

## Multimedia political communication. Channels, content, usage, and impact

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Thirty years ago, the Society for the German Language chose “multimedia” as its ‘*Word of the Year 1995*’, positioning it as a guiding word for the journey into the brave new media world. At the time, multimedia referred to the integration of various modes of communication—including text, images, audio, video, and interactive elements—within a single, often digital, medium. Today, such integration has become an essential part of political communication, encompassing both traditional forms like election posters and flyers, as well as contemporary formats like politicians’ TikTok videos and political memes circulating across digital platforms.

Although terms such as “digitalization” and “hybridization” have taken precedence in recent scholarly discourse, this *Thematic Section* seeks to return “multimedia” to the center of scholarly debate, recognizing both its significance and continued evolution. As Jürgen Wilke (2003) once defined in the *Fischer Lexikon Publizistik Massenkommunikation*, multimedia stands for the integration of all possible modalities of communication: spoken language, text, video, audio, telecommunications, consumer electronics, and computer technology. This convergence, stimulated largely by digital innovation, is not limited to digital media—analogue materials such as campaign leaflets are also part of the broader multimedia ecosystem of political communication.

Both historical and contemporary examples illustrate the potency of multimedia communication in the political sphere. The transformative role of television is epitomized by the famous debate between John F. Kennedy

and Richard Nixon, where Kennedy’s energetic television presence is widely credited with shaping the election outcome (Jamieson & Birdsell, 1990). Additionally, the widespread creation, sharing, and adaptation of memes—multimedia fusions of visuals, text, and tags—highlight new forms of participatory political engagement in digital arenas (Paciello et al., 2021). Furthermore, the proliferation of audiovisual platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram demonstrates the increasing importance and reach of multimedia content in contemporary political communication (Marquart, 2023).

This *Thematic Section* aims to explore the diverse forms and effects of multimedia in political communication by assembling a selection of papers initially presented at the joint annual meeting of the “Communication and Politics” division of the *German Communication Association* (DGPK) and the “Political Communication” division of the *Swiss Association of Communication and Media Research* (SACM), held at the University of Applied Sciences of the Grisons, Bern, in February 2024.

The section opens with the article “More of the same or manifold perspectives?” by Kira Klinger, Florian Wintterlin, Julia Metag, and Lukas Lindenschmidt (University of Münster). Through a systematic literature review, they introduce the current state of research on politicians’ use of social media, revealing a predominance of content analyses of Twitter data from the USA and Europe. Following this overview, several articles turn a closer eye on media content itself.

Tasmin Kaltschmitt, Laura Kaspar, Annika Diehl, Antonia Schmitt & Ole Kelm (Heinrich-



Table 1: Characteristics of the contributions

Author(s)	Medium of analysis	Research area	Geographical context	Method and design
Kira Klinger, Florian Wintterlin, Julia Metag, Lukas Lindenschmidt	Social media	Academic literature	International	Standardized content analysis
Tasmin Kaltschmitt, Laura Kaspar, Annika Diehl, Antonia Schmitt & Ole Kelm	Entertainment podcasts	Media content	Germany	Standardized content analysis
Judith Reinbold	Facebook	Media content	Germany	Qualitative framing analysis of Text and Images
Florin Zai & Dominique Wirz	Instagram	Media use	Switzerland	Standardized survey
Johanna Burger	Local media	Media use and effect	Switzerland	Standardized survey

Heine University Düsseldorf), in their article “Hello Hackis, stay at home!”, investigate how politics and political decisions were referenced during the COVID-19 pandemic in popular German entertainment podcasts, highlighting how hosts used these platforms to address political topics during a critical period.

Judith Reinbold (Zeppelin University), in her article entitled “From ‘War Hero’ to ‘Peace Hero’?”, examines the Bundeswehr’s Facebook presence to analyze how German soldiers participating in the MINUSMA peace-keeping mission are portrayed. Her qualitative framing analysis finds that heroism is a central motif, depicting German soldiers as both peacekeepers and protectors of civilians, in line with Germany’s political commitments.

The two final papers focus on the use of multimedia content: Florin Zai (University of Fribourg) and Dominique Wirz (University of Amsterdam), in their article “News usage on Instagram,” explore how Swiss adults who frequently use Instagram encounter news, finding that the platform is mainly used for entertainment and that most news exposure is incidental. Users with higher political interest also tend to engage more with news, while those with moderate interest prefer entertainment-oriented outlets.

Johanna Burger (University of Applied Sciences of the Grisons, Freie Universität Berlin), in her contribution “No local news-

papers, but WhatsApp?” analyzes political information use at the local level, expanding the geographical and thematic scope of the section. Her study identifies political information repertoires that are linked to differences in voter turnout and practice, underscoring the democratic relevance of local media access and use.

Together, the contributions reflect the richness and methodological diversity of multimedia research in the field of political communication, with a particular emphasis on social media. They examine content produced by both journalistic and political actors (see Table 1). Key questions revolve around the character of media content, its usage, and its effects, analyzed via content analyses, surveys (both standardized and qualitative), and with a notable focus on Germany and Switzerland.

We hope that you enjoy reading this issue as much as we did and find inspiration for further scholarly exploration.

We would like to thank the editorial team of *Studies in Communication Sciences* (SComS) for giving us the opportunity to guest-edit this thematic section. We would also like to express our special thanks to Philipp Bachmann for his tremendous support.

Last but not least: Our heartfelt thanks go to the thoughtful and constructive reviewers (in alphabetical order): Patrick Donges, Benjamin Höhne, Lara Kobilke, Simon Lübke,

Julian Maitra, Philipp Müller, Quirin Ryffel, and Seraina Tarnutzer.

### Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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