

Christina Grandien and Johanna Arnesson

A human behind the politics?

Personalisation and interactions in the comments sections of Swedish politicians' YouTube channels

Abstract: This chapter examines the intersection of influencer strategies and political communication through the comments sections of the YouTube channels of Swedish politicians Ebba Busch and Annie Lööf. It analyses viewers' comments to explore their impact on the emerging concept of the influencer politician. The study finds that comments reflect influencer-like communication strategies used by politicians, resembling realistic social interaction. Two-way interactions, such as politicians responding to comments, enhance viewer engagement and contribute to an active commenting environment. Comments also serve as reflective engagement, characterised by immediate and emotionally charged responses, typical of lifestyle influencer content. The results also highlight positive reactions to conversational engagement and concerns about insincerity in politicians adopting influencer personas.

Keywords: professionalisation, perceived political authenticity, influencer politician, social media, parasocial interaction

1 Introduction

Research has long recognised that voters' evaluations of politicians increasingly centre on personal traits, identity, and lifestyle (Pels & Corner, 2003). This indicates a shift towards individualisation and privatisation of politics, and blurs the line between the political and the personal in political communication (Enli & Skogerbø, 2013; Holtz-Bacha et al., 2014; Van Aelst et al., 2012). The development also aligns with the networked permanent campaign strategy, where political actors use digital platforms to communicate directly with potential voters in dynamic communication spaces (Joathan & Lilleker, 2020). Recent research further underscores the significance of successful personalisation, emphasising politician–audience interactions and behind-the-scenes visuals that showcase the politician's work and feelings about it, when trying to reach younger audiences (Ashley & Rasmussen, 2021; Parmelee et al., 2023).

In line with these developments, new styles of personalisation can be expected through, for example, increased user engagement (Zamora-Medina, 2023) and

adaption of textual as well as visual aspects of social media fame. The emergence of the “influencer politician”, as discussed by Ashley and Rasmussen (2021) and Starita and Trillò (2022), is, from this point of view, a natural development in modern political communication. This concept represents a shift from the traditional celebrity-politician narrative towards a model more like that of an influencer, representing an expansion of how politicians engage with and are perceived by the constituents in the digital age. Self-branding, calculated amateurism, and cultivating a personal affective relationship with the audience – i.e. potential voters – are some of the micro-celebrity practices associated with social media influencers that characterise this new “ideal type” of politician (Starita & Trillò, 2022).

This chapter is part of an ongoing study that focuses on the above-mentioned trends in digital political communication. It is based on case studies of two Swedish female political leaders, Annie Lööf and Ebba Busch, who, between two elections, launched their own YouTube channels. At the time of data collection, Lööf was the leader of the liberal Centre Party, and Busch was leader of the conservative Christian Democrats. The videos on the two channels borrowed typical genres, tools, and tactics from lifestyle influencers, not least a focus on interaction, dialogue, and cultivating an intimate relationship with the audience. We regard these vlogging politicians as examples of the ongoing transformation of political communication into a “highly professionalized, personalized communication environment” (Lilleker, 2014, p. 20) influenced by current communication trends, adopting and adapting commercial strategies to a political context (Falasca & Grandien, 2017).

YouTube is one of the largest platforms for *vlogging*, a form of video-based blog where content creators share insights into their daily lives. Success on the platform often builds on engaging the audience, and creating a perception of familiarity and collaboration between them and the vlogger. Interactions through comments or posts are encouraged by the platform affordances and are employed for communication purposes such as sharing ideas, showing appreciation, and answering questions (Madden et al., 2013). The vlogs allow the viewers to experience a sense of intimacy when more personal content is shared, and interaction in relation to the content is made possible through the comments section (Rihl & Wegener, 2019).

In the interaction between content creators and viewers, the boundary between interpersonal and mediated communication often gets blurred and a (perceived) intimisation of the relationship arises (Rihl & Wegener, 2019). Recent research has highlighted how different influencer strategies are used by politicians to cultivate a sense of authenticity, accessibility, and community (e.g. Ashley & Rasmussen, 2021; Starita & Trillò, 2022). In this chapter, we want to turn the attention towards the audience, specifically viewers’ reactions to the content and communication strat-

egies used by the two politicians. The aim is to explore and discuss the mediated interactions between politicians and the viewers taking place in the comments sections of the two YouTube channels. The research questions used to guide the analysis are: (1) what types of comments can be found on the two channels; (2) how do viewers' comments relate to the video content and the topics the politicians bring up; (3) what kind of strategies do the two politicians use when they interact with the viewers?

The remainder of the chapter is organised as follows. First, we discuss the transformation of political communication in the digital age, and highlight the shift towards personalisation and influencer-style tactics by politicians to create intimate, parasocial relationships with their audience through social media. Second, we present the two cases in a bit more detail, as well as the chapter's methodological approach. Thereafter, audience comments and reactions to the content and communication and the mediated interactions between the politicians and the viewers are analysed and discussed. Lastly, some conclusions are drawn about the comments sections of the YouTube channels.

2 Personalisation in the influencer era

The landscape of political communication is undergoing changes marked by increased personalisation, individualisation, and the intertwining of private and public personas. This transformative phenomenon encompasses the rising focus on specific politicians over parties or issues, portraying politicians as private individuals, and the expressive disclosure of emotions, all contributing to a dynamic where political figures adopt influencer-like strategies.

Personalisation of political communication means increased individualisation, privatisation, and emotionalisation (Van Aelst et al., 2012; Van Santen & Van Zoonen, 2010). Individualisation of political communication entails an increasing focus on specific politicians rather than parties, issues, or institutions, whereas privatisation suggests a tendency on the part of politicians to portray themselves as private individuals rather than representatives in public roles (Adam & Maier, 2010; Holtz-Bacha et al., 2014; Van Aelst et al., 2012). Disclosure and expression of emotions is argued to be another important element of personalisation (Metz et al., 2020), but also a gendered process within the current emotionalised landscape of mediated political communication (Yates, 2019). Empirical studies support the notion that self-personalisation helps politicians to connect emotionally with viewers and foster favourable impressions (Colliander et al., 2017; Lee & Oh, 2012; Peng, 2021). A study on viewers' interactions on social media with politicians showed that citizens preferred privatised and emotionalised posts (Vuckovic, 2023). As dis-

cussed earlier, younger audiences also express a preference for communication that presents the politician as trustworthy and personally relatable through two-way interactions and sharing details about their everyday life. Digital natives want politicians to show their political job in the form of a “backstage pass”, where they get to see and know what the job really looks like and how the politician feels about it (Parmelee et al., 2023).

2.1 Influencer politicians and parasocial experiences in social media

In research, the “celebrity politician” has long been understood as an official who adopts the style of a celebrity to advance their public image, or a former celebrity entering politics (Street, 2004). Social media has, however, changed the way that politicians craft their public persona, and the celebrity styles that they might strive to imitate. Historically, politicians were to a large extent dependent on traditional mass media to reach and engage with the public – today, they have the opportunity to circumvent journalists and instead communicate directly to people through Facebook, Instagram, X, and YouTube. Rather than being *re-presented* by the media, politicians – just like celebrities – might “gain control of their *self-presentation*” (Starita & Trillò, 2022, p. 333) on these platforms.

Starita & Trillò (2022) argue that the self-presentation techniques used by “everyday influencers” (Abidin, 2018) are crucial to understanding contemporary celebrity politics and the emergence of influencer politicians in digital media. Such influencers build their celebrity status on a perceived ordinariness, sharing mundane aspects of their life to build trust, community, and relatability. The content they produce often involves parenting issues, “day-in-the-life” vlogs, personal routines, and “backstage” views of their personal and professional lives. Perceived authenticity plays a central part for these influencers, similar to the mediated performance of political authenticity that politicians engage in (Luebke, 2021). It involves the audience forming impressions of politicians to assess whether they come across as authentic (Enli & Rosenberg, 2018). In such assessments, interactions and engagement in the form of comments and replies between politicians and the public might play a crucial role.

This chapter specifically focuses on commenting on the two politicians’ YouTube channels, and how they seek to foster a personal relationship with the viewers. The notion of parasocial experiences is often used to describe the one-sided connections individuals form with media personas or characters, conceptualised as either parasocial *interactions* or parasocial *relationships* (Giles, 2002, 2023). While these concepts both concern interactions individuals have with media fig-

ures, they encompass some important analytical and theoretical differences. Parasocial interaction refers to superficial, transactional, and short-term engagements or responses triggered by media content without the depth of emotional attachment, while a parasocial relationship involves a perceived emotional bond and attachment with a media figure resembling a genuine social relationship (Giles, 2002, 2023). Parasocial relationships have recently begun to interest researchers in a new way, since social media enables a more realistic social interaction (Rasmussen, 2018). Viewers can comment, post messages, or email a social media celebrity, which simulates real social interactions. The viewers often experience, and behave as if, they know the person in question, just like a friend, acquaintance, or family member (Reinikainen et al., 2020).

These ideas are particularly relevant for analysing political communication on social media, not least in view of the increasing personalisation and intimisation of political communication (Cohen & Holbert, 2021), which blurs the boundary between interpersonal and mediated communication. Research shows that rather than exclusively depending on a political candidate's ideology and authority, certain individuals seem to employ interpersonal frameworks to comprehend and establish symbolic closeness with specific political figures (Hakim & Liu, 2021). Also, these symbolic relationships with political figures are positively linked to heightened political interest, increased elaboration of political information, and enhanced internal political efficacy within the studied sample groups (Dunn & Nisbett, 2014; Hakim & Liu, 2021). Politicians who share personal information and engage with their viewer in the comments sections have the potential to create a perceived intimate relationship between themselves and their audience. Over time, a viewer can develop the experience of having an intimate relationship that resembles a real social interaction, especially when the viewer receives information about the famous person's private life. Research has shown that content that includes private elements, self-disclosure, or emotions positively impacts audience engagement, indicated through, for example, reactions, shares, and comments (see, for example, Bene, 2017; Gerodimos & Justinussen, 2015; Kruikemeier et al., 2016; Metz et al., 2020). To contrast this, more professionally oriented content focusing on individual political qualities and activities may collide with the social nature of social media (Larsson, 2016).

2.2 Commenting on YouTube

Commenting on media content of some sort can be an expression of an emotion or an opinion, a way of adding information, correcting, or giving a personal perspective (Stroud et al., 2016). Viewers also have specific ideas of how to communicate on

different platforms, depending on how they view the socio-technical affordances (De Ridder et al., 2016; Nagy & Neff, 2015). YouTube provides different tools to maximise viewer participation, such as thumbs-up and thumbs-down buttons to rate both videos and comments (Lee & Barton, 2013). The platform also provides a range of functions such as subscribing, private messaging, commenting on a profile, and options to share, rate, and comment on individual videos, to allow viewers to interact with each other and to share their responses to content (Madden et al., 2013). The person who uploaded the video can also adjust settings to allow only certain viewers to comment, require moderation of comments before publishing them, or disable the comments facility completely.

Commenting constitutes an elaborate form of interaction on social media, however, since it allows the expression of emotions and calls for an investment of time and effort (Tur-Viñes & Castelló-Martínez, 2019). Despite YouTube's technical and social affordances, only a minority of viewers seem to make use of them (Madden et al., 2013; Thelwall et al., 2012). According to Tur-Viñes and Castelló-Martínez (2019), commenting behaviour on YouTube has some known characteristics. The level of interaction between the YouTuber and commenter is relatively low and YouTubers rarely reply. Also, commenters rarely have a dialogue with one another, and this interaction is not always related to the video context (De Fina, 2016; Tur-Viñes & Castelló-Martínez, 2019). Also, triggering or polarising topics generate more opinions than more neutral topics (Thelwall et al., 2012). Commenters on YouTube have various motivations for leaving comments. One common reason is in response to a direct question or invitation from the YouTuber. Additionally, viewers may write comments to express their emotions or opinions, seek clarification on certain information, show their appreciation towards the YouTuber, or discuss the most captivating aspects of the video (Tur-Viñes & Castelló-Martínez, 2019).

Madden et al. (2013) provided a comprehensive framework for categorising and understanding the diverse types of comment on YouTube, encompassing a wide range of interactions and expressions. The study found, for example, that viewers request more information or clarification, give or request advice, express immediate reactions to the content, express their viewpoints or opinions about the content, and express feelings or emotional responses. Understanding the characteristics of comment types contributes to the broader comprehension of viewer engagement on YouTube.

3 The case studies: Swedish politicians on YouTube

This chapter focuses on viewers' comments on the YouTube channels belonging to two Swedish politicians, Annie Lööf and Ebba Busch. At the time of data collection, they were the only party leaders in Sweden who had launched this kind of personalised channel on the platform. The comments from viewers are also compared with the content in the videos, allowing an analysis of viewer engagement with different types of video content. In total, we collected 57 videos that are between 4 and 20 minutes long, 26 from Lööf's channel and 31 from Busch's channel. The first video on Lööf's channel was published in August 2020. The channel has 7000 subscribers and the views range between 1,700 and over 100,000. The first video on Busch's channel was published in September 2019. Her channel has around 6,800 subscribers and views vary between 2,000 and 30,000.

3.1 Methodological approach

Viewers' comments were analysed using qualitative content analysis focused on inductively generated categories – that is, summarised in a coding schema (Krippendorff, 2018; Silverman & Marvasti, 2008). The total of 2,304 comments were examined to identify types of comment. Firstly, the comments extracted from YouTube were reviewed to get an overview of the data. Secondly, initial codes were generated through an inductive approach, addressing each comment to develop rough categories. Thirdly, the comments were more thoroughly reviewed in a process where similar and dissimilar observations were compared to create meaningful classifications.

Comments posted by the party leaders were highlighted and analysed separately. These comments were examined in relation to the video content when applicable. The cases when this was applicable were when the party leader answered questions from the comments section as part of the video content. Since this chapter also aims at connecting viewers' comments with the video content, illustrative examples from each identified category from the viewers' comments are linked to video content when applicable. When comments reflect video content, the example from the video is used to contextualise. Comments presented in the article were translated from the original language Swedish into English.

4 Four types of viewers' comments

According to Madden et al. (2013), only a minority of viewers make use of the commenting function on YouTube in general, a pattern that is true for the cases analysed in this chapter as well. Common motivations for leaving a comment are in response to a direct question or invitation from the YouTuber or viewers write comments to express their emotions or opinions or appreciation (Tur-Viñes & Castelló-Martínez, 2019). On an overall level, four categories of comments are the most salient here. Firstly, viewers frequently express “impression” type comments that express their immediate reaction to what they have seen in a video. These comments typically contain, as Madden et al. (2013) specify, exclamation marks and emoticons and have features that convey personal responses and imitate features of spoken conversation.

You are so awesome! 😊 Beautiful inside and out.💕💕 (Annie Lööf, 2020, comment: 18 December 2020)

Gosh, do you get up at 4:30 in the morning Ebba? Fighter!! (Ebba Busch, 2020, comment: 23 January 2020)

Secondly, viewers request the politicians' point of view or give their own point of view on a video, person, object, or topic. These types of comments can be about the (political) issues or topics addressed in the video, about the person in the video, or about the content in general. The two comments below, from Lööf's channel, exemplify different types of points of view-oriented comments from the material.

Next time you have a Q&A session, please answer what you think about mink farms. Saw that the Centre Party wants to keep them. Please explain how you think.😊 (Annie Lööf, 2021, comment: 5 March 2021)

Interesting that you open up in this way and remind us that there is a human being behind the politics. It doesn't change my opinion that the politics of the Centre Party is completely inept, but this is quite likable. (Annie Lööf, 2020, comment: 28 August 2020)

Thirdly, offering different types of advice is a frequently occurring type of comment. The advice can be about political issues but also about other content in the videos that is unrelated to political issues. Below is an example of a comment on Busch's channel that is advice but that has nothing to do with an issue brought up in the video: rather, the comment is about the production of the video.

Keep vlogging. Nice to see more of you. Until next time, get a better microphone/ better audio recording settings. (Ebba Busch, 2020, comment: 18 September 2020)

Fourthly, expressions of personal feelings are frequently displayed in the material, in comments where the viewer describes personal sentiments or emotional responses to the video content or the video topic. According to Madden et al. (2013), they are often longer and have more detail, and will make use of adjectives describing emotions like “happy”, “sad”, or “angry”. The comment below is from a video where Lööf talks about the premature birth of her daughter.

I am moved to tears by your story. My youngest daughter and I also had a tough start, although in completely different ways. Thanks for sharing! Hope you don't get too much hate in the comments this fall. Keep in mind that it shouldn't cost too much in personal health. Take care of yourself! (Annie Lööf, 2020, comment: 28 August 2020)

In summary, the comments sections are dominated by comments that express immediate reactions to the videos, often accompanied by emoticons. According to Thelwall et al. (2012), lifestyle YouTube videos are primarily watched shortly after they are released. The comments sections mirror this: short reactions rather than more elaborate and reflective comments and discussions are typical for this material.

5 Nurturing connection through personalised content

Youtubers often aim to establish a feeling of intimacy with their viewers to capture their attention (Raun, 2018). This type of content has the potential to create a conscious or subconscious social bond between the YouTuber and the viewer. In this case, the videos use personalised content strategies in their communication and the comments sections often reflect the strategies used. Comments manifest and assess the strategies used in both positive and negative ways. Firstly, comments express appreciation that the political leaders show a more personal or human side of themselves, that it is a positive to get to know the person behind the professional role. Secondly, comments express negative opinions about political leaders trying or pretending to be something that they are not, or doing something that they should not be doing in their professional role.

There are several examples of private, personal, intimate, and emotional content in the videos. The first video Lööf published on her channel was a vlog where she talked about how her daughter was born prematurely and what happened after that. This video was published when Lööf had been on parental leave for one year and was returning to her job as a party leader. This video received more than 350 comments, making it the most commented on video in the studied

material. The video was recorded in Lööf's house. The comments to this video can largely be divided into three types: welcoming Lööf back to politics, saying something supportive about having a premature baby, or positively welcoming the YouTube channel. This is an example from one viewer who represents all the mentioned categories:

I don't agree with you politically but I'm glad you and your daughter did well and that you are strong enough now to come back, good that you are opening up to some privacy so people don't forget that there is a human being behind politics and serious questions, I subscribed! :) (Annie Lööf, 2020, comment: 28 August 2020)

In the example above, appreciation of the fact that there is a real human being behind the politician is expressed, a recurring feature in the comments section of this video. Viewers frequently comment that they like seeing the real person behind the politician. Lööf responds with a heart emoticon to many comments in the thread and answers some with general conversation – for example, saying thank you.

The comments sections for Busch mirror the slightly different content strategy used in the videos. There is less intimate, private, and emotional content. Rather, the videos embody more family-oriented qualities and femininity at the same time as they demonstrate decisiveness and authoritative leadership norms (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Jamieson, 1995). Busch engages in less personalised communication and portrays elements of being a decisive and strong leader. Comments on videos are thus less personal, relational, and intimate. The comment below is an example that mirrors and summarises the content in the posted video.

What a power woman you are! Is there anything you don't do? You do vlogging, are a mother of young children, exercise, do Instagram and do politics for the good of Sweden – absolutely incredible I must say! (Ebba Busch, 2020, comment: 20 February 2020)

Regardless of the level of intimacy or emotionality in the videos, the more personal vlog format allows viewers to depend not only on ideology or authority to relate to political figures (Hakim & Liu, 2021). Also, the vlog format constitutes a recognition factor for viewers, who are used to consuming lifestyle influencer content, and the comments sections reflect the typical language used in that context. In the same sense, the vlog format enables more realistic social interaction, and the comments sections reflect a common understanding or unspoken praxis of expression in influencer contexts.

6 Fostering and realising engagement: strategies and contrasts in interaction

Earlier research on political figures on social media indicated that social media is primarily utilised for one-way communication by political actors and genuine interaction with citizens is still limited (Gerodimos & Justinussen, 2015; Lilleker, 2016). However, research shows that younger people especially prefer authentic, personalised, and engaging content from politicians on social media (Parmelee et al., 2023). They value transparency, two-way interactions, educational material, and a mix of visual elements that align with their preferences for relatable and honest communication.

On a general level, the two political leaders studied here have different patterns when it comes to their presence and interactions in the comments section. Reference is explicitly made to the two party leaders, but there is no certainty that they are the ones personally commenting or responding. It is plausible that an employee handling their social media accounts could be managing these interactions. Lööf generally likes (with a heart emoticon) comments on each video. She also replies to comments frequently. Content wise, Lööf replies with short comments in a general conversational style, saying “thanks” or posting a positive emoji.

Comment: What wonderful energy! 😊

Lööf: Thanks! Nice to hear 😊 (Annie Lööf, 2021, comment: 21 December 2021)

Lööf rarely leaves longer comments on political issues or personal experiences and never enters a longer discussion. Some of the longer replies that she posts address accusations of her as a politician “acting as an influencer”.

Comment: Seriously Annie. The last thing we need is a politician trying to become a YouTuber. What you should do is focus on your job. Don't sit around and talk about the pandemic to light music, like an influencer trying on new shoes.

Lööf: I am not trying anything. But I think it is important to be where people hang out to be able to tell what we think, what we do and to receive input. (Annie Lööf, 2020, comment: 20 November 2020)

The comment and reply above also shed some light on the strategy behind the YouTube channel – to have a presence in an arena where potential voters from target groups are already present.

Busch has a different strategy for interacting in the comments sections. Busch has a recurring segment in her vlog, “Ebba online”, where she enters the com-

ments sections of her YouTube channel and the video shows her answering questions that are posted. In the videos, she frames the answer with more talk and context about the specific issues on which she is commenting. Busch answers some questions that are politically oriented, and she is more direct in the comments. The three videos most commented on by viewers are the videos that Busch comments on live. The number of comments on the video is not reflected in the number of views, however. The example below is from the video with the fewest views, but it is the third most commented on video. One of the comments concerns the lack of interactivity from Busch's side:

This channel needs to improve on interaction. Even Annie Lööf responds in the comments sections on her channel. You or the person responsible for the channel needs to engage much more with the viewers, otherwise it becomes a one-way communication and eventually people get tired of just listening. (Ebba Busch, 2021, comment: 2 February 2021)

If it was a result of the comment above, or for some other reason, Busch answers several questions in this thread. The answers Busch gives are factual answers to policy-related issues. Even though this video has the fewest viewers, it has more comments than most videos on the channel. There are threads of comments where viewers are discussing the issue of elderly care addressed in the video. The longest commenting threads are the ones that Busch herself has commented in.

Commenter: The funny thing is that it was you who prevented several elderly people from getting a place. YOU closed several elderly homes! You don't want to lower taxes for the elderly, you don't want to give every elderly person a place in an elderly home. This government has set up a plan to build more than 100 new elderly homes.

Busch: Hello! We converted a lot of so-called service houses into sheltered housing. As a result, they were no longer classified as SÄBO (special housing for the elderly), but they became more easily accessible to many more elderly people, as the municipality does not have to approve moving into an assisted living facility. With our budget, there will be significantly more nursing home places than with the government's. (Ebba Busch, 2021, comment: 2 February 2021)

Going back to the common motivations for leaving a comment, like responding to a direct question or invitation from the YouTuber (Tur-Viñes & Castelló-Martínez, 2019), this is a strategy that the two political leaders have used, and it is reflected in the comments sections. Invitations to comment are communicated in the videos as well as written in the episode description. In one video, Lööf talks about the importance of vaccination against Covid-19, and she asks the viewers to comment on whether they will take the vaccine or not. This question is also written in the episode description. The question is answered in the comments section:

Of course, I will take the vaccine! I can't wait until it's my turn! 😊 Thank you Annie for using your platform to spread important societal information! 🙏 (Annie Lööf, 2021, comment: 21 January 2021)

Busch also addresses the viewers and encourages comments and interactions in a Q&A video where she answers questions from her different social media platforms. She says that she always reads the comments after a video is published but that she does not have the capacity to answer all comments, and she refers viewers to her official email address if they want to be guaranteed an answer. She ends the video by encouraging viewers to comment on the video if they want more videos of this type. The following is also written in the video description:

🙏Do you like this type of video? Or is there something else you'd like to see? Leave a comment below🙏

Commenters react to her prompt:

YES!!! More more more videos... very nice. Like the concept. Stripped down and personal. Simply super nice 😊🙏 (Ebba Busch, 2021, comment: 9 March 2021)

In summary, the comments posted by the party leaders propose a more relaxed and personal language, even when the comment is about politics, creating a sense of intimacy or friendliness. The frequent use of emoticons by both the politicians and the viewers adds to this impression. However, the use of emoticons can also be interpreted as an adjustment to or standard practice in the YouTube environment. Going back to Parmelee et al. (2023), viewers appreciate two-way interactions with politicians through the platform features that afford real-time interactions. This study shows that viewers become more active by commenting when the politicians themselves comment on the videos or answer comments in the videos.

7 Conclusion

This study set out to explore and discuss audience comments and reactions to the content and communication strategies employed in videos by Annie Lööf and Ebba Busch, and mediated interactions between the politicians and the viewers. Typically, comments express impressions, points of view, advice, and feelings, and, in general, these types of comment have little or nothing to do with politics. The common themes in the comments resonate with the manifestation of the influencer politi-

cian as the result of an unspoken agreed praxis of content and comments borrowed from the mainstream influencer context.

Comments express both positive and negative reactions to politicians showing a more personal or human side, and the results suggest that regardless of the level of intimacy in videos, the vlog format enables more realistic social interaction, aligning with the language used in influencer contexts. The study also underscores the importance of engagement strategies in political communication on social media, the findings suggesting that two-way interactions, such as responding to comments, contribute to increased viewer engagement.

The examples further suggest that viewers' commenting behaviour is influenced by the active participation of politicians in the comments sections. Politicians who respond to comments or engage in two-way interactions contribute to a more active commenting environment. This finding aligns with the desire of viewers, especially those who are younger, for authentic and interactive content from political figures on social media. Commenting also seems to serve as a form of reflective engagement for viewers. The immediate and emotionally charged nature of comments aligns with the characteristics of lifestyle YouTube content, indicating that viewers are more inclined to share personal reactions and impressions rather than engage in lengthy or elaborate discussions.

Comments also play a role in shaping perceptions of perceived political authenticity. The results point towards a tendency wherein the politicians are perceived more positively when they respond to comments in a conversational style. Conversely, comments reflect concerns about politicians appearing insincere or trying to adopt "influencer-like" personas, suggesting that the perceived authenticity of political figures is a factor that helps shape the online discourse.

This chapter also addresses parasocial interactions, highlighting the one-sided relationship viewers develop with the two Swedish political leaders on YouTube in light of the relatively few comments and replies from the party leaders. The study notes that parasocial interactions can be fostered through the personal and informal style of the politicians' videos, which mimics influencer-like content. This blurs the traditional boundaries of political communication, making it more relatable and engaging for viewers, yet also raises questions about authenticity and the sincerity of the politicians' online personas. To develop these interactions into a parasocial relationship, however, takes time and engagement. It would also involve cultivating a sense of community on the platform where followers, in addition to interactions with the politicians, also engage with one another.

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