



universität
wien

MAGISTERARBEIT / MASTER'S THESIS

Titel der Magisterarbeit / Title of the Master's Thesis

„Campaigning successfully on social network sites:
Which issues do Facebook users like, comment or share?“

verfasst von / submitted by

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angestrebter akademischer Grad / in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts (MA)

Wien, 2019 / Vienna 2019

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt /
degree programme code as it appears on
the student record sheet:

UA 066 824

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt /
degree programme as it appears on
the student record sheet:

Politikwissenschaft

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Acknowledgements

As in so many other academic works, the writing of this thesis would not have been possible without the constant support of multiple people.

First and foremost, I want to thank my supervisors Prof. Sylvia Kritzinger and Dr Laurenz Ennser-Jedenastik for always providing me with valuable feedback and advice within my restricted time frame.

Furthermore, I am deeply thankful for Prof. Wolfgang C. Müller, Prof. Sylvia Kritzinger and colleagues for making this thesis possible by sharing the data before their publication. Also, I want to thank the Department of Government, and more specifically Prof. Wolfgang C. Müller, Prof. Thomas M. Meyer, Dr Laurenz Ennser-Jedenastik and Anita Boldos for providing me with the ideal working conditions and the continuous support in recent years to develop the skills needed for my work on this thesis.

Also, I want to thank all colleagues who gave feedback and advice in different parts of this thesis: Verena Reidinger and all colleagues in the master seminar, Prof. Thomas M. Meyer for advice of the model specifications, Anita Bodlos for helping me define my research question and providing me with a first glance at her PhD thesis, and Tanja Schüberl for proofreading.

Also, thank you to all my study, work and CCRG colleagues to survive stressful study weeks and always support me at different levels of this process in recent years, but especially Anita, Elisabeth, Kathi, Lena, Mariyana, Martin, Tanja and Verena.

Lastly, I want to thank my family to give me the opportunity to study what I love and my friends and Ben, who were always willing to listen and accepted my focus to this thesis in the recent months. Thank you.

Software

The statistical analysis of this thesis was conducted with Stata 14 (StataCorp, 2015). All graphs in this thesis were designed using the burd scheme by Briatte (2013).

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1 Introduction

There is no doubt that social media is an important electoral campaigning tool nowadays. Specifically, social network sites (SNS) like Facebook or Twitter allow politicians to directly, interactively and personally spread information to citizens online (Vergeer et al., 2013; Stier et al., 2018). This new form of campaigning can help to achieve electoral goals such as reaching potential, convincing undecided, and mobilising existing voters (Farrell and Schmitt-Beck, 2002). This is especially important in recent years, as personal contact can help to mobilise the increasing number of late deciders and volatile voters (Johann et al., 2018).

Political parties use different campaigning strategies to increase the impact of their campaign messages on SNS, which revolve about two main contents and can be separated in issue-centred and actor-centred strategies (Kriesi et al., 2009). Even though issue competition is increasingly important for party competition in Western Europe (Green-Pedersen, 2007), up until now most research on SNS has focused on actor-centred strategies such as personalisation and negative campaigning. Also, scholars either focus on the supply side, analysing content by political actors distributed via SNS or on the demand side, analysing how citizens use SNS. However, even though evidence suggests that political SNS usage can drive political participation (Boulianne, 2015, 2018), little is known about the perception of different campaigning strategies by voters on SNS.

Hence, this thesis tries to fill this gap in the literature by focusing on issue-centred campaigning strategies and combining both the supply- and demand-side of electoral campaigning on SNS by investigating which campaigning strategies are in fact successful on SNS. The scope of this question goes beyond the effects for users on SNS, as both ‘local opinion leaders’ (see Lazarsfeld et al. (1944) for a definition and Weeks et al. (2017); Miller et al. (2015) for studies on SNS) and journalists (Serazio, 2014; McGregor, 2019; Bode et al., 2016) spread campaigning messages from SNS to other audiences, who do not receive these messages directly.

Specifically, it analyses how the issue-centred campaigning strategies of riding-the-wave (see Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1994); Wagner and Meyer (2014)) and issue ownership (see Budge and Farlie (1983); Petrocik (1996)) drive the campaigning success of postings on Facebook, thus their respective mobilizing and persuading effect for both new and existing voters (Farrell and Schmitt-Beck, 2002). To this end, Facebook interactions were used as a proxy for measuring campaigning success, as they are expressions of attention, interest and endorsement with the content of users on SNS (Porten-Che   et al., 2018; Gerodimos and Justinussen, 2015). Also, a posting with a higher number of interactions will spread more easily as the algorithm on SNS recognizes this endorsement (Backstrom, 2013), a mechanism acknowledged by campaign managers (Kreiss et al., 2017). This

operationalization of campaigning success makes SNS a valuable data source to study the success of campaign messages, as the interaction numbers are a real-world measurement of endorsement by the whole target audience, in contrast to surveys or focus groups which can be used to study the effects of other campaigning tools such as posters or tv-ads.

In terms of policy content of the campaign messages, parties strategically emphasize some issues in a campaign over others, which signals the importance of these issues to the party and can thus convince voters to vote for the given party (Tavits, 2007). Some parties decide to talk about issues the electorate considers currently important (riding-the-wave strategy). Other parties focus on specific issues they are perceived as particularly competent on (issue ownership strategy). However, it is unclear if these strategies are actually successful in terms of campaigning success, especially on SNS. In addition, as Bélanger and Meguid (2008) show, these two campaigning strategies reinforce each other: in terms of vote choice, a parties' competence on an issue matters more if the issue is salient to voters, a mechanism which was tested in this thesis as well.

Beyond parties' decision which issues they should emphasize, the target group of the campaigning messages on SNS has to be kept in mind. As most followers of political accounts on SNS tend to be supportive of this party or candidate (Eberl et al., 2019; Bode et al., 2016; Ancu and Cozma, 2009), it is assumed that the campaigning strategies work even better if parties' focus on the preferences of their party supporters specifically. Therefore, for all campaigning strategies, it was tested if the preferences of party supporters have a higher impact when comparing them to the preferences of non-supporters.

These hypotheses were tested using a case study of the 2017 national election campaign in Austria on Facebook by combining a manual content analysis of all Facebook postings of parties' and top candidates, the interaction numbers for each of the postings (Müller et al., forthcoming), and public opinion data on issue saliency and competence of 30 policy issues (Kritzing et al., 2019a). The findings reveal that the saliency of an issue (i.e. riding-the-wave strategy) matters for campaigning success, but only if one takes the preferences of party supporters into account. Also, a higher competence of a party perceived by the general electorate on an issue (i.e. issue ownership strategy) increases the campaigning success of a message. Moreover, these two strategies reinforce each other: the competence of a party is more important for campaigning success, if the issue is more salient, especially for party supporters. Besides, the analysis shows that also actor-centred campaigning strategies such as negative campaigning and personalisation can increase campaigning success, which is in line with former research.

In sum, this thesis has important implications for the understanding of modern electoral campaigning and issue competition, as it shows that issue-centred campaigning strategies do have significant impact on the campaigning success of political parties on SNS. Even though most research has focused on actor-centred strategies so far, the results further strengthen the argument that issue competition is currently important. Also, the results show that SNS are a valuable data source to study the success of different campaigning

strategies, as user interactions are a convenient and real-world measurement of endorsement with campaign messages. As the results indicate that not all strategies work the same way across all types of interactions (likes, emotional reactions, comments and shares), future research should further differentiate between these different interactions and reveal the mechanisms behind these different types (see e.g. Eberl et al. (2019)). In addition, it should be studied how political actors themselves react on the immediate feedback received on SNS (see e.g. Ennser-Jedenastik et al. (2019)). Also, the effects of other campaigning strategies and the effect of communication strategies used outside an electoral campaign on success should be further investigated.

The remainder of this thesis is structured as follows. In Chapter 2 the theoretical assumptions and mechanisms are laid out and past research is reviewed, which leads to the research question and hypotheses. At first, electoral campaigning on SNS is explained, followed by the different campaigning strategies used on SNS and a definition of campaigning success on SNS. In section 2.4, the different issue-centred campaigning strategies on SNS, which are the focus of this thesis, are explained. Chapter 3 then explains the case, the data and the method which are used to test the hypotheses. After explaining how the content analysis and public opinion data were gathered, I explain how the two different data sources were matched. Also, this chapter includes the descriptives of all variables used and an explanation of the model. The results of the model are shown in Chapter 4. At first, the bivariate analysis shows the effects on the interaction number of the different variables independently. Then, the negative binomial regression analysis shows which hypotheses are supported by the data. Finally, in chapter 5, the results are discussed and a conclusion for the thesis is drawn, and an outlook for future research is suggested.

2 Theory and literature review

2.1 Electoral campaigning on social network sites

Social media as a campaigning tool has been on the rise ever since the successful 2008 campaign of US president Obama (Bronstein, 2013; Vergeer et al., 2013; Bene, 2017). In 2015, the leaders of more than 80% of U.N. member states had an active Facebook or Twitter account (Barberá and Zeitzoff, 2017). Main advantages of social media as a campaigning tool include being able to reach out to voters directly, the ability to mobilize supporters and to influence the public agenda (Stier et al., 2018, 50). This is especially true for social network sites like Twitter and Facebook, as they encourage citizens to become politically involved due to their interactivity (Vergeer et al., 2013, 479). In addition, politicians use social media in order to distribute information and make themselves ‘hip’ and visible to the public (Ross and Bürger, 2014). In recent years, more research has focused on shedding light on campaigns on social media (for an overview see Boulianne, 2016).

Boyd and Ellison (2007, 211) define *social network sites (SNS)* as web-based services that allow individuals to create a (semi-)public profile, state a list of users they are connected with, and view their connections and those made by others. Social network sites are unique as they make it possible for users to share their social networks, which are often based on some offline connections. In contrast to SNS, *social media* is a broader term, defined by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, 61) as ‘a group of internet-based applications [...] that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content’. Social network sites like Facebook are included in this framework of social media, but the term also includes other internet applications like blogs, collaborative projects like Wikipedia or content communities like YouTube. Hence, to be more specific, the term social network sites or the abbreviation SNS will be used here to refer to platforms like Facebook, Twitter or Instagram, which does not include other social media applications like blogs or YouTube.

Campaigning has developed tremendously over the last decades. Norris (2000) defined three models of campaigning in post-industrial societies: the pre-modern, the modern and the post-modern campaign. The pre-modern campaign lasted until the 1950s and its focus was mainly on local direct campaigning and print media such as partisan press and local posters. Then, the modern campaign developed with the rise of television and lasted from the early 1960s to the late 1980s. In this time, campaigns got more professional and were organised nationally using press conferences, photo opportunities and television broadcasts. The campaigns developed even further to post-modern campaigns since the 1990s, which has led to incorporate the internet for information on party websites and online newspaper websites and more specific, targeted ads in the mass media into the campaigns.

However, according to Vergeer et al. (2013), a new campaigning model is emerging through social network sites again, which is focusing on the personal, direct and interactive contact with politicians. This campaigning model is even more personal and direct, as there is no third party (e.g. journalists or party officials) involved in communicating between potential voters and politicians, which was still necessary in the modern and post-modern campaigns (see also Farrell and Schmitt-Beck, 2002, 7-8). This direct contact creates a stronger bond with the readers of politician's postings on social network sites (often called followers) and therefore reinforces the ties with potential voters. Also, on social network sites marketing strategies such as targeting are easy to implement, which make the campaigns more professional (Vergeer et al., 2013; Norris, 2000).

In general, the main purpose of an electoral campaign is to reach potential voters and to mobilise them to vote for a given party. Electoral campaigns are organised in a top-down manner and are aimed at specific audiences to achieve the political goal of the party, which is to maximise votes in most cases. More specifically, political actors need to attract the attention of citizens which might not know the political party or candidates and introduce themselves to them. Also, some citizens need to be mobilised so that they actually turn out to vote by reinforcing and stabilising their preferences to the political actor. Finally, the most difficult aim is to attract undecided voters or voters who were initially tending towards a competitor (Farrell and Schmitt-Beck, 2002). As Johann et al. (2018) show, political communication efforts are especially important during electoral campaigns in recent years, as there is an increasing number of late deciders and volatile voters. Using the 2013 Austrian national election case, they show that both impersonal and especially interpersonal party canvassing increases the likelihood of voters to change their vote preferences to the party conducting the canvassing.

All these campaigning goals can be achieved by developing campaigning strategies which set both the messages and channels used in the campaign and are directed towards these different target groups. Once the campaigning messages are set and distributed across the selected channels, political actors seek feedback to see if their campaigning strategies are working and to improve them (Farrell and Schmitt-Beck, 2002).

While in the pre-modern campaign feedback was limited to local canvassing, party's mass organizations and party meetings, opinion polls were used occasionally during the modern campaign and are used much more intensively since the post-modern campaign with the rise of the internet (Norris, 2000; Müller, 1997). Still, these traditional forms of feedback on campaigning strategies are often slow, biased and expensive (Müller, 1997). In the new campaigning era characterised by SNS, the feedback on campaigning messages is much more immediate, free and easily accessible, as SNS provide tools to interpret the success of the postings. Also, the feedback is based on the 'real' population who receives these campaigning messages and not only on a sample. Therefore, the success of campaigning messages on SNS can be used as feedback for parties to adapt their campaigning messages in the short term (Ennser-Jedenastik et al., 2019). Hence, as a new

campaigning model is emerging through SNS, and SNS give new possibilities of feedback to campaign developers, the campaigning strategies on SNS used in campaigns are the main focus of this thesis.

2.2 Campaigning strategies on social network sites

In order to reach their campaigning goals, parties develop campaigning strategies which set both the messages and channels used in the campaign (Farrell and Schmitt-Beck, 2002). As Kriesi et al. (2009, 352, emphasis in original) put it:

‘The essential element of the campaign is its *message*.’

In order to draft a message, campaigners seek to set the agenda about topics that are favourable for their party and choose rhetorical strategies to persuade voters with diverging opinions. According to Kriesi et al. (2009), campaigning messages revolve around two main contents: *issue-centred strategies* and *actor-centred strategies*.

With issue-centred strategies, parties try to set the agenda and selectively emphasize some policy issues over others, as voters only have a limited amount of interest and attention for politics and use only information that comes to their mind immediately to make a political decision (Kriesi et al., 2009; Tavits, 2007). This issue competition (i.e. which issues political parties will emphasize during a campaign) is increasingly important in party competition in western Europe. By using manifesto data, Green-Pedersen (2007) shows that issue competition has become more important in recent decades as the amount and diversity of issues in party manifestos increased since 1945.

From the perspective of voters, issues got more important over time due to partisan dealignment and less ideological division (Walgrave et al., 2015). Also, Tavits (2007, 51) theorises that a shift in issue emphasis is important for voters in their voting decision for two reasons. First, it can win new voters who have not considered an issue in their previous voting decisions as the issue is now part of the campaign. Also, it can mobilise voters who already voted on an issue to a new party as it shows the importance and seriousness of this issue to the party if they emphasize it in the campaign. She shows that issue importance is in fact significantly impacting the voting decision when a new party enters the political space using data from east European democracies. More specifically, Nadeau et al. (2010) show that issue-based strategies can have a significant impact on the election outcome by using a case study of the 2000 Canadian election and the issue emphasis strategy on the health care issue.

According to Kriesi et al. (2009, 354-355), two main issue-centred strategies emerge. The first one is the *issue ownership strategy*, in which political actors try to set the agenda focusing on the issues the party is perceived most competent on (see Budge and Farlie (1983); Petrocik (1996) and in more detail section 2.4). The other main strategy is the

riding-the-wave strategy, in which political actors focus on those issues that are highly salient to the public at the moment in order to be responsive to them (see e.g. Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1994); Wagner and Meyer (2014) and in more detail section 2.4).

In contrast to issue-centred strategies, actor-centred strategies are focused on the actors who communicate the message instead and try to distract attention from the policy issues (Kriesi et al., 2009, 355). The two main actor-centred strategies are *negative campaigning*, in which political opponents get attacked (see e.g. Haselmayer, 2019) and *personalisation*, which focuses on the personalities of specific candidates (see e.g. Kruikemeier et al., 2013).

However, given the new campaigning model proposed by Vergeer et al. (2013), it is not yet clear if new strategies are used for electoral campaigns on social network sites or if the classic campaigning strategies are replicated (Vergeer et al., 2013, 478; Bode et al., 2016; Stier et al., 2018). Regarding recent research, some authors have tried to evaluate campaigning on social network sites further (for an overview see Boulianne, 2016).

Most researchers have focused on the supply side by analysing which political actors use which campaigning strategies on SNS and how the use of strategies differ across channels or between actors. The lions share of this research was conducted in the US context. Borah (2016) compared the Facebook campaigns of the US presidential candidates in 2008 and 2012. She finds that both McCain and Romney were more likely to use negative campaigning compared to Obama. Also, in 2008 the focus was much more often on issues in Obama's postings (72%) compared to McCain (33%), while in 2012 Romney (46%) posted more on issues than Obama (34%).

Gerodimos and Justinussen (2015) investigate different campaigning strategies used during the 2012 Facebook campaign of Barack Obama. The authors find that actor-centred postings were much more common than postings focusing on policies. Specifically, personalisation was used extensively in this campaign, as more than half of the postings included a photo of Barack Obama. Also, negative campaigning was avoided in most cases and most of the postings had a positive tone. In addition, the authors compared the campaign with the Obama campaign in 2008 and concluded that in 2008 policy issues were more important, while in 2012 the campaign focused more on personalisation, which is in line with the findings of Borah (2016).

Also, Bode et al. (2016) compare the campaign messages on Twitter and in television ads during the 2010 US senate campaign and find that the two channels differ remarkably in their tone, as the negative tone increased over time in the TV ads but not on Twitter. Also, regarding actor-centred campaigning strategies, they find that attacks against opponents are coordinated across platforms. On the contrary, regarding policy-centred campaigning strategies, they find that messages about policy issues are much more frequent in TV ads compared to Twitter and they are not coordinated between the two platforms.

In a European multi-party context, Enli and Skogerbø (2013) analysed the 2011 Norwegian election campaign on Twitter and Facebook. They find that Facebook was the preferred platform for marketing purposes, but it was common to personalize the content

by including private content of the candidates.

Stier et al. (2018) analyse the communication of candidates on Facebook and Twitter during the German federal election campaign in 2013 and focus on the riding-the-wave strategy. They find that the topics discussed on SNS differ from the topics relevant to the mass audience, as politicians and SNS users often discuss specific topics related to campaign events on SNS. Regarding policy content, candidates and their audiences still discuss mostly those policies important to the general population.

Bodlos (forthcoming) analysed how both actor-centred and issue-centred campaigning strategies on Facebook differ compared to other communication channels using manually coded data from the Austrian national election campaign in 2013. She concluded that issue ownership, negative campaigning and personalisation are more common on Facebook than in other channels, while issue diversity is lower on Facebook compared to other channels such as press releases and manifestos.

In contrast to the research about the supply side, who used mostly content analysis of postings on SNS, other scholars analysed the demand side, who receives the campaigning messages on SNS. However, this research is much less frequent as this data cannot simply be scraped from SNS. Instead, it mostly focuses on surveys asking respondents how they use SNS and which political actors they follow on SNS, concluding which individual characteristics increase the use of SNS for political purposes.

In the literature snapshot of Boulianne (2016), she concludes that liberal citizens and supporters of opposition parties are more likely to use SNS for political purposes and that the gender effects differ across contexts. Other studies focused more on the personalities of the audiences. Karlsen (2015) studied the Norwegian case and concluded that followers of parties and politicians on Facebook are opinion leaders to a great extent. Heiss and Matthes (2017) conducted a case study of Austrian adolescents following right-wing populist actors on Facebook, and find that adolescent followers of right-wing populist actors have less political trust, differ in personality traits and are more likely to be male and lower educated.

Using an innovative non-survey approach, Bobba et al. (2018) analysed who follows politicians on Facebook in France, Italy and Spain by using actual Facebook data and an algorithm to identify the gender of the users liking the postings. The authors find that men are more likely to support populist parties and politicians by clicking the like button on Facebook compared to women.

Still, these studies do not analyse how specific campaign messages or strategies are perceived by the demand side on SNS. Even though a lot of studies show a positive effect of political SNS usage on political participation (Boulianne, 2015), and this effect gets bigger over time (Boulianne, 2018), it remains unclear which campaigning strategies effectively drive this participation, which will be discussed in the next section.

2.3 Campaigning success on social network sites

A successful campaign can generally be defined as a campaign that reaches, mobilises and persuades both new and existing voters (Farrell and Schmitt-Beck, 2002). Still, research analysing which campaigning messages make a campaign successful is rare, especially for social network sites.

Utz (2009) was one of the first scholars who analysed how campaigning on SNS is perceived by its users using the Dutch general elections in 2006 and showed that visiting a candidate's profile can reinforce existing attitudes. Also, using an experiment, she showed that politicians who react to comments were perceived more favourable, an effect which was mostly driven by left-wing voters and right-wing politicians. Still, in order to analyse the perception of the content of campaigning messages and thus campaigning strategies, a connection between a content-analysis on the supply-side and demand-side data for perception is necessary, which is extremely scarce (Kruikemeier, 2014).

One option was used by scholars analysing the Dutch case, who used the number of preference votes of candidates as a measurement for the effectiveness of campaigning strategies. Using the Dutch national elections of 2010, Kruikemeier (2014) connected a content-analysis of tweets posted by political candidates and the number of preferential votes for these candidates and showed that using Twitter has positive consequences for political candidates, especially for those who used Twitter in an interactive way. This finding was replicated by Jacobs and Spierings (2015) for the 2012 Dutch elections, where Twitter was already much more common. Interestingly, Kruikemeier (2014) found that personalisation did not affect electoral support. Unfortunately, the policy content was not analysed in both studies.

Another possibility is using the interactions provided by SNS as a measurement of the campaigning success on the demand side, which will be also used in this thesis. Interactions on SNS can be viewed as a measure of the success of a campaign message, as users use these interactions to express attention towards and endorsement of the content they see on SNS (Porten-Che   et al., 2018). Hence, these studies assume that campaigning messages with a higher number of interactions were more popular and interesting to the users and thus more *successful* (Gerodimos and Justinussen, 2015). Also, SNS enhance this effect as they use algorithms to decide what messages will be shown to users, and the number of interactions (especially from friends) is an important part for these algorithms to decide if the message is worth spreading (Backstrom, 2013). This is also acknowledged by campaign managers who were interviewed by Kreiss et al. (2017). Campaign managers mention that interactions on SNS (in particular on Facebook) are very important in order to distribute the message to a broader audience. As one campaign manager puts it:

‘If you put a post out, it’s not going to get four million views right away. Facebook is going to show it to a small percentage of our base, and based on

how that small percentage interacts with our post, it will spread more to both our followers and their followers based on how many people shared or liked something that shows up on their friend's feed.' (Kreiss et al., 2017, 20)

Hence, the number of interactions on SNS can be used as a measurement of campaigning success of messages on SNS. To the best of my knowledge, up until now, eight studies used this approach. However, not all of them were conducted during election campaigns and thus do not measure the specific effect of election campaigning strategies.

Most studies focused on actor-centred campaigning strategies so far. Regarding negative campaigning, the results are mixed. Heiss et al. (2018) analyse profile-level and post-level drivers of user engagement during a non-electoral period in Austria in 2015 and find that negative tonality and references to competitive political actors have the potential to increase different types of user engagement. Bene (2017) analysed candidates' Facebook postings during the 2014 Hungarian election campaign and finds that users react more to negative emotion-filled posts. In the US context, Borah (2016) found the opposite effect. She analysed the emotional appeals of the Facebook postings of the presidential candidates in 2008 and 2012 and found that humoristic and enthusiastic postings received more likes and shares compared to negative postings and attacks.

For personalisation, the evidence suggests a positive association. Metz et al. (2019) used a manual content analysis of German MPs' Facebook posts in 2016 in a non-electoral period and show that the use of a more private style leads to higher user engagement. Bene (2017) also finds that personal postings are more successful. Bobba (2019) analysed the Facebook postings of Matteo Salvini and Lega on Facebook in a non-electoral period and finds that postings published by the leader compared to the party were more successful.

In terms of issue-centred campaigning strategies, to the best of my knowledge, only three studies have analysed the policy content of postings on SNS up until now. In a US context, Bronstein (2013) analysed the Facebook postings of the 2012 presidential candidates using a content analysis coding persuasion elements, subjects (i.e. issues) and calls for action. However, she only analysed the coded issues in a descriptive way and did not test if they made a difference for user interactions. Still, she finds significant effects for different persuasion themes and calls for action in the number of likes and comments. Similarly, Gerodimos and Justinussen (2015) analysed all Facebook postings posted by Obama in the 2012 campaign and did analyse the policy content of the postings. They find that followers engage more with policy-oriented posts compared to simply promotional or personal ones and that some policy issues triggered more interactions than others. Unfortunately, the results are not shown in detail. Still, the authors mention that postings about education were the most popular among all policies and postings about taxes and foreign policy triggered comments the most (Gerodimos and Justinussen, 2015, 127). In a European context, a recent conference paper of Eberl et al. (2019) analysed the Facebook postings of 315 politically relevant Facebook accounts during the 2017 Austrian long

election campaign (starting already in May 2017). Using automated content analysis, the authors classified the postings into eleven policy fields and matched them to survey data of the saliency of these. Concentrating on the emotional reactions and particularly the angry and love reactions only, they show that postings about more salient issues are more often reacted to with the angry emotion, but do not find an effect for the love emotion.

Even though these studies shed some light on campaigning strategies and their effect on campaigning success, a research gap emerges here. As already mentioned in section 2.2, issue-centred strategies are important campaigning strategies as issue competition is increasingly important in party competition in Western Europe (Green-Pedersen, 2007; Tavits, 2007; Nadeau et al., 2010). Still, most studies conducted up until now concentrated on actor-centred strategies only (Kruikemeier, 2014; Jacobs and Spierings, 2015; Heiss et al., 2018; Metz et al., 2019; Bene, 2017; Bobba, 2019; Borah, 2016). These studies did not analyse specific political issue content of the postings but content in terms of other factors such as mobilization, humour or emotional tone. Bronstein (2013) did analyse the policy content of the 2012 presidential candidates in the US but did not analyse their impact on user interactions.

Hence, to the best of my knowledge, only two studies so far analysed what policies trigger user interactions. Eberl et al. (2019) did analyse the textual content of the posting automatically, but only showing the effect of issue saliency on the emotional reactions of love and angry, but not campaigning success in general. Gerodimos and Justinussen (2015) only analysed the campaign of one actor in a US context and thus did not compare the usage of specific issue-centred campaigning strategies among different actors. Therefore, the campaigning success of issue-centred campaigning strategies such as riding-the-wave or issue ownership (see Kriesi et al. (2009)) on SNS has not been studied up until now in a multi-party context, which is why this thesis will focus on this topic and answer the following research question:

Research question *How do issue-centred campaigning strategies drive the campaigning success of postings (in terms of interaction numbers) on social network sites?*

To be specific, the campaigning success of a posting is assumed high when it reaches both new and existing voters and can thus mobilize and convince them to vote for a given party, as these are the main goals of electoral campaigns as explained above (Farrell and Schmitt-Beck, 2002). On social network sites, these goals can be best fulfilled if parties get a lot of interactions on their campaign messages (Kreiss et al., 2017; Gerodimos and Justinussen, 2015; Porten-Che   et al., 2018). However, it might be argued that achieving these goals in general is not possible on SNS, as only a small part of the electorate is actually perceiving campaign messages through social media (Bene, 2017, 515).

Still, it has been shown that parties can reach a wider electorate with postings on social network sites, as traditional media pick up stories which are successful on SNS (Serazio,

2014; McGregor, 2019; Bode et al., 2016, 582). Moreover, it has been shown that people who follow political actors on social network sites have a higher interest in politics and are more likely to talk about politics to their peers during the election campaign (Norris and Curtice, 2008; Karlsen, 2015). Therefore, political actors can influence the wider public and thus make their campaign successful by reaching and convincing their followers who then should spread the message to their peers. These so-called multiplying actors are often referred to as ‘local opinion leaders’ in the literature (see Lazarsfeld et al., 1944). These opinion leaders spread information to their peers either offline or online and do so actively. As Weeks et al. (2017) showed, highly active users on social media consider themselves as opinion leaders and actively try to persuade others politically directly (by sharing their political opinion with them) and indirectly (by perceiving themselves as opinion leader). Similarly, Miller et al. (2015) concluded that users who connect different networks of connected users on Facebook (‘gatekeepers’) are more likely to engage in political discussions and attempt to persuade other users.

In general, opinion leaders tend to talk about politics in interpersonal discussion with family, friends or neighbours (Norris and Curtice, 2008, 4). In addition, on social network sites, these opinion leaders can also like, comment or share campaign messages of the political actors they follow, which will be then shown to their Facebook friends (Karlsen, 2015). As messages from friends are in general more persuasive and have a higher credibility, and are prioritised by the Facebook algorithm to be shown on the newsfeed, these multiplying interactions of opinion leaders are especially valuable in an electoral campaign setting as they can also reach potential new voters who might not know the political actor or might not have been interested yet (Bene, 2017; Farrell and Schmitt-Beck, 2002; Gerodimos and Justinussen, 2015; Karlsen, 2015).

This makes the success of electoral campaigns on social network sites relevant in a wider context, as greater parts of the electorate can be reached by multiplying opinion leaders and content will be picked up by traditional media.

2.4 Issue-centred campaigning strategies and campaigning success on social network sites

In order to elaborate on how issue-centred campaigning strategies drive the campaigning success of postings on social network sites of political parties in electoral campaigns, I will now explain the theoretical mechanisms that lead parties to emphasize some policies over others in their electoral campaign and why these campaign messages might be more successful than other messages.

In general, parties strategically emphasize some issues over others as voters only have a limited interest in politics and only concentrate on a few issues (Tavits (2007), but see also Wlezien (2005), Riker (1990) and Popkin (1991)). According to Tavits (2007), emphasizing

an issue in a campaign signals importance of this issue to the party and can thus convince voters to vote for the given party. On the one hand, voters who find an issue important but did not vote because of it yet (as it was not important in electoral campaigns in the past) might change their vote choice to a new party if a party is stressing this issue in the current campaign. On the other hand, voters who already voted on this issue in the past may change their vote choice to the new party who is stressing it in the current campaign, as it seems more important for this party currently. But how do parties decide which issues to emphasize? Two main strategies emerge in the literature: riding-the-wave and issue ownership.

2.4.1 Riding-the-wave

As explained by Kriesi et al. (2009), *riding-the-wave* is one of the most important issue-centred campaigning strategies. The riding-the-wave strategy of parties is a responsive, bottom-up approach which assumes that parties focus on those issues which are important for voters at the moment (Ansolabehere and Iyengar, 1994; Sides, 2006; Wagner and Meyer, 2014; Klüver and Sagarzazu, 2015). In other words, parties will focus on current concerns of voters and thus ‘ride the wave’.

As voters only have a limited amount of interest and resources for attention in politics, focusing on the issues voters care most about should have a beneficial electoral effect, as these issues will motivate voters in their decision making (Sides, 2006). Also, being responsive to the electorate can enhance the popularity of political actors and improve their image (Wagner and Meyer, 2014). In contrast, if political actors ignore voters’ current concerns, they can be perceived in a more negative way (Klüver and Sagarzazu, 2015; Sides, 2006).

As Klüver and Sagarzazu (2015) show, parties indeed follow the priorities of voters in their campaigns (see also Spoon and Klüver (2014), Klüver and Spoon (2014)). Hence, political actors assume that focusing on these issues will bring them electoral benefits. As Stier et al. (2018) also show in the context of SNS, when talking about policies, politicians on Facebook and Twitter mostly post about policies the mass audience finds important.

Still, it remains unclear if campaign messages focusing on salient issues are actually more successful than messages focusing on non-salient issues. However, due to the reasons explained above, I expect that messages about issues that are currently important to the electorate are more successful because citizens will acknowledge the prioritisation of this issue in the campaign and will find the campaign message particularly interesting (Tavits, 2007; Wagner and Meyer, 2014). As Bobkowski (2015) shows in an experimental setting, information is more likely to be shared by users if they rate the information important to them and their friends. In the context of SNS, it is possible to actually measure this mechanism as a real-life success measurement is available for campaign messages, as users show their support through engagement with the posting (Gerodimos and Justinussen,

2015; Porten-Che   et al., 2018). This was also proposed by Eberl et al. (2019), which concentrated on the emotional reactions of love and angry and showed that postings about more salient topics trigger more angry reactions. In a more general way, this leads to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1a *The **more salient** a policy issue is to the **electorate**, the higher the campaigning success of postings about this issue.*

On SNS, most authors assume that users that follow a particular party or candidate page are supportive of this party or candidate (Bode et al., 2016; Macafee, 2013; Ancu and Cozma, 2009; Eberl et al., 2019). This is also supported by survey data from the 2017 Austrian National Election Study (Kritzing et al., 2018). Ennser-Jedenastik et al. (2019) compared the party sympathy scores for the six competing parties among party voters, other voters (including non-voters) and parties' Facebook followers. For all of the six Austrian parties, Facebook followers have higher sympathy scores than other voters. Still, Facebook followers are not as favourable as party voters, which means that the audience on Facebook is still a bit broader than just the voters of a party.

This means that parties can more directly tailor the content they post on social network sites to an audience which is in general supportive about their political views compared to other forms of campaigning which are often targeted to a general audience (Bode et al., 2016, 583). Stier et al. (2018) tested this assumption on Facebook and Twitter and found that politicians, in fact, prioritize the topics most important to their audience on SNS rather than a mass audience. Still, as mentioned above, when talking about specific policy issues, these preferences often overlap.

Therefore, as the followers on SNS are mostly supportive of the party they are following, the opinion of party supporters might be especially important for the success of a given campaign message. This is because, on the one hand, party supporters are more likely to follow their party on SNS and are thus more likely to be exposed to the campaign message. On the other hand, party supporters are more likely to engage with the posting if it is about a policy issue they find particularly salient, as they acknowledge the prioritisation of this issue in the campaign by the party they are supporting (Tavits, 2007) and show their support through engagement with the posting (Gerodimos and Justinussen, 2015; Porten-Che   et al., 2018). Hence, issue saliency among party supporters might be especially important for the campaigning success of a posting, as most of the users receiving the campaign message are in fact party supporters.

In contrast, users who are not supportive of a given party are unlikely to engage with the postings of this party for two reasons. On the one hand, they are less likely to follow a particular party and hence to see the campaign message at all. On the other hand, even if they see the posting due to the sharing mechanisms described above, they are less likely to engage with the posting as they do not want to support the party and its message. Therefore, postings about policy issues citizens not supportive of this party find

particularly salient (and the supporters of the party do not) will be less successful than postings about policy issues the supporters of the party find particularly salient. This leads to my next hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1b *Issue saliency among party supporters has a higher impact on the campaigning success of a posting than issue saliency among party non-supporters.*

This assumption was also made by Eberl et al. (2019), who only use the saliency of each party’s voters as their saliency measurements. Hence, their result that more salient issues are more likely to trigger angry reactions is actually based on the preferences of party supporters only. With the test of hypothesis 1b, I will test if this assumption is valid.

2.4.2 Issue ownership

The second important issue-centred campaigning strategy according to Kriesi et al. (2009) is *issue ownership*. In contrast to the riding-the-wave strategy, issue ownership is a top-down approach which assumes that parties strategically decide which issues should be important during the campaign and selectively highlight them in order to make them more salient for voters (Klüver and Sagarzazu, 2015). According to the classical literature on issue ownership theory (see Budge and Farlie, 1983; Petrocik, 1996), parties emphasize those issues in election campaigns which they ‘own’, meaning that the public thinks that this party is the most competent in handling these issues. In addition, voters will vote for that party which they think is the most competent on specific issue domains.

According to Bélanger and Meguid (2008), most empirical research has focused on the first claim of the theory, and did, in fact, find evidence that parties are likely to strategically emphasize those issues on which they are perceived most competent. In the context of SNS, Bode et al. (2016) do find that Democrats are more likely to tweet about social issues than Republicans. Also, Ennser-Jedenastik et al. (2019) show descriptively in the 2017 Austrian case, that parties post more on Facebook about issues they traditionally own. However, the second part of the issue ownership theory, that individual voters also vote for a party because of the competence of that party, has not been that well tested yet (Bélanger and Meguid, 2008) and yields mixed results (Walgrave et al., 2015).

Bellucci (2006) theorizes about the mechanisms behind voter decisions regarding issue ownership and differentiates between the long-term perspective of *issue ownership* based on the constituencies of the parties and the short-term perspective of *party competence* based on their handling reputations. He explains that in electoral campaigns, the long-term views of issue ownership of some parties on their traditional issues get mixed with the short-term policy handling reputations of the party, which a party can have in all kinds of issues and not only the ones they ‘own’. To be specific, Bellucci (2006, 551) defines party competence as ‘people’s evaluation of the capacity of parties to bring about positive

outcomes’ and explains that voters can differentiate between their issue priorities (i.e. saliency), (long-term) issue ownership and (short-term) party competence on these issues.

Similarly, Walgrave et al. (2012) differentiate between the competence and associative dimensions of issue ownership. The competence dimension captures how competent a party is on a specific issue (i.e. party competence by Bellucci (2006)), whereas the associative dimension captures the spontaneous association between a party and an issue (i.e. similar to long-term issue ownership by Bellucci (2006)).

Hence, from a voter perspective, it is not only the long-term association of issue ownership that matters but also the perceived party competence of all competing parties on various issues including those outside their traditionally ‘owned’ policies. Of course, this measurement of the competence dimension of issue ownership will correlate with the classic or associative dimension of ‘owned’ issues. However, it gives more freedom in the conceptualization so that various parties can be perceived as competent on the same issue (which is particularly plausible in a multi-party system) and that parties can be perceived as more or less competent on a lot of different issues (which is particularly useful if analysing campaigning messages on a lot of different topics). Therefore, for this analysis, the conceptualisation of the competence dimension of issue ownership will be used in order to test the success of the campaigning strategy of issue ownership.

Like Bellucci (2006), Petrocik et al. (2003) argue that voters can differentiate which parties can best solve the current problems in society and thus ‘own’ these issues. Importantly, the authors explain what happens when voters receive campaigning messages about these issues during a campaign: voters take campaigning messages on owned issues more sincere as the party has a good reputation on this issue and voters are more likely to believe that the party will actually do something to improve the current situation regarding this issue. This is also emphasised by Kriesi et al. (2009), who explain that the crucial mechanism behind the advantage of campaigning on owned issue is credibility, as voters are more likely to believe that the party will tackle this problem if they accumulated a positive reputation in the past.

Hence, citizens are more likely to support campaign messages about issues on which they perceive the party as competent because they believe the messages more and trust the party to be able to solve the problems regarding this specific issue. Thus, parties do post more about the issues on which they are perceived as competent because they think that these will be more successful and mobilize users to vote for them. However, it has not been studied yet if postings on owned issues are more successful than postings about issues the parties are not perceived as particularly competent on. This leads to the next hypothesis, which reads as:

Hypothesis 2a *The **more competent** the **electorate** views a party on an issue, the higher the campaigning success of postings about this issue.*

Again, the argument that the followers of a SNS page are in general supportive to the specific party and thus the perception of party supporters will be particularly important for the success of a given posting applies here. On the one hand, parties strategically design their content on SNS to their SNS audiences (Stier et al., 2018), which is in general supportive to them (Enns-Jedenastik et al., 2019). Hence, if the supporters of a party perceive the party as particularly competent on an issue, they will be more likely to show their support through engagement with the posting (Gerodimos and Justinussen, 2015; Porten-Che   et al., 2018). In contrast, citizens who are not supportive of the party are less likely to see the campaign message and even if so, they are less likely to show their support. Therefore, the campaigning strategy of issue ownership should be even more effective if parties concentrate on the issues their supporters think they are competent on compared to the issues their non-supporters think they are competent on. Hence, the next hypothesis is formulated as follows:

Hypothesis 2b *Perceived issue **competence** among **party supporters** has a stronger impact on the campaigning success of a posting than perceived issue competence among party non-supporters.*

2.4.3 Riding-the-wave and issue ownership

Given the two issue-centred campaigning strategies outlined above, I will now evaluate how these two might interfere with each other. As Petrocik et al. (2003) explain, voters assign high importance to almost any issue, which is why issue salience is not all that matters. However, voters also differentiate which parties can best solve the current problems in society and thus ‘own’ these important issues (see also Bellucci (2006)). Hence, in their voting decision, they will take into account the competence of the party on the issues they are most concerned about.

This assumption was tested by B  langer and Meguid (2008). The authors theorize that voters do take issue ownership more into account if the voter thinks that an issue is important. In other words, they expect that the effect of issue ownership is conditional on the saliency of an issue. If an issue is not salient to the voters, issue ownership should not matter as much. They demonstrate this effect using the 1997 and 2000 federal elections in Canada. Their results indicate that the perceived party competence of an issue matters more if this issue is salient to voters. Similarly, Abbe et al. (2003) show that agreement between candidates and voters about the most pressing issue in the current election can be a robust predictor of vote choice if the candidate’s party owns this issue. The authors show this effect using the 1998 House elections in the US and demonstrate that this effect is particularly high for independent voters. In a European context, this claim is also supported by Plescia et al. (2019), who finds that the Austrian   VP was especially successful in its 2017 campaign, as its campaign focused on issues that were both salient for all voters and their support base, and the party was owning these issues.

Due to these findings, it is expected that users take party competence into account more when reacting to a posting on SNS, if they find the issue of the posting important and thus interesting to them. Therefore, an interaction effect of the two issue-centred strategies is expected, which will be tested in the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 3a *Perceived issue competence among the electorate has a higher impact on the campaigning success of a posting, if this issue is **salient** to the **electorate**.*

Again, it is assumed that authors specifically design their campaign messages to their SNS audiences and that SNS audiences mostly consist of party supporters (Stier et al., 2018; Ennser-Jedenastik et al., 2019). Hence, if it is true that campaign messages will be more successful if a party is perceived as competent on that issue and that the issue is salient at the same time (Petrocik et al., 2003), this mechanism should work particularly well when taking the issue saliency and competence perceptions of supporters of a specific party into account, as SNS followers are more likely to be party supporters. Party supporters will be more likely to see the campaign message and take both the importance of an issue and the competence of a party in this issue into account, when deciding if one should support this posting by engaging with it (Gerodimos and Justinussen, 2015; Porten-Che   et al., 2018). On the other hand, the perception of party non-supporters on issue saliency and competence should not matter as much for the campaigning success, as they are less likely to receive the message and even if they do so, they are less likely to show their support as they are not supporting the author of the posting.

This leads to my last hypothesis, which reads as:

Hypothesis 3b *Perceived issue competence among party supporters has a higher impact on the campaigning success of a posting, if this issue is **salient** to **party supporters** than the impact perceived issue competence among party non-supporters has if non-supporters think the issue is salient.*

Given these three blocks of hypotheses, I will now explain how I plan to test these hypotheses in order to answer my research question.

3 Case, Data, and Method

3.1 The 2017 Austrian national election campaign on Facebook

To answer the research question, I will focus on a case study of the national election campaign in Austria in autumn 2017. Austria is an interesting case to study the effects of campaigning, as it shares many common characteristics with other European democracies such as a proportional electoral system, a moderately pluralised multiparty system and the rise of new competitors against the traditional mainstream parties (Haselmayer and Jenny, 2018; Dolezal, 2015).

At first, I want to describe the main aspects of the campaign briefly. As Bodlos and Plescia (2018) explain, six parties had realistic chances to pass the threshold of 4% to get into the national parliament in the 2017 Austrian national election campaign. The most salient topic of the campaign was immigration, due to the European migrant ‘crisis’ in the summer of 2015. A major change in the election campaign was that online tools became more important compared to other channels. Also, an important scandal during the campaign emerged on SNS, in which the political advisor Tal Silberstein on behalf of the SPÖ was accused to anonymously attack the leader of the ÖVP (Sebastian Kurz) on Facebook (see also Galyga et al., 2018; Holter, 2018).

In the end, five parties passed the threshold: the victorious centre-right ÖVP formed a new government with the populist radical right FPÖ, who both gained several percentage points compared to the last national election in 2013. The social-democratic SPÖ was the second strongest party but did not change their vote share significantly to 2013. Surprisingly, the Greens did not pass the threshold to get into parliament. Main reasons were intra-party conflicts and that one of their former MPs Peter Pilz formed his own list (‘list of Peter Pilz’) and managed to gain parliamentary representation. Also, the liberal NEOS who first entered parliament in 2013, again passed the threshold and slightly increased their vote share (Bodlos and Plescia, 2018).

More specifically, I only focus on the Austrian national election campaign on the social network site Facebook, which is the preferred social media platform for marketing purposes by politicians (Enli and Skogerbø, 2013). As Kreiss et al. (2017) show, Facebook is the most important SNS according to US campaign managers, as it fulfils many different aspects to mobilize existing and to reach new supporters. This is true also in Austria, where the majority of candidates have a Facebook profile (Dolezal, 2015). Also, in 2017, all competing parties and their leaders had active Facebook pages (Bodlos and Plescia, 2018). Moreover, Facebook was by far the most widely used Social Media application in Austria during the 2017 election campaign with a market share of 76% compared to a

market share of 4% for Twitter (Statista, 2018 as cited in Parlamentsbibliothek, 2018 and Holter, 2018).

Facebook is a social network site first launched in 2004 (Boyd and Ellison, 2007, 218) and offers various services, such as creating events, groups or private messages. The most important feature is the newsfeed (also called timeline), which shows a list of postings on the user’s homepage (Paul et al., 2015, 5). It includes status updates, photos, videos, links, app activity and likes from other users, pages and groups that a user follows on Facebook (Bene, 2017, 527). As information supply increases, but users only spend a limited time scrolling through their newsfeed, Facebook acts as an information mediator that tries to place only the relevant and interesting content for each user on the personal timeline with the help of algorithms. According to the Facebook help page for businesses, the newsfeed algorithm takes the following four signals from the user into account (Backstrom, 2013):

- How often a user interacts with the friend or page who posted the content
- The number of likes, shares and comments a post receives from all users and especially from friends of the user
- How much a user has interacted with this type of posting in the past
- If other users are hiding or reporting a posting

Also, in their news feed values, Facebook states that ‘friends and family come first’, which means that content posted by friends and family of the users is particularly prioritised (Mosseri, 2016). This effect was intensified even more in recent years, as Mark Zuckerberg posted that Facebook changed the algorithm to prioritise content from ‘people that matter to us’ even more compared to ‘businesses, brands and media’ (i.e. also political parties) since 2017 (hence already during the 2017 Austrian election campaign) (Mosseri, 2018). This mechanism is enhancing the opinion leader effect described in section 2.3, as the content from friends and family is not only more convincing for users, but also shown more prominently on the news feed.

As a consequence, Facebook is offering owners of pages to pay for their postings, in order to increase their reach. The post reach is the number of people who had the post shown on their screen, either unpaid (organic reach) or paid (paid reach) (Facebook, 2019a). However, these reach metrics are only available to the owners of the Facebook pages, which makes measuring the campaigning success of a posting difficult.

Still, as mentioned above, the number of likes, emotions, shares and comments a post receives is important information for the algorithm to decide if the posting is shown on the news feed. These interactions are especially valuable if they are given by a friend of the user. Importantly, as already mentioned in section 2.3, campaign managers are aware of these mechanisms on Facebook and take these algorithms into account. Campaign managers specifically acknowledge that a campaign message will spread more easily if the message will get more interactions on Facebook (Kreiss et al., 2017).

Therefore, to answer my research question, the influence of campaigning strategies on the sum of all different interactions available on Facebook will be measured as a proxy

of reach and thus campaigning success of a posting. Now, the data set used to test the hypotheses will be described.

3.2 Data

In order to answer my research question, three types of data are needed. First, a content analysis of campaign messages on Facebook distributed by the political actors to measure which issues the campaign messages cover is necessary. Also, public opinion data measuring how salient these issues are to the electorate and how competent each party is to handle these issues is needed. In addition, the interaction numbers each campaign message received to measure the campaigning success of each posting is necessary. Fortunately, all of the required data sets can be combined using data generated by the Austrian National Election Study (AUTNES).

3.2.1 Content analysis and interaction numbers of campaign messages on Facebook

In the AUTNES content analysis of Facebook postings of the 2017 Austrian national election campaign (Müller et al., forthcoming), both a detailed manual content analysis and the interaction numbers of these Facebook postings are provided. The manual content analysis has several advantages. Even though some authors made huge progress in analysing social media text data with the help of algorithms (see e.g. Barberá et al., 2015), manually coded data sets are still the most valid way to analyse political sources (Grimmer and Stewart, 2013, 2). Also, this approach makes it possible to analyse pictures and videos, which is proposed by Boulianne (2016, 569), as this is still a research gap (but see e.g. Metz et al., 2019; Gerodimos and Justinussen, 2015) and which will be done in this analysis.

The AUTNES content analysis of Facebook postings was created by human coders who coded both the policy issues and actors of all Facebook postings of the accounts of all relevant political parties (the 6 party organisation sites of ÖVP, SPÖ, FPÖ, the Greens, NEOS and ‘Liste Pilz’) and their top candidates (the six accounts of Sebastian Kurz, Christian Kern, Heinz-Christian Strache, Ulrike Lunacek, Matthias Strolz and Peter Pilz) in Austria during the election campaign from September 4th (six weeks before the election) to October 14th, 2017 (the day before election day). Hence, this data is a valuable and unique source for this analysis as the actual content of the posting was coded as a policy issue by human coders, including text, pictures and videos seen on the newsfeed and because the sample is complete as it includes all postings from the main actors during the main campaign period. In addition, the interaction numbers for each posting are available, as they were collected every day during the election campaign. For each posting, the

amount of every type of interaction is available five days after the posting was posted¹.

The coders coded each posting using a screenshot, which was collected a few hours after the posting was posted. Thus, the coding process simulated the situation as of users ‘scrolling’ through their newsfeed. Pictures, links and videos were also coded. Importantly, the postings were coded the way when first seeing the posting without interacting with it (reconstructing ‘scrolling over’ a posting without clicking on a link or watching a video). To make this process clear, Figure 3.1 shows both a video and a picture coded in the data set.



Figure 3.1 – Screenshots showing a video and picture coded²

On the left side, one can see a screenshot from a video which was coded. Again, the video was not watched but instead only the first frame one can see when scrolling over the news feed was coded. A text-only approach would only capture the text below the video. However, with the screenshot approach issues and actors that are only visible on the video can be coded too. As the text written in the video is the most prominent, this issue (*all-day school*) was then coded in this case.

On the right side of Figure 3.1, the example is a more extreme case. When using only the text possible to scrape from Facebook, this posting would be dropped without any content as no text was written next to the posted picture. However, with the screenshot approach, the posting could be coded as human coders can read this formatted text and can, therefore, both code a policy issue (*support for single parents*) and an attack against the ÖVP in this case.

¹In some cases, the interaction number on day five was not available due to technical problems. In these cases, the interaction number for the first available day after day five was collected. However, this is not a problem, as on average the interactions increase sharply in the first two days after posting and then stabilise. In other cases, the posting was already deleted five days after posting it. In these cases, the last possible interaction count was used (Müller et al., forthcoming).

²Screenshots were taken of postings by Facebook page ‘SPÖ’ (www.facebook.com/77393060080_10155379394395081) and Facebook page ‘Peter Pilz’ (www.facebook.com/127399223970566_1540059969371144) on September 26, 2019.

With this approach, dozens of both issue-centred and actor-centred variables were coded. In detail, the coded variables include:

- type of posting: text, picture or video (if a picture contained only a picture of text, e.g. the right side of Figure 3.1, it was coded as ‘text-only’. This is also a major advantage which is possible with this coding approach, as Facebook pre-classifies these postings as pictures when providing the data)
- reference of the author: if the author (‘subject actor’) of the posting (either party or top candidate) was specifically mentioned again in the posting as text, picture, or both (e.g. in the right side of Figure 3.1, Peter Pilz (the author of the posting) was specifically mentioned again as text)
- policy and campaigning issue: two issues were coded based on the screenshot seen, one policy issue which captures the policy issue of a posting and a predicate indicating the direction (e.g. for/against environmental protection, for/against migration) and one campaign issue which captures issues regarding the campaign of the party (e.g. tv-confrontation, the personal life of a politician...). The issue categories are very detailed and contain more than 700 issues in 88 sub-categories and 15 main categories (for a detailed explanation see Dolezal et al., 2016).
 - In order to reconstruct the process of scrolling through the newsfeed and noticing the most visible issue first, the coders coded the issues dependent on the visible dominance of the issues: issues in pictures were coded first, followed by headings, graphical accentuations, and then text.
 - The coders were also coding the picture, but the topic had to be specifically mentioned in some form as well as text. If an issue was only illustrated with a picture (e.g. a picture of mountains which could refer to environmental protection but also to tourism) the issue was coded as ‘policy issue shown without text’ and will thus not be included in the analysis, as it was decided that the policy interpretation should not be based *only* on pictures
- the name and organisation of up to 10 individual or collective ‘object actors’ based on the text and the pictures seen in the posting, an indication of how the object was referenced (text, picture or both), the relationship to the author if the object actor was mentioned as a text (if the author talks about the actor negatively, positively or neutrally), and if the actor has a connection to the coded policy or campaign issue. In the example of the right side of Figure 3.1, Sebastian Kurz was referred to negatively, was mentioned as a text-only and had a reference to the coded policy issue (as he was attacked on this issue).

With these variables provided in the AUTNES content analysis of Facebook postings of the 2017 Austrian national election campaign (Müller et al., forthcoming), I can construct most of the variables needed in the models. Still, in order to measure issue saliency and

issue competence according to the demand side, public opinion data was necessary, which was then matched to the content analysis.

3.2.2 Public opinion data on issue saliency and competence

Issue salience and issue ownership measurements were gathered using the pre-electoral wave of the pre- and post-election panel study on issue yield and voters' priorities in the 2017 Austrian elections (Kritzing et al., 2019a). This data set was kindly provided by the authors of Plescia et al. (2019) and is part of the Issue Competition Comparative Project (De Sio et al., 2019). The pre-electoral wave was carried out in September 2017 using computer-assisted web interviewing. The population of this survey is the electorate of the national election in 2017: Austrian citizens who are 16 years old or older at election day. In total, 1000 interviews were collected, and a demographic weight is provided in order to adjust for differences in the known socio-demographic distributions of the population (Kritzing et al., 2019b).

The core questions of this survey are questions about an extensive list (31) of policy issues. The list is divided into 10 valence issues, in which society agrees to a common goal, and 21 positional issues, where two opposite positions can be held (Plescia et al., 2019). At first, the respondents were asked about their own position on these issues (except on the valence issues). Then, it was asked which party is most competent in handling these issues. Also, respondents were asked how important these issues are. In addition, socio-demographic variables and standard questions such as the probability to vote for a given party are included (Kritzing et al., 2019b). As my focus in this thesis is issue saliency and competence, the position of voters and parties in these issues do not matter, which is why I handle the valence and positional issues in exactly the same way.

3.3 Measurement and Descriptives

In this section, I will describe how I use the data explained above in order to construct my variables and show and discuss some descriptive statistics about them. At first, I will clarify the different dependent variables used in the analysis. Then, I will explain my independent variables and how I matched the public opinion data to the content analysis. Lastly, I will illustrate my control variables used in the models.

3.3.1 Dependent variables: campaigning success on Facebook

The dependent variable in my hypothesis is campaigning success. Again, as e.g. Gerodimos and Justinussen (2015, 117) argue, 'a post with many interactions has evidently grabbed more attention and spread more widely, whereas a post with fewer interactions has not been deemed worthy or interesting to engage with'. Hence, the number of the different

interactions are a valid way to measure campaigning success, as campaign managers also acknowledge these mechanisms (Kreiss et al., 2017; Porten-Che   et al., 2018).

As mentioned above, the sum of the four different interactions on Facebook will be used as a proxy of reach and thus campaigning success of a posting: likes, emotions, comments and shares. The different interactions possible can be seen in Figure 3.2. In general, the total sum of all interactions will be the main dependent variable in my analysis. Nevertheless, as the different interactions are used for different purposes, I will also show the distinct effects for each interaction, which are now explained in further detail.



Figure 3.2 – Different types of Facebook interactions and amounts shown to users³

As Bene (2017, 517-518) explains, *likes* are the easiest form of interaction as they require only one click. Macafee (2013) shows that the prime reason for liking political candidates, causes and parties is self-presentation to others. Hence, as also Gerodimos and Justinussen (2015) and explain, liking a posting implies that the user was exposed to the posting and it grabbed his/her attention. Clicking the like button is a form of endorsement and affirmation of the message in the posting (see also Porten-Che   et al. (2018, 213)).

In terms of campaigning success, likes work in two ways. On the one hand, a greater number of likes is increasing the probability that this posting is shown on the newsfeeds of followers (Backstrom, 2013). On the other hand, the like may be seen by the friends of the liking user on their timeline, expanding the visibility and interaction possibility to non-followers of the respective account (Backstrom, 2013; Bene, 2017).

Since February 2016, users can choose from a wider range of *emotional reactions* (love, haha, wow, sad and angry) once they scroll over the like-button (Eberl et al., 2017), which can be seen in Figure 3.3. These emotional reactions thus need a little bit more effort than only liking a posting, as they require the scrolling over (or holding a few seconds in most mobile apps of Facebook) and then selecting the emotional reaction.

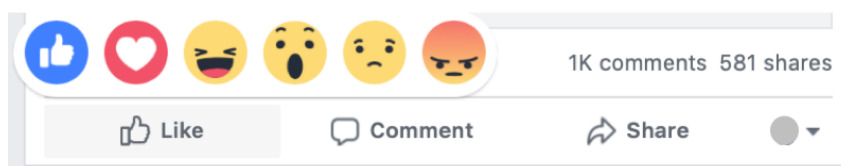


Figure 3.3 – Different types of emotional reactions on Facebook³

Even though emotional reactions do not directly show the actual emotional response of a user, they do show the affection and thus opinion of the user in a more explicit form than likes, as the like button is used in various ways (Gerlitz and Helmond, 2013; Eberl et al., 2019). Still, given all these different emotional reactions, it is not entirely clear what they

³Screenshot was taken on Facebook (www.facebook.com) on April 14, 2019.

mean. On the one hand, the emotional reactions are not a direct measurement of emotions as they are also used ironically (Tian et al., 2017). On the other hand, each emotional reaction can be interpreted in different ways. For example, the *angry* reaction can be interpreted as users being angry about the content of the post (and therefore agreeing with the person posting the post) or being angry about the person posting the content and actually disagreeing with the author (Bene, 2017, 517; Eberl et al., 2017, 9).

Therefore, I will neglect to differentiate between the different emotional reactions, but I will combine them in my analysis as they all work similarly in the sense of campaigning success of a posting. First of all, a greater number of emotional reactions is increasing the probability that this posting is shown on the newsfeeds of followers similarly to the like button (Backstrom, 2013). However, the newest update of the news feed algorithm suggests that emotions are more important to the algorithm than likes as they are ‘meaningful interactions’ (Mosseri, 2018). Also, the emotional reactions may be seen by the friends of the reacting user on their timeline, expanding the visibility and interaction possibility to non-followers of the posting account (Backstrom, 2013; Bene, 2017). As the emotional reaction is more meaningful, the friend can see the opinion of the user more clearly compared to the like button, which can enhance the opinion leader effect explained in section 2.3.

Comments enable users to express their opinion about the posting. Other than likes or emotional reactions, comments make the opinion of the commenting user explicit. Macafee (2013) shows that commenting on political postings is primarily done to interact with other Facebook users and share information with them. Even though comments can be both positive or negative, in order to reach more people (i.e. the campaigning success as defined in this thesis) more comments are better in any case. Again, a greater number will increase the probability of the posting being placed in the newsfeed of followers (Backstrom, 2013). In addition, friends of the user might see this comment in their own timeline which makes the post more visible to both followers and non-followers of the posting account (Bene, 2017, 518).

Importantly and in contrast to likes and emotions, a comment can be liked or re-commented again by the audience, which can lead to an active discussion below a posting, which again increases visibility to non-followers. For example, friends of the commenting user can like the comment or debate with them on the topic below the posting, which can lead to mobilising effects of political discussions with opinion leaders. According to the new algorithm, these ‘back-and-forth discussion(s) in the comments’ are ranked especially high to be shown to other users (Mosseri, 2018).

Building on this, *shares* are the most important interaction of users in order to increase the visibility of a posting to non-followers (Bene, 2017, 518). Again, for reaching more people it does not matter if the posting is shared because of a positive or negative opinion of the sharing user. In general, the posting has a higher probability of being placed in the newsfeed of followers if the number of shares is higher (Backstrom, 2013). In addition, as

the sharing user copies the posting into their own timeline (or to a friends timeline, or into a group’s newsfeed (Paul et al., 2015, 7)), it is now seen by a specific part of the user’s friends the user wants it to be seen. Therefore, the user’s friends can interact with the posting in a more personal space by liking, commenting or sharing it themselves. Sharing is especially valuable as the posting is now interpreted as being authored by the user, and Facebook prioritises postings from friends in the newsfeed compared to commercial sites like party pages or businesses (Paul et al., 2015, Mosseri, 2018).

Given all these four types of Facebook interactions, one can see that they work in a slightly different way and that they are not equally valuable in order to reach the highest number of people. However, as the Facebook algorithm is not public and I do not specifically know how much more valuable one interaction is compared to another, I cannot validly weigh the different interactions. Nevertheless, what all interactions have in common is that campaigning success increases with the number of interactions. Therefore, I combined them in my analysis and use the total number of all Facebook interactions as my main dependent variable. Still, as it is interesting to see the specific effects for each interaction, I will also report and interpret the results for each interaction separately.

Descriptive values of dependent variables

In Table 3.1 and Figure 3.4 one can see the descriptive values and the distribution of the different dependent variables. The number of interactions per posting is the sum of all the other four interactions. On average, a posting has 1,167 interactions in total. However, as one can see in Figure 3.4, the distribution of the dependent variables is right-skewed. A small number of interactions for a posting is much more common than a big number, which is why the median posting only has 392 interactions. This has to be acknowledged in the model, which will be explained in section 3.4. Also, it is noticeable that likes (median = 286) are much more common than any other interaction (medians 23, 21 and 41). Hence, one has to interpret the results regarding the main dependent variable with caution, as the number of likes is influencing the number of interactions most.

	Min	Max	Median	Mean	SD	Variance
Interactions per posting	10	32,602	392	1,167	2,196	4,822,724
Likes per posting	10	23,364	286	837	1,628	2,651,445
Emotions per posting	0	3,424	23	102	257	66,135
Comments per posting	0	4,516	21	77	202	41,003
Shares per posting	0	6,479	41	150	350	122,665

Observations: 1,462

Table 3.1 – Descriptive statistics of dependent variables

This can also be seen in Table 3.2, where the correlations of the dependent variables are shown. All interactions are correlated positively and the correlations are statistically significant. In the first column, the correlations of the sum of all interactions with the

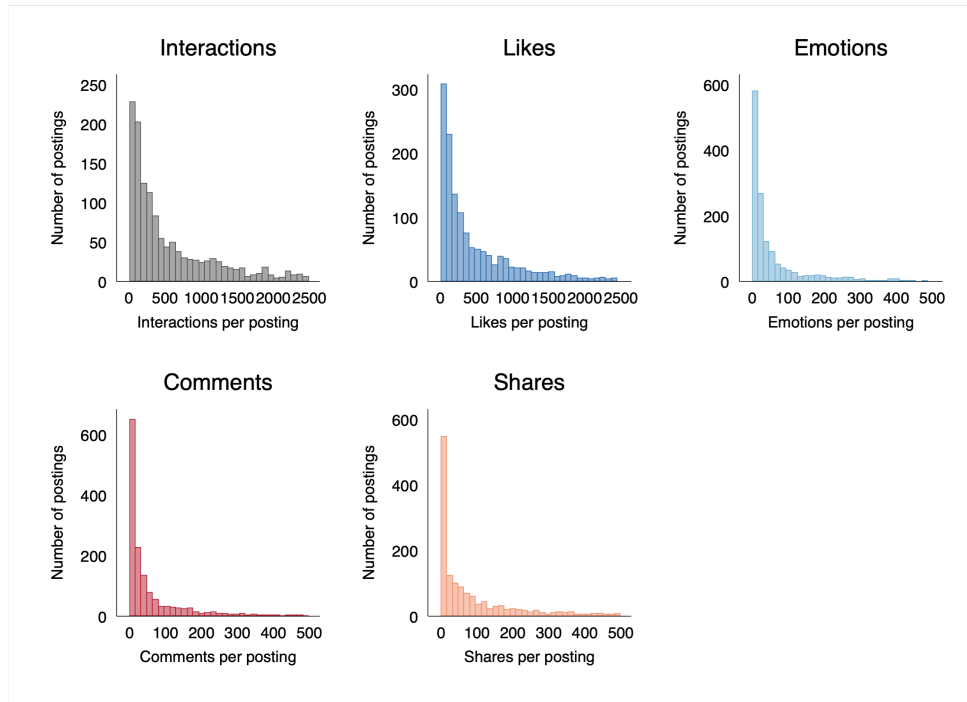


Figure 3.4 – Distribution of total interactions, likes, emotions, comments and shares by number of postings

The interaction numbers shown here do not include the full range to see the distribution more clearly.

individual interactions can be seen. As expected, especially the interactions and likes variables are highly correlated (Pearson’s $r = 0.98$). The correlation between emotions and interactions is the lowest (Pearson’s $r = 0.63$).

The other columns show the correlations between the four different interactions. The highest correlation can be seen between likes and shares with a Pearson’s r of 0.78. Still, it can also be seen that the different interactions are in fact distinct and measure different mechanisms, as some pairs of interactions (e.g likes and emotions: Pearson’s $r = 0.48$ or comments and shares: Pearson’s $r = 0.58$) are not that highly correlated. As a consequence, I will report the models for each interaction separately and not only for the sum of all of them.

	All interactions	Likes	Emotions	Comments	Shares
All interactions	1.00				
Likes	0.98***	1.00			
Emotions	0.63***	0.48***	1.00		
Comments	0.70***	0.60***	0.64***	1.00	
Shares	0.86***	0.78***	0.63***	0.58***	1.00

*** $p < 0.001$; Observations: 1,462

Table 3.2 – Correlation matrix of all dependent variables

Figure 3.5 shows the distribution of the main dependent variable (all interactions) per account, with very diverging results between accounts. The most successful postings are posted by the top candidates of ÖVP (median = 2,350), FPÖ (median = 2,122) and SPÖ

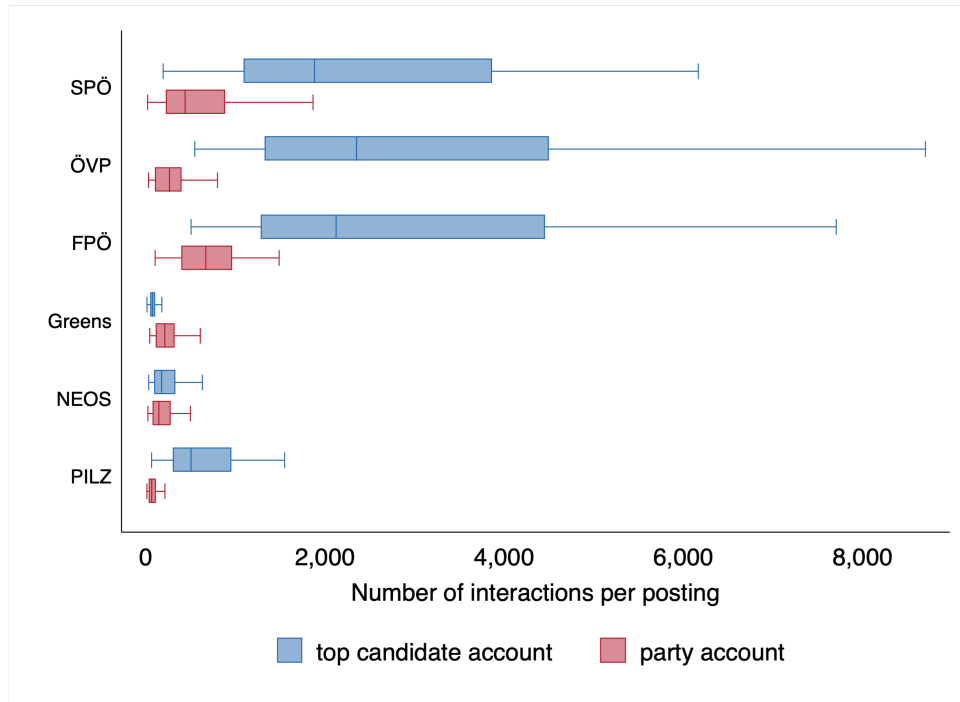


Figure 3.5 – Interactions per account

Outliers are not shown here to display the distribution more clearly.

(median = 1,882) followed by the party accounts of FPÖ and SPÖ and the candidate page of Peter Pilz. All other accounts have fewer interactions on their postings. The lowest number of interactions on average have the postings of the party page of Liste Pilz (median = 64) and the top candidate of the Greens (median = 74). It stands out that in all cases but the Greens, the postings of the top candidate accounts are more successful than the postings of the party accounts on average. Due to these very different distributions, the models will be calculated using dummies for each account (see section 3.4).

3.3.2 Independent variables: issue-centred campaigning strategies on Facebook

The measurement of the issue-centred campaigning strategies (riding-the-wave and issue ownership) will be based on data from Kritzinger et al. (2019a). As mentioned above, this project conducted a public opinion survey collecting voters' issue priorities and perceived party issue competence on thirty-one policy issues.

As a first step, the very detailed policy issues coded in the content analysis of the Facebook postings (Müller et al., forthcoming) were combined into broader categories that matched the thirty-one policy issues used in the public opinion survey (Kritzinger et al., 2019a). Then, the issue saliency (to measure the riding-the-wave strategy) and issue competence (to measure the issue ownership strategy) variables were constructed and matched to the content analysis data set.

Issue classification

In order to match the issue saliency and competence measurement of the public opinion survey to the content analysis of the Facebook posting, both data sets need the same classification of policy issues. Therefore, I combined the very detailed policy issues of the AUTNES content analysis of the Facebook postings into categories matching the 31⁴ issue statements asked in the public opinion survey.

The proposed classification can be seen in Table 3.3 below. The **15 headings** are broad classifications of issue topics, which only serve for a better overview and some descriptive analyses. Below one can see the *30 issues* and the according *survey statement* which was asked to respondents next to it. For each issue, the *number of postings (N)* is shown on the left side. The main independent variables will be calculated in this issue dimension in order to measure competence and saliency as specific as possible. The (over 300) specific AUTNES categories are not shown here, but the whole classification can be seen in Table A.1 in the Appendix (see page 86).

N	Headings / <i>Issues: Survey issue statement</i>
	Migration and Integration
22	<i>Asylum rules: Keep current asylum rules / Make asylum rules more restrictive</i>
33	<i>Control immigration: Control immigration</i>
123	<i>Cultural integration: Allow / Require foreigners in Austria to preserve their own / fully adapt to Austrian culture</i>
18	<i>EU and migration: The EU has to enforce refugee quotas / Member states should decide on their own</i>
19	<i>Welfare chauvinism: Maintain current levels of / Restrict access to welfare benefits for immigrants</i>
	Corruption / Behaviour Politicians
209	<i>Corruption / Behaviour Politicians: Fight corruption</i>
	Social Justice
11	<i>Membership trade associations: Austria should (not) abolish the obligatory membership in trade associations</i>
151	<i>Social Justice: Providing Social Justice</i>
	Environmental protection
115	<i>Environmental protection: Protect the environment</i>
15	<i>Sustainable Energy: Promoting the production of sustainable energy / Maintaining current mix</i>
17	<i>Transport: Diesel cars should (not) be banned</i>
	Economy
123	<i>Economy: Support economic growth</i>
	Education
100	<i>Education : Austria should (not) introduce a compreh. school for all children until the age of 14</i>
	Health and social services
97	<i>Health and social services: Raise (cut) taxes and spend more (less) on health and social services</i>

⁴One survey statement (Allow/End freedom of movement of people from the EU into Austria) was not used for the classification as no Facebook posting addressed this policy issue.

Gender equality and homosexuals	
69	<u>Gender equality</u> : Politics should implement / not enforce gender quotas
13	<u>Homosexuals</u> : (Do not) Allow gay marriages
Job market	
16	<u>Fight unemployment</u> : Fight unemployment
49	<u>Regulations job market</u> : Keep current regulations in the job market / Deregulate the job market
10	<u>Unemployment / national debt</u> : (Do not) decrease unemployment even at the expense of high national debt
Security and Crime	
36	<u>Fight crime</u> : Fight crime
4	<u>Surveillance measures</u> : Surveillance measures should (not) be extended
25	<u>Terrorist attacks</u> : Protect Austria against terrorist attacks
European Integration	
54	<u>European Integration</u> : Stay in the EU / Leave the EU
Redistribution of wealth	
11	<u>Minimum wage</u> : (Do not) increase the minimum wage above 1500 euros
20	<u>Property tax</u> : Austria should (not) have a property tax on inheritance
20	<u>Reduce income differences</u> : (Do not) reduce income differences
Housing	
32	<u>Housing</u> : Providing affordable homes
(Direct) democracy	
30	<u>(Direct) democracy</u> : Introduce stronger / Keep current level of direct democracy measures
Elderly People	
18	<u>Elderly People</u> : Fighting poverty of Elderly People
2	<u>Pension age</u> : Keep current / Increase pension age
Residual	
920	<u>No policy issue</u> : No policy issue
387	<u>Other / not matched</u> : Other / not matched
2769	Sum

Table 3.3 – Issues and corresponding survey statements

As an example, I will explain the categorisation of a posting shown in Figure 3.6. This posting was coded into the AUTNES category ‘homosexuals: equality’. This posting and all other postings coded into the AUTNES categories ‘homosexuals: marriage’ and ‘homosexuals: equality’ were combined into the issue *Homosexuals*. This issue was then matched to the survey issue statement ‘(Do not) Allow gay marriages’. Hence, all postings about this issue will be matched with the saliency and competence measurements of the respondents answering this statement. Then, this issue and the issue *Gender equality* were given the heading **Gender equality and homosexuals**, which consists of 69 postings about gender equality and 13 postings about homosexuals. With this classification process, I was able to match all Facebook postings to the corresponding competence and saliency measures according to the Austrian electorate.



Figure 3.6 – Example posting on issue homosexuals⁵

Table 3.4 shows the distribution of the headings (i.e. broad issue topics). Again, the analysis will be conducted on the more detailed issue categories shown above in Table 3.3, but these 15 broad categories give a better overview than the 30 specific issues. Out of the 2,769 postings collected, 920 were not about a policy issue at all. For 387 postings which were about some policy issue, no survey issue statement could be matched. These postings mostly include postings that were coded as ‘not classifiable’ in the AUTNES data (244) and some postings about foreign policy, civil rights and defence. Hence, 1,462 (i.e. 52.8% of all) postings can be included in the analysis.

Table 3.4 shows that the largest category in the analysis is ‘migration and integration’ (15% of valid) and ‘corruption or behaviour of politicians’ (14% of valid). This is no surprise, as migration was the most important topic during the 2017 campaign and the ‘Silberstein scandal’ falls into the ‘corruption or behaviour of politicians’ category and was an important topic during the campaign, too (Bodlos and Plescia, 2018; Galyga et al., 2018, see also section 3.1). After these two most important issues, the categories of social justice, environmental protection, economy and education follow. Some of the categories are more narrow, and only a few of the Facebook postings talked about these issues. For example, only 20 postings are about elderly people.

⁵Screenshot was taken of posting by Facebook page ‘Ulrike Lunacek’ (www.facebook.com/46239976233_10155255680076234) on September 28, 2019.

		Freq.	Percent	Valid
Valid	Migration and integration	215	7.8	14.7
	Corruption / behaviour politicians	209	7.5	14.3
	Social justice	162	5.9	11.1
	Environmental protection	147	5.3	10.1
	Economy	123	4.4	8.4
	Education	100	3.6	6.8
	Health and social services	97	3.5	6.6
	Gender equality and homosexuals	82	3.0	5.6
	Job market	75	2.7	5.1
	Security and crime	65	2.3	4.4
	European integration	54	2.0	3.7
	Redistribution of wealth	51	1.8	3.5
	Housing	32	1.2	2.2
	(Direct) democracy	30	1.1	2.1
	Elderly people	20	0.7	1.4
	Total	1,462	52.8	100.0
Missing	Other / not matched	387	14.0	
	No policy issue	920	33.2	
	Total	1,307	47.2	
Total		2,769	100.0	

Table 3.4 – Frequencies of broad issue topics

Table 3.5 shows the distribution of the 30 issues per party, which correspond to the survey questions asked and on which level the independent variables will be calculated. As it is easier to discuss, Table 3.6 shows the distribution of the headings (i.e. broad issue topics) per party. As one can see, parties post more about the issues they are traditionally seen as competent on (for an evaluation of the issue ownership of Austrian parties over time see e.g. Meyer and Müller (2013)), which shows that the measurement and operationalization are valid. The most posted issue topic of the SPÖ is social justice. Also, about 20% of all postings of the FPÖ are about migration and integration. For the Greens, 25% of the postings are about environmental protection. Moreover, the newer and smaller parties concentrate on their main issues as well: NEOS posted 10% of their postings about education and from all the postings of the Liste Peter Pilz 19% were about corruption.

One observation which has to be made here is that about 45% of the postings of the ÖVP are not about any issue category at all, which stands out compared to the other parties. Also, the ÖVP only posted about 3% of their postings about their core topics of economy and European integration. Instead, most of their postings are about migration and integration. Even though this seems odd at a first glance, this suggests a valid classification of the postings. As Bodlos and Plescia (2018) explain, the campaign of the new ÖVP and its new leader Sebastian Kurz mostly focused on undermining the ownership of the FPÖ on the migration issue and was characterised by not addressing any policy issue at all in a lot of the campaign material (e.g. in the poster campaign), which can thus also be seen on Facebook (see also section 3.1).

Issues	SPÖ	ÖVP	FPÖ	Greens	NEOS	PILZ	Total
(Direct) democracy	0.1%	1.8%	1.3%	0.9%	0.8%	2.4%	1.1%
Asylum rules	0.3%	0.2%	2.7%	0.4%	0.3%	0.3%	0.8%
Control immigration	0.4%	2.7%	2.7%	0.0%	0.3%	0.7%	1.2%
Corruption / behaviour politicians	3.2%	4.3%	10.8%	5.6%	8.2%	18.8%	7.5%
Cultural integration	2.1%	2.5%	8.8%	1.8%	5.9%	6.9%	4.4%
EU and migration	0.0%	0.9%	1.6%	0.7%	0.3%	0.3%	0.7%
Economy	6.6%	2.9%	2.5%	6.5%	2.8%	4.2%	4.4%
Education	4.4%	2.3%	0.4%	4.5%	9.9%	1.0%	3.6%
Elderly people	0.7%	0.9%	0.4%	0.2%	1.7%	0.0%	0.7%
Environmental protection	2.2%	0.0%	1.1%	19.6%	0.6%	1.7%	4.2%
European integration	0.4%	2.7%	0.9%	3.1%	5.1%	0.7%	2.0%
Fight crime	1.0%	1.1%	3.4%	0.4%	0.6%	0.3%	1.3%
Fight unemployment	1.3%	0.5%	0.0%	0.0%	1.1%	0.3%	0.6%
Gender equality	6.2%	0.5%	0.9%	2.2%	0.6%	2.8%	2.5%
Health and social services	5.6%	4.3%	2.2%	1.6%	5.4%	0.7%	3.5%
Homosexuals	0.9%	0.0%	0.0%	0.9%	0.8%	0.0%	0.5%
Housing	3.1%	0.2%	0.4%	1.3%	0.6%	0.0%	1.2%
Membership trade associations	0.6%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	2.0%	0.0%	0.4%
Minimum wage	1.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.4%	0.0%	0.3%	0.4%
Pension age	0.1%	0.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%
Property tax	1.6%	0.2%	0.2%	1.6%	0.0%	0.0%	0.7%
Reduce income differences	0.9%	0.5%	0.2%	1.1%	0.0%	2.1%	0.7%
Regulations job market	5.0%	0.2%	0.7%	0.9%	1.4%	0.3%	1.8%
Social justice	12.0%	1.1%	2.0%	6.3%	0.6%	8.0%	5.5%
Surveillance measures	0.0%	0.2%	0.0%	0.2%	0.0%	0.7%	0.1%
Sustainable energy	0.1%	0.5%	0.0%	2.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.5%
Terrorist attacks	0.1%	0.5%	3.1%	0.7%	0.0%	0.7%	0.9%
Transport	0.7%	0.0%	0.0%	2.5%	0.0%	0.3%	0.6%
Unemployment / national debt	0.0%	1.1%	0.2%	0.0%	0.6%	0.7%	0.4%
Welfare chauvinism	0.0%	0.0%	3.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.7%
Other / not matched	8.8%	22.3%	14.2%	10.3%	20.3%	10.8%	14.0%
No policy issue	30.2%	45.5%	36.0%	23.4%	30.4%	34.7%	33.2%

Table 3.5 – Issues per party

Broad issue topic	SPÖ	ÖVP	FPÖ	Greens	NEOS	PILZ	Total
(Direct) democracy	0.1%	1.8%	1.3%	0.9%	0.8%	2.4%	1.1%
Corruption / behaviour politicians	3.2%	4.3%	10.8%	5.6%	8.2%	18.8%	7.5%
Economy	6.6%	2.9%	2.5%	6.5%	2.8%	4.2%	4.4%
Education	4.4%	2.3%	0.4%	4.5%	9.9%	1.0%	3.6%
Elderly people	0.9%	1.1%	0.4%	0.2%	1.7%	0.0%	0.7%
Environmental protection	3.1%	0.5%	1.1%	24.7%	0.6%	2.1%	5.3%
European integration	0.4%	2.7%	0.9%	3.1%	5.1%	0.7%	2.0%
Gender equality and homosexuals	7.0%	0.5%	0.9%	3.1%	1.4%	2.8%	3.0%
Health and social services	5.6%	4.3%	2.2%	1.6%	5.4%	0.7%	3.5%
Housing	3.1%	0.2%	0.4%	1.3%	0.6%	0.0%	1.2%
Job market	6.3%	1.8%	0.9%	0.9%	3.1%	1.4%	2.7%
Migration and integration	2.8%	6.3%	19.3%	2.9%	6.8%	8.3%	7.8%
Redistribution of wealth	3.7%	0.7%	0.4%	3.1%	0.0%	2.4%	1.8%
Security and crime	1.2%	1.8%	6.5%	1.3%	0.6%	1.7%	2.3%
Social justice	12.6%	1.1%	2.0%	6.3%	2.5%	8.0%	5.9%
Other / not matched	8.8%	22.3%	14.2%	10.3%	20.3%	10.8%	14.0%
No policy issue	30.2%	45.5%	36.0%	23.4%	30.4%	34.7%	33.2%

Table 3.6 – Broad issue topics per party

Note: Values in bold are the values mentioned in the text.

Calculation of issue salience and competence

To test my hypotheses, several variables measuring the issue-centred campaigning strategies of a given Facebook posting are necessary. These variables about the issue saliency of a topic and the issue competence of a party in a given topic are derived from public opinion data from Kritzinger et al. (2019a)⁶.

In order to measure the riding-the-wave strategy, and thus testing hypotheses 1a and 3a, a *saliency (all) variable* is needed indicating how important an issue is according to all respondents (i.e. the electorate). This variable was constructed using the same approach as Plescia et al. (2019) do for their systematic saliency. For every policy issue, the respondents were asked which priority this issue has for Austria on a three-point scale ranging from low and medium to high (Kritzinger et al., 2019b). The variable was calculated showing for every policy issue the proportion of all respondents indicating that the statement has a high (weight: 1) or medium (weight: 0.5) priority for Austria.

To test the issue ownership strategy, and thus hypotheses 2a and 3a, a *competence (all) variable* is needed indicating how competent each party is viewed on an issue according to all respondents (i.e. the electorate). Again, the respondents were asked for every policy issue which party is able to tackle this issue and could pick one or more parties out of a list of all six parties (Kritzinger et al., 2019b). The variable was calculated showing for every policy issue the proportion of all respondents picking this party as being competent on this issue.

In hypothesis 1b, 2b and 3b, two groups are compared: party supporters and non-supporters. These two groups were constructed using the survey question of how likely the respondent is to vote for each party on a scale from 0 to 10. If a respondent selected higher than five on this scale, the respondent is considered a party supporter. If the respondent selected five or lower, the respondent is considered not supporting this party. This quite loose operationalization of party supporters was chosen in order to imitate the ‘intermediate group’ of followers on Facebook as best as possible, which are less supportive than the very distinctive group of party voters, but considerably more supportive than non-voters and voters of other parties (see Ennser-Jedenastik et al., 2019). With this operationalization, a respondent can be supportive of more than one party or not supportive of any party at all. Still, for each party, there are only two groups of respondents: supportive of the given party or not supportive of the given party. These groups will be used to calculate the following variables.

To assess Hypothesis 1b and 3b, a *saliency (supporters)* and a *saliency (non-supporters) variable* are needed indicating how important an issue is according to the respondents supporting or not supporting each party. The same approach as for the saliency (all) variable is used here, calculating the proportion of all party supporters indicating that the

⁶For all calculations explained in this section, the socio-demographic weights were applied, in order to compensate for socio-demographic differences between the respondents and the Austrian electorate.

statement has high (weight: 1) or medium (weight: 0.5) priority for Austria. The same process is applied to the group of party non-supporters.

To investigate Hypothesis 2b and 3b, a *competence (supporters)* and a *competence (non-supporters) variable* are needed indicating how much competence each party gets assigned for tackling an issue according to the respondents supporting or not supporting this party. The same process as for the competence (all) variable explained above is used. The variables were calculated showing for every policy issue the proportion of all party supporters / non-supporters picking this party as being competent in handling this issue.

These variables are then matched to the content analysis of the Facebook postings using the (party of the) author and issue of each posting (which have the same classification, as explained above). As 6 parties and 30 issues are in the data set, 180 measurements are available. However, as not every party posted on every policy issue, only 139 party-issue dyads are used for the analysis. These dyads will also be the clusters in the model, which will be explained in more detail in section 3.4.

Descriptive values of issue saliency and competence

In Table 3.7 one can see the descriptive values of the six variables explained above. For the issue saliency by all respondents variable the maximum value of 0.85 means that 85% of the electorate thinks that an issue has a medium or high priority for Austria⁷. As one can see, for all issues, at least 42% of the electorate thinks that the issue has priority. For both groups of party supporters and party non-supporters, the range is slightly broader, meaning that some issues are less salient for these groups and some issues are more salient for these groups on average.

	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Saliency of issue (all respondents)	0.42	0.85	0.71	0.11
Saliency of issue (party supporters)	0.40	0.95	0.72	0.12
Saliency of issue (party non-supporters)	0.39	0.90	0.72	0.12
Competence of party on issue (all respondents)	0.05	0.66	0.25	0.14
Competence of party on issue (party supporters)	0.14	0.93	0.45	0.18
Competence of party on issue (party non-supporters)	0.03	0.58	0.16	0.11

Observations: 139

Table 3.7 – Descriptive statistics of independent variables

For the issue competence of all respondents variable, the maximum value of 0.66 means that on one issue, a party is perceived as competent on by 66% of the electorate (in this case the FPÖ on the issue ‘control immigration’). One can see that the range and mean of the competence variable for party supporters are higher, as party supporters typically indicate a greater competence of their party on all issues. Similarly, the range and mean of the competence variable of the non-supporters are lower, as non-supporters rate a party as less competent on most issues.

⁷But note that the respondents who answered with ‘medium’ priority count half in this calculation.

In terms of the correlation between the independent variables, one can see in Table 3.8 that all saliency measures and all competence measures are highly correlated. Therefore, the models that test the saliency of supporters and non-supporters against each other have to be interpreted with caution. Still, the models will show what the difference in saliency between these groups can explain. Interestingly, the competence measurements are not significantly correlated with the saliency of all respondents and the non-supporters, but with the saliency of the supporters. This means that a party is perceived particularly competent on those issues that the supporters of the party find important.

	S(a)	S(s)	S(n-s)	C(a)	C(s)	C(n-s)
Saliency (all)	1					
Saliency (supporters)	0.91***	1				
Saliency (non-supporters)	0.98***	0.82***	1			
Competence (all)	0.14	0.37***	0.023	1		
Competence (supporters)	0.13	0.37***	0.015	0.97***	1	
Competence (non-supporters)	0.11	0.36***	-0.017	0.96***	0.91***	1

*** $p < 0.001$; Observations: 139

Table 3.8 – Correlation matrix of independent variables

To give these measurements some context, I will now show some specific policy examples. Regarding issue saliency, the measurement is (as already mentioned above) the same as the systematic saliency in Plescia et al. (2019, see Table 1⁸). Hence, the most important issues according to the Austrian electorate in 2017 are the fights against unemployment and crime, the protection against terrorist attacks and the control of immigration. More than 80% of the electorate indicate high priority for these issues. The least important issues are gender quotas and same-sex marriage, with values less than 50%.

In terms of issue ownership, Table 3.9 shows the best three and worst three issues per party in terms of competence according to all respondents. The whole table with all issues can be seen in Table B.1 in the Appendix on page 97. The table can be read as follows: Across all respondents, 49% picked the SPÖ when asked who can handle the issue ‘Fighting poverty of elderly people’⁹. Across SPÖ supporters, 77% picked the party and across SPÖ non-supporters, only 34% picked it. In terms of saliency, 81% of all respondents indicated that this issue is important, with a slightly higher number for supporters (83%) than non-supporters (81%).

Also, in the party-rows, Table 3.9 shows the competence and saliency measures across all issues the party addressed in its postings. This means that across all issues the SPÖ addressed, 30% of respondents picked the SPÖ as being competent on handling this issue. This number is higher for supporters (53%) and lower for non-supporters (19%). This number is interesting for a party comparison, as the ÖVP is most competent on most issues they posted about according to all respondents, followed by the FPÖ, the SPÖ, the

⁸Small differences occur due to the applied socio-demographic weights.

⁹See exact survey statements in Table 3.3.

Greens, the NEOS and PILZ.

Moreover, it can be seen that the FPÖ is perceived most different amongst party supporters and non-supporters. FPÖ supporters find their party particularly competent on most issues, as the supporter competence value is highest in their case (across all issues, 60% of all FPÖ supporters pick the FPÖ as being competent on this issue). In contrast, on average across all issues only 20% of non-supporters pick the FPÖ as being competent.

With these values, I am able to measure the saliency and competence of an issue according to the three groups (the whole electorate, the party supporters, and the party non-supporters). These measurements were matched to the content analysis of the Facebook posting. Coming back to the example shown in Figure 3.6 on page 32, where the top candidate of the Greens posted something about the equality of homosexuals, this posting will get the values shown in the row ‘Homosexuals’ below ‘Greens’ in Table 3.9 in the independent variables: the party of the author is seen as quite competent on this issue among all respondents (36% picked the party), but particularly from supporters (69% picked the party). Also, this issue is not that important for the whole electorate (42%), but more important for the Green supporters (55%). In both variables, the non-supporters have lower values as expected.

Hence, after having matched all postings with all these saliency and competence measurements, I am now able to measure how these issue-centred campaigning strategies influence the campaigning success of the given posting. Still, as the issue-centred campaigning strategies are not all that matters to influence the success of a posting, a few control variables will be introduced, which will be explained now.

Party / Issue	Competence			Saliency		
	all	sup.	n-s.	all	sup.	n-s.
SPÖ	0.30	0.53	0.19	0.69	0.70	0.70
Elderly people	0.49	0.77	0.34	0.81	0.83	0.81
Fight unemployment	0.48	0.80	0.32	0.84	0.88	0.83
Housing	0.48	0.76	0.34	0.78	0.82	0.76
...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Cultural integration	0.19	0.39	0.08	0.78	0.72	0.83
Asylum rules	0.17	0.37	0.06	0.82	0.76	0.86
Corruption / behaviour politicians	0.16	0.32	0.08	0.79	0.78	0.81
ÖVP	0.35	0.53	0.23	0.72	0.72	0.73
Economy	0.57	0.77	0.45	0.73	0.79	0.70
Control immigration	0.52	0.76	0.36	0.84	0.90	0.79
Fight crime	0.47	0.67	0.34	0.84	0.88	0.81
...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Sustainable energy	0.26	0.42	0.16	0.67	0.64	0.69
Gender equality	0.24	0.39	0.13	0.45	0.42	0.48
Corruption / behaviour politicians	0.21	0.35	0.11	0.79	0.77	0.81
FPÖ	0.34	0.60	0.20	0.73	0.76	0.72
Control immigration	0.66	0.92	0.53	0.84	0.95	0.78
Asylum rules	0.58	0.86	0.44	0.82	0.92	0.76
Welfare chauvinism	0.57	0.87	0.44	0.80	0.92	0.75
...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Gender equality	0.23	0.44	0.12	0.45	0.47	0.45
Education	0.22	0.48	0.09	0.57	0.56	0.60
Environmental protection	0.13	0.31	0.04	0.75	0.70	0.78
Greens	0.19	0.42	0.14	0.69	0.69	0.70
Environmental protection	0.61	0.87	0.57	0.75	0.83	0.73
Sustainable energy	0.42	0.73	0.36	0.67	0.75	0.64
Homosexuals	0.36	0.69	0.29	0.42	0.55	0.38
...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Fight crime	0.07	0.20	0.04	0.84	0.75	0.86
Terrorist attacks	0.07	0.17	0.05	0.84	0.73	0.87
Economy	0.05	0.15	0.02	0.73	0.67	0.76
NEOS	0.14	0.31	0.10	0.71	0.70	0.72
European integration	0.27	0.50	0.21	0.76	0.85	0.75
Economy	0.23	0.51	0.16	0.73	0.78	0.73
Homosexuals	0.22	0.39	0.18	0.42	0.40	0.42
...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Control immigration	0.10	0.21	0.07	0.84	0.78	0.86
EU and migration	0.09	0.23	0.06	0.80	0.79	0.81
Asylum rules	0.08	0.21	0.04	0.82	0.77	0.83
PILZ	0.10	0.26	0.06	0.71	0.72	0.72
Corruption / behaviour politicians	0.28	0.61	0.20	0.79	0.85	0.78
Environmental protection	0.22	0.44	0.16	0.75	0.82	0.73
European integration	0.18	0.42	0.12	0.76	0.81	0.76
...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Asylum rules	0.06	0.20	0.03	0.82	0.79	0.83
Control immigration	0.05	0.15	0.02	0.84	0.76	0.86
Economy	0.05	0.13	0.03	0.73	0.73	0.75
Across all parties and issues	0.24	0.45	0.16	0.71	0.71	0.71

Table 3.9 – Best and worst issues (in terms of competence by all respondents) per party

3.3.3 Control variables

For all models, several control variables will be necessary. All these variables can also drive the campaigning success of a posting. To only see the specific effect for the issue-centred campaigning strategies, these controls will be introduced.

	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Negative campaigning	0	1	0.27	0.44
Type: text-only	0	1	0.03	0.17
Type: picture / top candidate not visible (reference)	0	1	0.34	0.47
Type: picture / top candidate visible	0	1	0.21	0.41
Type: video / top candidate not visible	0	1	0.16	0.37
Type: video / top candidate visible	0	1	0.26	0.44
Number of postings	1	12	4.68	2.73
Days until election day	-41	-1	-19.61	11.62
Observations = 1,462				

Table 3.10 – Descriptive statistics of control variables

Actor-centred campaigning strategies: negative campaigning and personalisation

As explained in section 2.4, both issue-centred and actor-centred campaigning strategies are important for the success of a given posting. In order to only see the effect of the issue-centred campaigning strategies, I will control for the two most important campaigning strategies of negative campaigning and personalisation.

Several studies have shown so far that *negative campaigning* affects interaction. Some studies analyse the tone of and emotions used in the campaign messages and find that a negative tone or negative emotions can increase user engagement (Heiss et al., 2018; Bene, 2017; Bobba, 2019). In contrast, Borah (2016) finds that positive postings are more successful than negative ones. Also, Heiss et al. (2018) show that the explicit mention of another party increases the number of comments, but decreases likes. Hence, as negative campaigning tends to have a significant impact on different user interactions, this control variable will be included. It was generated using the content analysis of Facebook postings, in which also up to 10 different actors and the relation to the author were coded. Negative campaigning was set to 1 if the posting contained an attack on a (member of) a politically relevant organisation (such as a party or the government), else 0.

In Table 3.10 one can see that 27% of all postings in the analysis contain an attack against an opponent. In Figure 3.7 on the left side, one can see that this proportion varies significantly between the different accounts, even though in most cases both accounts of the same party have similar proportions. The FPÖ undoubtedly attacks the most, as about 55% of the postings by the party account and 67% of the postings by the top candidate account contain an attack. In contrast, the ÖVP attacks the least, where only 1-3% of the postings from both accounts contain an attack.

The other important actor-centred campaigning strategy I will control for is *personalisation*. As also already mentioned in section 2.4, several studies found positive effects of a personalised posting on interactions (Metz et al., 2019; Bene, 2017; Gerodimos and Justinussen, 2015). Using several of the variables available, I constructed a variable which indicates if the top candidate is shown as a picture in the posting. This is the same procedure as one of the approaches used by Bodlos (forthcoming) for measuring personalisation. Among all postings in the analysis, the top candidate is visible in 47% of them. In Figure 3.7 on the right side, one can see the share of these postings by account. As expected, in most cases, the top candidates are more visible in the postings distributed from the top candidates accounts. From all top candidate accounts, Ulrike Lunacek from the Greens is visible the most in 85% of her postings. Surprisingly, among all top candidate accounts, the populist leader HC Strache of the FPÖ has the lowest share of being visible in his postings with only 40%. Still, the party account of the FPÖ has the highest proportion among all party accounts, showing HC Strache in 57% of the postings.

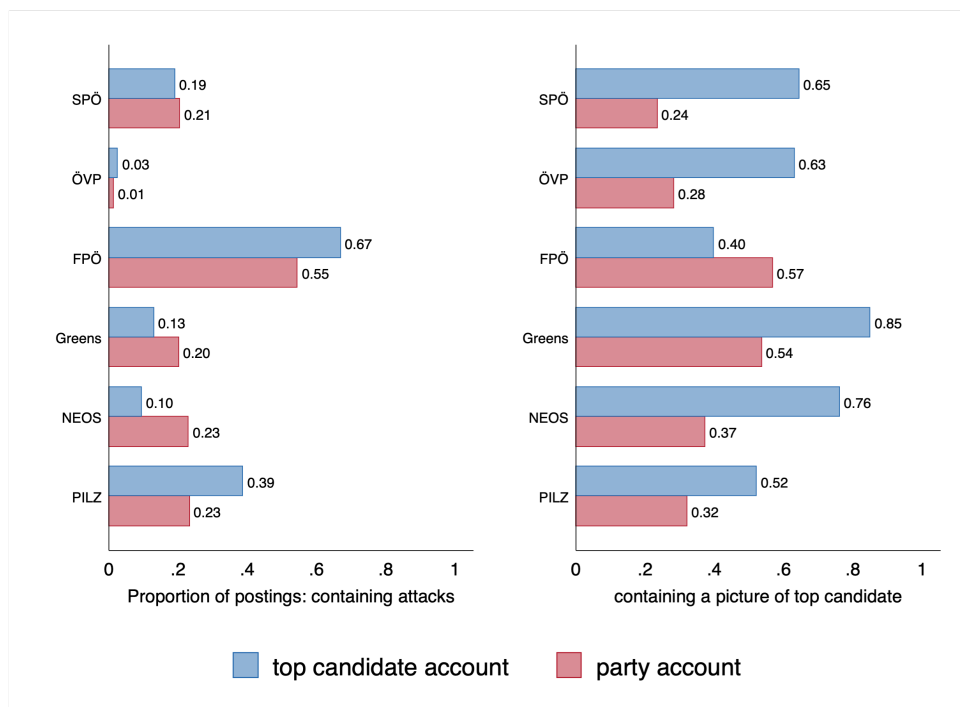


Figure 3.7 – Proportion of actor-centred campaigning strategies by account

Structural features of a posting

Besides these actor-centred campaigning strategies, some structural features, which are all features not related to the campaign message of a posting, can influence the number of interactions a posting receives.

Both Heiss et al. (2018) and Bene (2017) find significant effects for the *type of posting*. Surprisingly, both studies find that content containing only text is more likely to be commented, liked and shared than visual content. Therefore, the type of posting will be

controlled for. However, as personalisation (as operationalized as explained above) is only possible in postings which contain a picture or a video, these two variables were combined. Hence, five categories were constructed: text-only, picture with top candidate not visible, picture with top candidate visible, video with top candidate not visible and video with top candidate visible. The most common type (34%) is a picture with the top candidate not visible, which also serves as the base category in the models. This type of posting is a posting which includes a picture, but the top candidate is not visible, such as the posting seen in Figure 3.6, where the top candidate Ulrike Lunacek is not visible in the picture posted. The text-only postings are extremely rare (3%, see Table 3.10).

Also, the *number of posts* made from an account during a given day has a significant impact on campaigning success in the study of Bene (2017). As expected, the number of interactions per posting decreases if more postings by one account are distributed in one day. As Table 3.10 shows, up to twelve postings a day were posted from one account in this analysis, with a mean value of about five postings per day.

Lastly, the *days until election day* will be included, as Bene (2017) showed as expected that interactions will increase if election day is closer. This can be due to two reasons. On the one hand, followers will get more interested in political postings closer to election day and thus are more likely to interact with a posting. Secondly, the number of followers of the accounts increases during the election campaign. This can be seen in Figure 3.8, where the trend in the number of followers can be seen for both accounts of each party. In all cases, one can see a surge of followers over the election campaign. Also, it is interesting to see that in all cases but the Greens and the NEOS, the top candidate has significantly more followers than the party account. For the Greens, this is likely due to the reason that Ulrike Lunacek only took the lead of the party a few months before the election in May 2017 (Bodlos et al., 2018).

Hence, with the inclusion of the days until election day control variable and the accounts as dummies in the model (see for more detail section 3.4), both reasons why interactions might increase over time can be controlled for. The variable counts how many days are left until election day with a negative sign so that if election day comes closer, and the number of interactions increases, the coefficient will be positive.

Given all these control variables, I want to mention here that I am not able to control for two important structural features of the posting, which are able to influence the campaigning success as well. First, Facebook offers to highlight some content, which makes this posting more visible on a page. Bene (2017) finds a positive effect on interaction for highlighted content, but I can unfortunately not control for this, as this data was not collected in this data set. Also, there is the opportunity to advertise certain content on Facebook, and parties also admitted that they did sponsor Facebook posting during the 2017 campaign (Holter, 2018). However, even though Facebook makes the sponsored content now transparent in their *Ad Library* since March 2019 in Austria, for 2017 there is no data available which postings were sponsored and how much money was spent for each

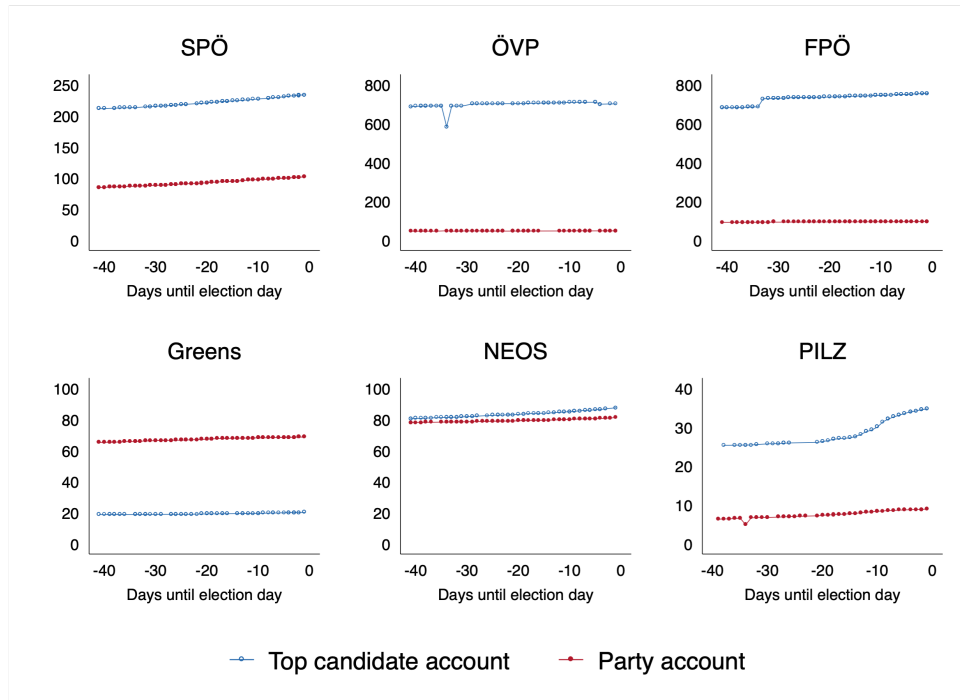


Figure 3.8 – Number of followers (in 1000) over time by party and account

posting (Facebook, 2019b; Holter, 2018). At least, the differences in sponsoring behaviour between accounts are controlled for by introducing the account fixed effects. Still, the results presented here have to be interpreted with caution as it might be the case that one of those two aspects influences the campaigning success significantly. For further research on this topic, and with the ad library available now, it will be possible to include information about these factors and thus to re-evaluate the conclusions which are drawn in this thesis on the 2017 data.

3.4 Model

To test an effect on count variables, such as the dependent interaction variables in this thesis, a Poisson regression model is the typical model to apply. However, when dealing with overdispersed data (that the variance is larger than the mean), which is the case in the Facebook interaction numbers as seen in Table 3.1, the assumptions for Poisson models are violated. Instead, negative binomial regression models can be used, which allow the variance to exceed the mean (Allison and Waterman, 2002).

Hence, I test the hypotheses using negative binomial regression models, as my outcome variables are counts of likes, emotions, comments and shares (see similar approaches in Heiss et al., 2018 and Bene, 2017).

Also, there are assumed to be specific effects for twelve different accounts (six parties and six top candidates), which also has to be acknowledged in the model. On the one hand, as seen in Figure 3.8, the number of followers is very different for each account, which is why the interaction numbers will differ. Also, the audience of each account might

show different behaviour on which postings they interact with. Hence, to control for all the differences which might be possible between accounts, I introduce dummies for the twelve different accounts. This is the most appropriate way to do so in a negative binomial regression model (fixed effects models are problematic with this type of model, see Allison and Waterman (2002)).

Finally, as already explained in subsection 3.3.2, there are 139 party-issue dyads in the analysis, for which the main independent variables of issue saliency and issue ownership were calculated. Hence, I will introduce clustered standard errors for these 139 party-issue dyads in the model, as these independent variables can only differ between them.

With this type of model, I can test my various hypotheses. In general, I test the effect of issue-centred campaigning strategies (my main interest), actor-centred strategies and structural features of a posting (my control variables) on the number of interactions of a posting. Also, I introduce dummy variables for the different accounts as another control variable and cluster the standard errors for the party-issue dyads in the model. The formulas¹⁰ shown here only show the effect on the sum of all interactions. However, as already mentioned, the specific effects on likes, emotions, comments and shares will be calculated as well.

$$\begin{aligned}
 \log(Interactions) = & \textit{Intercept} \\
 & + b_i \textit{ issue-centred strategies} \\
 & + b_j \textit{ actor-centred strategies} \\
 & + b_k \textit{ structural features of posting} \\
 & + b_l \textit{ dummy variables for different accounts}
 \end{aligned}$$

To assess hypotheses 1a and 2a the main independent variables (issue saliency and issue competence for the whole electorate) will be used and their effects on interactions will be calculated. Hence, the hypotheses 1a and 2a are supported if the coefficient of b_1 is positive and significant in the models, as this would show that the saliency of an issue or the competence of a party on an issue influences the number of interactions positively.

¹⁰I used the base formula shown in UCLA: Statistical Consulting Group (2019) to create these formulas, which show the calculation in Stata. As mentioned in this documentation, the dispersion parameter alpha is not in the formula as it is not affecting the counts, but only the estimated variance of them.

$$\begin{aligned}
 \log(\text{Interactions}) &= \text{Intercept} \\
 &+ b_1 \text{ saliency}_{all} \\
 &+ b_c \text{ control variables}
 \end{aligned} \tag{H1a}$$

$$\begin{aligned}
 \log(\text{Interactions}) &= \text{Intercept} \\
 &+ b_1 \text{ competence}_{all} \\
 &+ b_c \text{ control variables}
 \end{aligned} \tag{H2a}$$

Then, the models for hypotheses 1b and 2b test the two groups of party supporters and party non-supporters against each other by calculating the effects of issue saliency/competence by supporters and non-supporters on the counts of interaction numbers. With these models, it is possible to see if the saliency and competence of the supporters are what really matters (compared to the saliency and competence measurements of non-supporters). Hence, the hypotheses 1b and 2b are supported if the coefficient b_1 (supporters) is significantly greater than the coefficient b_2 (non-supporters) in the models, as this would indicate that the saliency/competence among party supporters matters more to the number of interactions than the saliency/competence among party non-supporters. Hence, it will be tested if the two coefficients are significantly different from each other.

$$\begin{aligned}
 \log(\text{Interactions}) &= \text{Intercept} \\
 &+ b_1 \text{ saliency}_{supporters} \\
 &+ b_2 \text{ saliency}_{non-supporters} \\
 &+ b_c \text{ control variables}
 \end{aligned} \tag{H1b}$$

$$\begin{aligned}
 \log(\text{Interactions}) &= \text{Intercept} \\
 &+ b_1 \text{ competence}_{supporters} \\
 &+ b_2 \text{ competence}_{non-supporters} \\
 &+ b_c \text{ control variables}
 \end{aligned} \tag{H2b}$$

Finally, when testing hypothesis 3a, the saliency (all) and the competence (all) variables will be interacted. For these models, the average marginal effects of the interaction will be shown in order to interpret the results. Hypothesis 3a is supported if the AME of competence on the number of interactions is higher if the saliency is high (compared to a less salient issue).

$$\begin{aligned}
\log(Interactions) = & Intercept \\
& + b_1 saliency_{all} \\
& + b_2 competence_{all} \\
& + b_3 saliency_{all} \times competence_{all} \\
& + b_c control\ variables
\end{aligned} \tag{H3a}$$

Similarly, to investigate hypothesis 3b, the saliency (supporters) and the competence (supporters) variables will be interacted and tested against the interaction of saliency (non-supporters) and competence (non-supporters). Again, the average marginal effects of the interaction will be interpreted. Hypothesis 3b is supported if the AME of competence on the number of interactions by saliency of party supporters shows a steeper, positive slope than the AME of competence on the number of interactions by saliency of non-supporters. For hypothesis 3b, it will be also tested separately if the coefficients b_3 and b_6 are significantly different from each other.

$$\begin{aligned}
\log(Interactions) = & Intercept \\
& + b_1 saliency_{supporters} \\
& + b_2 competence_{supporters} \\
& + b_3 saliency_{supporters} \times competence_{supporters} \\
& + b_4 saliency_{non-supporters} \\
& + b_5 competence_{non-supporters} \\
& + b_6 saliency_{non-supporters} \times competence_{non-supporters} \\
& + b_c control\ variables
\end{aligned} \tag{H3b}$$

4 Analysis and Results

After having explained my case, data, measurement and model in the last chapter, I will now report the results. At first, the bivariate analysis will show the effects of the independent and control variables on the interaction numbers. Then, the negative binomial regression model will show if the hypotheses proposed in chapter 2 hold.

4.1 Bivariate analysis of Facebook interactions

4.1.1 Issue-centred campaigning strategies

At first, I will concentrate on the main independent variables, the issue-centred campaigning strategies. In Table 4.1 one can see the correlations of each saliency and competence measurement (for all respondents, party supporters and non-supporters) with the different dependent variables. All saliency and competence measures are significantly and positively correlated with the total number of interactions and the different interactions.

	Interactions	Likes	Emotions	Comments	Shares
Saliency (all)	0.15***	0.13***	0.17***	0.14***	0.15***
Saliency (supporters)	0.19***	0.16***	0.23***	0.18***	0.20***
Saliency (non-supporters)	0.10***	0.087***	0.11***	0.098***	0.099***
Competence (all)	0.23***	0.21***	0.22***	0.19***	0.22***
Competence (supporters)	0.23***	0.20***	0.23***	0.18***	0.23***
Competence (non-supporters)	0.15***	0.13***	0.16***	0.13***	0.15***

*** $p < 0.001$; Observations: 1,462

Table 4.1 – Correlations of issue-centred campaigning strategies and dependent variables

The first column shows the correlation with the main dependent variable (sum of all interactions). In this bivariate analysis, it seems like that competence matters more for the number of interactions than saliency, as in all groups the correlation is higher with the competence measurements. Also, within the two campaigning strategies, the correlation of supporters is always the highest, then all respondents follow and the non-supporters have the lowest correlation with the interaction numbers, which supports the assumption that especially the saliency and the competence among supporters matter (compared to non-supporters) in terms of interaction numbers.

The other columns show the correlation with each of the different interactions. For the saliency measurement (riding-the-wave strategy), the correlation with emotions is the highest (Pearson's $r = 0.17$ for all respondents). This is also the case for the competence measurement (issue ownership strategy), but shares are as highly correlated (Pearson's $r = 0.22$ for all respondents).

Riding-the-wave

Figure 4.1 shows the interactions by issue saliency (all respondents). For this visualisation, the saliency measures were grouped in categories within the empirical range of this variable. The interaction number is highest if the saliency is highest for the whole electorate, supporting hypothesis 1a at first glance. Also, it is interesting to see that postings on low saliency issues (saliency < 0.5) are actually slightly more successful than postings about issues that are a bit more important ($0.5 \leq \text{saliency} < 0.6$), suggesting that this relationship might be not linear. However, one has to keep in mind that all the control variables mentioned above, such as the different number of followers for each account, are not taken into account yet in this analysis.

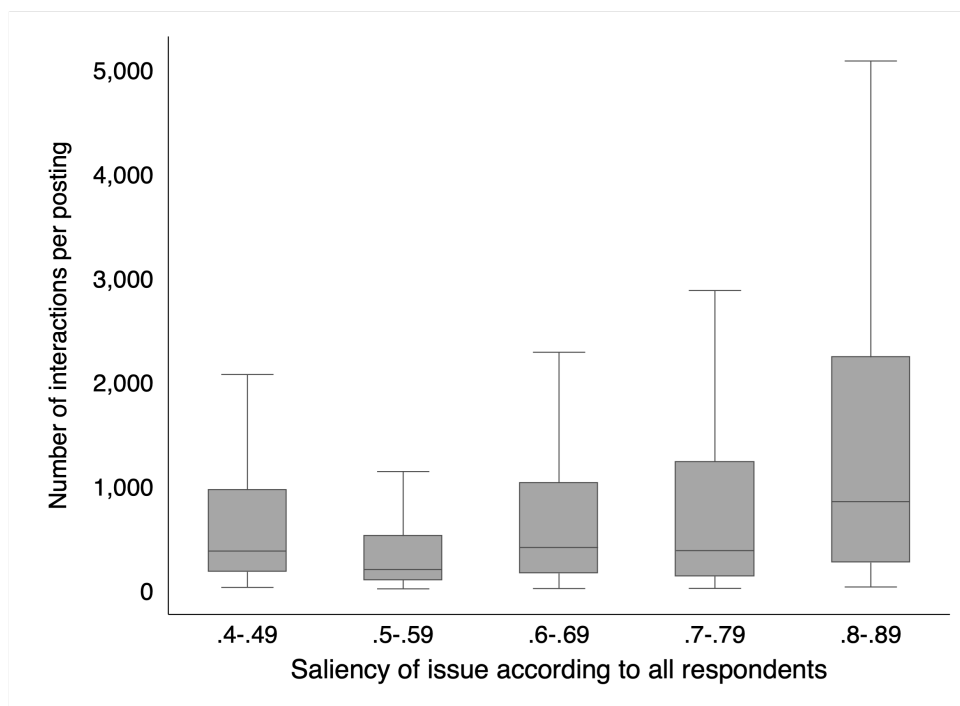


Figure 4.1 – Interactions by saliency of issue to all respondents
Outliers are not shown here to display the distribution more clearly.

Figure 4.2 compares the groups of supporters and non-supporters. Hypothesis 1b, which states that the saliency of supporters is what really matters for campaigning success compared to the saliency of non-supporters, is also supported at first glance. On the left side, with the values for non-supporters, no pattern can be seen. However, on the right side, with the saliency-values of supporters, the campaigning success increases the more salient an issue (except the first low-saliency category). The last category, which is highly salient (> 0.9) to party supporters, and which was particularly successful in terms of interaction numbers, includes issues such as welfare chauvinism for FPÖ supporters and control of immigration for both FPÖ and ÖVP supporters.

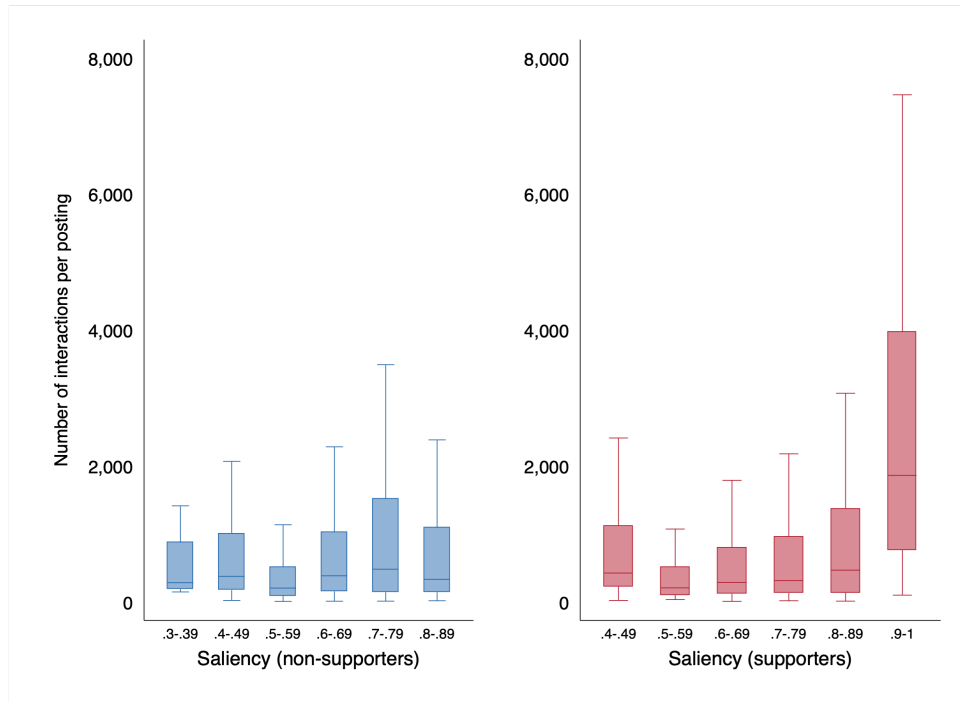


Figure 4.2 – Interactions by saliency of issue to (non-)supporters
Outliers are not shown here to display the distribution more clearly.

Issue ownership

Figure 4.3 shows the observed range of issue competence (again grouped in categories) according to all respondents and the distribution of interactions within these categories. In general, hypothesis 1b, which states that campaigning success increases if a party is seen as competent on that issue, is supported, as the number of interactions increases if competence is higher. However, a big outlier is the last category, in which more than 60% of the electorate picked a party as being competent on that issue. The postings in this category are much less successful. This is due to the reason that this category only includes two party-issue dyads: the FPÖ competence on immigration and the Green competence on environment. In this category, more than 85% of the postings are from the Green party and top candidate accounts, which have significantly fewer followers than most of the other accounts in the analysis (see Figure 3.8), and thus also fewer interactions on their postings compared to all other accounts. Hence, this effect will be cancelled out once the fixed effects for the accounts are taken into account in the multivariate analysis.

Figure 4.4 shows the same distribution separated into supporters and non-supporters. Both graphs show that a higher competence evaluation leads to more interactions, regardless of whether this evaluation is by supporters or non-supporters. As above, this is except for the outlier of the last category of non-supporters. Hence, in contrast to issue saliency and not supporting hypothesis 2b at first glance, the difference in competence evaluation between the two groups of supporters and non-supporters does not seem to matter much in terms of interaction numbers.

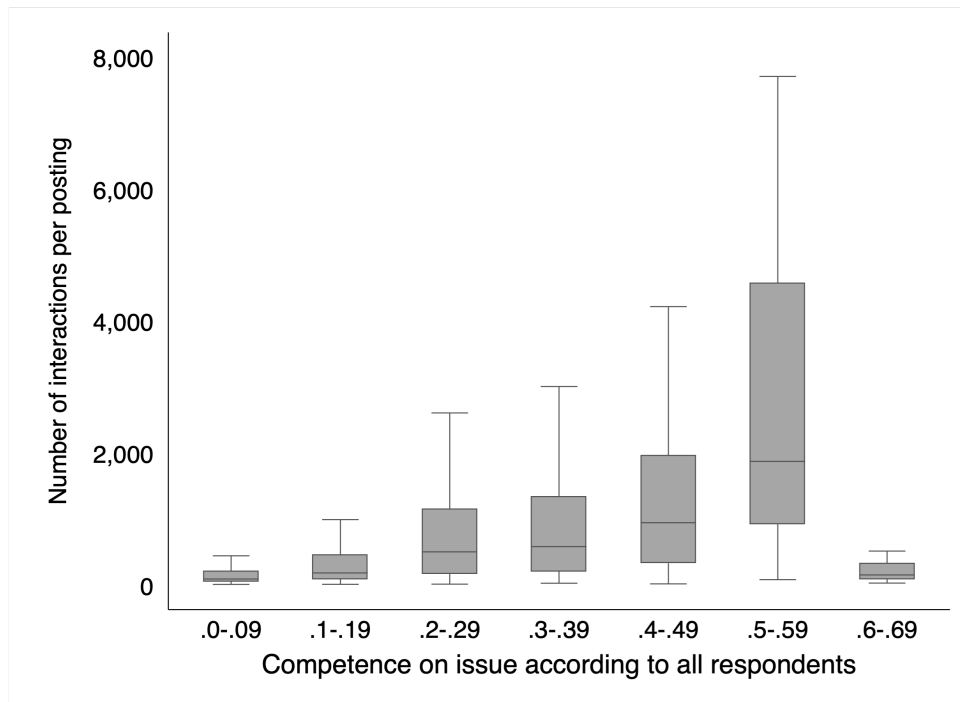


Figure 4.3 – Interactions by competence on issue by all respondents
Outliers are not shown here to display the distribution more clearly.

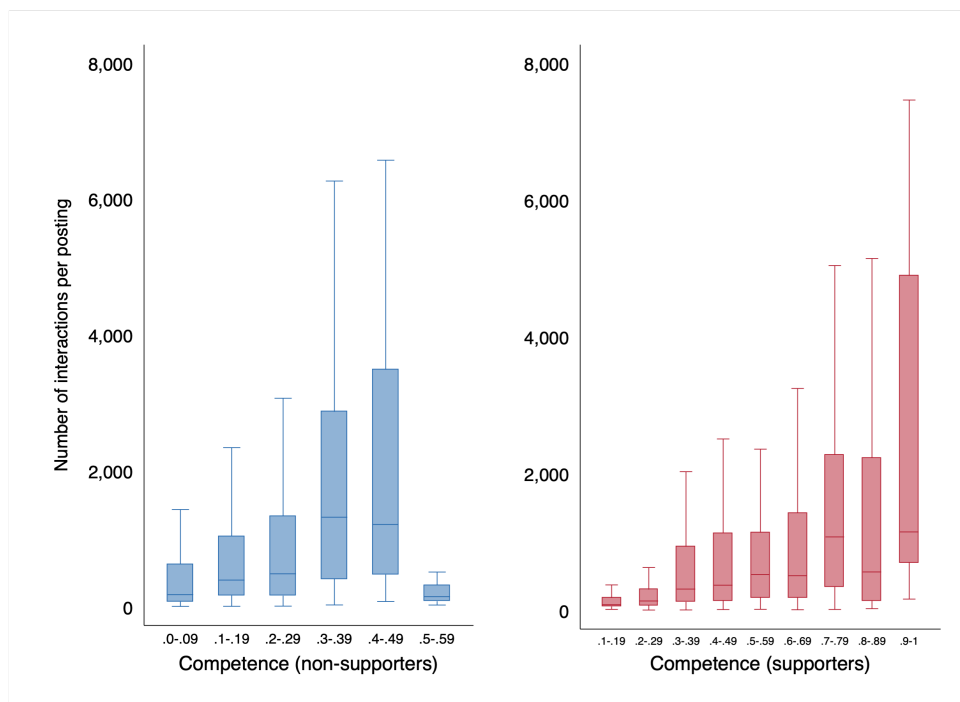


Figure 4.4 – Interactions by competence on issue by (non-)supporters
Outliers are not shown here to display the distribution more clearly.

4.1.2 Control variables

Table 4.2 shows the bivariate correlation between the control variables and the different dependent variables in the analysis. The two most important control variables are the actor-centred campaigning strategies negative campaigning and personalisation. Negative

campaigning (i.e. an attack on a political opponent in the posting) is positively correlated with interactions, especially with emotions and shares. For personalisation, this relationship is not that clear. The visibility of the top candidate is positively (and significantly) correlated with the sum of all interactions and likes, but negatively correlated with emotions. This is most likely due to the variance between the different types of emotions, which will be explained in more detail in the next section.

	Interactions	Likes	Emotions	Comments	Shares
Negative campaigning	0.090***	0.047	0.21***	0.064*	0.16***
Top candidate visible	0.094***	0.13***	-0.085**	0.025	0.014
Number of postings	-0.041	-0.044	-0.027	-0.039	-0.013
Days until election day	0.019	0.032	-0.018	-0.012	-0.010

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$; Observations: 1,462

Table 4.2 – Correlations of control and dependent variables

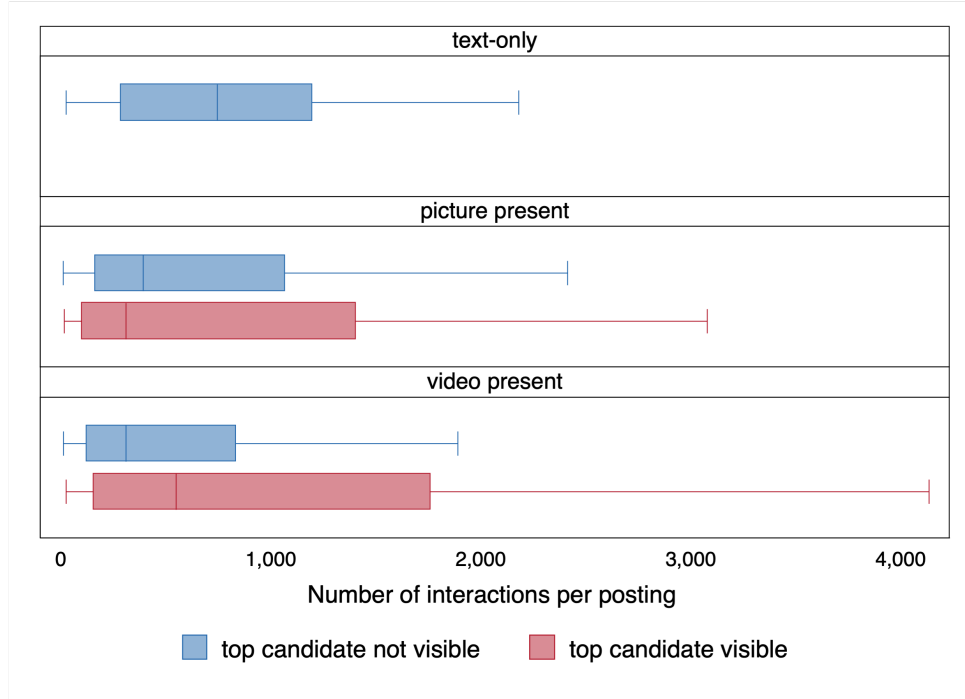


Figure 4.5 – Interactions by type of posting and personalisation
Outliers are not shown here to display the distribution more clearly.

As already explained in subsection 3.3.3, the visibility variable will be combined with the type of posting, a structural feature of the posting. Figure 4.5 shows the distribution of the main dependent variable across all the categories of this combined variable. Surprisingly, the text-only postings are the most successful on average when not controlling for any other variables (see similar results in Heiss et al. (2018) and Bene (2017)). For pictures, there is not much difference in interaction numbers whether the top candidate is visible or not. In contrast, for videos, the top candidate matters: videos have more interactions if the top candidate is visible.

Another structural feature is the number of postings, which shows a negative, albeit non significant, correlation with all interactions: if an account posts more postings within one day, each posting receives fewer interactions. Also, the correlations of the last structural feature, the days until election day with the different interaction numbers are not significant. Still, interactions and likes show a positive sign (hence grow over time), while emotions, comments and shares decline over the election campaign.

4.1.3 Robustness check of different emotions

As argued in subsection 3.3.1, I combine all different types of emotional reactions available on Facebook in my analysis, as it is unclear what they mean specifically, yet they work the same in terms of campaigning success. To evaluate this assumption, I first show the descriptive values of the sum of all emotions (which will be used in the analysis) and all different types of emotions (loves, wow, haha, sad, angry) and correlations between all the different emotions in Table 4.3 and Table 4.4. All emotions are again right-skewed, as their median is much smaller than their mean. Also, all different emotions are correlated with the sum of all emotions positively and significantly. However, not all emotions are correlated with each other, which shows that negative emotions such as sad and angry serve different functions than positive emotions like love, haha and sad.

	Min	Max	Median	Mean	SD
Emotions per posting	0	3,424	23	102	257
Loves per posting	0	872	10	30	62
Wow per posting	0	195	1	5	14
Haha per posting	0	1,017	2	18	63
Sad per posting	0	667	0	8	42
Angry per posting	0	2,884	1	41	189

Observations: 1,462

Table 4.3 – Descriptive values of different emotions

	All emotions	Loves	Wow	Haha	Sad	Angry
All emotions	1.00					
Loves	0.34***	1.00				
Wow	0.59***	0.24***	1.00			
Haha	0.48***	0.30***	0.26***	1.00		
Sad	0.63***	0.00	0.39***	0.05*	1.00	
Angry	0.91***	0.01	0.48***	0.19***	0.58***	1.00

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$; Observations: 1,462

Table 4.4 – Correlations between different emotions

Still, it is valid to combine all emotions in my analysis, as they work similarly in terms of campaigning success, as a higher number of any type of emotion is better for the algorithm to spread the message (see ‘meaningful interactions’ in subsection 3.3.1) and show friends of users the affection of the user towards the posting. To evaluate this

assumption further, I show the correlation with all independent and control variables with the sum of all emotions and all different types of emotions in Table 4.5.

	Emotions	Loves	Wow	Haha	Sad	Angry
Saliency (all)	0.17***	0.067*	0.16***	0.12***	0.087***	0.14***
Saliency (supporters)	0.23***	0.093***	0.18***	0.13***	0.11***	0.20***
Saliency (non-supporters)	0.11***	0.041	0.12***	0.10***	0.058*	0.084**
Competence (all)	0.22***	0.16***	0.15***	0.062*	0.11***	0.20***
Competence (supporters)	0.23***	0.16***	0.15***	0.064*	0.11***	0.20***
Competence (non-supporters)	0.16***	0.092***	0.10***	0.025	0.086***	0.16***
Negative campaigning	0.21***	-0.037	0.19***	0.19***	0.12***	0.19***
Top candidate visible	-0.085**	0.18***	-0.095***	0.0098	-0.13***	-0.14***
Number of postings	-0.027	-0.0035	-0.014	-0.069**	-0.023	-0.0057
Days until election day	-0.018	0.099***	0.015	-0.0085	-0.016	-0.052*

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$; Observations: 1,462

Table 4.5 – Correlations of independent/control variables and different emotions

The main independent variables (saliency and competence) all show a positive sign and most of them are highly significant across all different types of emotions. This means that the more important an issue and the more competent a party on an issue, the more common are all types of different emotions. As this is the main interest of this thesis, it is valid that all emotions are combined for the multivariate analysis.

However, in terms of control variables, the different emotions show different patterns. For negative campaigning, the emotions wow, haha, sad and angry are significantly and positively correlated. Yet, the number of loves is negatively (albeit not significantly) correlated with negative campaigning, which makes sense as attacks are normally perceived in an angry or ironic, but not a very positive way.

For the ‘top candidate visible’ variable, the opposite pattern emerges: even though the total number of emotions is negatively correlated, which is driven by wow, sad and angry emotions, the love reaction is positively correlated. Hence, the total number of emotions have to be interpreted with caution here. For the number of postings, all emotions have the expected negative correlation. For the days until election day, loves (significantly) and wows (not significantly) increase over time, while haha, sad and angry decrease.

Keeping all these differences in the control variables in mind, it is still a valid way to combine all emotional reactions in my analysis for two reasons. Firstly, all emotions work in the expected (and same) direction for the main independent variables of interest: saliency and competence. Secondly, in terms of campaigning success (if the posting can reach more people), all emotions work in the same way. Still, this brief robustness check shows that emotional reactions are an interesting field to study and can show different effects for mostly actor-centred campaigning strategies. This opens up possibilities for future research such as Eberl et al. (2019), who differentiate between the different emotional reactions.

4.2 Negative binomial regression analysis: campaigning success of issue-centred campaigning strategies on Facebook

In this section, I will show the results of the negative binomial regression models testing my hypotheses. After reporting the effects of riding-the-wave and issue ownership strategies, I will discuss the interaction between the two. Finally, I will sum up all results in the last section of this chapter.

4.2.1 Campaigning success of riding-the-wave on Facebook

As explained in subsection 2.4.1, I expect that campaigning success is higher the more salient a policy issue is to the electorate (hypothesis 1a), as these postings are more interesting to them and voters appreciate parties being responsive to their concerns. Also, I expect that issue saliency among party supporters has a higher impact on campaigning success than issue saliency among non-supporters (hypothesis 1b), as most of the audience on SNS are party supporters and will acknowledge the prioritisation of content targeted to them more.

The results for testing hypothesis 1a are shown in Table 4.6, which shows the effect of the saliency among all respondents on the sum of all interactions (first column) and on each of the different interactions separately, controlling for the actor-centred strategies and structural features explained above. For all models shown in this chapter, dummies for the different accounts are included but not shown and the standard errors are clustered by the 139 party-issue dyads across which the issue-centred campaigning strategy measurements vary. Also, the $\ln(\alpha)$ constant shows that α is significantly different from zero, which makes the negative binomial regression model a more appropriate way to test my hypotheses compared to a Poisson regression.

Regarding hypothesis 1a, the models in Table 4.6 show that the saliency of an issue to all respondents is positively associated with the number of all interactions. However, the coefficient is only significant for comments (0.05 level) and emotions (0.1 level). This is also visible in Figure 4.6, which shows the predicted number of all types of interactions across the empirical range of issue saliency among all respondents. For example, in the bottom left graph one can see that a posting has about 55 comments if the saliency (all) variable has a value of 0.4 (i.e. the equality of homosexuals), which increases to about 90 comments if the saliency (all) variable has a value of 0.9 (i.e. fighting terrorism), keeping all other variables constant. While the effects for emotions and shares are also clearly positive, the number of likes is hardly impacted by the saliency of an issue.

	All interactions	Likes	Emotions	Comments	Shares
Saliency (all)	0.231 (0.318)	0.0452 (0.327)	0.738 ⁺ (0.416)	0.949* (0.417)	0.519 (0.390)
Negative campaigning	0.114 (0.0877)	0.0118 (0.0822)	0.507*** (0.132)	0.157 (0.100)	0.353* (0.151)
Type: picture / top cand. not vis.	Reference	Reference	Reference	Reference	Reference
picture / top cand. vis.	0.228* (0.0990)	0.345*** (0.0946)	-0.0706 (0.157)	0.0301 (0.134)	-0.0817 (0.137)
video / top cand. not vis.	0.128 (0.131)	0.132 (0.132)	-0.162 (0.154)	0.144 (0.159)	0.295 ⁺ (0.153)
video / top cand. vis.	0.392*** (0.108)	0.454*** (0.0996)	0.0136 (0.176)	0.327* (0.130)	0.421* (0.167)
text-only	0.278 (0.313)	0.375 (0.312)	0.0248 (0.329)	0.330 (0.329)	-0.0644 (0.301)
Number of postings	-0.0455** (0.0164)	-0.0452** (0.0152)	-0.0628* (0.0245)	-0.0474 ⁺ (0.0260)	-0.0592* (0.0240)
Days until election day	0.0103** (0.00367)	0.0113** (0.00362)	0.0105** (0.00401)	0.00238 (0.00453)	0.0171*** (0.00477)
Constant	8.214*** (0.343)	7.942*** (0.345)	5.733*** (0.431)	4.965*** (0.427)	6.211*** (0.420)
ln(alpha) Constant	-0.413*** (0.0465)	-0.458*** (0.0520)	0.0656 (0.0583)	0.0364 (0.0592)	0.798*** (0.0669)
Dummies for accounts	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Pseudo R-squared	0.07	0.08	0.09	0.09	0.05
Party-issue dyads	139	139	139	139	139
Observations	1,462	1,462	1,462	1,462	1,462

Note: Coefficients from negative binomial regression models on number of Facebook interactions

Dummies for accounts not shown, Clustered SE for party-issue dyads in parentheses

⁺ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 4.6 – Effect of saliency of issue to all respondents on sum and different types of Facebook interactions

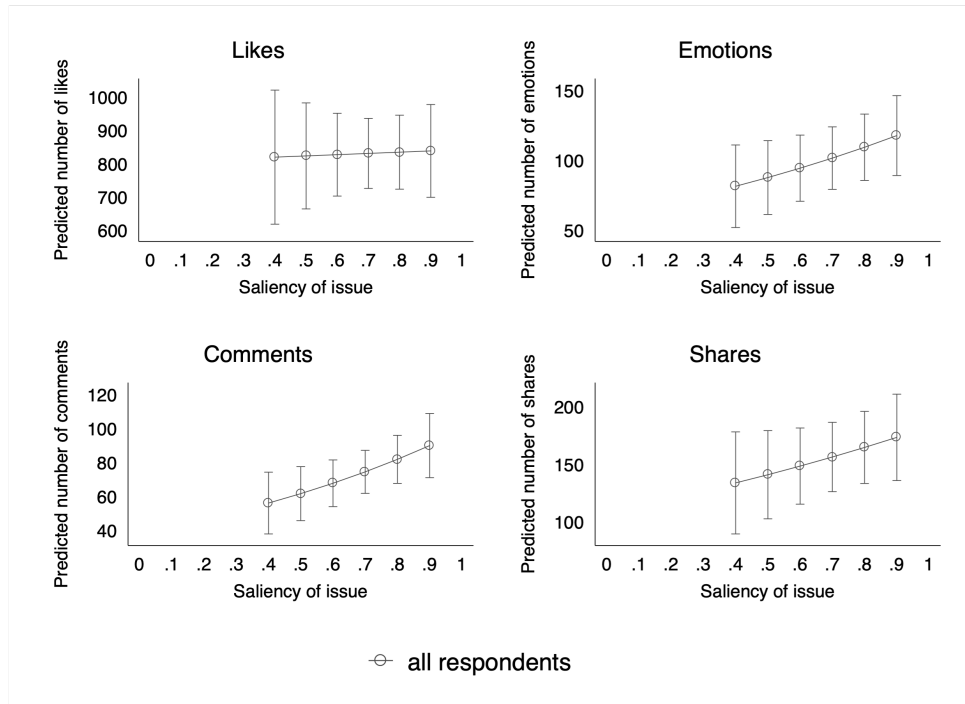


Figure 4.6 – Effect of saliency of issue to all respondents on different types of Facebook interactions

Note: Based on models in Table 4.6

	All interactions	Likes	Emotions	Comments	Shares
Saliency (supporters)	1.265** (0.482)	1.062* (0.473)	2.295** (0.749)	1.249+ (0.714)	1.725** (0.625)
Saliency (non-supporters)	-1.039* (0.514)	-1.017* (0.517)	-1.553* (0.763)	-0.298 (0.768)	-1.253+ (0.698)
Negative campaigning	0.133 (0.0824)	0.0298 (0.0772)	0.535*** (0.124)	0.174+ (0.0969)	0.378** (0.146)
Type: picture / top cand. not vis.	Reference	Reference	Reference	Reference	Reference
picture / top cand. vis.	0.226* (0.100)	0.342*** (0.0956)	-0.0653 (0.160)	0.0273 (0.135)	-0.0912 (0.142)
video / top cand. not vis.	0.125 (0.129)	0.127 (0.130)	-0.161 (0.148)	0.142 (0.158)	0.282+ (0.153)
video / top cand. vis.	0.395*** (0.106)	0.456*** (0.0991)	0.0281 (0.169)	0.328* (0.128)	0.406* (0.166)
text-only	0.328 (0.312)	0.418 (0.311)	0.110 (0.319)	0.375 (0.326)	-0.0135 (0.301)
Number of postings	-0.0449** (0.0164)	-0.0441** (0.0153)	-0.0624** (0.0242)	-0.0469+ (0.0258)	-0.0607* (0.0240)
Days until election day	0.0104** (0.00370)	0.0114** (0.00363)	0.0109** (0.00401)	0.00255 (0.00456)	0.0177*** (0.00486)
Constant	8.087*** (0.324)	7.824*** (0.326)	5.518*** (0.404)	4.859*** (0.417)	6.105*** (0.403)
ln(alpha) Constant	-0.421*** (0.0480)	-0.464*** (0.0530)	0.0516 (0.0586)	0.0332 (0.0597)	0.794*** (0.0672)
Dummies for accounts	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Pseudo R-squared	0.07	0.08	0.09	0.09	0.05
Party-issue dyads	139	139	139	139	139
Observations	1,462	1,462	1,462	1,462	1,462

Note: Coefficients from negative binomial regression models on number of Facebook interactions

Dummies for accounts not shown, Clustered SE for party-issue dyads in parentheses

+ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 4.7 – Effect of saliency of issue to (non-)supporters on sum and different types of Facebook interactions

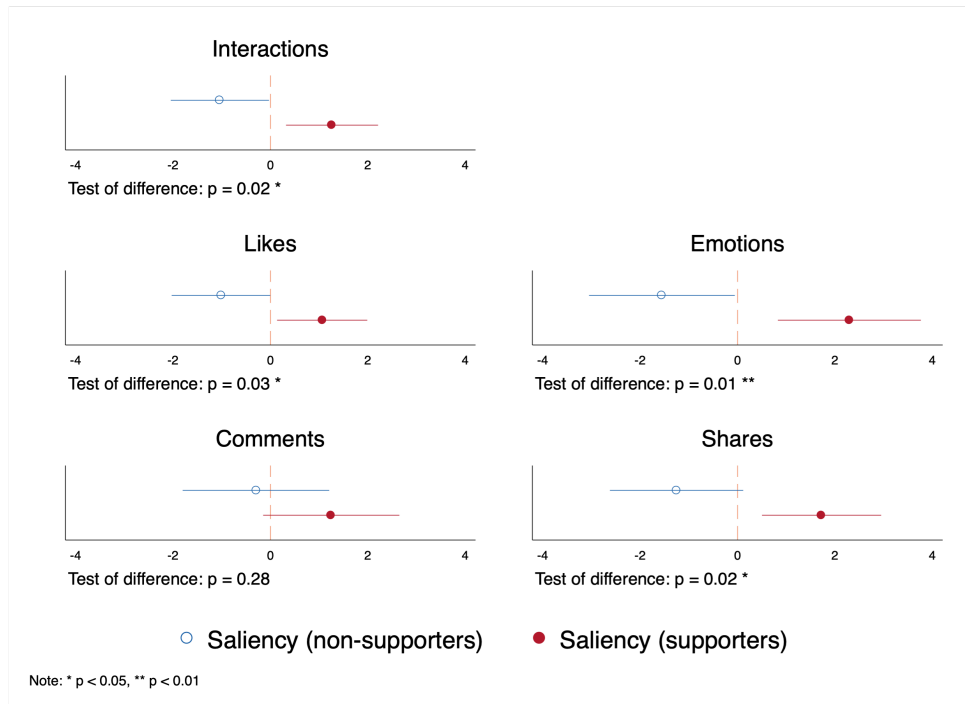


Figure 4.7 – Effect of saliency of issue to non-supporters vs supporters on sum and different types of Facebook interactions

Note: Based on models in Table 4.7

In Table 4.7 hypothesis 1b, which states that the saliency of an issue to party supporters (compared to non-supporters) is what drives the campaigning success of an issue, is tested. As one can see, the saliency (supporters) coefficient is clearly positive and significant and higher than the saliency (non-supporters) coefficient for all types of reactions except the comments. Also, the saliency (non-supporters) variable is negative and significant for all reactions except the comments.

To evaluate the difference between the groups of supporters and non-supporters even further, I tested if the coefficients from saliency (supporters) and saliency (non-supporters) are significantly different from each other, which can be seen in Figure 4.7. The tests and the graphs show that the coefficients of the saliency of supporters and non-supporters are significantly different from each other in all models except the comments. This finding strongly supports hypothesis 1b, which states that the saliency of supporters is what actually matters to the number of interactions (compared to the saliency of non-supporters).

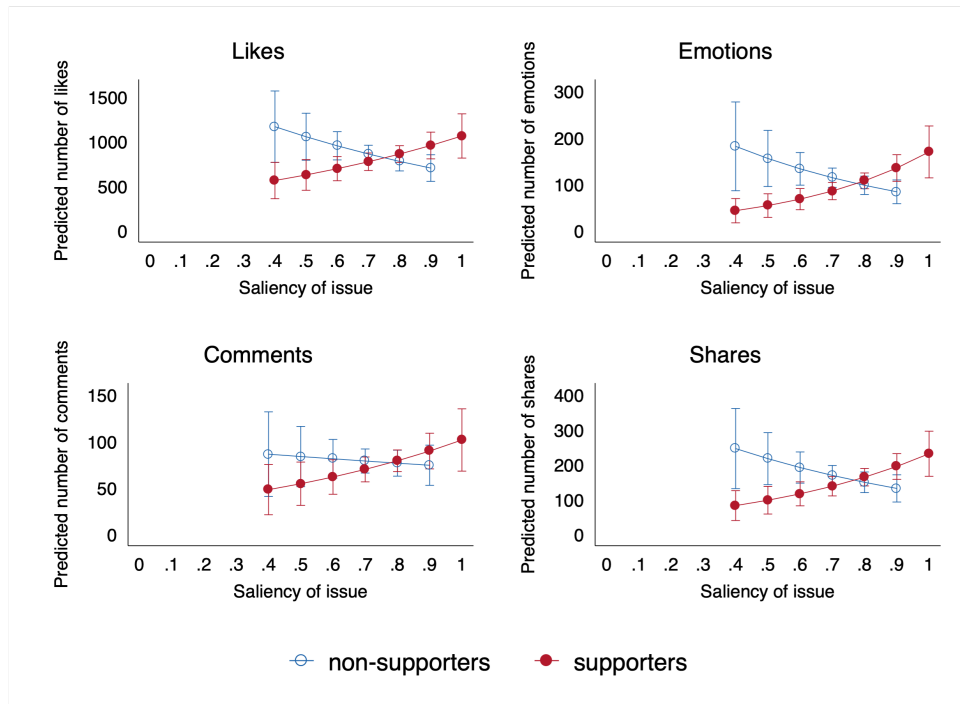


Figure 4.8 – Effect of saliency of issue to (non-)supporters on different types of Facebook interactions

Note: Based on models in Table 4.7

This is also shown in Figure 4.8 which displays the predicted number of interactions by the saliency of the issue to non-supporters and supporters across their observed empirical range. As an example, in the top-left graph one can see that a posting about an issue where the saliency (supporters) is about 0.4 (e.g. if the ÖVP posts about gender equality) receives about 600 likes. However, if a posting is about an issue where the saliency (supporters) is about 1 (e.g. if the ÖVP posts about the control of immigration) it receives about 1100 likes, keeping all other variables constant.

This effect clearly differs when using the saliency of non-supporters as a predictor: the effect is negative in all cases, which seems rather unintuitive. However, one has to keep in mind the strong correlation between the two variables (Pearson's $r = 0.82$, see Table 3.8). Hence, the negative coefficient of the saliency (non-supporters) is only an artefact of the high correlation between the two variables. If a party would only focus on issues non-supporters find highly salient, but party supporters do not find very salient, the predicted number of interactions would be smaller. This is rarely the case but one example would be if the SPÖ posts about immigration control, which is the most salient topic for non-supporters (0.9), but is only the 11th most important topic for SPÖ supporters (0.75) after several issues concerning the welfare state, Europe and environmental protection. This further strengthens the argument that the audience on Facebook are mostly party supporters, which is why the saliency of the supporters, and not the non-supporters, is what matters for campaigning success.

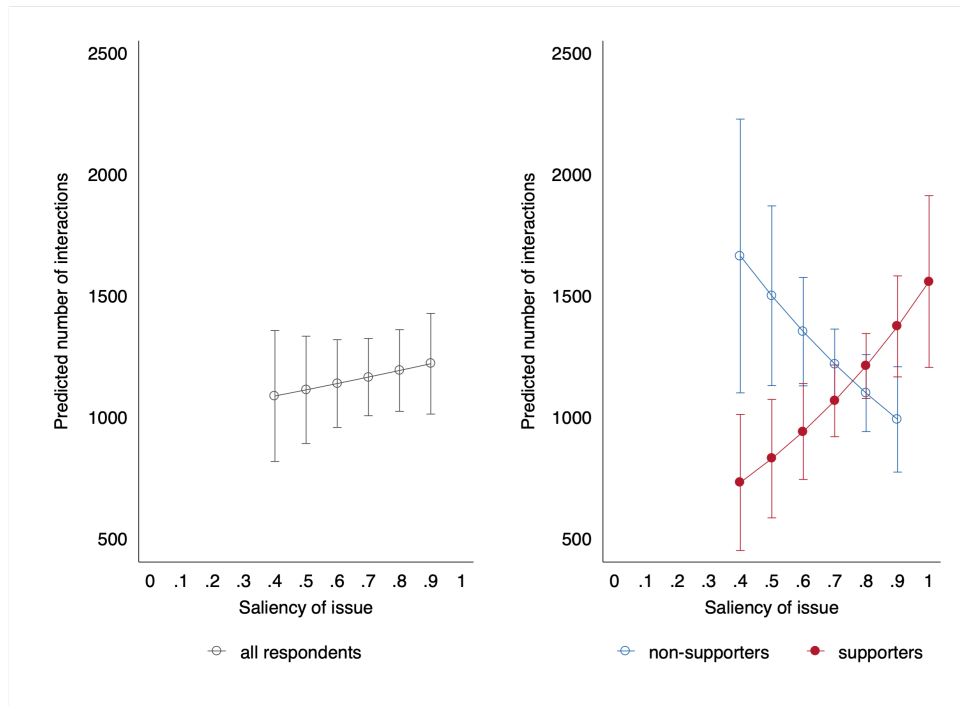


Figure 4.9 – Effect of saliency of issue to all respondents / (non-)supporters on the sum of all Facebook interactions

Note: Based on models in Table 4.6 and Table 4.7

Figure 4.9 sums up the findings of the relationship between riding-the-wave and campaigning success on Facebook. On the left side, it shows that the saliency of an issue to all respondents has a positive, but not significant impact on the total number of interactions. Still, the saliency of all respondents does lead to a significantly higher number of emotions and comments, which shows the importance of differentiating between the different interaction types in future studies. Hence, hypothesis 1a, which states that campaigning success is higher if an issue is more salient to the whole electorate is therefore only partly supported.

On the right side of Figure 4.9, it is shown that the saliency of an issue among party supporters is what actually drives the number of interactions of a posting. While postings on low-saliency issues (0.4) have about 750 interactions, postings on highly salient issues (1) have double the interactions (1500), keeping all other variables constant. On the contrary, postings on issues only party non-supporters find salient, would not be as successful. Hence, hypothesis 1b, which states that the saliency of an issue among party supporters (compared to non-supporters) is what actually matters for campaigning success, is strongly supported. If parties and politicians want to increase their interactions on postings and thus reach more people on SNS and beyond that, they should (somewhat counter-intuitive) focus on the issues their supporters care about, as their target audience then interacts with the postings more. With more interactions, the algorithm on Facebook will show the postings to more people and journalists are more likely to pick the story up in traditional media. Also, if the target audience of supporters reacts to the postings more, they are more likely to spread their opinion also to non-supporters (see for more details section 2.3).

4.2.2 Campaigning success of issue ownership on Facebook

Coming to my next set of hypotheses, which draws on the issue ownership literature (see subsection 2.4.2), I expect that postings about issues the (party of the) author is seen as competent on are more successful on Facebook (hypothesis 2a), as these messages will be perceived as more credible. Again, I expect this mechanism to work particularly well for party supporters (compared to non-supporters, hypothesis 2b), as parties strategically tailor their content on SNS to supporters who will then be more likely to show their support through engagement with the posting.

Table 4.8 shows the results for hypothesis 2a. Parties' issue competence among all respondents (i.e. the electorate) is associated with the number of emotions and shares (statistically significant at the 5 percent level) and the total sum of all interactions and likes (10 percent level). This can be also seen in Figure 4.10, which shows the predicted number of the different interactions across the empirical range of the competence (all) variable. The top left corner shows that postings on low-competence issues (e.g. if the Greens post about the economy) receive about 700 likes, while postings on issues where 70% of the electorate rate the party as competent (e.g. if the Greens post about environmental protection) receive about 1000 likes, holding all other variables constant. These findings strongly support hypothesis 1b, as the perceived competence of a party on an issue by the electorate is related to the number of interactions (and therefore campaigning success).

	All interactions	Likes	Emotions	Comments	Shares
Competence (all)	0.516 ⁺	0.438 ⁺	0.886*	0.386	0.714*
	(0.264)	(0.243)	(0.429)	(0.451)	(0.338)
Negative campaigning	0.134	0.0244	0.557***	0.200*	0.385**
	(0.0820)	(0.0774)	(0.123)	(0.0963)	(0.145)
Type: picture / top cand. not vis.	Reference	Reference	Reference	Reference	Reference
picture / top cand. vis.	0.237*	0.346***	-0.0447	0.0704	-0.0664
	(0.101)	(0.0963)	(0.161)	(0.139)	(0.141)
video / top cand. not vis.	0.120	0.120	-0.173	0.165	0.291 ⁺
	(0.129)	(0.130)	(0.151)	(0.166)	(0.151)
video / top cand. vis.	0.396***	0.452***	0.0357	0.361**	0.430**
	(0.108)	(0.101)	(0.172)	(0.130)	(0.167)
text-only	0.334	0.412	0.142	0.437	0.0133
	(0.326)	(0.321)	(0.341)	(0.348)	(0.316)
Number of postings	-0.0450**	-0.0446**	-0.0621*	-0.0448 ⁺	-0.0605*
	(0.0165)	(0.0154)	(0.0246)	(0.0265)	(0.0241)
Days until election day	0.0106**	0.0116**	0.0108**	0.00253	0.0179***
	(0.00375)	(0.00367)	(0.00416)	(0.00470)	(0.00485)
Constant	8.156***	7.779***	5.887***	5.498***	6.302***
	(0.221)	(0.226)	(0.272)	(0.287)	(0.296)
ln(alpha) Constant	-0.419***	-0.462***	0.0592	0.0417	0.795***
	(0.0483)	(0.0535)	(0.0588)	(0.0592)	(0.0673)
Dummies for accounts	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Pseudo R-squared	0.07	0.08	0.09	0.09	0.05
Party-issue dyads	139	139	139	139	139
Observations	1,462	1,462	1,462	1,462	1,462

Note: Coefficients from negative binomial regression models on number of Facebook interactions

Dummies for accounts not shown, Clustered SE for party-issue dyads in parentheses

⁺ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 4.8 – Effect of competence of party on issue by all respondents on sum and different types of Facebook interactions

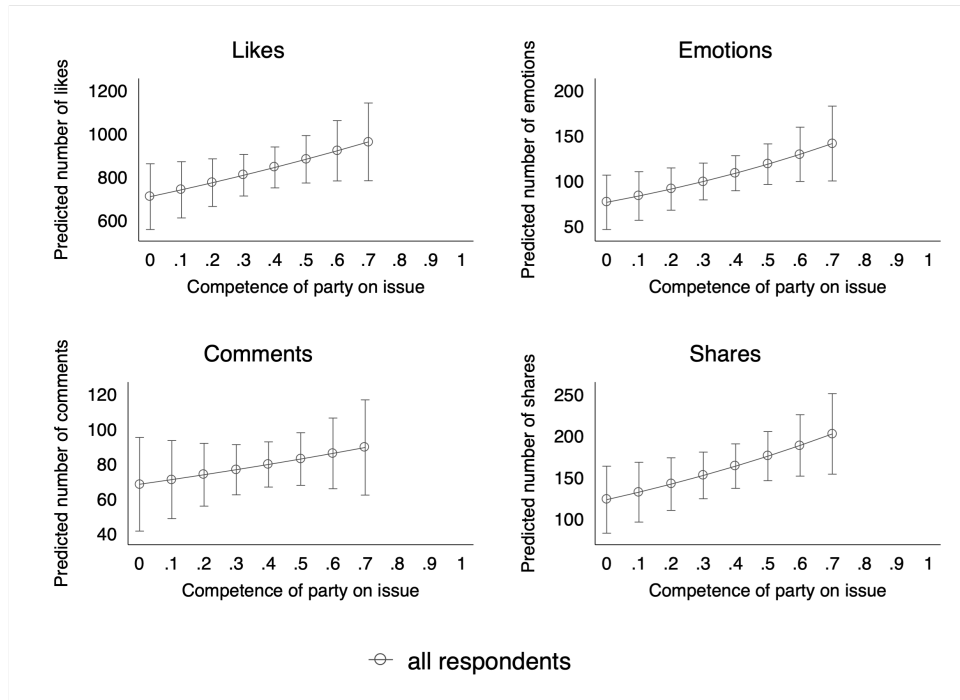


Figure 4.10 – Competence of party on issue by all respondents on different types of Facebook interactions

Note: Based on models in Table 4.8

	All interactions	Likes	Emotions	Comments	Shares
Competence (supporters)	0.392 (0.528)	0.421 (0.493)	0.519 (0.877)	0.983 (0.755)	0.0985 (0.608)
Competence (non-supporters)	0.0326 (0.635)	-0.0854 (0.586)	0.248 (1.051)	-0.856 (0.963)	0.610 (0.863)
Negative campaigning	0.132 (0.0823)	0.0223 (0.0777)	0.554*** (0.123)	0.196* (0.0975)	0.386** (0.145)
Type: picture / top cand. not vis.	Reference	Reference	Reference	Reference	Reference
picture / top cand. vis.	0.237* (0.101)	0.345*** (0.0960)	-0.0440 (0.163)	0.0605 (0.135)	-0.0646 (0.140)
video / top cand. not vis.	0.117 (0.128)	0.117 (0.130)	-0.178 (0.148)	0.151 (0.163)	0.293* (0.146)
video / top cand. vis.	0.391*** (0.108)	0.446*** (0.100)	0.0282 (0.169)	0.339** (0.126)	0.433* (0.169)
text-only	0.338 (0.324)	0.418 (0.321)	0.143 (0.336)	0.464 (0.348)	0.00728 (0.312)
Number of postings	-0.0449** (0.0165)	-0.0445** (0.0154)	-0.0619* (0.0248)	-0.0438+ (0.0265)	-0.0607* (0.0240)
Days until election day	0.0105** (0.00374)	0.0115** (0.00365)	0.0108** (0.00413)	0.00258 (0.00464)	0.0179*** (0.00485)
Constant	8.092*** (0.283)	7.696*** (0.279)	5.832*** (0.406)	5.223*** (0.401)	6.362*** (0.333)
ln(alpha) Constant	-0.419*** (0.0485)	-0.462*** (0.0537)	0.0592 (0.0596)	0.0394 (0.0590)	0.795*** (0.0672)
Dummies for accounts	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Pseudo R-squared	0.07	0.08	0.09	0.09	0.05
Party-issue dyads	139	139	139	139	139
Observations	1,462	1,462	1,462	1,462	1,462

Note: Coefficients from negative binomial regression models on number of Facebook interactions

Dummies for accounts not shown, Clustered SE for party-issue dyads in parentheses

+ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 4.9 – Effect of competence of party on issue by (non-)supporters on sum and different types of Facebook interactions

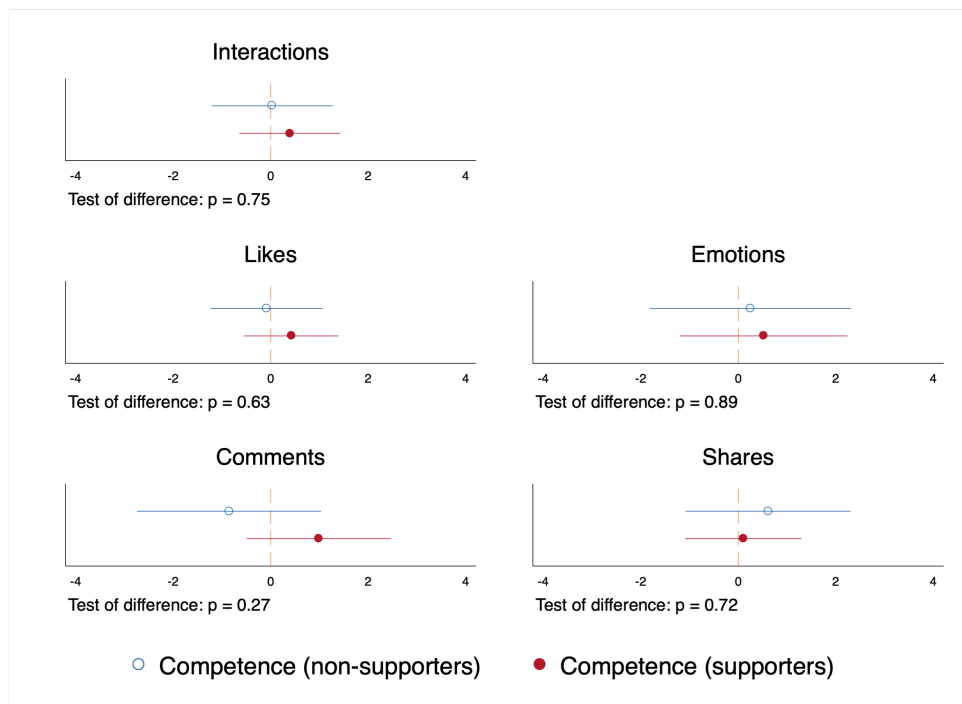


Figure 4.11 – Effect of competence of issue to non-supporters vs supporters on sum and different types of Facebook interactions

Note: Based on models in Table 4.9

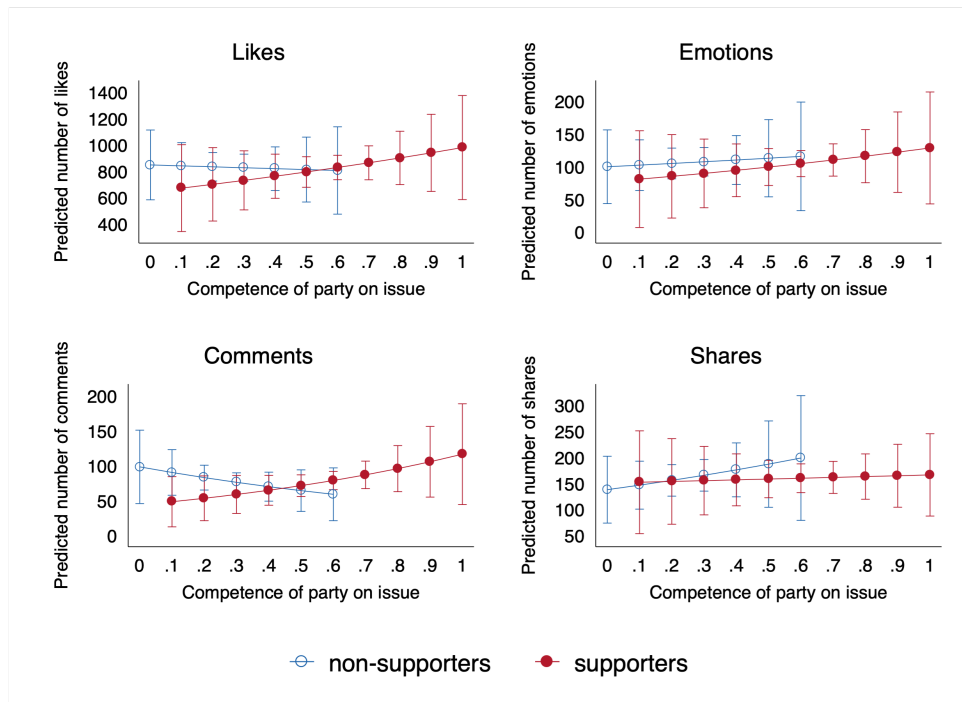


Figure 4.12 – Competence of party on issue by (non-)supporters on different types of Facebook interactions

Note: Based on models in Table 4.9

Table 4.9 tests hypothesis 2b, which conjectures that this mechanism works particularly well for party supporters. However, none of the coefficients of the perceived competence by supporters and non-supporters are significant in any of the models. Even though the effect for supporters (compared to non-supporters) is a bit higher in all models (except shares), Figure 4.11 shows that in none of the models the coefficients are significantly different from each other. This is further illustrated by Figure 4.12, which shows the predicted number of the different interactions across the empirical range of competence by non-supporters and supporters. It does not show great differences in the predicted number of interactions between the two groups. In all interactions except the comments, the effects for two groups are in the same direction and very close to each other. The comments seem to work as expected, but as already mentioned above, this difference is not significant.

Hence, hypothesis 2b, which states that the competence of a party according to party supporters is more important in predicting the campaigning success compared to non-supporters is not supported. However, it is not clear if the theory is wrong and there is actually no effect for these variables, or one cannot test these effects with the data used in this thesis due to multicollinearity. As there is a very strong correlation between the two groups (Pearson's $r = 0.91$, see Table 3.8), the two variables seem to measure the same concept. Therefore, this hypothesis should be tested again using different data, where supporters and non-supporters actually have different perceptions about the competence of a given party across issues. This could be achieved by collecting data in a more polarized party-system than Austria, or using a single-choice question when measuring

party competence instead. As respondents could pick more than one party as being competent on an issue, the answers are most likely not as distinctive than asking for only the *most competent* party on an issue.

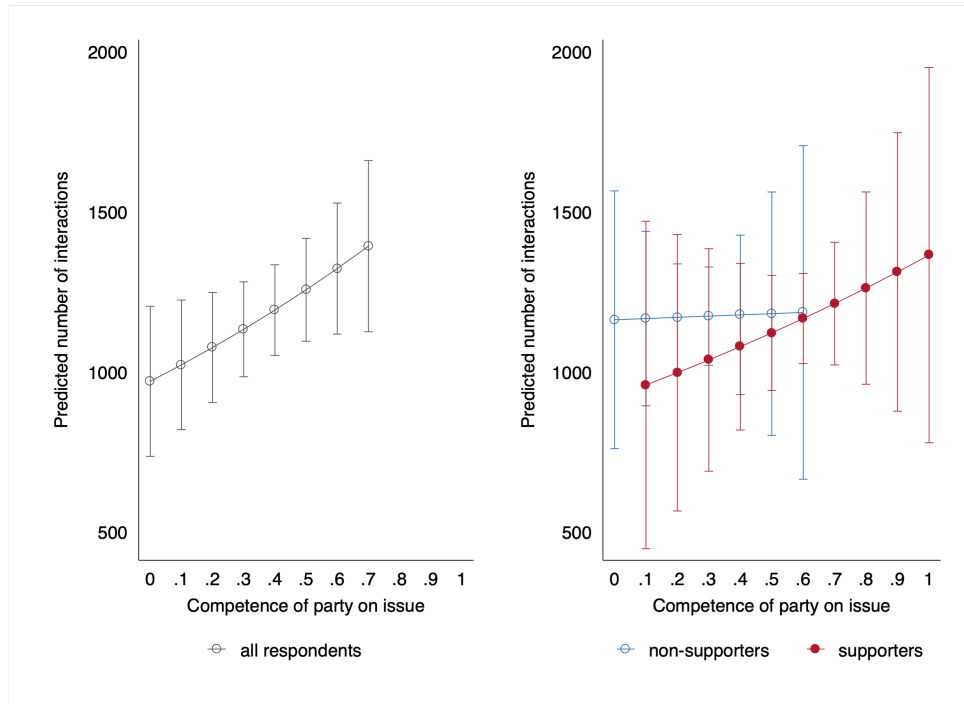


Figure 4.13 – Competence of party on issue by all respondents / (non-)supporters on the sum of all Facebook interactions

Note: Based on models in Table 4.8 and Table 4.9

Finally, Figure 4.13 sums up the findings regarding the success of issue ownership on Facebook. Hypothesis 2a, which states that the more competent a party is seen on an issue by the electorate, the more interactions a posting will get, is supported by the data. The left graph shows that a posting which is about an issue nearly nobody sees the party as competent on (e.g. if the Greens post about the economy) receives about 1000 interactions, while postings about issues 70% of the electorate rate the party as competent on (e.g. if the Greens post about environmental protection) receives about 1400 interactions, keeping all other variables constant.

However, hypothesis 2b, which states that this mechanism works particularly well for supporters (compared to non-supporters) is not supported by this data, which can be seen on the right side of Figure 4.13. As explained above, it is not clear if this effect is not as expected because the theory is wrong or because of multicollinearity, which is why there will be no further interpretation of the results regarding 2b. Still, the left side of the graph shows that a posting will be more successful if the party is seen as competent on that issue by the electorate. If a party wants to have successful postings, they should, therefore, focus on issues on which they are viewed as competent on by the electorate.

4.2.3 Reinforcement of riding-the-wave and issue ownership on Facebook

After evaluating the distinct effects of the two issue-centred campaigning strategies, I will now test if the two reinforce each other. As explained in subsection 2.4.3, it is expected that users take party competence into account more, if they find the issue of the posting important and thus interesting, when reacting to a posting on SNS. At first, this mechanism will be tested for the whole electorate (hypothesis 3a), and secondly, if this is particularly true for supporters compared to non-supporters (hypothesis 3b).

	All interactions	Likes	Emotions	Comments	Shares
Saliency (all)	-0.867 (0.785)	-0.659 (0.816)	-1.554 (1.113)	-0.600 (0.935)	-1.332 (0.983)
Competence (all)	-2.362 (2.430)	-1.232 (2.589)	-5.361 (3.439)	-4.391 (2.872)	-4.483 (2.905)
Competence $\times$ saliency (all)	3.715 (3.096)	2.190 (3.306)	7.996 ⁺ (4.361)	5.973 ⁺ (3.511)	6.661 ⁺ (3.794)
Negative campaigning	0.139 ⁺ (0.0817)	0.0318 (0.0769)	0.551*** (0.123)	0.180 ⁺ (0.0939)	0.393** (0.145)
Type: picture / top cand. not vis.	Reference	Reference	Reference	Reference	Reference
picture / top cand. vis.	0.229* (0.0993)	0.346*** (0.0951)	-0.0598 (0.157)	0.0262 (0.133)	-0.0811 (0.139)
video / top cand. not vis.	0.125 (0.128)	0.126 (0.129)	-0.157 (0.150)	0.147 (0.162)	0.288 ⁺ (0.152)
video / top cand. vis.	0.390*** (0.106)	0.453*** (0.0991)	0.0201 (0.170)	0.322* (0.126)	0.414* (0.165)
text-only	0.334 (0.315)	0.423 (0.316)	0.126 (0.319)	0.364 (0.317)	0.00318 (0.302)
Number of postings	-0.0445** (0.0163)	-0.0441** (0.0152)	-0.0617* (0.0241)	-0.0468 ⁺ (0.0253)	-0.0613* (0.0241)
Days until election day	0.0107** (0.00372)	0.0116** (0.00364)	0.0112** (0.00406)	0.00251 (0.00458)	0.0182*** (0.00493)
Constant	8.800*** (0.596)	8.258*** (0.638)	7.057*** (0.786)	6.002*** (0.709)	7.308*** (0.769)
ln(alpha) Constant	-0.420*** (0.0481)	-0.463*** (0.0531)	0.0528 (0.0606)	0.0329 (0.0598)	0.793*** (0.0676)
Dummies for accounts	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Pseudo R-squared	0.07	0.08	0.09	0.09	0.05
Party-issue dyads	139	139	139	139	139
Observations	1,462	1,462	1,462	1,462	1,462

Note: Coefficients from negative binomial regression models on number of Facebook interactions

Dummies for accounts not shown, Clustered SE for party-issue dyads in parentheses

⁺ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 4.10 – Interaction effect of competence and saliency by all respondents on sum and different types of Facebook interactions

Table 4.10 shows the results for testing hypothesis 3a, which takes into account the whole electorate. The interaction term competence $\times$ saliency is positive and substantive in most models, but only significant (at the 10 percent level) for emotions, comments and shares. To interpret the interactions more easily, Figure 4.14 shows the average marginal effect of competence on the predicted number of Facebook interactions across the empirical range of the saliency of an issue. The effect of competence increases, the more salient an issue is to the electorate, which is in line with hypothesis 3a. However, this is only

statistically significant for emotions, comments and shares¹¹. In particular, the estimations in the figure are the change in the predicted number of interactions for a one-unit increase in competence: from nobody to everybody in the electorate picking this party as competent on that issue. However, this is not realistic, as the maximum empirical competence value is 0.66 in this study. Hence, I will divide the AMEs by ten, as this shows the change in the predicted number of interactions if 10 percentage points more of the respondents picked a party as being competent on that issue.

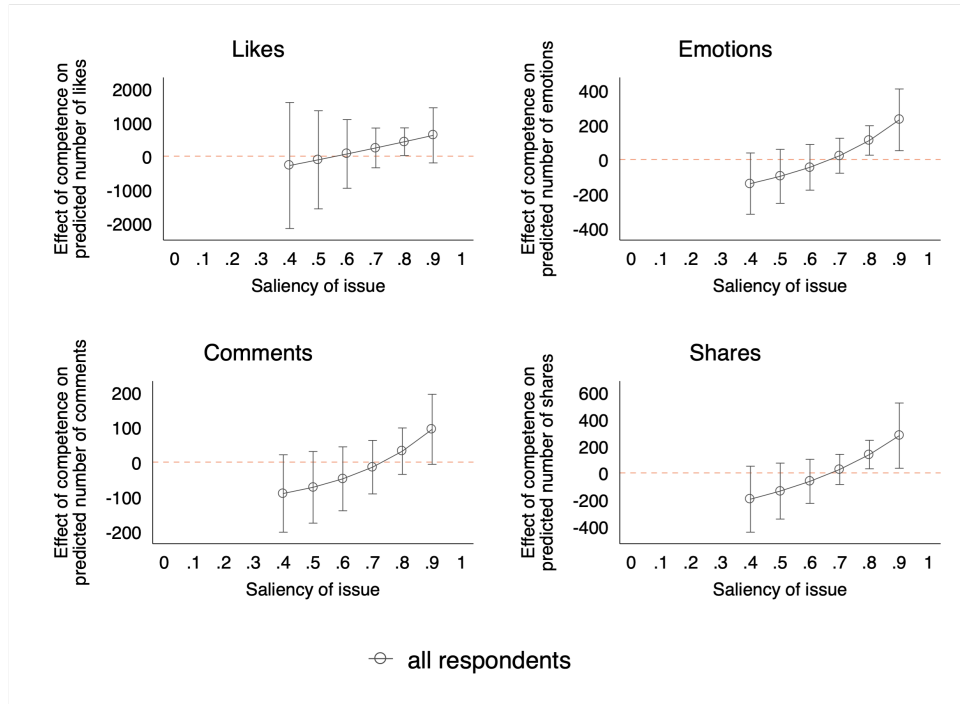


Figure 4.14 – Average marginal effect of competence by saliency by all respondents on different types of Facebook interactions

Note: Based on models in Table 4.10

As an example, I will explain the interaction effect of competence and saliency on shares in the bottom right corner of Figure 4.14. Generally, the effect of competence on the shares is significantly higher if the saliency is 0.9 compared to a saliency of 0.4. More specifically, the ten percentage points increase in competence significantly increases the number of shares if issue saliency is higher than 0.7. For example, if both the SPÖ and NEOS are posting about immigration control, where saliency (all) is 0.9, the SPÖ gets about 30 more shares on this posting, as it is perceived as competent on that issue by 20% of the electorate and NEOS only by 10%, keeping all other variables constant. In the hypothetical scenario that one party is not picked as competent by anybody and one party by everybody on that issue, the more competent party would get 300 more shares, as shown in Figure 4.14.

¹¹Using a pairwise comparison test, it was additionally tested if the AME of competence on the predicted number of interactions is significantly higher at a saliency level of 0.9 compared to a saliency level of 0.4. These tests were only significant for emotions, comments and shares ($p < 0.05$), while there were not significant for interactions and likes.

Hence, hypothesis 3a, which states that the perceived issue competence among the electorate has a higher impact on the campaigning success of a posting if the issue is salient to the electorate, is only partly supported, as the interaction effect is only significant for emotions, comments and shares.

	All interactions	Likes	Emotions	Comments	Shares
Saliency (supporters)	-2.083 (1.820)	-1.688 (1.730)	-4.845 ⁺ (2.802)	-2.930 (2.416)	-2.414 (2.292)
Saliency (non-supporters)	1.146 (1.192)	1.114 (1.170)	2.341 (1.790)	1.762 (1.459)	0.924 (1.687)
Competence (supporters)	-4.568 ⁺ (2.567)	-3.527 (2.464)	-10.50** (3.807)	-6.189 ⁺ (3.674)	-6.033* (2.774)
Competence (non-supporters)	8.698 ⁺ (4.599)	8.444 ⁺ (4.670)	15.77* (6.194)	9.016 (5.699)	8.497 (6.700)
Competence × saliency (sup.)	6.680* (3.303)	5.413 ⁺ (3.183)	14.67** (4.833)	9.317* (4.527)	8.113* (3.837)
Competence × saliency (non-sup.)	-13.07* (6.488)	-12.72 ⁺ (6.624)	-23.72** (8.620)	-14.90 ⁺ (8.057)	-12.26 (9.573)
Negative campaigning	0.137 ⁺ (0.0792)	0.0307 (0.0746)	0.546*** (0.119)	0.174 ⁺ (0.0936)	0.396** (0.142)
Type: picture / top cand. not vis.	Reference	Reference	Reference	Reference	Reference
picture / top cand. vis.	0.230* (0.102)	0.347*** (0.0967)	-0.0640 (0.158)	0.0128 (0.135)	-0.0710 (0.141)
video / top cand. not vis.	0.127 (0.130)	0.123 (0.132)	-0.125 (0.145)	0.150 (0.163)	0.310* (0.151)
video / top cand. vis.	0.387*** (0.104)	0.449*** (0.0973)	0.0274 (0.163)	0.303* (0.126)	0.416* (0.164)
text-only	0.324 (0.301)	0.417 (0.304)	0.104 (0.293)	0.365 (0.305)	-0.0112 (0.286)
Number of postings	-0.0429** (0.0166)	-0.0429** (0.0154)	-0.0570* (0.0240)	-0.0422 (0.0263)	-0.0580* (0.0245)
Days until election day	0.0102** (0.00374)	0.0112** (0.00366)	0.0109** (0.00398)	0.00250 (0.00457)	0.0175*** (0.00503)
Constant	8.730*** (0.810)	8.040*** (0.814)	7.653*** (1.184)	6.140*** (1.165)	7.443*** (0.953)
ln(alpha) Constant	-0.428*** (0.0485)	-0.470*** (0.0534)	0.0327 (0.0587)	0.0240 (0.0607)	0.790*** (0.0682)
Dummies for accounts	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Pseudo R-squared	0.08	0.08	0.09	0.09	0.05
Party-issue dyads	139	139	139	139	139
Observations	1,462	1,462	1,462	1,462	1,462

Note: Coefficients from negative binomial regression models on number of Facebook interactions

Dummies for accounts not shown, Clustered SE for party-issue dyads in parentheses

⁺ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 4.11 – Interaction effect of competence and saliency by (non-)supporters on sum and different types of Facebook interactions

Table 4.11 tests hypothesis 3b, which states that this interaction works particularly well for supporters compared to non-supporters. The interaction term for supporters is significantly positive and quite substantial in all models¹². Also, the interaction term of non-supporters is negative and significant in all cases but shares, which suggests that supporters are in fact what matters here. This can also be seen in Figure 4.15, which

¹²Using the same pairwise comparison test as above, it was additionally tested if the AME of competence on the predicted number of interactions is significantly higher at a saliency level of 1 compared to a saliency level of 0.4 for supporters. These tests were significant for all types of interactions, with a p-value lower than 0.5 for interactions, emotions and comments and a p-value lower than 0.1 for likes and shares.

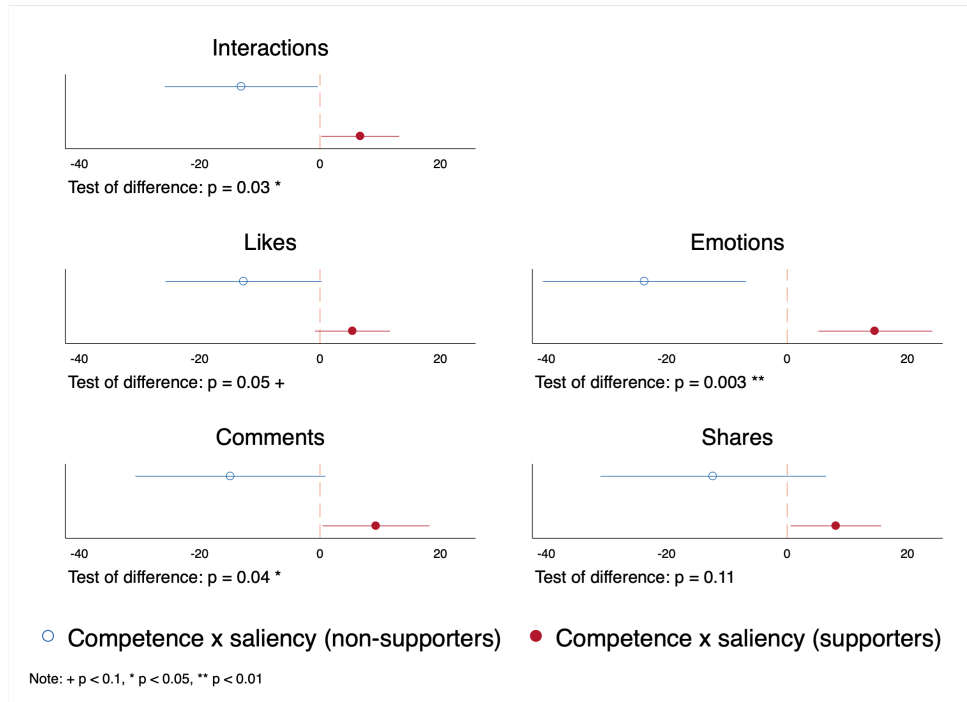


Figure 4.15 – Effect of competence×saliency of issue to non-supporters vs supporters on sum and different types of Facebook interactions

Note: Based on models in Table 4.11

shows the comparison of the two groups in the interaction term and tests if they are significantly different from each other, which is the case in all models but shares. This strongly supports hypothesis 3b, which states that the effect of competence by saliency is higher for supporters than non-supporters.

This is also shown in Figure 4.16, which displays the average marginal effect of a one-unit change in competence on the predicted number of interactions across the empirical range of saliency by supporters and non-supporters. In general, the effect of competence (supporters) on the predicted number of all types of interactions is significantly higher at a saliency (supporters) level of 1 compared to a saliency (supporters) level of 0.4.

Again, I will interpret these AMEs divided by ten, as a 10 percentage points change in competence is much more realistic than a 100 percentage points change. In the bottom left corner, it is shown that a 10 percentage point increase in competence (among party supporters) do not lead to more comments if the issue saliency (supporters) is lower than 0.8. If it is higher than 0.8, it leads to significantly more comments. This increase in comments grows, the more important the topic (20 more comments if saliency is 0.9 and 40 more comments if saliency is 1). In contrast, a 10 percentage point increase in competence (according to non-supporters) leads to significantly fewer comments if the issue saliency (non-supporters) is higher than 0.8. Again, this only measures if the two highly correlated saliency measurements are different from each other, hence a party posting about issues which are very important to non-supporters, but not to supporters (which is rarely the case, but see an example on page 58).

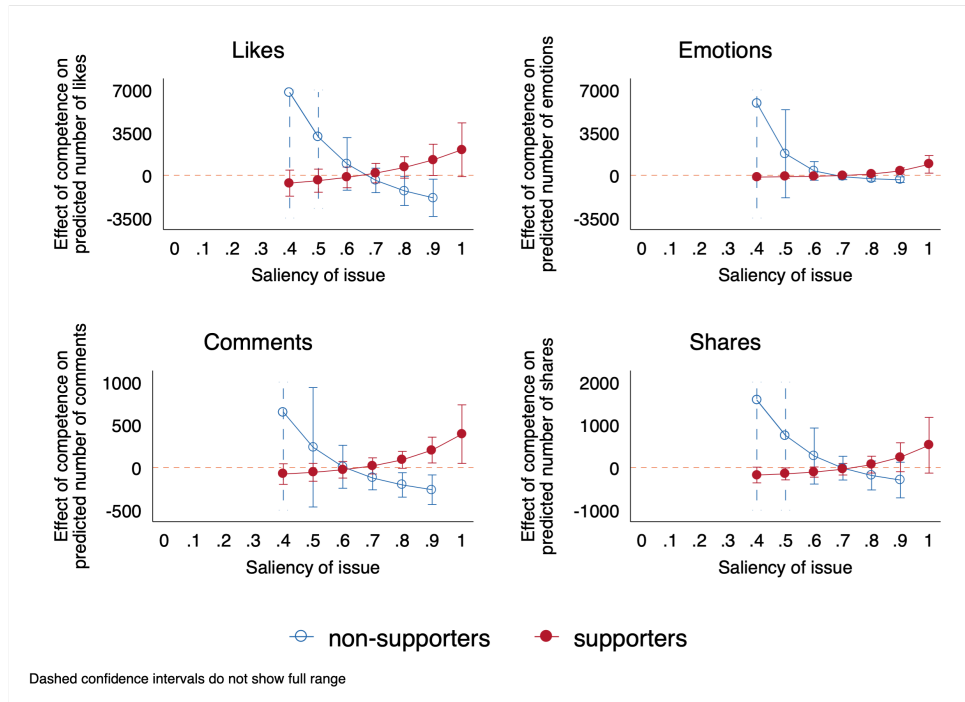


Figure 4.16 – Average marginal effect of competence by saliency by (non-)supporters on different types of Facebook interactions

Note: Based on models in Table 4.11

Similar effects are seen in Figure 4.17 for the total number of interactions, which sums up the findings for the dependence of issue ownership on riding-the-wave. On the left side, it is shown that the competence of a party in the electorate does not significantly matter more for the total number of interactions, the more important an issue to the electorate. The effect of competence (all) is not significantly higher at a saliency level of 0.9 compared to a saliency level of 0.4. Hence, hypothesis 3a, which states that the perceived issue competence among the electorate has a higher impact on the campaigning success if the issue is salient to the electorate is only partly confirmed, as this is only true for emotions, comments and shares, but not for the sum of all types of interactions.

The right side of Figure 4.17 shows the results for the two groups of non-supporters vs supporters. As explained above, the difference between groups is significant and the impact of competence on saliency is higher for supporters than non-supporters. As expected, the effect of competence by supporters on the predicted number of interactions increases the more salient an issue. Specifically, a 10 percentage point increase in competence (among party supporters) leads to 200 more interactions if the issue saliency (supporters) is 0.9 and to 350 more interactions if the issue saliency (supporters) is 1. In contrast, the effect of competence among non-supporters on the predicted number of interactions decreases as the issue becomes more important to non-supporters. Therefore, 3b is confirmed, as the interaction effect works particularly well for party supporters.

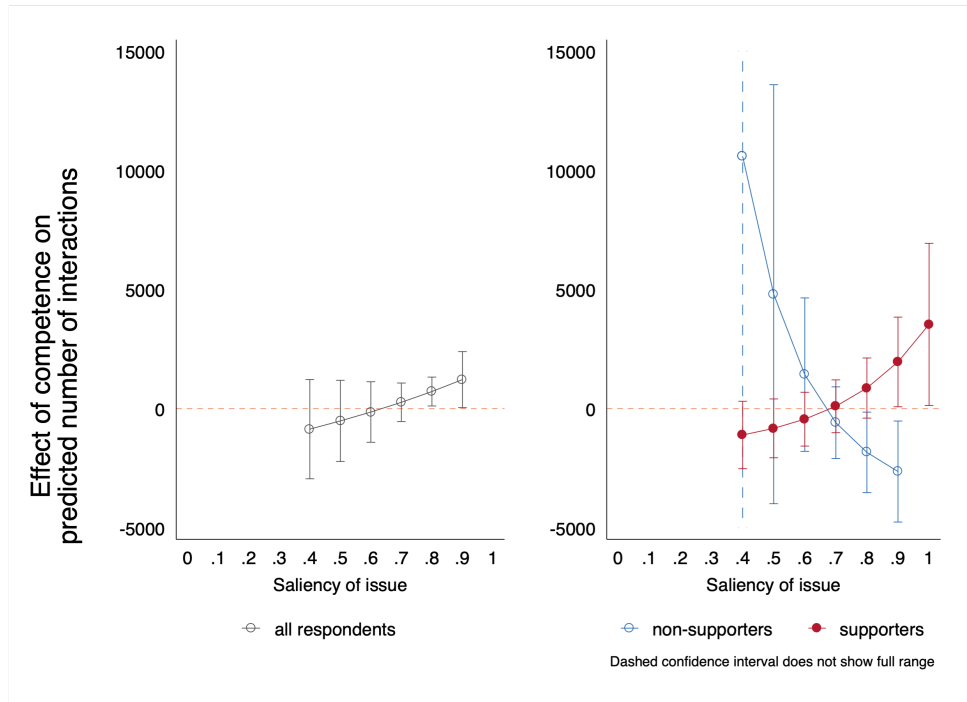


Figure 4.17 – Average marginal effect of competence by saliency by all respondents / (non-)supporters on the sum of all Facebook interactions

Note: Based on models in Table 4.10 and Table 4.11

To conclude, if parties and politicians want to increase the campaigning success of their postings on Facebook, it is advantageous to post on issues that are salient to the electorate *and* on which the party is perceived as competent. This strategy is even more effective if the postings are about issues that party supporters find salient and on which party supporters perceive their party as particularly competent.

4.2.4 Summary of analysis

In this section, I now want to sum up the analysis. Table 4.13 shows all the models with the main dependent variable (sum of all interactions). Also, Table 4.12 sums up the results for all hypotheses in a convenient way.

	Support?	All interactions	Likes	Emotions	Comments	Shares
H1a Saliency (all)	~			+	*	
H1b Saliency (sup. vs non-sup.)	✓	*	*	**		*
H2a Competence (all)	✓	+	+	*		*
H2b Competence (sup. vs non-sup.)	?					
H3a Sal. × comp. (all)	~			+	+	+
H3b Sal. × comp. (sup. vs non-sup.)	✓	*	+	**	*	

+ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Note: significant levels are from the coefficients for H1a, H2a, H3a and from the tests of difference for H1b, H2b and H3b

Table 4.12 – Overview of results of all hypotheses

Hypothesis 1a, which states that a posting is more successful if the issue of the posting is salient to the electorate is only partly supported, as the saliency is only significantly associated with emotions and comments. However, there is strong evidence for hypothesis 1b, which states that the saliency of supporters (compared to non-supporters) is what actually influences campaigning success. The coefficients for supporters are significantly higher than the ones for non-supporters for all models except for comments. This means that riding-the-wave is successful on Facebook, but especially if parties concentrate on the issue priorities of their supporters.

Hypothesis 2a is also supported, which stated that the more competent a party is perceived on an issue by the electorate, the higher the campaigning success of a posting. In line with issue ownership theory, the perceived competence of a posting is significantly associated with the number of all interaction types except comments. Still, it is not clear if this mechanism works particularly well for party supporters (compared to non-supporters). The data used in this thesis makes it impossible to test hypothesis 2b properly due to multicollinearity. Hence, this hypothesis should be tested in another setting with a more polarized perception of parties' issue competence between supporters and non-supporters.

Moreover, the interaction between riding-the-wave and issue-ownership matters. Hypothesis 3a is partly supported, as the perceived competence of a party by the electorate matters more for emotions, comments and shares, the more salient an issue is to the electorate. Still, this mechanism works particularly well for supporters (compared to non-supporters), which is why hypothesis 3b is strongly supported. The interaction term is significantly higher for supporters than non-supporters for all types of interactions except share.

These results show that both issue-centred strategies tested in this thesis matter for campaigning success on Facebook: both riding-the-wave and issue-ownership by themselves, but especially their combination lead to significantly more interactions. The results also show that these strategies do not work as well across all groups: riding-the-wave works particularly well for party supporters, whereas it seems like issue ownership is mostly dependent on the whole electorate. Also, Table 4.12 shows that issue-centred campaigning strategies do not seem to have the same effect on all types of interactions. Especially emotions seem to be most associated with the issues posted on Facebook, as these results are the most robust across all tested strategies. The other interactions such as comments, shares and likes seem to be more dependent on other characteristics of the postings.

Hence, I want to come back to the control variables, which work as expected in most cases. Table 4.13 shows that the effects for the control variables are quite stable across all models. Negative campaigning is positively, but not always significantly, associated with the number of interactions. This is especially true for emotions, comments and shares (see the various tables above). Also, personalisation matters for campaigning success: both pictures and videos with the top candidate visible are significantly more successful than pictures without the top candidate visible. Finally, the other structural features work as

expected: a higher number of postings in one day per account leads to fewer interactions for each posting and the closer election day the more interactions a posting will get. Also, the table includes account dummies which were not shown in the other tables. The reference category is the top candidate of the FPÖ, which has the most followers. Therefore, most of the accounts have significantly fewer interactions than the Heinz-Christian Strache account. Lastly, the $\ln(\alpha)$ constant shows that α is significantly different from zero in all models, which makes the negative binomial regression model a more appropriate way to test my hypotheses compared to a Poisson regression.

	H1a	H1b	H2a	H2b	H3a	H3b
Saliency (all)	0.231 (0.318)				-0.867 (0.785)	
Saliency (supporters)		1.265** (0.482)				-2.083 (1.820)
Saliency (non-supporters)		-1.039* (0.514)				1.146 (1.192)
Competence (all)			0.516+ (0.264)		-2.362 (2.430)	
Competence (supporters)				0.392 (0.528)		-4.568+ (2.567)
Competence (non-supporters)				0.0326 (0.635)		8.698+ (4.599)
Comp. $\times$ sal. (all)					3.715 (3.096)	
Comp. $\times$ sal. (supporters)						6.680* (3.303)
Comp. $\times$ sal. (non-supporters)						-13.07* (6.488)
neg_camp	0.114 (0.0877)	0.133 (0.0824)	0.134 (0.0820)	0.132 (0.0823)	0.139+ (0.0817)	0.137+ (0.0792)
Type: picture / top cand. not vis.	Reference	Reference	Reference	Reference	Reference	Reference
picture / top cand. vis.	0.228* (0.0990)	0.226* (0.100)	0.237* (0.101)	0.237* (0.101)	0.229* (0.0993)	0.230* (0.102)
video / top cand. not vis.	0.128 (0.131)	0.125 (0.129)	0.120 (0.129)	0.117 (0.128)	0.125 (0.128)	0.127 (0.130)
video / top cand. vis.	0.392*** (0.108)	0.395*** (0.106)	0.396*** (0.108)	0.391*** (0.108)	0.390*** (0.106)	0.387*** (0.104)
text-only	0.278 (0.313)	0.328 (0.312)	0.334 (0.326)	0.338 (0.324)	0.334 (0.315)	0.324 (0.301)
num_postings	-0.0455** (0.0164)	-0.0449** (0.0164)	-0.0450** (0.0165)	-0.0449** (0.0165)	-0.0445** (0.0163)	-0.0429** (0.0166)
days_until_election	0.0103** (0.00367)	0.0104** (0.00370)	0.0106** (0.00375)	0.0105** (0.00374)	0.0107** (0.00372)	0.0102** (0.00374)
Account: H.C. Strache	Reference	Reference	Reference	Reference	Reference	Reference
FPÖ	-1.689*** (0.189)	-1.652*** (0.183)	-1.660*** (0.188)	-1.659*** (0.188)	-1.656*** (0.187)	-1.606*** (0.176)
S. Kurz	-0.172 (0.199)	-0.0659 (0.187)	-0.146 (0.184)	-0.115 (0.188)	-0.114 (0.182)	0.153 (0.187)
ÖVP	-2.532*** (0.202)	-2.383*** (0.201)	-2.471*** (0.199)	-2.441*** (0.200)	-2.430*** (0.202)	-2.203*** (0.194)
C. Kern	-0.360* (0.175)	-0.257 (0.167)	-0.318+ (0.165)	-0.315+ (0.165)	-0.273 (0.171)	-0.129 (0.163)
SPÖ	-1.518*** (0.177)	-1.417*** (0.166)	-1.481*** (0.165)	-1.476*** (0.163)	-1.434*** (0.173)	-1.287*** (0.159)
U. Lunacek	-3.750*** (0.178)	-3.664*** (0.169)	-3.678*** (0.187)	-3.681*** (0.179)	-3.643*** (0.182)	-3.545*** (0.163)
Greens	-2.334*** (0.171)	-2.267*** (0.151)	-2.287*** (0.160)	-2.290*** (0.161)	-2.251*** (0.162)	-2.145*** (0.156)
M. Strolz	-2.565*** (0.210)	-2.438*** (0.204)	-2.432*** (0.213)	-2.418*** (0.225)	-2.433*** (0.203)	-2.275*** (0.212)
NEOS	-2.889*** (0.207)	-2.745*** (0.209)	-2.759*** (0.217)	-2.745*** (0.222)	-2.749*** (0.213)	-2.628*** (0.204)
P. Pilz	-1.566*** (0.248)	-1.484*** (0.245)	-1.438*** (0.256)	-1.445*** (0.264)	-1.422*** (0.253)	-1.351*** (0.259)
Liste Pilz	-3.466*** (0.214)	-3.365*** (0.203)	-3.319*** (0.218)	-3.317*** (0.218)	-3.317*** (0.211)	-3.221*** (0.214)
Constant	8.214*** (0.343)	8.087*** (0.324)	8.156*** (0.221)	8.092*** (0.283)	8.800*** (0.596)	8.730*** (0.810)
ln(alpha) Constant	-0.413*** (0.0465)	-0.421*** (0.0480)	-0.419*** (0.0483)	-0.419*** (0.0485)	-0.420*** (0.0481)	-0.428*** (0.0485)
Pseudo R-squared	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.08
Party-issue dyads	139	139	139	139	139	139
Observations	1,462	1,462	1,462	1,462	1,462	1,462

Note: Coefficients from negative binomial regression models on sum of all Facebook interactions
Clustered SE for party-issue dyads in parentheses, + $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 4.13 – Linear and interaction effects of competence and saliency
by all respondents and (non-)supporters on the sum of Facebook interactions

5 Discussion and Conclusion

This master thesis provides some of the first evidence that issue-centred campaigning strategies matter for campaigning success on SNS. Using a case study of the Austrian national election campaign on Facebook, this study combines both a content analysis of postings by political actors and public opinion data on riding-the-wave and issue ownership. The results reveal that postings about issues that are currently important to party supporters and about issues the author is perceived competent on are particularly successful on Facebook, controlling for actor-centred strategies and structural features of a posting. Also, it is shown that the two strategies reinforce each other, as the impact of competence on campaigning success increases, if the issue is salient (to party supporters). These findings are important for future research due to several aspects.

First and foremost, there is no doubt that electoral campaigning on SNS is on the rise (Bronstein, 2013; Vergeer et al., 2013; Barberá and Zeitzoff, 2017), which is why it is interesting to understand the impact of electoral campaigning on SNS. However, up until now, it is not clear yet if classic campaigning strategies are replicated or new strategies are used on SNS (Vergeer et al., 2013; Bode et al., 2016; Stier et al., 2018). Furthermore, it is even more unclear if the campaigning strategies used on SNS are actually successful in reaching and convincing new and existing voters. Even though some research has started to fill this gap in recent years (Kruikemeier, 2014; Heiss et al., 2018; Metz et al., 2019; Bene, 2017; Bobba, 2019; Borah, 2016), most studies focused on actor-centred campaigning strategies such as personalisation and negative campaigning so far. As issue competition is increasingly important in western Europe (Green-Pedersen, 2007; Tavits, 2007; Nadeau et al., 2010), this thesis focuses on issue-centred campaigning strategies instead. To the best of my knowledge, the data provides some of the first evidence that the classical issue-centred campaigning strategies of riding-the-wave and issue ownership work in terms of campaigning success on Facebook.

Secondly, this thesis shows that the target group of campaign messages on SNS is quite specific. The riding-the wave strategy works particularly well if the parties do not concentrate on those issues the whole electorate finds important, but specifically on those issues, their supporters find salient. Due to data limitation, this result is not entirely clear for issue ownership. Still, also the reinforcement of riding-the-wave on issue ownership works particularly well when using the preferences of party supporters (compared to non-supporters). Hence, this further strengthens the existing evidence that the target group of messages on SNS are mostly party supporters (Bode et al., 2016; Macafee, 2013; Ancu and Cozma, 2009; Eberl et al., 2019; Ennser-Jedenastik et al., 2019). Postings will be more successful on SNS if the content is tailored to party supporters specifically, as this is the main target group on SNS. With the higher amount of interactions, the message will

then spread more easily through the algorithm used on Facebook (Backstrom, 2013; Kreiss et al., 2017). Hence, SNS can be particularly useful tools to reach campaigning goals targeted to an audience already supportive of a given party such as mobilizing (Farrell and Schmitt-Beck, 2002).

Thirdly, even though the previous point may lead to the conclusion that SNS are *only* useful for campaigning goals targeted to party supporters, this is not the case. Campaigning messages on SNS are spread by various mechanisms to the general electorate, which is why they are also useful in reaching campaigning goals such as reaching and convincing potential new voters (Farrell and Schmitt-Beck, 2002). If postings have more interactions (i.e. campaigning success as defined in this thesis), they can more easily reach and convince a wider target group. On the one hand, postings on social network sites that are particularly successful are picked up by traditional media and thus can reach a wider electorate (Serazio, 2014; McGregor, 2019; Bode and Dalrymple, 2016). Also, followers of political actors on SNS are often ‘local opinion leaders’ (Lazarsfeld et al., 1944), who actively try to persuade others both online and offline (Weeks et al., 2017; Miller et al., 2015). This is why particularly successful postings will first reach more of these local opinion leaders and then a wider electorate through them. Hence, the study of successful campaign messages is not only important for the target group which can be directly reached through postings of political actors on SNS (which are mainly supportive to a given party already, see above), but also beyond that as these messages reach also the wider electorate.

Forth, studying the success of campaigning messages on social network sites is also relevant for the study of campaigning strategies in general. Social network sites provide a convenient way to study the perception of campaigning messages, as the interactions are expressions of attention, interest and endorsement with the campaign message (Porten-Che   et al., 2018; Gerodimos and Justinussen, 2015). In many other channels campaigning messages are spread to voters directly or indirectly via the mass media, such as party manifestos, press releases, advertisements in the newspapers or on TV, party homepages or posters (Bodlos, forthcoming), no such direct feedback mechanism exists.

Hence, if researches want to test the direct perception of voters and thus the effectiveness of certain campaign strategies on these channels, it is necessary to use focus groups, experiments or surveys. However, these methods are most likely only possible using a small sample of the target audience and are often biased and expensive (M  ller, 1997). Also, some scholars tested the effect of campaign strategies on vote choice (Nadeau et al., 2010; Tavits, 2007) or preferential votes (Kruikemeier, 2014; Jacobs and Spierings, 2015), but these measurements are much more indirect and cannot be connected to the perception of a specific campaign message. Hence, to the best of my knowledge, interactions on social network sites are the only direct way to study the effectiveness of specific campaign messages and thus strategies using the whole target audience. This offers room for future research using interaction numbers as the dependent variable, which can study the success

of other electoral campaign strategies or study the effect of communication strategies used outside an electoral campaign.

Fifth, this feedback in terms of interaction numbers is also available for the political actors themselves who spread the campaign messages. Hence, as social network sites are dynamic campaigning channels in which the messages can easily be adapted during the campaign (Bodlos, forthcoming), this feedback can be taken into account. As Kreiss et al. (2017) show, campaign managers are aware that postings which receive more interactions are more likely to spread and thus reach the campaigning goals. Hence, it is expected that political actors will take this feedback into account when adapting the agenda used in a campaign, which offers room for future studies. For example, Ennser-Jedenastik et al. (2019) study if parties are responsive to user engagement on specific issues on Facebook and show that major parties that have enough resources do so, especially on issues which are not important during their pre-campaign agenda. Again, future studies can study the responsiveness of parties on other features of campaign messages (e.g. actor-centred strategies) or the responsiveness outside electoral campaigns. In addition, further research is needed what constraints parties face when adapting campaigning messages on SNS (see e.g. Meyer, 2013; Meyer and Wagner, 2016).

Sixth, the results reveal that the different campaigning messages do not have the same effect for all different types of Facebook interactions (likes, emotional reactions, comments and shares). Emotional reactions seem to be most dependent on issue-centred campaigning strategies. Also, the actor-centred campaigning strategy of negative campaigning triggers emotions, comments and shares the most. Hence, future studies should differentiate between the different interactions or even emotions such as Eberl et al. (2019). Furthermore, thus far, there is a lack of research revealing the underlying mechanisms how users choose how to interact with a given posting on SNS (but see e.g. Macafee, 2013; Porten-Che   et al., 2018). Further research could investigate which campaigning strategies lead to different interactions and why this is the case using, for example, interviews or experiments. Does the riding-the-wave strategy lead to more emotional reactions because the audiences acknowledge that parties talk about the issues they care most about? Why are attacks on political opponents most interesting to discuss by using comments? Answers to these open questions can reveal interesting patterns in the perception of campaign messages not only on SNS but in general.

Lastly, I want to mention how future studies can improve the approach taken in this thesis. On the one hand, as already mentioned in subsection 3.3.3, I was not able to control for highlighted content and sponsoring of the postings in this thesis due to the lack of data, but the *Ad Library* has been providing insights in sponsoring since March 2019 (Facebook, 2019a). Also, as explained in subsection 4.2.2, the differences in parties' issue competence by supporters and non-supporters are highly correlated, which is why the differences between the two groups could not be tested properly. Hence, I propose to study this hypothesis again by collecting data in a more polarized party-system than

Austria or using a single-choice question for measuring party competence instead, as this will also lead to more polarized opinions. Of course, as these results are only based on a case study of the 2017 Austrian national election campaign, future research should try to replicate the results across different contexts.

To conclude, this master thesis has important implications for the understanding of modern electoral campaigns and issue competition, as it shows that issue-centred campaigning strategies used on SNS are effective strategies to increase the campaigning success of campaign messages. As shown in this chapter, these results provide various new insights on how campaigning messages are perceived by the electorate and open new interesting research questions which should be investigated in the future.

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Appendices

A Complete issue classification

N Headings / *Issues: Survey issue statement* / AUTNES label

Migration and integration

- 123** *Cultural integration : Allow / Require foreigners in Austria to preserve their own / fully adapt to Austrian culture*
- 35 patriotism / nationalism / home country
- 20 integration of immigrants (general)
- 16 Islam / muslims (general)
- 8 integration of immigrants: support
- 8 Austrian cultural identity / Leitkultur
- 5 Islam in schools / in the Austrian Armed Forces
- 5 headscarf / burqua / niqab
- 4 multiculturalism / dialogue / acceptance of differences / pluralism
- 4 right-wing extremism / neo-Nazis
- 4 mosques / minarets / Islamic institutions (general)
- 3 antisemitism
- 3 forced marriage / genital mutilation / honor killing / cultural crimes
- 2 integration of immigrants: compulsion / constraints / forced adaption
- 2 segregation in schools (foreigners and Austrians)
- 1 right to vote for immigrants (general)
- 1 parallel society
- 1 racism / xenophobia
- 1 compulsory German language skills before school enrollment
- 33** *Control immigration: Control immigration*
- 20 immigration / immigrants / foreigners (general)
- 6 restriction of number of foreigners
- 6 admission of economic refugees
- 1 criteria for immigration (Green Card, credit system, skilled labor, ...)
- 22** *Asylum rules: Keep current asylum rules / Make asylum rules more restrictive*
- 12 asylum / admission of refugees
- 5 deportation of illegal immigrants / asylum seekers from third countries
- 2 supervision of asylum seekers / pre-deportation detention / reporting obligations
- 1 right to stay for asylum seekers
- 1 acceleration / improvement of asylum procedure
- 1 asylum fraud

19 Welfare chauvinism: Maintain current levels of / Restrict access to welfare benefits for immigrants

16 welfare benefits only for Austrian citizens

2 benefit fraud by foreigners

1 special welfare system for foreigners

18 EU and migration: The EU has to enforce refugee quotas / Member states should decide on their own

12 Schengen / Frontex

3 EU: common standards for refugees / asylum-seekers

2 Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) (general)

1 EU: quotas for refugees / immigrants / asylum-seekers

Corruption / behaviour politicians

209 Corruption / behaviour politicians: Fight corruption

69 political culture / sense of decency in politics / behaviour of politicians

31 performance / efficiency in politics

20 illegal party funding / corruption

17 parliamentary minority rights: control / oversight / investigation committees

16 abuse of power by parties (general)

16 ORF (Austrian broadcasting corporation): objectivity / independence

13 patronage / nepotism / favoritism

13 legal party funding (e.g. public and donations)

9 investigation of specific scandals and affairs (incl. parliamentary committees)

2 public disclosure / restriction of campaign expenditures

2 funding of political advertising by parliamentary party groups / ministries / state-owned enterprises

1 privileges for civil servants

Social justice

151 Social justice: Providing social justice

82 social justice / equality / equal opportunities (general)

30 social policy / welfare state (general)

17 support for single parents (e.g. higher child care benefit)

7 poverty (general)

6 social Europe

3 basic income / means-tested guaranteed minimum income

3 payments to the poor / social welfare benefits

2 integration / support for disabled

1 personal bankruptcy / debt relief for individuals

11 Membership trade associations: Austria should (not) abolish the obligatory membership in trade associations

7 social partnership / corporatism / compulsory membership in chambers

4 reform of chambers (Chamber of Labor, Austrian Economic Chambers, etc.)

Environmental protection

115 *Environmental protection: Protect the environment*

32 climate protection (general) / Kyoto Protocol

22 environmental protection / sustainability / conservation (general)

20 pesticides / colony collapse disorder (bees)

18 animal protection (general)

14 organic farming

5 quality of food / nutrition / diet

2 ministry of the environment (competences)

1 eco-tax / green tax

1 livestock transport / battery cages / use of hormones in animal breeding

17 *Transport: Diesel cars should (not) be banned*

7 traffic / mobility (general)

5 public transport

2 diesel scandal / pollution fraud

1 cyclists / pedestrians

1 air pollution / particulate matter / fine dust

1 development of roads / transport infrastructure

15 *Sustainable energy: Promoting the production of sustainable energy / Maintaining current mix*

11 renewable energy (general)

3 energy from fossile fuels

1 energy saving

Economy

123 *Economy: Support economic growth*

14 farming / agriculture / farmers (general)

14 digitalisation / automation

13 economic growth

12 globalisation / reduction of tariffs / open world market

7 promotion of self-employment / self-employment / business creation (general)

6 national competitiveness

6 living standard / quality of life in Austria (general)

6 economic policy (general)

6 promotion / measures for companies (general)

6 business taxes: cut

5 capitalism / market economy / entrepreneurs / property (general)

5 living standard / quality of life in rural areas

2 science / development / innovation / research

2 promotion / measures for small and medium sized companies (specific)

2	telecommunications infrastructure
2	corporate tax
2	combatting inflation / price increase; maintaining purchasing power / price stability
2	business taxes: increase
2	social / fair / just world trading system
2	non-smoker protection / smoking bans
2	privatisation / liberalisation / deregulation: rail transport
1	protection of domestic markets / protectionism
1	competition policy / combatting cartels, monopolies, price agreements
1	social security contributions / ancillary labor costs (employers)
1	eco-social market economy (Austrian term)
1	economic stimulus program / public investment

Education

100 *Education* : Austria should (not) introduce a comprehensive school for all children until the age of 14

42	education / education policy (general)
12	equal opportunities in education
9	students / schoolchildren (social group)
7	schools / school infrastructure (general)
7	teachers (social group)
5	admission tests / restriction of free university admission
4	university fees / tuition fees / enrollment fees
4	comprehensive school for 10- to 14-year-olds
3	all-day school
2	university students / college students (social group)
2	financial support for university students / grants / scholarships
2	school autonomy
1	studying abroad

Health and social services

97 *Health and social services*: Raise (cut) taxes and spend more (less) on health and social services

13	tax reduction / decrease of tax and contribution ratio (general)
10	kindergarten / child care / day care
10	children / youth (general)
8	geriatric care (general)
8	improve quality of health care
6	tax cut for small and medium incomes
5	tax reform (general)
5	private / home care (e.g. financial support)
4	tax increase (general)

4	tax policy (general)
4	income tax
3	services for the health-insured / improved coverage
3	'two-class' health care
2	patient contributions / ambulance fees / prescription fees
2	families (social group / general)
2	health care system reform (general)
1	value added tax / VAT (general)
1	tax exemption for small incomes
1	social security contributions / ancillary labor costs (general)
1	simplification of the tax code
1	extension of geriatric care (retirement homes)
1	tax deduction for families with children
1	education in kindergarten / early learning
1	support for families / family allowance

Gender equality and homosexuals

69 *Gender equality: Politics should implement / not enforce gender quotas*

24	gender equality
23	alimony for divorced / kids / advance payments by government
9	equal payment for men and women
3	women in politics
3	paternity leave (specific)
2	quota for women in the private sector
1	support for women in the job / education (general)
1	social protection of women
1	help / conseling in case of domestic violence (women's shelters etc.)
1	gender mainstreaming / gender budgeting
1	reconciliation of work and family life (general)

13 *Homosexuals: (Do not) Allow gay marriages*

7	same-sex marriage
6	support / equal rights for homosexuals

Job market

49 *Regulations job market: Keep current regulations in the job market / Deregulate the job market*

16	levelling of legal status of workers and employees
6	apprentices (social group)
5	further education / qualification / on-the-job training / sabbatical
4	working hours
3	salaries / wages / earnings
3	employment protection (general)

- 2 strict labor regulation / against flexible working environment
- 2 flexible working hours (general)
- 2 adult education / adult education centers / adult evening classes
- 1 supervision of companies (social dumping etc.)
- 1 marginal / part-time employment (people)
- 1 trade unions
- 1 high salaries / severance pay for managers (private sector)
- 1 safety and health in the workplace (noise / chemicals etc.)
- 1 government financing of vocational training / support for apprentices

16 Fight unemployment: Fight unemployment

- 11 unemployment (general)
- 3 unemployment: elderly employees
- 1 active labour market policies
- 1 right to work

10 Unemployment / national debt: (Do not) decrease unemployment even at the expense of high national debt

- 5 cuts in government expenditures
- 3 budget deficit
- 1 public debt
- 1 financial policy (general)

Security and crime

36 Fight crime: Fight crime

- 11 crime prevention (general)
- 8 crime (general)
- 3 public expenditure for police (money, staff)
- 3 more severe punishment of child abuse / sexual crimes / rape
- 3 crime committed by foreigners (general)
- 2 police (general)
- 2 deportation of foreign offenders (individuals)
- 1 rights of victims (e.g. procedural rights)
- 1 death penalty
- 1 crime prevention through education / welfare
- 1 protection against sexual harrassment

25 Terrorist attacks: Protect Austria against terrorist attacks

- 18 Islamic terrorism / Islamism / fundamentalism / hatemongering
- 7 terrorism (general)

4 Surveillance measures: Surveillance measures should (not) be extended

- 2 supervision of intelligence services
- 1 data protection / privacy

1	police powers
	European integration
54	<i>European integration: Stay in the EU / Leave the EU</i>
34	European integration (general)
7	EU-accession Turkey
6	subsidiarity principle in the EU
3	Europe of nations
2	federal / strong EU / extension of powers
1	Brexit
1	EU centralism
	Redistribution of wealth
20	<i>Reduce income differences: (Do not) reduce income differences</i>
13	tax evasion / trusts / foundations
3	tax cut for high incomes
3	redistribution (specific)
1	high salaries / executive bonuses
20	<i>Property tax: Austria should (not) have a property tax on inheritance</i>
13	inheritance tax
7	wealth tax / luxury tax
11	<i>Minimum wage: (Do not) increase the minimum wage above 1500 euros</i>
11	minimum wage
	Housing
32	<i>Housing: Providing affordable homes</i>
17	government control of rents / protection of tenants
13	rent / housing costs (general)
2	public housing / social housing / housing benefits
	(Direct) democracy
30	<i>(Direct) democracy: Introduce stronger / Keep current level of direct democracy measures</i>
21	democracy / participation (general)
5	direct democracy (general)
3	democracy / participation (specific groups)
1	democracy / participation in the EU
	Elderly people
18	<i>Elderly people: Fighting poverty of Elderly people</i>
11	pension reform (general)
4	pensioners / elderly people (general)
3	pension increase (general)
2	<i>Pension age: Keep current / Increase pension age</i>

2 raise of retirement age / longer working life

No policy issue

920 *No policy issue: No policy issue*

827 no policy issue coded

27 OEVP-FPOE coalition

20 SPOE-OEVP coalition (SPOE as chancellor party)

13 OEVP-SPOE coalition (OEVP as chancellor party)

8 government participation of own party

7 right-wing / nationalist

5 government formation / coalition composition (general)

3 SPOE-FPOE coalition

3 coalition including the FPOE

2 Freedom Party

1 green / alternative

1 three-party coalition government

1 minority government

1 Social Democratic

1 OEVP-Greens-NEOS coalition

Other / not matched

387 *Other / not matched: Other / not matched*

244 not classifiable

14 foreign policy / international cooperation (general)

14 civil rights / human rights / basic rights

9 hate speech on the internet / cyber-bullying

8 reference to another federal state (Bundesland)

8 reference to another country

8 disarmament / ban on certain weapons (NBC-weapons, mines, cluster munition)

7 postal vote / absentee ballot

7 foreign aid / development cooperation

6 consumer protection (general)

6 reform / economisation / modernisation of the administration / reduction of bureaucracy

6 arms exports (general)

5 choice / individual responsibility / effort (general)

4 voluntary services / civil society

4 arts / culture (general)

4 issue without text

3 separation of church and state (general)

3 parliamentary reform (general)

3 war (general)

3	parliamentary system
2	rule of law
2	federalism
2	ORF (Austrian broadcasting corporation): fees / charges
2	professional sports (elites)
1	relationship with individual countries
1	amateur sports (masses)
1	Austrian Armed Forces / national defence / army (general)
1	Austrian Armed Forces: border protection / border security deployment
1	clubs / associations / recreational facilities / leisure facilities
1	judicial reform (general)
1	abolition / reduction of political institutions (President, Bundesrat)
1	public financing of arts and culture
1	UN / Reform of UN / UN subdivisions (WHO, UNIDO, UNICEF etc.)
1	entrusting Federal Chancellor with power to give directives to ministers
1	government aid in case of natural disasters / flood protection
1	economisation of the public service / reduction civil servants
1	institutional reform / constitutional reform (general)

2769 Sum

Table A.1 – Policy categories, corresponding survey issue statements and AUTNES labels

B Issue saliency and competence values

Party / Issue	Competence			Saliency		
	all	sup.	n-s.	all	sup.	n-s.
SPÖ	0.30	0.53	0.19	0.69	0.70	0.70
Elderly people	0.49	0.77	0.34	0.81	0.83	0.81
Fight unemployment	0.48	0.80	0.32	0.84	0.88	0.83
Housing	0.48	0.76	0.34	0.78	0.82	0.76
Social justice	0.44	0.77	0.28	0.78	0.82	0.77
European integration	0.44	0.71	0.31	0.76	0.85	0.72
Regulations job market	0.40	0.63	0.30	0.65	0.67	0.65
Reduce income differences	0.35	0.59	0.23	0.64	0.69	0.64
Minimum wage	0.35	0.58	0.23	0.65	0.64	0.66
Economy	0.31	0.55	0.17	0.73	0.74	0.74
Health and social services	0.30	0.53	0.19	0.60	0.62	0.61
Pension age	0.30	0.52	0.20	0.72	0.73	0.74
Homosexuals	0.30	0.52	0.21	0.42	0.45	0.40
Education	0.29	0.50	0.19	0.57	0.61	0.57
Property tax	0.29	0.51	0.18	0.62	0.63	0.62
Fight crime	0.28	0.53	0.14	0.84	0.80	0.87
Membership trade associations	0.27	0.46	0.18	0.49	0.48	0.51
Gender equality	0.27	0.47	0.17	0.45	0.46	0.45
Terrorist attacks	0.26	0.43	0.16	0.84	0.78	0.89
(Direct) democracy	0.23	0.47	0.10	0.65	0.63	0.67
Sustainable energy	0.22	0.40	0.13	0.67	0.72	0.64
Environmental protection	0.20	0.36	0.12	0.75	0.80	0.72
Transport	0.20	0.37	0.11	0.57	0.56	0.58
Control immigration	0.19	0.39	0.07	0.84	0.75	0.89
Cultural integration	0.19	0.39	0.08	0.78	0.72	0.83
Asylum rules	0.17	0.37	0.06	0.82	0.76	0.86
Corruption / behaviour politicians	0.16	0.32	0.08	0.79	0.78	0.81
ÖVP	0.35	0.53	0.23	0.72	0.72	0.73
Economy	0.57	0.77	0.45	0.73	0.79	0.70
Control immigration	0.52	0.76	0.36	0.84	0.90	0.79
Fight crime	0.47	0.67	0.34	0.84	0.88	0.81
European integration	0.46	0.65	0.35	0.76	0.74	0.79
Terrorist attacks	0.46	0.65	0.34	0.84	0.89	0.81
Asylum rules	0.41	0.67	0.25	0.82	0.85	0.80
Fight unemployment	0.41	0.63	0.28	0.84	0.84	0.86
EU and migration	0.39	0.55	0.28	0.80	0.82	0.79
Cultural integration	0.39	0.60	0.24	0.78	0.84	0.74
Surveillance measures	0.32	0.46	0.23	0.60	0.59	0.62
Property tax	0.32	0.50	0.20	0.62	0.61	0.63
Unemployment / national debt	0.32	0.48	0.21	0.70	0.70	0.73
Health and social services	0.30	0.44	0.22	0.60	0.59	0.62
Elderly people	0.30	0.52	0.15	0.81	0.78	0.85
Regulations job market	0.30	0.46	0.19	0.65	0.62	0.68
Reduce income differences	0.30	0.50	0.16	0.64	0.63	0.67
Education	0.30	0.48	0.17	0.57	0.57	0.59

(Direct) democracy	0.29	0.46	0.18	0.65	0.65	0.66
Pension age	0.29	0.44	0.20	0.72	0.73	0.73
Social justice	0.28	0.50	0.12	0.78	0.75	0.82
Housing	0.28	0.48	0.13	0.78	0.74	0.82
Sustainable energy	0.26	0.42	0.16	0.67	0.64	0.69
Gender equality	0.24	0.39	0.13	0.45	0.42	0.48
Corruption / behaviour politicians	0.21	0.35	0.11	0.79	0.77	0.81
FPÖ	0.34	0.60	0.20	0.73	0.76	0.72
Control immigration	0.66	0.92	0.53	0.84	0.95	0.78
Asylum rules	0.58	0.86	0.44	0.82	0.92	0.76
Welfare chauvinism	0.57	0.87	0.44	0.80	0.92	0.75
Cultural integration	0.53	0.83	0.38	0.78	0.89	0.73
Fight crime	0.52	0.82	0.38	0.84	0.92	0.79
Terrorist attacks	0.49	0.76	0.36	0.84	0.92	0.80
EU and migration	0.44	0.71	0.30	0.80	0.85	0.78
(Direct) democracy	0.31	0.64	0.13	0.65	0.73	0.61
Property tax	0.28	0.54	0.15	0.62	0.62	0.63
European integration	0.26	0.58	0.08	0.76	0.66	0.83
Elderly people	0.26	0.54	0.11	0.81	0.83	0.81
Regulations job market	0.26	0.49	0.13	0.65	0.67	0.65
Social justice	0.25	0.56	0.09	0.78	0.78	0.80
Corruption / behaviour politicians	0.25	0.50	0.11	0.79	0.80	0.79
Economy	0.24	0.51	0.10	0.73	0.76	0.73
Unemployment / national debt	0.24	0.45	0.14	0.70	0.69	0.73
Reduce income differences	0.24	0.46	0.13	0.64	0.64	0.66
Housing	0.24	0.51	0.09	0.78	0.76	0.79
Health and social services	0.23	0.44	0.13	0.60	0.62	0.61
Gender equality	0.23	0.44	0.12	0.45	0.47	0.45
Education	0.22	0.48	0.09	0.57	0.56	0.60
Environmental protection	0.13	0.31	0.04	0.75	0.70	0.78
Greens	0.19	0.42	0.14	0.69	0.69	0.70
Environmental protection	0.61	0.87	0.57	0.75	0.83	0.73
Sustainable energy	0.42	0.73	0.36	0.67	0.75	0.64
Homosexuals	0.36	0.69	0.29	0.42	0.55	0.38
European integration	0.30	0.59	0.24	0.76	0.86	0.74
Gender equality	0.24	0.51	0.18	0.45	0.51	0.44
Transport	0.23	0.49	0.17	0.57	0.56	0.58
Housing	0.22	0.52	0.16	0.78	0.84	0.77
Social justice	0.21	0.52	0.14	0.78	0.81	0.78
Elderly people	0.20	0.43	0.14	0.81	0.83	0.82
Reduce income differences	0.17	0.45	0.11	0.64	0.65	0.65
Corruption / behaviour politicians	0.17	0.41	0.11	0.79	0.79	0.79
Education	0.15	0.39	0.10	0.57	0.62	0.57
Minimum wage	0.15	0.36	0.11	0.65	0.60	0.67
Surveillance measures	0.14	0.37	0.09	0.60	0.53	0.62
Health and social services	0.13	0.32	0.09	0.60	0.62	0.61
Regulations job market	0.13	0.29	0.09	0.65	0.66	0.65
Property tax	0.12	0.33	0.08	0.62	0.65	0.62
Cultural integration	0.12	0.38	0.06	0.78	0.66	0.82
(Direct) democracy	0.12	0.28	0.08	0.65	0.58	0.67
Asylum rules	0.10	0.38	0.04	0.82	0.70	0.85
EU and migration	0.08	0.27	0.04	0.80	0.77	0.81

Fight crime	0.07	0.20	0.04	0.84	0.75	0.86
Terrorist attacks	0.07	0.17	0.05	0.84	0.73	0.87
Economy	0.05	0.15	0.02	0.73	0.67	0.76
NEOS	0.14	0.31	0.10	0.71	0.70	0.72
European integration	0.27	0.50	0.21	0.76	0.85	0.75
Economy	0.23	0.51	0.16	0.73	0.78	0.73
Homosexuals	0.22	0.39	0.18	0.42	0.40	0.42
Corruption / behaviour politicians	0.18	0.38	0.13	0.79	0.78	0.80
Gender equality	0.17	0.31	0.14	0.45	0.40	0.47
Fight unemployment	0.16	0.37	0.11	0.84	0.85	0.85
Membership trade associations	0.16	0.36	0.11	0.49	0.50	0.50
(Direct) democracy	0.15	0.35	0.11	0.65	0.61	0.67
Regulations job market	0.14	0.29	0.11	0.65	0.62	0.66
Social justice	0.13	0.31	0.09	0.78	0.78	0.79
Education	0.13	0.29	0.09	0.57	0.60	0.58
Unemployment / national debt	0.12	0.28	0.09	0.70	0.73	0.70
Environmental protection	0.12	0.27	0.09	0.75	0.77	0.75
Elderly people	0.12	0.28	0.08	0.81	0.77	0.83
Health and social services	0.11	0.26	0.08	0.60	0.63	0.60
Fight crime	0.11	0.20	0.09	0.84	0.79	0.86
Housing	0.11	0.22	0.08	0.78	0.76	0.78
Cultural integration	0.10	0.22	0.08	0.78	0.70	0.81
Control immigration	0.10	0.21	0.07	0.84	0.78	0.86
EU and migration	0.09	0.23	0.06	0.80	0.79	0.81
Asylum rules	0.08	0.21	0.04	0.82	0.77	0.83
PILZ	0.10	0.26	0.06	0.71	0.72	0.72
Corruption / behaviour politicians	0.28	0.61	0.20	0.79	0.85	0.78
Environmental protection	0.22	0.44	0.16	0.75	0.82	0.73
European integration	0.18	0.42	0.12	0.76	0.81	0.76
Social justice	0.13	0.35	0.07	0.78	0.80	0.78
(Direct) democracy	0.11	0.29	0.06	0.65	0.66	0.65
Reduce income differences	0.11	0.29	0.05	0.64	0.68	0.64
Gender equality	0.10	0.25	0.06	0.45	0.47	0.45
Surveillance measures	0.10	0.26	0.05	0.60	0.65	0.60
Terrorist attacks	0.09	0.19	0.06	0.84	0.79	0.86
Fight unemployment	0.09	0.23	0.05	0.84	0.87	0.85
Minimum wage	0.09	0.21	0.05	0.65	0.65	0.66
Fight crime	0.08	0.20	0.04	0.84	0.78	0.86
Regulations job market	0.08	0.19	0.04	0.65	0.66	0.65
Cultural integration	0.07	0.23	0.03	0.78	0.73	0.81
Education	0.07	0.21	0.03	0.57	0.64	0.56
Health and social services	0.07	0.19	0.04	0.60	0.60	0.61
Unemployment / national debt	0.07	0.19	0.04	0.70	0.75	0.70
EU and migration	0.07	0.18	0.03	0.80	0.78	0.81
Transport	0.06	0.19	0.03	0.57	0.56	0.58
Asylum rules	0.06	0.20	0.03	0.82	0.79	0.83
Control immigration	0.05	0.15	0.02	0.84	0.76	0.86
Economy	0.05	0.13	0.03	0.73	0.73	0.75
Across all parties and issues	0.24	0.45	0.16	0.71	0.71	0.71

Table B.1 – Issue saliency and issue competence for each issue per party

C Abstracts

English Abstract

Even though social network sites are important election campaigning tools nowadays and issue competition is becoming increasingly important in party competition, it is unclear how the policy content of postings on SNS affects their campaigning success. This thesis seeks to answer this question, using the interaction numbers (likes, emotions, comments and shares) as a proxy for campaigning success, as they help in reaching both new and existing voters. It is analysed if the campaigning success of a Facebook posting is higher if it covers a specific policy issue which is salient to the voters (*riding-the-wave* strategy) or on which the author is perceived particularly competent (*issue ownership* strategy). In addition, it is tested if these issue-centred campaigning strategies reinforce each other and if the success differs if the parties focus on the preferences of the general electorate or their supporters only.

The hypotheses were investigated through a quantitative content analysis of all Facebook postings of political parties' and top candidates from the 2017 Austrian national election campaign. This data was matched with public opinion data on party competence and issue saliency of 30 different policies. The results show that focusing on issues that are currently important to party supporters and on which the party is seen as competent by the electorate increases campaigning success on Facebook. In addition, it is shown that the two campaigning strategies reinforce each other, as the impact of competence on campaigning success gets higher if the issue is salient.

The results provide some of the first evidence on how successful issue-centred campaigning strategies on SNS are and show that SNS are a valuable data source to study the success of campaigning strategies using user interactions. The findings have important implications for the understanding of modern electoral campaigning and issue competition.

German Abstract

Obwohl soziale Netzwerke mittlerweile zu den wichtigsten Instrumenten in Wahlkampagnen zählen, und Themen im politischen Wettbewerb immer wichtiger wurden, ist unklar, wie die Themensetzung eines Beitrages dessen Kampagnenerfolg auf sozialen Netzwerken beeinflusst. Hierbei wird angenommen, dass der Kampagnenerfolg eines Beitrages dann hoch ist, wenn er viele Facebook-Interaktionen (Likes, Emotionen, Kommentare und Shares) erhält, da diese helfen, neue und vorhandene Wählerinnen und Wähler zu erreichen. Das Ziel dieser Masterarbeit ist es zu untersuchen, ob der Kampagnenerfolg eines Beitrages höher ist, wenn Parteien zu jenen Themen posten, die wichtig für die Wählerinnen und Wähler sind (*riding-the-wave* Strategie) oder bei welchen Themen sie als besonders kompetent wahrgenommen werden (*issue ownership* Strategie). Zusätzlich wird getestet, ob sich diese beiden Strategien gegenseitig verstärken und ob der Erfolg davon abhängt, ob sich Parteien in der Themensetzung auf die Präferenzen aller Wählerinnen und Wähler oder speziell auf jene ihrer Anhängerinnen und Anhänger konzentrieren.

Zur Untersuchung dieser Hypothesen wurde eine quantitative Inhaltsanalyse aller Facebook-Beiträge der österreichischen politischen Parteien und Spitzenkandidatinnen und Spitzenkandidaten in der Nationalratswahlkampagne 2017 herangezogen. Diese Daten wurden mit Meinungsumfragen zur Kompetenz der politischen Parteien und zur Wichtigkeit von 30 verschiedenen politischen Themen kombiniert. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass Beiträge auf Facebook zu politischen Themen, die den Anhängerinnen und Anhängern einer Partei sehr wichtig sind, und bei welchen die Partei von allen Wählerinnen und Wählern als sehr kompetent wahrgenommen wird, erfolgreicher sind. Weiters kann gezeigt werden, dass sich diese beiden Strategien gegenseitig verstärken, da der Effekt von Kompetenz auf den Erfolg größer ist, wenn das Thema wichtig ist.

Diese Ergebnisse liefern erste Evidenz für den Kampagnenerfolg von themenbasierten Kampagnenstrategien auf sozialen Netzwerken und zeigen, dass soziale Netzwerke eine wertvolle Datenquelle sind, um den Kampagnenerfolg verschiedener Strategien mithilfe von Interaktionen zu untersuchen. Weiters haben sie wichtige Implikationen für das Verständnis von modernen Wahlkampagnen und die Bedeutung von Themensetzung im politischen Wettbewerb.