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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	4
INTRODUCTION	5
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	7
2.1 VISUAL FRAMING	7
2.2 VISUAL RHETORIC	8
2.3 ECHO CHAMBERS	9
2.4 POLITICAL IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT.....	10
LITERATURE REVIEW	12
3.1 INSTAGRAM.....	13
3.2 ELECTION CAMPAIGNS AND SOCIAL MEDIA	15
3.3 MILLENNIALS.....	17
3.4 JUSTIN TRUDEAU’S CELEBRITY STATUS	19
3.5 SCANDALS.....	22
HYPOTHESES.....	25
METHODOLOGY.....	26
5.1 RESEARCH DESIGN	26
5.2 CONTENT ANALYSIS	27
5.3 DATA COLLECTED	29
5.4 CONCEPTUALIZATION OF VARIABLES	31
<i>Filimonov et al.’s functions</i>	31
<i>Targeting youth</i>	32
<i>Mentioning scandal</i>	32
<i>Trudeau’s presence</i>	33
<i>Patriotic imagery</i>	34
<i>Personal vs. Professional</i>	34
<i>Staged vs. Casual</i>	34
<i>Main visual themes</i>	35
5.5 QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS CAPTIONS	36
5.5 PROCEDURE	37
RESULTS.....	38
6.1 AMOUNTS OF POSTINGS.....	38
6.2 FILIMONOV ET AL.’S FUNCTIONS	39
6.3 TARGETING YOUTH	40
6.4 SCANDALS.....	40
6.5 TRUDEAU’S PRESENCE	41
6.6 PATRIOTIC SYMBOLISM	41
6.7 PROFESSIONAL VS. PERSONAL.....	42
6.8 STAGED VS. CASUAL	42
6.9 MAIN VISUAL THEMES.....	43
6.10 QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF CAPTIONS	43
DISCUSSION	44
CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH.....	52

REFERENCES	54
APPENDICES	59
APPENDIX A.....	59
APPENDIX B.....	59
APPENDIX C.....	60
APPENDIX D.....	60

Abstract

This thesis aims to report the findings of a qualitative and quantitative content analysis of the Instagram page of Canada's Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau. Instagram has been gaining more and more popularity every day, but the academic world has not focused on the role and impact of the platform. The goal will be to analyse the Instagram postings of the Prime Minister, and to see what kind of content is posted in order to understand what strategy his social media team used in order to make him an attractive candidate while he was involved in a series of scandals. The sample of data collected contained 115 posts from the period of July 20th, 2019 to January 21st, 2020. A mix of quantitative and qualitative methods were used to perform the content analysis. Findings show that the platform was mostly used as a broadcasting tool for the Liberal Party of Canada rather than being focused on his persona, and as a tool to communicate more privately with his followers. Since academic research on Instagram-based political communication is still at the exploratory stage, this research will help clarify and expand the comprehension of the role of visual politicking.

Diese Arbeit soll über die Ergebnisse einer qualitativen und quantitativen Inhaltsanalyse der Instagram-Seite des kanadischen Premierministers Justin Trudeau berichten. Instagram wird von Tag zu Tag beliebter, aber die akademische Welt hat sich nicht auf die Rolle und die Auswirkungen der Plattform konzentriert. Ziel ist es, die Instagram-Postings des Premierministers zu analysieren und herauszufinden, welche Inhalte veröffentlicht werden, um zu verstehen, mit welcher Strategie sein Social-Media-Team ihn zu einem attraktiven Kandidaten gemacht hat, während er an einer Reihe von Beiträgen beteiligt war Skandale. Die Stichprobe der gesammelten Daten enthielt vom 20. Juli 2019 bis zum 21. Januar 2020 115 Beiträge. Zur Durchführung der Inhaltsanalyse wurde eine Mischung aus quantitativen und qualitativen Methoden verwendet. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass die Plattform hauptsächlich als Rundfunkinstrument für die Liberale Partei Kanadas verwendet wurde, anstatt sich auf seine Person zu konzentrieren, und als Instrument, um privater mit seinen Anhängern zu kommunizieren. Da sich die akademische Forschung zu Instagram-basierter politischer Kommunikation noch in der Erkundungsphase befindet, wird diese Forschung dazu beitragen, das Verständnis der Rolle der visuellen Politik zu klären und zu erweitern.

Author keywords

Instagram; Justin Trudeau; Politics; Elections; Political Communication

1. Introduction

The use of communication platforms by campaigning politicians has a long history, starting from the 1800's telephone campaigning, to radio debates, and television, to the current social media platforms. Although the influences of older media such as radio or television are still felt in most political contexts, the need for politicians to consider and master new media forms has been suggested to be of the highest importance (Larsson, 2015, p.151). Even if the visual medium of television is arguably still the most important platform for campaigning politicians and their parties, the role of social media in elections has become more prominent (Owen, 2014). According to Diane Owen (2014) it triggered changes in the campaign strategies of political parties, candidates, and political organizations; it reshaped election media coverage, and influenced voter engagement. Political actors seem to appreciate the significant role visuals play in constructing political images (Schill, 2012), since, in the words of Lalancette and Raynauld (2017), "images supersede words". In the last decade, politicians have been massively turning to social media during the election campaigns, which provides actors previously marginalized from the public agenda with a mode of communication beyond the "gatekeepers" of traditional media. They are important to study in order to "understand how politicians communicate with different publics in a media environment where still and moving images are playing an increasingly important role" as Lalancette and Raynauld (2017) said. While several scholars have taken interest in broader patterns of visual political communication in the social mediascape, much more research is needed (Filimonov et al., 2016).

In the last few years there has been a large volume of published research which usually focused on the usage of the Instagram platform across a number of applied contexts including marketing, advertising, health, as well as behaviour associated with narcissism (Sheldon and Bryant, 2016). Only a small number of recent researchers have focused on exploring Instagram and its role in politics (Parmalee and Roman, 2019; Lalancette and Reynauld, 2019; Mahoney et al., 2016; Ekman and Widholm, 2017; Filimonov, et al., 2016); however, still most of the published work only considers Instagram as a part of a broader group of social media platforms, few of them focus exclusively on Instagram as a unique platform. This thesis suggests that it is important for the academic community to cultivate an understanding of how emergent social media platforms are being used by politicians and political parties for the broadcasting of political messages and the crafting of a personalized public image.

This research is of particular interest as visual content is becoming a central component of political players' digital political communication, mobilization, and persuasion strategies. These practices are gaining in power as they are part of a wave of new trends in visual political communication. Justin Trudeau exemplifies this trend as he is considered to be the first federal Prime Minister of the "Instagram Era" in Canada (Lalancette & Raynault, 2017). In particular, he is very active on Instagram in order to seemingly avoid traditional media intermediaries and reach out directly to Canadian and international publics in highly personalized ways. Pictures of Trudeau walking the gay pride parade, the climate strike or attending cultural or religious celebrations could have more effects on citizens than more traditional, text-based political messaging (Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019). There are many reasons why

politicians want to be active on social media, and being able to “speak” directly to their voters as well as the wider electorate is one of those motivations (Karlsen & Enjolras, 2016).

This study will help elucidate how political actors, such as Trudeau, use social media to advance their political agenda in a given social, cultural, or electoral context. Understanding digital architectures of social media platforms alone cannot fully justify how and in what way politicians campaign online since every case is unique; however, understanding how a platform’s digital architecture influences campaign practices may provide insight into their strategy (Bosetta, 2018). This article addresses the gap in the academic literature as it focuses on the uses and the possible effects of Instagram, a social media tool with a visual bent, for Justin Trudeau’s public political image construction and management.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Visual framing

Of course, when talking about campaigning and visual aspects of political communication, visual framing plays an important role. It is a theory that has been studied extensively in the past (Goffman, 1974), while always being pertinent to newer concepts. According to Marland (2012) the use of photos in political marketing is what he calls a “low-cost, low-risk framing activity that may result in free and positive coverage of a controlled visual message”. Frames provide a “schemata of interpretation” or story lines that enable individuals to make sense of what they read or see by drawing upon their previous experiences (Goffman 1974). Visual framing is an extension of Goffman’s work on framing (1974); it can be

argued that visual image framing techniques emphasizing politicians' individuality as well as elements of their personal life as they are saturating all aspects of their digital communication strategies and affecting dynamics of public impression creation and management (Marland, 2012). Therefore it encourages the personalization of politics, which was defined as the "process in which politicians become the main anchor of interpretation and evaluation in the political arena" (Balmas and Sheafer, 2016). While some research exists regarding visual political communication within social media, less is known on how politicians incorporate Instagram into their marketing strategies (Muñoz & Towner, 2017). Images can be manipulated to elicit a desired response from audiences. The visual aspect of communication remains one of the least studied and the least understood areas" (Schill, 2012, p. 119). It is known, though, that visuals play a significant role in constructing a general image of a campaigning political actor (Schill, 2012).

2.2 Visual rhetoric

Visual rhetoric is another theory that is highly interesting in the context of this study. Gleason and Hansen's (2017) study focused on visual rhetoric used by the former U.S. President, Barack Obama; where he was able to effectively harness the power of social media to deliver his desired narrative and a well-cultivated image to a wide audience. According to Foss (2005) the definition of visual rhetoric is "the social function that influences and manages meanings" (p. 142), she also claims that there is a need to study images (and their embedded symbols) and how they function rhetorically in contemporary culture. Hill (2006) notes that rhetorical elements are not always obviously and explicitly persuasive. Trudeau's Instagram posts will be

analyzed and in order to understand how they carry subtly persuasive messages, and how they can be more persuasive than text alone or abstract information. Trudeau's use of the platform is a combination of rhetoric, visual communication, and political communication.

2.3 Echo Chambers

Another reason that social media is becoming more and more popular during electoral campaigns is that parties are seeking to communicate with the younger demographic and to incite them to participate in politics by using the platforms that they are most likely using (Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019). According to a Pew Research Center analysis of the Census Bureau Data, Generation Z, Millennials, and Generation X – aged 18 to 53 in 2018- reported casting 62.2 million votes, compared with 60.1 million cast by Baby Boomers and older generations (Pew Research Center, 2019). Which makes the younger generation more interesting in the eyes of politicians. However, the self-selection of content on social media, where people choose to “follow” a particular political party's online account, has brought up doubt in the efficiency of campaigning on social media. Since the ones being exposed to the political messages are already supporters of the party, the messages that are being distributed are creating “echo chambers” because the messages are being circulated within an already “converted” group. The term used to refer to this self-selection bias of engagement on social media networks is “echo chambers” (Garrett, 2009). Echo chambers can be described as the way people are using the Internet to devoid of other viewpoints, no matter how much control over their political information environment they are given (Garrett, 2009, p.279). According to Garrett (2009), the evidence that online news users are not screening out other perspectives contradicts traditional interpretations of selective exposure, which suggest that the phenomenon

is composed of “equal parts opinion reinforcement seeking and opinion challenge avoidance” (Garrett, 2009). However, there is comparatively little evidence that individuals systematically avoid contact with opinion-challenging political information. Therefore, in the context of Instagram, political messages have the potential to move beyond their active followers base and penetrate additional users’ feeds (Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019). Should any Instagram user interact with a party’s post by either liking or commenting on the publication, because of the way the algorithm is designed, the exposure of the post will be increased; the chances that they, or their followers, see similar content are amplified. The echo chambers theory is important to remember when evaluating the impact an Instagram post may have on the public, especially in a political context. Not every member of the electorate has an Instagram account, and people that usually follow Justin Trudeau probably already like his persona and agree with his politics. Therefore, even if his social media presence helped build a brand, it would not be safe to attribute his popularity to social media alone.

2.3 Political Impression Management

According to Tedeschi and Riess (1981), impression management is not a new topic. The researchers suggest that “even prehistoric and primitive peoples were concerned about self-presentation” (p.15). Impression management was explained as “any behaviour by a person that has the purpose of controlling or manipulating the attribution and impressions formed of that person by others” (Tedeschi and Riess, 1981). The theory introduces the theory of *symbolic interaction*, which stems from social philosophy’s view that individuals learn to play roles and take on characteristics related to the roles they play. Hence, the individual acts in ways that

he believes are appropriate to the role and avoid the ones that would be deemed inappropriate. According to the impression management theory, these individuals use self-presentational strategies to “avoid blame and social disapproval by disassociating themselves from negative actions and outcomes” and to “gain credit and social approval by associating themselves with positive ones” (Tedeschi, 1981). Their goal is to craft a desired image in the minds of others (Harris, et al., 2007). The candidate image, as Christ’l De Landtsheer et al. (2008) have referred to it, is the image that the voters have of the candidate. In political marketing, the candidate is perceived as a product that must be sold to the public. In order to be successful, the candidate must be aware of their own image.

There is a strong link between impression management and perception politics. Perception politics are the result of the modernization of politics towards commercialization and the visual culture of media. It started with television, but perception politics are now more important than ever because of the visual bend of social media platforms. People do not only focus on content and information anymore, they are looking at style (Landtsheer et al., 2008). The element of style is a collection of the politician’s charisma, language style, appearance, and nonverbal behaviour, which are all important factors that will encourage the public to form an “intuitive impression” (Landtsheer et al., 2008) which seems to be the true basis of political opinion formation. While others propose that even rational voters faced with the decision of whom to elect as their representative will not base their choice on factors such as policy coherence, political skillfulness or ideological consistency.

Politicians and their advisors are particularly aware that people tend to trust their feelings and emotional impression of a candidate when casting a vote (Landtsheer et

al, 2008) and that is why political impression management is so important. Furthermore, according to Street (2004) only a small group of politically interested people is getting the complete picture and is thus capable of forming arguments based on facts. Thus, the perceived personality of the politician helps both political parties and individual politicians to become more distinguishable, enabling them to live up to the aspirations of the voter audience. There is a vast body of literature suggesting that political developments and even election outcomes are strongly influenced by political personality. Newman (1999, cited from Lalancette and Raynauld, 2017) explained that visual impressions of a candidate's physical appearance, media presence and political record can construct a political image or impression in the minds of the citizens. The impression or perception that citizens have of a politician have always played an important role in politics; hence it encourages the politicians to make the necessary adjustments to his perceived image to become more attractive and meet the electorate's expectations. Political marketing is used to sell the candidate to the people by forming and presenting an image of them that the public will support. Charisma and overall attractiveness are important during an electoral campaign, as they have the power to influence who will achieve the most votes, but the politician is ultimately judged on his abilities to perform his obligations (Lalancette and Raynauld, 2017).

3. Literature review

In the past decade a plethora of studies in the communications field has focused on social media and its role in the propagation of information. However, the many popular platforms are often grouped as "social media" without emphasis on the distinctions or focus on the uniqueness of each one of them. This happens because

researchers have a tendency to see social media as one single media genre (Bossetta, 2018, p.472) when in fact each of the platforms have their own functionalities, designs, algorithms, etc. Out of all them, Twitter seems to be the one that has caught most of the scholarly attention because of the ease of collecting tweets for quantitative analysis. Facebook has also been largely studied since it has been the most popular social media platform in the past few years (Bossetta, 2018, p.472); and rightly so, according to Statista (2019) as of the second quarter of 2019, Facebook had a combined total of 244 million monthly active users in the United States and Canada. Yet, social media platforms are increasingly shifting away from text to visual communication (Gupta 2013). According to Muñoz and Towner (2017) these visual-centric social media platforms provide new avenues of self-presentation and image management, which is one of the reasons why Instagram has recently started to gain scholarly attention. Instagram's user engagement is significantly higher than both Facebook and Twitter, with 500 million daily active users worldwide as of January 2019 (Statista, 2019). For brands, it is important to look into engagement rates since high engagement rates can indicate things like: audiences health (how responsive your audience is and how many of them are "real" followers), interesting content types and awareness of your brand (Chen, 2019). The platform began to operate in 2010 and is currently one of the fastest growing social networks (Liebhart & Bernhardt, 2017).

3.1 Instagram

Instagram is different from other social media such as Twitter in that it rather revolves around uploading pictures than disseminating text-based messages (Filimonov et al., 2016). Previous research demonstrates that images can be more

memorable, garner more attention, and illicit more emotive responses than text in traditional, offline advertising (Muñoz & Towner, 2017). There is also an interesting phenomenon from the psychology field called “the picture superiority effect” (Paivio, Rogers, and Smythe 1968), which supports the claim that a single photograph has the ability to affect a voter’s judgments on a variety of candidate character traits (Rosenberg et al. 1986). However, the existing literature that focuses on visuals in political campaigns revolves around advertisement and content shared on traditional media, or on how political candidates and parties are visually framed by the mass media. As Instagram has grown in popularity, politicians and celebrities alike have joined the platform to deliver their stories, brands, and messages to audiences, thereby curating and controlling the images presented to a wider audience (Dingwall, 2017). It should be noted that the effects of Instagram posts by politicians on audiences are still understudied in Canada and, to some degree, in other national contexts (Filimonov et al., 2016; Schill, 2012).

The usage of Instagram and other social media platforms is part of a new wave of political communication where the visual is gaining in importance. According to Kelly C. Vossen (2019), “our perception of politicians is not a true reflection of reality, but rather a co-construction between receivers and enunciators, in which communication advisers play an important role”. The aspect of political marketing is very much present on the platform, and professionals assume that it is possible to compare the behaviour of consumers and that of citizens. They sell a product-candidate by convincing the target (voters) of its qualities which they adapt beforehand to the target’s requirements (Vossen, 2019). Communication advisers try to control the way their clients are perceived publicly through advertising, news

management, press releases, interviews, spin use, media training and a permanent campaign. Following the impression management theory, it can be assumed that when the audience believes in the speaker's "good character", their opinions will be accepted more quickly. Visual images make it easier for viewers to develop a connection and compassion with politicians they see on television, or on social media, and to empathize with their goals (McAllister, 2007, p.578). Hence why parties find it easier to advertise political choices to voters through a familiar personality, who can promote the party's policies much more efficiently to voters when compared to the simple dissemination of a press release or through the publication of a policy document (McAllister, 2007, p.580).

3.2 Election Campaigns and Social Media

The use of social networks as tools for the dissemination of information by politicians in electoral campaigns has yet to be researched in depth. So far, academic work that focused on Instagram as a political communication platform as both means of staging a political personality and a platform for political image management has been rare; very little is known of how politicians use Instagram images in their self-presentation, what types of images will illicit the most engagement, and the images' attitudinal and behavioral impact on voters (Muñoz & Towner, 2017). Self-presentation, or impression management, acknowledges an individual's attempts to influence the impression of others in an effort to achieve their own goals (Goffman 1974). However, there has been a few studies that have dived into the topic and that inspired this research (e.g. Filimonov et al, 2016; Schill, 2012; Bossetta, 2018; Muñoz, 2017). Filimonov et al (2016) found that in the 2014 Swedish national

elections, political parties rarely used Instagram to directly communicate with their followers and mostly used it to broadcast information. They described it as an “online billboard”, where the politician shares messages without necessarily communicating with his or her followers. In his 2008 study of Hillary Clinton’s fandom on MySpace, Erikson claimed that the number of supporters a politician has on a social network has become a competition parallel to the actual polls and these numbers provide status to the politician. Most research in the international literature focuses on political communication in election campaigns in the United States, a quite atypical country in terms of politics. This research will focus on Canadian politics, which is a parliamentary democracy.

In the literature about social media, it is often mentioned that the 2008 Obama campaign has served as an inspiration and example for political actors around the globe, especially when it comes to building on intimacy by way of social media techniques (Kellner 2009). Specifically, offering a glimpse of private moments, a politician can help the voter to identify with her or him. In contrast to traditional media, social media makes it possible for political parties and politicians to directly transmit information and opinions to their followers, who in turn can share them between themselves. Instagram has many valuable purposes, from projecting power, trustworthiness, and prestige to capturing and sharing aspects of the politician’s private life in an attempt to present a more humanized and relatable version of themselves (Page & Duffy, 2016). Street (2004) stated that by releasing personal information about themselves politicians can more easily become “relatable” to their audiences. Political strategists say that the selfie has replaced the handshake as a legitimate form of interaction between politicians and voters, especially younger

ones (Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019). Purely by being online, politicians are conveying the message that they are up to date. Filimonov et al. (2016) note that image management involves managing audience impressions to decrease psychological distance from voters by showcasing politicians' personalities (personalization), humanizing politicians by sharing private moments (privatization), and including celebrities as third-party endorsements (celebrities).

3.3 Millennials

The Millennial Generation has often been seen as politically tuned-out and inactive, a phenomenon not specific to the Canadian context (Blais and Loewen, 2011). Many sources, ranging from researchers to journalists, claim that this generation of young people is less involved in politics than the previous generations were at their age. It is believed that they are less likely to vote in federal, provincial and local elections, and that they have little knowledge about politics in general (O'Toole, Marsh & Jones, 2003). However, research has shown that the youth is committed to the democratic process, though the lack of engagement might be explained by scepticism and cynicism of political institutions, politicians and political parties (Henn, Weinstein and Wring, 2002). Young people show signs of disengagement from formal politics as a way of reflecting their perceptions of how politics are organised rather than the simple lack of interest (O'Toole et al., 2003). Younger generations' dissatisfaction with government procedures and politicians can be recognized in their declining levels of participation.

O'Toole et al.'s (2003) data suggests that young people's attitude to politics are distinctive in at least two ways. First, many of the respondents believed that they

are excluded or marginalised from mainstream politics because they are young, which results in a sense of weak political efficacy. Second, there were a number of concerns and issues that their respondents discussed as being important to them that related quite specifically to their age, and there was a clear feeling that these issues were inadequately addressed, contributing to a weak sense of political inclusion. The findings from their interviews show that young people are far from being apathetic to politics. They are, actually, very much aware and politically articulate about issues that affect them, but they are also aware of the clear disconnect between them and mainstream politics; they feel like there is no elected official that can or wants to listen to their problems

The reason for the overall declining turnout among youth, has not yet been discovered, but there are many theories. One of them is the distrust of the system by a group of people that feel underrepresented and undervalued by their elected officials (O'Toole, 2012); others present the possibility of a decrease due to an electoral system change, a lack of competitiveness between candidates, the elections becoming more meaningless, or late maturation of the Millennial generation (Blais and Loewen, 2011). Another theory presented by Blais and Loewen (2011) is that the changing nature of political information is resulting in a generation of citizens who are politically informed in a different way than previous generations. This information might encourage politicians to broadcast their messages directly to the youth by being present on their most used platforms, such as Instagram. However, being present does not imply that the messages that are being broadcasted are targeted at younger generations; being active on social media is a message of trendiness and connection to the youth in itself.

According to data published by Abacus Data (2017), the Millennial Generation, those born between 1980 and 2000, were the largest generation in Canada to make up the electorate in the 2019 elections, making their opinions and views matter now more than ever. Contrary to the theories supporting the idea of voting turnout declining, data from Elections Canada (2017) shows that young Canadians have exercised their right to vote more than any other age group during the 2015 elections. The turnout reached 68.3 per cent, an 18 percentage point increase in comparison with 2011. The data for 2019 are not yet available, but according to research commissioned by Elections Canada (2017), “voting is habit-forming: if a person votes in their first election, they will probably be a life-long voter”. Assuming this is true, the voting turnout for the youth should be as high in 2019. In 2015, Liberals obtained the majority of the youth votes, and according to a survey conducted in 2017 by David Coletto at Abacus Data (2017), Millennials would still cast their votes for the Liberals, consequently, remaining a core support group for the Liberals.

3.4 Justin Trudeau’s celebrity status

It is often overlooked that one of the first politicians whose personal popularity surpassed the one of his party during an election was Pierre Trudeau in 1968, when young voters created “Trudeaumania” centred on the prime minister’s “young and fashionable” persona (McAllister, 2007, p.571). As the son of Pierre Trudeau, 15th Prime Minister of Canada, and the successor of “Trudeaumania”, Justin Trudeau was a celebrity even before his debut as a politician. Trudeau fits both the category of a celebrity who becomes a politician, and that of a politician who

becomes a celebrity (like Barack Obama) (Lalancette & Raynauld 2017). Trudeau can be described, as a celebrity politician, a phenomenon researched by John Street (2004). The word “celebrity” designates people who, via mass media, enjoy a greater presence and wider scope of activity and agency than the rest of the population” (Street, 2004). The term “celebrity politician” designates political actors that use the artefacts, icons and expertise of popular culture to enhance their political functions and goals. Trudeau’s celebrity status was acquired at birth, because of his father. Consequently, he is not a celebrity from the entertainment world that ventured into politics (Arnold Schwarznegger, Donald Trump, and others) but a politician that understands and uses popular culture to his advantage. John Street (2004) claims that “the advertisement (and the conventions of advertising) come to define political communication. “Politicians become stars, politics becomes a series of spectacles and the citizens become spectators” (Street, 2004).

Trudeau wanted to project an image of democratic accessibility which he worked to build by being “relatable”, and he quickly became known as the selfie prime minister. This makes Trudeau attractive to light entertainment programming, ranging from Vanity Fair to TMZ (Marland, 2018). The celebrity-like popularity of Trudeau and “the personality cult” speak to the “choreographed way [he] rose to power” (Rodrick, 2017). Bureaucrats in Global Affairs Canada have discussed framing the country’s foray into UN peacekeeping operations as “building on Brand Trudeau” (Blanchfield 2016). This media-savvy awareness gives Trudeau an advantage when it comes to conveying his visual brand, rhetoric, and narrative as a politician and Prime Minister. The personality of the candidates increases progressively its weight in the electoral choice, at the expense of ideological and

partisan considerations (Andre et al., 2015 *cited from* Vossen, 2019) while the privatization indicates the media's attention to the characteristics and the intimate life of candidates. The reason behind the personalization of politics is not clear, but an explanation that is often advanced is the rise of technology and its use in electoral campaigns (McAllister, 2007). There is no clear reason for the personalization of politics in democratic societies, or the importance of the media in that process, nonetheless it is clear that a complex process is behind it (McAllister, 2007).

As said by Lees-Marshment (2001) in her study of British political parties: political marketing theory, the marriage of political science and marketing, supports that product-oriented parties or campaigns tend to focus on the core of the political product by selling the ideology and policy positions it designed to provide voter satisfaction. Such a party focuses on selling a product, much like in traditional marketing. "They assume that voters will realize that their ideas are the right ones and therefore vote for it" (Lees-Marshment 2001, p.696). In the 2015 election campaign, the Liberal Party was associated with progressive policies: they promised to legalize marijuana, nominate more women to the federal cabinet, investigate missing and murdered indigenous women, settle refugee Syrians, engage in deficit spending, and reinvest in infrastructures. In 2019, they promised to raise the Canada Child Benefit (CCB; a tax-free payment given to families raising children under 18), improve parental leave, lower childcare fees by 10%, implement universal pharmacare, prioritize indigenous issues, and much more. Trudeau, as his father Pierre-Elliott Trudeau, became a synonym of progressive legislations. Back in 2015, some political experts and pollsters gave Justin Trudeau's Liberal Party of Canada little chances of defeating Stephen Harper's Conservative Party during the 2015

federal election; he was elected Prime Minister of Canada on October 19, 2015, after the longest federal election campaign in Canadian history (78 days). In 2019, the race between the Liberals and the Conservatives parties was much tighter, and the tension was kept until the very end when the Liberal Party won the 2019 election and formed a minority government; which means that they will need support from at least one other party in order to pass legislation, therefore fulfilling campaign promises will be harder this time around.

3.5 Scandals

Trudeau was treated like a rock star in the Canadian, and international, media. He was on the cover of Vogue and the Rolling Stone magazine. However, his reputation slowly started to deteriorate. A chain of scandals started when, in December 2017, he broke four sections of Canada's conflict-of-interest law for cabinet ministers, their staff members, senior public servants and others when he chose to vacation on an island in the Bahamas owned by Aga Khan, a family friend. In 2019 and the year prior to his re-election, he was involved in scandals including; wearing costumes while in India, the purchase of the Trans Mountain pipeline from Kinder Morgan for about \$3.4 billion, his team pressuring Former Attorney General Jody Wilson-Raybould to drop a criminal probe involving the engineering firm SNC-Lavalin, which employs thousands of people in Quebec, and when three separate photographs emerged where Trudeau was wearing racist brown and blackface (see image 1).

Image 1: Justin Trudeau in Blackface with colleagues during an *Arabian Nights*-themed gala at West Point Grey Academy in 2001.



(Source: TIME.com (2019) <https://time.com/5680759/justin-trudeau-brownface-photo/>)

An Angus Reid Institute survey found that more than half of Canadians believe that Trudeau's fame is a great thing for Canada, it helps put the country on the map and to be acknowledged on an international level (Angus Reid Institute, 2017). However, the same poll found that just as many Canadians think that the Trudeau government places excessive attention on public relations and marketing, and that he is not getting things done. The Liberals used contemporary media forms like Twitter, Instagram, and selfies to make Trudeau appear more proximate and unscripted – dismantling the “product of campaign” image (Lalancette and Raynauld, 2017) in order to sell his “celebrity image” better. Melissa Lantsman, a VP of Strategy at Hill+Knowlton Strategies, believes that an exceptionally strong personal brand is the only reason Trudeau was still in the election. She claims that “there is no other politician who could have endured the blackface scandal” (Shea,

2019). A Prime Minister should represent hope and optimism, and that's what Trudeau was until slowly being involved in one scandal after the other. The accumulation of controversial decisions, broken promises, scandals, unethical behavior and negative news accumulated and damaged the Trudeau brand (Marland, 2018).

Therefore, it's unnerving how some of the recognizable shots of Trudeau now serve to highlight his scandals and mistakes. For example, his Instagram still displays an emotional picture taken the moment when he offered the Minister of Justice position to Jody Wilson-Raybould on February 7th, 2016, who 3 years later testified to the Commons justice committee of the corruption surrounding the SNC-Lavalin case. The posts showing Trudeau celebrating Halloween with his children is a reminder of his past racist makeup controversy; besides the images exhibiting Canada's natural beauty are perceived as selfish since the purchase of the Trans-Mountain Pipeline.

Scandals are a major concern because in contrast to presidential systems that have fixed terms for their elected officials that do not depend on the confidence of the electorate, a parliamentary system means that the survival of the leader depends upon the confidence of their legislature. Since parties are stronger and more meticulous, leaders are more likely to be assessed on their non-political, personal qualities. (McAllister, 2007, p.574). The executive can be removed at any moment by a motion of no confidence, which means that the people deem that the leader is no longer fit to rule. Presidents have a higher liberty in formulating and adopting new legislature and policies, since the chances of an impeachment are less likely. This means that prime ministers must do their very best to maintain the confidence of

their party in the eyes of the constituency by refining their performance in office (McAllister, 2007, p.577).

People prefer to hold individuals accountable rather than an entire government or institution for their action (Bean and Mughan, 1989). In the context of a controversy, personalization can be especially tricky since the accountability of a government's collective performance is now based on a single person, who is easier to punish than an entire party (McAllister, 2007). Some research proposes that seeing a public figure apologize either increases the desire to punish him or her, or has no effect at all (Hanania, 2015; Sustain, 2019). An apology can assure people that the offender will not make the same mistake again, especially if he gives a genuine explanation of the context. Some people will feel hurt and disrespected, and an apology can help them soften their opinion (Sustain, 2019). However, there are plenty of reasons an apology would be futile, or even counterproductive; an apology will not help when it is not clear whether someone has done something wrong. The apology is treated like a confession, when it is issued it makes the wrongdoing more salient. An apology might be counterproductive and raise the public's antipathy if it is clear that the offender intentionally committed an offense (Sustain, 2019).

4. Hypotheses

As mentioned before, the topic of Instagram as a political communication tool is still very new and understudied in the academic world, which makes the nature of this research exploratory. So, generating hypotheses would be better suited than research questions since the reasoning is mainly deductive; the goal is to test predetermined theories and thoughts. This research is heavily inspired by Filimonov

et al.'s (2016) study of Swedish political parties' presence on Instagram during the 2014 elections, in which they have found that Swedish politicians use Instagram mostly for broadcasting and that most of the posts were highly personalized. By analyzing Justin Trudeau's Instagram posts by using Filimonov et al.'s functions (broadcasting, mobilization, personalization, and hybridity) it will be easy to see if the Canadian Prime Minister has the same techniques as the Swedish officials, which were not considered *celebrity politicians*. Other hypotheses were based on the overall literature and theoretical that was presented previously. Therefore, our hypotheses are as follow:

H1: The content shared on Justin Trudeau's Instagram is going to be highly personalized and of broadcasting nature.

H2: An important amount of the content shared on Instagram will be targeted at younger segments of the population.

H3: The amount of posts shared three months before the election will be significantly larger than the amount of posts shared three months after the election.

H4: The scandals that the Prime Minister was involved in will not be mentioned on his Instagram account.

H5: The posts will be highly influenced by the Liberal Party of Canada and will reflect their values and electoral priorities.

5. Methodology

5.1 Research design

The method that was chosen to perform the thesis and test our hypotheses

was a content analysis of the Prime Minister's Instagram account. The reasoning behind this choice was simple and straight-forward; this thesis is looking to understand how Trudeau uses a platform with a strong visual bend to create and maintain a strong public image. To be able to perform future and more complex research on the topic, it is important to initially understand what kind of content is being shared. So, the content that will be analyzed is a combination of pictures, videos and the captions that accompany them. The captions are usually short texts that are included underneath the photos as a context or additional information. Nevertheless, the goal is to focus on both visual and textual aspects of the posts. This qualitative method will give us the chance to interpret, contextualize and gain in-depth insights of the material. The researcher is aware that using a qualitative method requires interpretation that might have an influence on the results. While an inter-coder (correlation of judgements of several coders analyzing the same data) process would have been preferable, in the setting of this thesis an intra-coder (correlation of judgement of a single coder at different times) was used (Bell, 2001). The lack of time and resources was the main reason for this choice. To ensure the reliability of the results, the entirety of the data was analyzed by a single coder at three different times.

5.2 Content Analysis

For the purpose of this study, a combination of quantitative and qualitative content analysis methods was judged to be the most appropriate. According to Downe-Wambolt (1992) "content analysis is a research method that provides a systematic and objective means to make valid inferences from verbal, visual, or

written data in order to describe and quantify specific phenomena” (page 314).

Content analysis is unique in that it has both quantitative and qualitative methodology. The purpose is to organize and extract meaning from the data collected and draw accurate conclusions.

According to Burnard (1995, cited from Bengtsson, 2016) One of the most important part of any qualitative research is the researcher’s self-reflection. Being familiar with the topic and having preconceived knowledge of the subject can be an advantage as long as it does not affect the interpretation of the results. During both the planning and the analyzing process, the researcher took into consideration their preconceived knowledge and their familiarity with the Canadian political scene to avoid bias that could influence their results.

Data analysis can follow two different reasonings: inductive and deductive. Bengtsson (2016) describes inductive reasoning as ” the process of developing conclusions from collected data by weaving together new information into theories”. This method will be followed during the qualitative analysis of the textual content, the captions. The captions will be collected and meaningful topics that stand out will be identified and the coding list will be created during the course of the process. The second reasoning will be used in the content analysis of the ensemble of posts that is a combination of quantitative and qualitative data. In quantitative content analysis, the ensemble of the data are presented as frequency which are turned into percentage and numbers (Berelson, 1952; Krippendorff, 2004; Neuendorf, 2002). In qualitative content analysis, data are presented in themes, which makes it possible to draw some interpretation of the results. Bengtsson (2016) says that in contrast to the inductive reasoning, the researcher using a deductive method will “look for predetermined, existing subjects by testing hypotheses or principles”. A coding sheet, including

explanations of the codes, was used to minimize a perceptive change during the analysis in order to guarantee reliability. The categories created in the code sheet, which are based on previous researches and theoretical frameworks, will simplify the identification of patterns around which the data can be assembled.

There are no established criteria when using content analysis for the size of a unit of analysis, neither the number of informants or objects to study (Bengtsson, 2016) which is why it was decided to choose the data based on a time period rather than a set amount of posts.

During the analysis process, human mistakes are foreseeable; these mistakes can be caused by fatigue, errors interpretation and personal bias. Which is why the same data was analyzed at three different times to ensure reliability. Reliability requires that the same results would be obtained if the study were replicated (Bengtsson, 2016).

5.3 Data collected

As briefly mentioned before, the material that will be analyzed for the purpose of this study are Instagram posts that were taken directly from the Prime Minister's account. What we consider a "post" is the images, or videos posted, their caption, and the date it was published on. The simultaneous evaluation of images and text offers a global impression of what content is shared. An example of a regular post is shown in image 2. Since Canada is a bilingual country that takes great pride in its French heritage, nearly all of the Prime Minister's captions are written in both English and French; for the purpose of the analysis we will only analyze the English version, unless there is only a French version available, in that case it will be translated in English. In total, it was decided that 115 posts that were published in the

period between July 20th 2019 and January 21st 2020 will be analyzed; the period when the official elections campaign's form of political communication is at its peak. Analyzing three months preceding the election day, will give insight into the campaigning content, while the three months following the election will be composed of postings showing the first three months of office in his second term as the 23rd Prime Minister of Canada. Considering the fact that the 21st century is characterized by "permanent electoral campaigns", the period of six months was chosen because of time-management reasons, but should still provide plenty of information. It should be noted that posts that include multiple pictures, or videos were counted as a singular post. This thesis can be categorized as a case study of Trudeau and his brand, and therefore constitutes an analysis of a particular case, which cannot be generalized to all politicians and their Instagram usage.

Image 2: An example of an Instagram post taken from Trudeau's account.



(Source: @justinptrudeau on Instagram)

5.4 Conceptualization of variables

Filimonov et al.'s functions

The first set of categories were influenced by Filimonov et al.'s functions developed in their *Picturing the Party* (2016) study, which are: broadcasting, mobilization, personalization, and hybridity. Since it is difficult to assign any of these functions to a photo or video, only the caption was categorized into the function that it fits the best with. The items that fall into the *broadcasting* category can be designated as postings that are used to broadcast or spread information about the Liberal Party, their programs, their accomplishments or the election.

The *mobilization* category includes captions (or videos with mobilization messages) that clearly call for action; usually to vote. According to Filimonov et al. (2016) social media platforms can be used to mobilize broader groups of people that usually wouldn't have been reached by the normal election campaign techniques. Recent data shows that turnout to elections has declined globally. According to McAllister (2007), low levels of turnout will enhance the focus on the prime minister's ability to mobilize the vote. During the 2015 Canadian federal elections, there was an important increase in turnout amongst young voters. Based on data released by Elections Canada, the biggest turnout, which was set at 57.1 per cent, happened among voters between the ages of 18 and 24, compared to 39.8 per cent in 2011 for the same age group. In 2019, the general turnout dropped slightly compared to the last election; from 68.3 per cent of eligible Canadian (all age groups) that voted in 2015 to 65.95 per cent in 2019 (Elections Canada, 2020). Based on Elections Canada's website, the data broken down by age groups will be available during summer 2020.

Personalization covers the postings that show or describe private moments of the Prime Minister that help the voter identify with him (Filimonov et al., 2016). An example of this could be a family photo, or a caption dedicated to friends or family. Though, this function will be measured by the *personal vs. professional* category which is explained more in details below.

The last category is *hybridity*; all postings that bore any signs of hybrid campaign use are included here. Instagram offers the possibility to link other websites and re-direct people to other platforms, by include links on the main page or captions. Hybrid campaign material are references to traditional campaign instruments or to other platforms (Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, etc.).

Targeting youth

The posting was evaluated as being targeted to the youth (or not), either by directly mentioning the younger segments of the population or including them in the picture and/or video. Younger segments of the population that are targeted by this category are the ones that represent the majority of social media users, which are between 18 and 30 years of age (Pew Research Center, 2020). The age citizens are allowed to vote in Canada is 18, which means that there would be no reason to target a younger generation that cannot vote. Besides, children (under 18) will not be included in this category since it is believed that if a child is included in a post, the targeted audiences are most likely adults that have children and not the child itself.

Mentioning scandal

As briefly mentioned before, Justin Trudeau was involved in a series of scandals since 2017. Politicians like to argue that social media platforms help them

communicate with the population directly (Enli & Skogerbø, 2013), which is why it's safe to assume that they would take the opportunity to use their platforms to communicate directly with the public when a scandal erupts. The reason this is of interest is because the use of social media by politicians as a communication tool gives them an opportunity for creating intimate relations to voters, and therefore add to the process of personalization (Enli & Skogerbø, 2013). Consequently, when looking into the content shared during the period of analysis, any content that could be related to one of the scandals Trudeau has been involved in will be labeled. Even though an election campaign brings out many skeletons out of the closet, the scandals that were still pertinent in the period of July 2019 to January 2020 were: the SNC-Lavalin affair, the Trans-Mountain pipeline, and the blackface makeup scandal.

When looking at the captions, any mention of the scandals or formal apology will be categorized as "mentioning scandal".

Trudeau's presence

As social media is progressively shifting away from text to visual communication (Gupta, 2013), it is important to understand what kind of visual messages are being shared. Looking into visual-centric platforms such as Instagram helps elucidate how these platforms are creating new avenues for self-presentation and image management. Research has shown that political parties are using campaigns to focus more on the politician's personality because "communication of messages requires a messenger" (Plasser, 2009). Likewise, Muñoz and Towner (2017) revealed, the primary candidates of the 2016 federal election in the United States were using Instagram as a "visually rich self-presentation platform, offering behind-the-scenes looks, family photographs, issue messages, thank you messages,

and pictures of rallies”. That is why it is important to look into how often Trudeau appears on the content featured on his Instagram.

Patriotic imagery

If there is a patriotic symbol in the picture, it was recorded in the coding. A patriotic symbol could be anything from the Canadian flag, provincial flags, maple leaf, to national sports teams logos. Patriotic images are a way of representing Canadian values and the “brand” that the Liberal Party is building. Visual cues that remind people of the Liberal Party values, and of the stereotypical image of Canada will be looked into.

Personal vs. Professional

Inspired by Filimonov, Russmann and Svensson’s (2016) functions, the personalization aspect focuses on the fact that Instagram postings of politicians are preaching authenticity, in contrast to professional photos that highlight the distance between citizens and the politicians.

Ultimately, if the photo shows Trudeau with his family, or in a casual setting where he doesn’t put his role as Prime Minister forward, it’s a personal posting. If he is in his office, with other politicians, giving a speech or doing any other activity that could be associated with his role as a Prime Minister, it’s a professional posting.

Staged vs. Casual

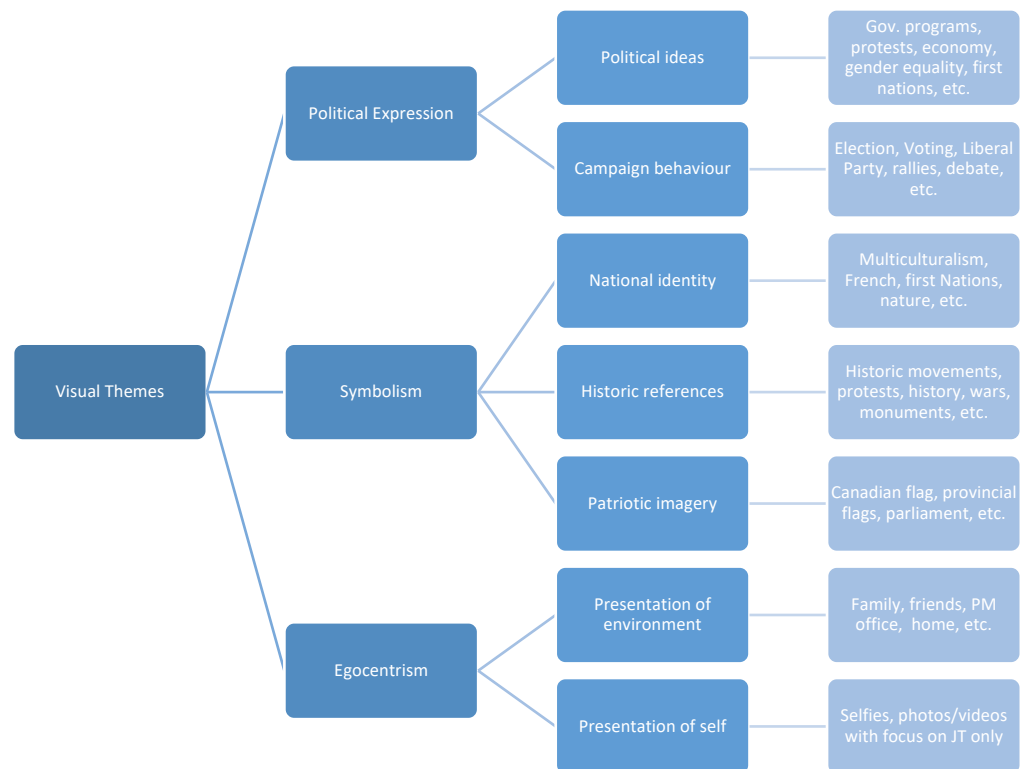
These two categories were inspired by Schill’s (2012) study of political communication. The nature of the pictures is trickier to code because it relies more heavily on the coders personal opinion than the other categories did, but it

fundamentally divides the postings in two groups: pictures that look candid, like they were taken in the moment, that are natural and that could have been taken by anyone on a mobile phone; and the staged pictures that have a more professional feel to them, that don't depict a totally natural and relaxed situation and that look propped. As Schill (2012) said: "the hand-shaking and back-patting photograph sessions that are staged for cameras at international summits and negotiations are similarly designed to suggest alliances or peaceful talks". With Trudeau, it is tricky to know if the picture is truly candid or staged since the photos are almost exclusively taken by Adam Scotti, the Prime Minister's official photographer, which he then edits to adjust the lighting (Chan, Globe and Mail). Scotti helps the communications staff to meticulously select the photos, with an objective in mind. Scotti also says that the Prime Minister "understands what we need photos for, he understands what you [the media] need photos for, he understands what the six o'clock news needs footage for... it's not his first rodeo" (Chan, Globe and Mail).

Main visual theme

In order to better understand the visual aspect of the content, it was decided that the pictures would be categorized into one of the three main visual themes that they best fit with. During the first coding round, the word that best summarizes the picture was written. After the first round, the Quirkos program was used to classify the entirety of the words in groups. This created 7 sub-categories, which were then grouped in three main categories. The second and third round were coded based on the 3 main visual themes which are shown in the figure 1 below. This helps understand how the messages are conveyed from a visual perspective in addition to the textual one.

Figure 1: Main visual themes coding hierarchy chart



5.5 Qualitative analysis of captions

The qualitative analysis of the textual component of the Instagram content was inspired by the need to understand the topics that were preferred by the prime minister, and to comprehend how they relate to the values and electoral promises of the Liberal Party. The analysis was qualitative in nature. The entirety of the captions were exported into the Quirkos program, a qualitative data analysis software, and were then sorted into topics. It was an inductive analysis, since there was no codebook created before the start of the coding. Since the captions can be quite long (a maximum of 2,200 characters), a single caption could sometimes contain a few topics at once.

The result of this data analysis will hopefully help recognize what topics are

favorized on Instagram, and if those topics are in-line with the Liberal Party values and areas of interest.

5.6 Procedure

In order to get a more detailed insight how the Instagram posts were coded for this thesis, the developed steps will be described in the following section.

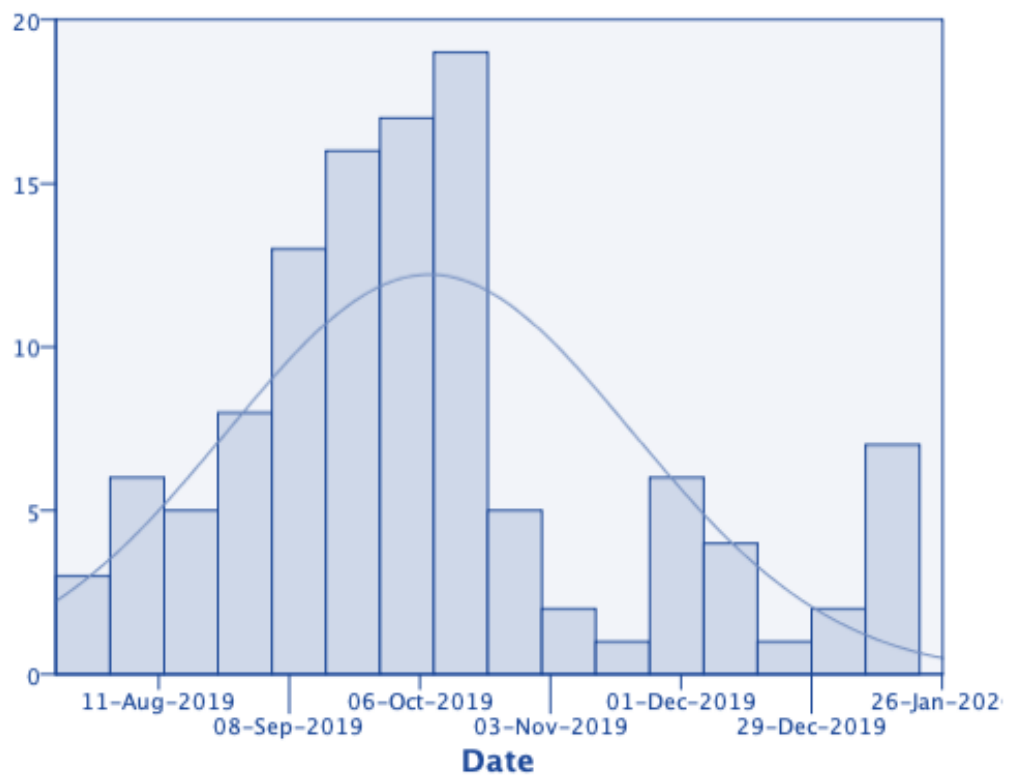
As a precautionary measure, the first step of the collection of data was to screenshot the Instagram page in February, 2020. Thanks to this, it was easier to see if any posts were deleted during the process of the content analysis; which was not the case for any of them. The process that follows was fairly simple; a coding sheet was created based on previous researches and the hypotheses that were formulated. Every post was coded based on the ten distinct categories described previously. If there were any insecurities in the coding, the coder flagged the post and would come back to it at a later date; if no code from the original codebook was suitable, a new category would be created. This is what happened with the *main visual theme* category. After coding half the data during the first round, the coder decided to add the *main visual theme* category because it seemed important to focus more strongly on the visual aspect of the posting and to regroup pictures and videos that have a similar themes. The first round of analysis happened in the beginning of March, 2020; the second round in April, 2020; and the third and final round was in May, 2020. The same data was analyzed at three different times to ensure intra-coder reliability.

6. Results

6.1 Amount of postings

In the period of 186 days between July 20th, 2019 and January 21st, 2020, a total of 115 posts were published (an average of 0.62 a day) on Justin Trudeau's Instagram. The election day was held on October 21st, 2019; during the pre-election period (from July 20th, 2019 to October 20th, 2019), 87 posts were published compared to 28 during the period following the election (between October 21st, 2019 and January 21st, 2020) as shown in figure 2. In another context, this means that an average of 0.94 posts were published per day during the pre-election period, compared to 0.30 posts per day for the post-election period (shown in Figure 2).

Figure 2: Frequency of postings over the period of six months

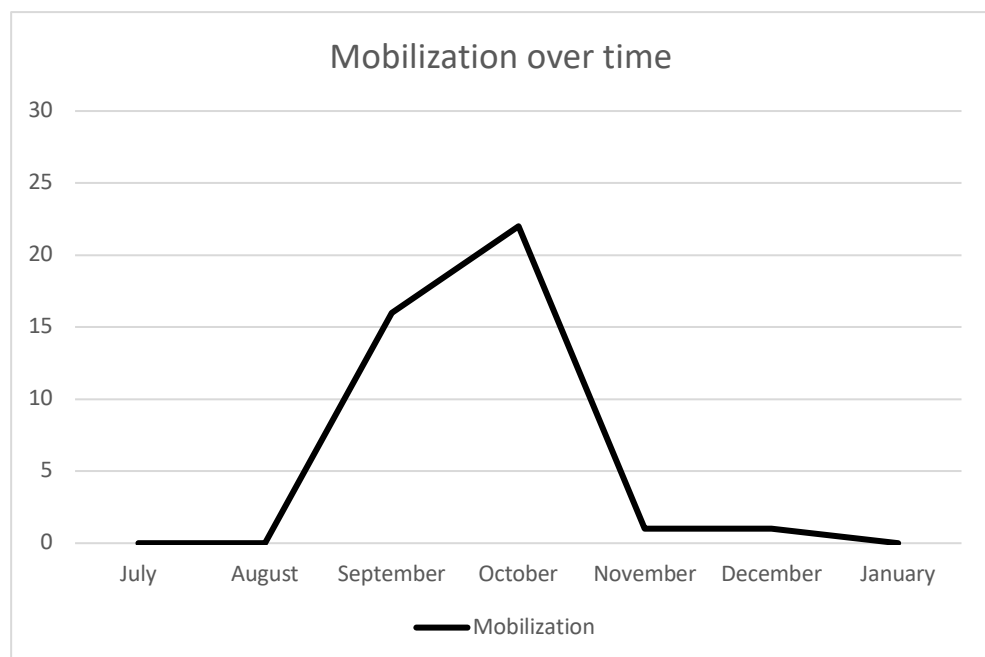


6.2 Filimonov et al.'s functions

The majority of the content shared that was analyzed falls under the *broadcasting* category, as 66.1% of the posts had some kind of broadcasting goal within the caption or the text in a photo itself (shown in Annex A). It must be noted that the type of content that was categorized as being of broadcasting nature was used to broadcast the Liberal Party of Canada, their programs, future projects, electoral promises and Trudeau's role as a prime minister.

The posts that had a mobilization intention were scarcer, with only 34.8% of the content being used to mobilize the public. There is a considerable rise in mobilization content closer to the election day, as well as a dramatic drop immediately after the election; no mobilization posts were recorded in both July and August, however, in September there were 16 posts, followed by 22 posts in October, then it falls to 1 post for both months of November and December, and none in January (shown in figure 3).

Figure 3: Mobilization posts over the period of six months



A Pearson Correlation was computed to test the relationship between *broadcasting* postings and *mobilization* ones in order to understand if posts that are used to mobilize were more likely to also include a broadcasting message. The results indicate that there is a statistically significant moderate positive correlation between *broadcasting* posts and *mobilization* ones set at $r=.330$, $n=115$, $p=.002$.

Hybrid posts consist of content from a different platform (television, other social media platforms, posters, publishing someone's Instagram post) that was shared on Trudeau's Instagram. Following the results of the analysis, less than a fifth (18%) of the content could be considered to be *hybrid*.

6.3 Targeting youth

Pictures that explicitly featured a person between the ages of 18 and 30, and/or captions that reference, mention or target the youth were labeled as *targeting youth*. Out of the 115 posts analyzed, 39 postings (33.9%) were categorized as having the younger segment of the population as their main target.

6.4 Scandals

The only post that could have been categorized as having a scandal for a topic was a picture that depicts an attentive Trudeau standing next to a fountain in Danforth accompanied by a woman, two members of Parliament and a young girl. The caption explains that Trudeau talked to the young girl, who lost her friend in the 2018 shootings that happened there, he adds "We'll strengthen gun control because

we have to do better, we have to do more.” (@justinpjtrudeau, 2019). Even if that scandal was not directly related to the ones we highlighted before starting to code, gun violence and gun control were a massive subject of debate on the Canadian political scene which is why it was decided to include it in this category.

6.5 Trudeau Presence

For the purpose of understanding image management and self-representation, every post that featured Justin Trudeau was labeled. After analyzing the data that was collected, it was shown that the Prime Minister is present in the majority of the analyzed data. More precisely, he is shown in 93.9% of the postings (n= 115), which is about 108 posts out of 115.

6.6 Patriotic symbolism

When analyzing the pictures, imagery or symbols that are of national significance were labeled as a way to measure how much does the Prime Minister reinforce the Canadian narrative through his pictures and videos. The analysis shows that 53% of the data collected included some kind of patriotic symbolism.

The relationship between *broadcasting* posts, *mobilization* posts, and the posts containing patriotic symbolism was analyzed. The goal was to see if there is a correlation between the nature of the posts and the presence of a patriotic symbol. So, if a post is broadcasting the Liberal Party of Canada, will it be more likely to have a patriotic symbol somewhere in the picture or video? A Pearson Correlation

was computed (shown in Annex B) and it revealed that there is a statistically significant moderate positive correlation between broadcasting posts and postings with patriotic symbolism ($r = .393$, $n=115$, $p = .002$). Additionally, the analysis showed that the positive correlation between mobilization and patriotic imagery is low ($r = .285$, $n=115$, $p = .002$).

6.7 Professional vs. Personal

Personalization is one of Filimonov et al.'s functions, it looks into postings that show or describe private moments from the politician's life, which makes people feel closer to him. The reason it was not grouped with the rest of the functions is because the *professional* aspect of this category is of interest too. Overall, 73% of the posts depict a professional Trudeau compared to 27% that depicted a more personal side of Trudeau. There is a statistically significant high correlation ($r = .682$, $n=115$, $p = .000$) between professional posts and broadcasting ones; meaning that posts used to broadcast political messages are more likely to depict a professional Trudeau (shown in Annex C).

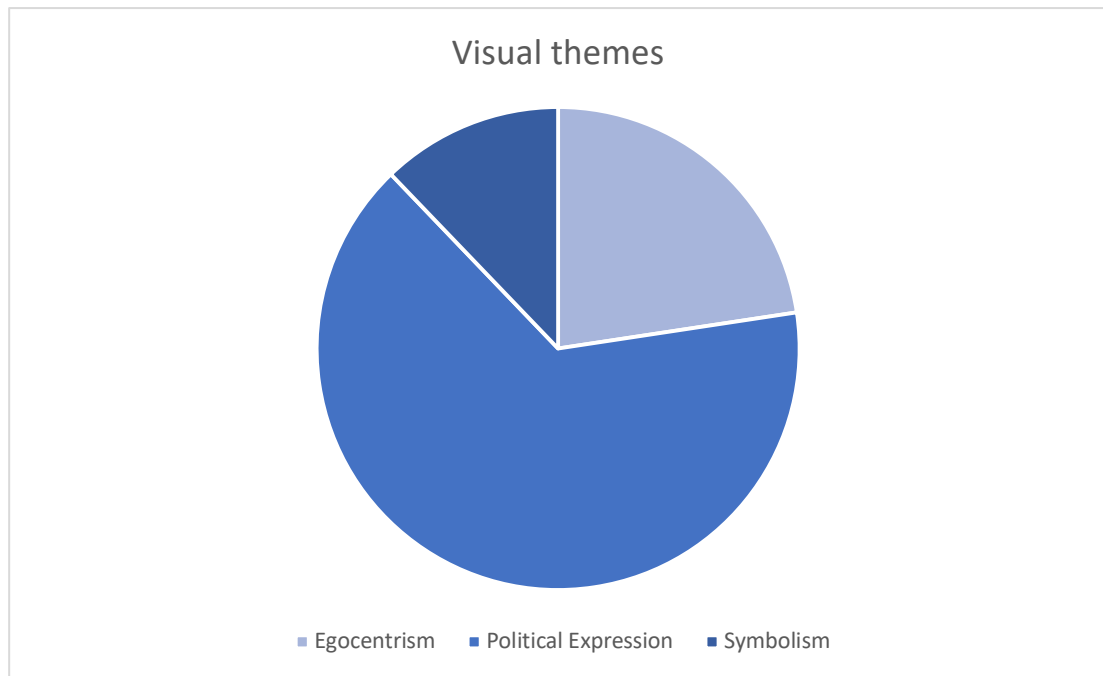
6.8 Staged vs. Casual

The analysis of the coded data shows that 60 % of the posts were considered to be staged, and 40% seemed casual. The near-entirety of the photos and videos published on the prime minister's Instagram have a very professional feel to them because they were most probably the work of his private photographer Adam Scotti, thus making the distinction between candid and propped photos difficult.

6.9 Main visual themes

Every picture was coded as belonging to one of three main visual themes, which were political expression, symbolism, and egocentrism. The analyzed data shows that most of the published media fell under the “political expression” theme with 65.2% of postings. It is followed by the “egocentrism” theme with 22.6% of posts, and “symbolism” with 12.2%. The shares are shown in figure 4.

Figure 4: Pie chart representing the visual themes shares



6.10 Qualitative analysis of captions

The qualitative analysis of the captions revealed that the topics can be regrouped in five main themes; elections, communities, climate change, peace/security, personal. There was a total of 63 items in the “elections” group, in addition to captions that were directly coded in the “elections” category, it is composed of three sub-groups. The first, with 19 items, were captions in the #ChooseForward group; which are the posts that had the official hashtag used by the

Liberal Party during the election. This hashtag was included at the end of English captions or as the only element of the caption; the French equivalent is #ChoisirDAvancer. The second sub-group is “Future/Tomorrow” which includes the posts that focus on the future and a “better tomorrow” like the following caption that accompanied a picture posted on October 12, 2019 of Trudeau on a podium giving a speech surrounded by people:

*Thank you, Mississauga! Let's keep working
together today for a better tomorrow.
#ChooseForward
Merci, Mississauga! Continuons de travailler
ensemble pour bâtir un meilleur avenir.
#ChoisirDAvancer*

(@justinpjtrudeau, 2019)

The third sub-group, the Liberal Party of Canada, counts 5 items and includes all the captions that directly mention the Liberal Party of Canada.

The second most important theme is “communities” also composed of 63 elements. In addition to the captions that fell directly into the “communities” group, this category has seven sub-groups: children/families, middle class, First Nations, gender equality, youth, seniors, and LGBTQ+. The third category is “Peace/Security” composed of: Canadian forces, gun control, and tragedy. The fourth and last category is “climate change”, with 21 captions that have climate change as a topic.

7. Discussion

The analysis of Justin Trudeau's Instagram feed helps understand the construction of the political image in the global socio-political context of

personalization, and thus supports previous theoretical considerations.

H1: The content shared on Justin Trudeau's Instagram is going to be highly personalized and of broadcasting nature.

The data that was collected and analyzed shows that Justin Trudeau's Instagram page is dedicated to building upon his online persona and used as a self-presentation tool. When looking at the visual aspect of the content, an overwhelming percentage (93.9%) of the posts strongly focused on Trudeau's presence. It was shown in past research that visual content is more effective than text in gaining the public's attention (Brantner, Lobinger, & Wetzstein, 2011). This follows the visual framing theory, that argues that visual image framing techniques emphasize politician's individuality are saturating digital communication strategies and affecting dynamics of public impression creation and management (Marland, 2012). Therefore it encourages the personalization of politics, which was defined as the "process in which politicians become the main anchor of interpretation and evaluation in the political arena" (Balmas & Sheafer, 2016) which is the case with Trudeau's content, that leans strongly towards personalization. The aspect of personalization can also be recognized in the type of photos and videos he shares with 22.6 per cent of them being coded under "egocentrism". Street (2004) claimed that by publishing personal information about themselves politicians try to portray themselves as ordinary people with whom their public can identify. Although only 27 per cent of the posts were recognized as showing a personal side of the Prime Minister, it might be because the data was collected during an election campaign, where the professional side of the politician is put forward (73%). Hence why 65.2 per cent of the visual content could be described as having serving for "political expression".

As Paul Duncum (2004) has said “the visual was never exclusively visual”, and the same applies to text. In today’s society, visual and textual are the most omnipresent modes in the media that we consume, and they interact in a highly complex way (Brantner et al, 2009). In the context of Instagram, the two modes are synchronized, making the caption as important as the picture. Our data showed that the most present visual theme was related to “political expression”; there were many themes representing different important topics that were recognized in the captions, but the most important one was “elections” (n = 63) which encapsulates all the posts that mentioned the election or the Liberal Party directly. The political image was accompanied by a political text as a way to help the viewer understand the message faster (Russman and Svensson, 2017). Overall, most of the content, both visually and textually, has been of political nature.

In June 2020, Justin Trudeau has over 1,370 posts that are followed by 3,8 million people from all over Canada and the world. His Instagram account during the election period, which is an important time for all politicians in terms of content creation, has shown to be used as a sort of “virtual billboard” for broadcasting information about the election, the Liberal Party and his achievements as a Prime Minister. More than half (66,1%) of the posts had a broadcasting goal, which is in line with previous researches (Filimonov et al, 2016; Lalancette and Reynauld, 2017; Russman and Svenson, 2017) that have claimed that political parties and politicians use social media to spread information rather than to communicate and connect with their followers.

Similarly to the results obtained by Filimonov et al. (2016), mobilization intention was rare within the content shared, with only 34.8% of the posts being used to mobilize the public. However, even though the overall rate of mobilization

postings was relatively low, there is a considerable rise closer to the election day of October 21st (16 posts in September and 22 in October). This can be explained by the fact that the public was called to action to watch debates, to familiarize themselves with the Liberal Party and to go vote during the election. Thus, this also explains why there is a dramatic drop immediately after the election, with only three mobilization posts for the period of November to January. There is a significant relationship ($r=.330$, $n=115$, $p=.002$.) between broadcasting posts and mobilization posts, meaning that posts that were spreading information were simultaneously used to mobilize the electorate.

Again, the results of this study match the ones from Filimonov et al.'s study of the Swedish political parties, as the amount of hybrid posts in the data was fairly low (18%). References to other campaign instruments (television, Twitter, and YouTube) were rare. Trudeau's team did not make use of the hybridized options that Instagram has to offer, which suggests that they focused on the basic functions of Instagram without trying to connect their campaigning platforms together.

Staged photographs and videos during election campaigns are not new. They have been used on television and newspapers for decades, and now they found their way onto social media. Staged media is supposed to transfer a message, that is not explicitly said or written, to the public through images. Trudeau is no exception, as 60 per cent of his content was judged to be staged. Ranging from the classic electoral campaigns shots with babies and seniors, to carefully propped scenes with other politicians, the postings were broadcasting the image of an inclusive, active and professional politician. Instagram is supposed to reflect authenticity by encouraging the sharing of candid moments. In a social media setting that is largely focused on entertainment, strategic images do not require or include editorial scrutiny for their

distribution, and the captions direct audiences as to how they should interpret the picture. Instagram embodies a platform that allows Trudeau to reach a specific audience that regularly consumes media as entertainment, where he can manage his image and brand while persuading the public of his abilities to be a qualified prime minister.

H2: An important amount of the content shared on Instagram will be targeted at younger segments of the population.

Politicians have been attracted to social media for their own image management agendas. They want to be seen as modern, connected and up-to-date with the latest trends in order to seem more appealing to the voters. In 2019, more Millennials were eligible to vote in Canada than Baby Boomers; in combination with a rise in youth engagement in politics they quickly become an attractive population to politicians. In the 2015 election, there was a rise of 20 per cent in youth voter turnout and the majority of those votes went to the Liberals. The data for the 2019 elections have not been published yet, but it is assumed that Millennials have visited the polls in great numbers. Justin Trudeau owes it to the youth to embrace their political engagement, to understand them and find ways to listen to their concerns.

The Millennial Generation, as mentioned before, grew up with technology and are exceptionally attached to their social media platforms. Because Instagram is also popular among the younger age demographic, Trudeau can direct photos and messages through captions to this specific audience, thereby appealing to their desire for visual engagement. Still, only a fragment of Trudeau's Instagram posts were directed to the youth (33.9%). This might suggest that his Instagram is not used to communicate with the youth about their issues and concerns, but rather it's a way to

communicate his general messages to the youth by connecting with them on a platform they are comfortable with. The fact that he is on Instagram may be the message in itself. We have to thereby reject the hypothesis that an important amount of his posts will be targeted at younger segments of the population.

H3: The amount of posts shared three months before the election will be significantly larger than the amount of posts shared three months after the election.

Looking at the difference in the amount of content posted before and after the election confirmed that Instagram was used in a similar way as traditional media, such as television. Postings were more than three times (87 posts) as frequent in the three months prior to the election compared to the post-election period (28 posts). Politicians are obviously much more present in the media during an electoral campaign, as they try to gain as much popularity within the public as possible. Television and newspapers were the main avenue used by political parties for years to present their candidates, however, as times have changed and people's focus shifts from television to social media so do campaigns. The drop in posting frequency most definitely has to do with the end of the elections, but it might also be a message in itself. The fact that Trudeau suddenly published less photos on his Instagram might suggest that he is too busy undertaking his responsibilities as a Prime Minister to be active on social media. In fact, the United States have a tradition of looking into the accomplishments of a newly elected president during his first 100 days to judge how qualified he is.

As said before, social media (in this case Instagram) is used by politicians to broadcast their messages to their followers and to keep them in the loop of their accomplishments and latest undertakings. It would be interesting for future

researches to see if posts following an election are more likely to be of professional nature than the ones posted before the election.

H4: The scandals that the Prime Minister was involved in will not be mentioned on his Instagram account.

Politicians argue that using social media makes it easier to communicate directly with the voters than by using traditional media. Though, when comes the time to issue an apology about a scandal or mishap, traditional media is preferred, even if the goal is still to “communicate directly” with the public. The same goes for Justin Trudeau, who does not have a single Instagram post mentioning a scandal he was directly involved in. In this study, we have not looked into the reasons why politicians prefer to avoid talking about their scandals on social media, and to the best of our knowledge, there are no studies that have focused on answering that question yet; it might be because a social media post that is dedicated to a scandal is a constant reminder of it. It might also reach more people than it originally did. An apology, if there is one that is being issued in the first place, that appears on television or during a press conference will be forgotten faster than when it’s immortalized on social media. Bronstein (2013) suggest that the avoidance of controversial subjects is the result of the need of electoral campaigns to control the content and message displayed on the candidate’s page. Still, more research is needed on this topic.

H5: The posts will be highly influenced by the Liberal Party of Canada and will reflect their values and electoral priorities.

Because of the today’s fast-paced society, it is assumed that people tend to prefer looking at pictures than reading texts, which makes the focus on pictures and

visual communication grow in importance. Visual communication is an important segment of political communication, and the relationship between the two is what inspired this study in the first place. As mentioned before, Trudeau is aware of his celebrity status and understands what it takes to build and manage an image. Pictures featured on his Instagram are carefully shot and selected by his communications team; the goal is to push the professional image of the prime minister and to broadcast Liberal values and messages. When asked what is it like to be the most photographed person in the country, Trudeau answered: “You figure out early on that perceptions of you can’t lift you up or bring you down; you have to be true to who you are and hope that shines through everything that you do” (printed article). Even if the Liberal Party is not noticeably present in the photos and videos, it stays omnipresent through the symbols or values, such as integration, dignity, compassion, responsibility, and reason, that are being propagated by the posts. These values and the overall “Canadian brand” are represented through patriotic symbols, that are present in more than half (53%) of the content analyzed. The overall theme of the picture was also analyzed, to show that 12.2 per cent of the content focused on representing patriotic values. These visual cues to the Canadian flag, provincial flags, patriotic symbols are a reminder of the “Canadian brand” by working in relation with posts meant to broadcast the same values, as well as electoral messages.

When it comes to the textual share of the analyzed content, the theme that was the most present in the captions was related to the elections, and to the Liberal party. However, Trudeau dedicated a few captions to the “future” and to different communities that form the Canadian population. Though this was not analyzed, a Canadian flag emoji was included in-between the English and French versions in nearly the entirety of his captions; a visual reminder included in the text as a way to

encourage the “Canadian brand” once again.

9. Conclusion, limitations and future research

It can be concluded that this study has uncovered a few interesting findings that could be used for future and more in-depth research on the topic. Instagram is still fairly new and understudied in the academic world, and it would be interesting to see more studies focusing on the particularity of this platform, and its usage in the political communication sphere. The case of Justin Trudeau is interesting because his popularity extends beyond Canada; he is the first “selfie prime minister” and he has used that reputation to his own advantage by connecting with the youth and using his charisma to share political messages in a modern way. He has used Instagram as a way to connect with people by sharing moments of his personal life with them, while also using his moment in the spotlight to broadcast his party and his accomplishments as a prime minister by means of carefully curated photographs. Besides, the elections were an interesting time to study because postings were frequent and focused on Trudeau as a political figure that is fighting to be re-elected amidst a sea of scandals, that he choose to strategically leave-out from his Instagram content. Overall, the results that were obtained make it easier to understand how Trudeau uses his platform, and how messages can be successfully transmitted through a combination of pictures and text.

The main limitations of this research have to do with time and resources. More time would have encouraged the analysis of a larger sample, or the use of other methods to acquire results. A larger sample could include more postings by expanding the time period that was chosen; it would make the results more

generalizable. For example, a visual semiotic analysis to analyse images posted to social media during the election would have allowed for a deep understanding of the content and construction of individual images, however, this method is time consuming and labour intensive. Another limitation is the lack of multiple coders during the coding process. While the necessary steps were taken to ensure validity and reliability, the opinion and judgement of other coders cannot be substituted. Qualitative methods are obviously delicate because the researcher's own knowledge and logic is referred to more than in other methods, which might have influenced the results to a certain extent.

Future researches can focus on doing a comparison between the Instagram accounts of the Opposition's members. It would be interesting to understand how their content is different one from another and if there is a correlation between some type of content and higher levels of popularity. Also, as it was mentioned, this study focuses solely on Justin Trudeau and the Canadian context; studying politicians from other countries may provide the academic world with a better understanding of the role of Instagram in politics. Researchers could also study the governments' response to the COVID-19 pandemic on Instagram, as each country had a unique approach to the outbreak and to the approach they choose to communicate with the public.

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Appendices

Annex A: Amount of broadcasting posts

→ Frequencies

Statistics

Broadcasting

N	Valid	115
	Missing	6

Broadcasting

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0	39	32.2	33.9	33.9
	1	76	62.8	66.1	100.0
	Total	115	95.0	100.0	
Missing	System	6	5.0		
Total		121	100.0		

Annex B: Correlation between patriotic imagery, broadcasting and mobilization.

→ Correlations

Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
PatrioticSymbol	.53	.501	115
Broadcasting	.66	.475	115
Mobilization	.35	.478	115

Correlations

		PatrioticSymbol ol	Broadcasting	Mobilization
PatrioticSymbol	Pearson Correlation	1	.393**	.285**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.002
	N	115	115	115
Broadcasting	Pearson Correlation	.393**	1	.330**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	115	115	115
Mobilization	Pearson Correlation	.285**	.330**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.000	
	N	115	115	115

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Annex C: Correlation between personal and professional posts, and broadcasting.

→ Correlations

Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
PersoPro	.73	.446	115
Broadcasting	.66	.475	115

Correlations

		PersoPro	Broadcasting
PersoPro	Pearson Correlation	1	.682**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	115	115
Broadcasting	Pearson Correlation	.682**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	115	115

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Annex D: Frequency of visual themes.

→ Frequencies

Statistics

VisualTheme		
N	Valid	115
	Missing	0

VisualTheme

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Egocentrism	26	22.6	22.6	22.6
	Political expression	75	65.2	65.2	87.8
	Symbolism	14	12.2	12.2	100.0
	Total	115	100.0	100.0	