



*Universitat
Abat Oliba CEU*

**Political communication and new media.
The dual character of the person as
politician: The AOC case study**

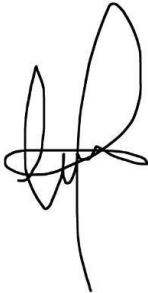
TRABAJO FIN DE GRADO

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Firma:

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several loops and a long vertical stroke at the bottom.

CRISTINA MOLAS I GUAL

Progress is impossible without change, and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything.

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

Resumen

El objeto de estudio de este Trabajo de Fin de Grado fue investigar si la relación entre el político y el votante es mejor si el político es activo y personal en sus redes sociales. La comunicación ha evolucionado exponencialmente en las últimas décadas, convirtiendo a los nuevos medios en el centro de la política actual. Mediante el análisis de la actividad de Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez en su cuenta de Instagram personal, se ha pretendido averiguar si la personalización de la figura política en la era de la digitalización, genera más oportunidades para vincularse con el público. Además de comprobar si los nuevos medios afectan al discurso y a la participación en política.

Resum

L'objecte d'estudi d'aquest Treball de Fi de Grau va ser investigar si la relació entre el polític i el votant és millor si el polític és actiu i personal en les seves xarxes socials. La comunicació ha evolucionat exponencialment en les últimes dècades, convertint als nous mitjans en el centre de la política actual. Mitjançant l'anàlisi de l'activitat d'Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez en el seu compte d'Instagram personal, s'ha pretès esbrinar si la personalització de la figura política en l'era de la digitalització, genera més oportunitats per a vincular-se amb el públic. A més de comprovar si els nous mitjans afecten en el discurs i a la participació política.

Abstract

The object of study of this Final Degree Project was to investigate whether the relationship between the politician and the voter is better if the politician is active and personal in their social media accounts. Communication has evolved exponentially in recent decades, making new media the center of current politics. By analyzing the activity of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez on her personal Instagram account, we tried to find out if the personalization of the political figure in the era of digitization, generates more opportunities to connect with the public. In addition to checking if the new media affects discourse and participation in politics.

Keywords / Palabras claves

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez – Political Communication – New Media – Private Sphere

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Introduction

Communication is key to defining and explaining everything to the world. It creates and shares ideas, information, views, facts, and feelings with other people to reach a common understanding. It is fundamental to our existence and our survival. It is also indispensable for any company, business, educational groups, and of course, also in politics. It is often forgotten that politics without communication would not arrive as far as it does. In this Final Degree Project, our goal is to bring together politics and communication and shine a light on the new ways these two collide. It is considering that political communication has been relevant for years and that it has exponentially changed due to the appearance of new mediums in recent years. Therefore we will analyze these developments and how they affect political communication in today's time. For this, the analysis consists of taking a look at American congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's Instagram activity by collecting data according to the case study methodology. The aim is to see how she uses these new mediums to share her beliefs and political discourse, as well as to see how she sends her messages and how the public responds. With this, we will see social media's potential in politics and its influence to see its role in this field. Furthermore, how 'new politicians' take advantage of these 'new mediums'.

This Final Degree Project will deal with the assumption that the communication process between the politician and the voter/public is better if the politician is active and personal on social media. The goal is to find out if new forms of media – and especially social media- have changed the way politics are done and to see if it really affects political discourse and political participation. With this, we expect to give answers to our investigative question, which is to see if the personalization of the political figure, in the digitalization context, brings opportunities to politicians to link with their public.

To prove that new media and social media have a political impact, we must first understand and prove how communication itself has influenced social and political affairs, which we will see throughout this paper.

The topic for this project was chosen out of personal interest due to the relevance that social media proves to have every day, even in politics. A field that moves millions of people and affects every one of us since politics is part of every aspect of life. Furthermore, it seemed interesting to investigate how the role of communication and new mediums changes the way politicians express themselves and consequently get voters to like and trust them.

1. Political communication

1.1 Key concepts of the term

Political communication is the basis of the complex relationship between politics, the media, and democracy (Graber & Smith, 2005). The concept has been discussed by many authors and specialists, but no definition has achieved universal acceptance. Although not having a generic definition, most definitions emphasize the same essential elements (Denton & Woodward, 1998) that derive from different social fields, such as communication, political science, sociology, psychology, history, and rhetoric (Kaid, 2004). Linda Lee Kaid - a communication specialist - writes that perhaps the simplest definition of the term is described by Steven H. Chaffee in 1975. In one of his essays, the American professor suggests that political communication is "the role of communication in the political process."

Like any other term related to communication, political communication is tightly connected to sending, receiving, and processing messages. However the messages' aim is to have a potential impact on politics. Therefore, we can understand as political communication, communication that uses messages where the message's aim is to affect the beliefs of individuals or groups and institutions.

The senders of this message can be different actors, such as politicians and journalists, or even members of interest groups – that can be public or private - or unorganized citizens (Graber & Smith, 2005). Linda Lee Kaid, Doris A. Graber, and James M. Smith - confirm that political communication is key for democracy. Political Communication is relevant in the construction of a free society that is connected to the state and it is crucial when building democracy because it is important for the citizens to be informed. Also so they can exercise their participation through protests, demonstrations and elections. Therefore, political communication is not only key for those in power, but it is also indispensable for the citizens, for its part in the democratic system. That is why political communication must play the role of an 'activator', meaning that it must encourage participation among the citizens and allow feedback (Lilleker, 2006). In the current times, where communication is easier and more accessible than ever, political communication plays an important role more than ever.

Additionally to the continuous accessibility there is a challenge to distinguish correct from false information. Information nowadays is everywhere, which means that – although some messages are authentic- many of the inputs we receive are false. It is because with information bombarding us constantly, it has become harder to filter the content ("Growing up in the age of fake news," 2021). Traditionally we got our news from trusted sources

that had to follow deontological codes of practice. Many people now get information from millions of sites and networks online, and often it can be difficult to tell whether stories are reliable or not (McGarrigle, 2021). Therefore, the internet has enabled a whole new way to publish, share and consume information and news with very little regulation or editorial standards. In this sense, political communication has to try harder to be respected and trustworthy.

In his book 'Key Concepts in Political Communication', Darren G. Lilleker states that - in modern times- political communication focuses on three main actors. According to the author, each actor produces political communication. Recognizing these types of public is relevant to understanding that there are different levels of communication strategies and that political communication is different for each actor and each target audience. Moreover, it shows the weight media outlets have in political communication since they are in the same group as public administration officials.

These three main actors are:

- *The political sphere.* By this, he means the state and its political actors. Their primary role is to communicate to society what they are doing in order to win legitimacy.
- *The non-state actors.* These include many organizations and groups that try to send a message, hoping they will enter the political sphere and have some influence.
- *The media outlets.* Media outlets are the ones who influence not only the public but also the political sphere. They send messages and influence people's ideas and beliefs. In a free country, media should be free to communicate openly without being controlled by those in power in the political sphere, leading individuals to form their arguments and opinions.

1.2 The evolution of political communication

Some say that the study of political communication goes as far back as the Aristotle era. In their essay 'Political Communication Faces the 21st Century', Doris A. Graber and

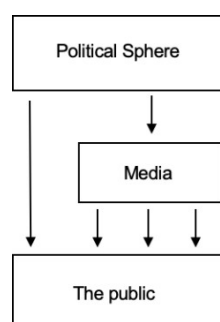


Figure 1 Traditional form of political communication by Darren G. Lilleker

James M. Smith argue that *Rhetoric* and *Politics* – two of the most significant treatises written by the Greek philosopher- can be considered as a starting point of the spreading of political messages, and therefore the origin of political communication. In the beginning political communication was seen as a top-down method, where the people would obey the leaders and not take part in the process (Lilleker, 2006). The political sphere could conduct the message through the media, whatever form they had at the time. To explain these Darren G. Lilleker created a figure that quickly demonstrates the direction of traditional political communication (*figure 1*).

As the democratization of most political systems evolved, the trajectory of political communication also changed. This is because people became more active in politics, and citizens were expected to have a political role (Lilleker, 2006). At the same time, the media changed drastically, and with it came the era of unlimited access to information. Also, an increasing amount gained access to a better education, therefore the public's greater demand was more access, involvement, and influence in politics. The voter was not content by the simple act of voting; the voter wanted to be part of the system and an active citizen. With these, the lines of communication changed. Political communication was no longer between politics, media, and the public, new actors such as advisors or non-elective officials came into the picture.

Moreover, a larger group of voices took part in the process, influencing citizens and the public sphere. Since the number of voices increased, the competition was also higher, and, at the same time, more people felt like they were represented and heard. Some specialists claim that the modern form of political communication (*figure 2*) is a clear example of a technological impact and the absorption of political marketing and advertising techniques (Lilleker, 2006).

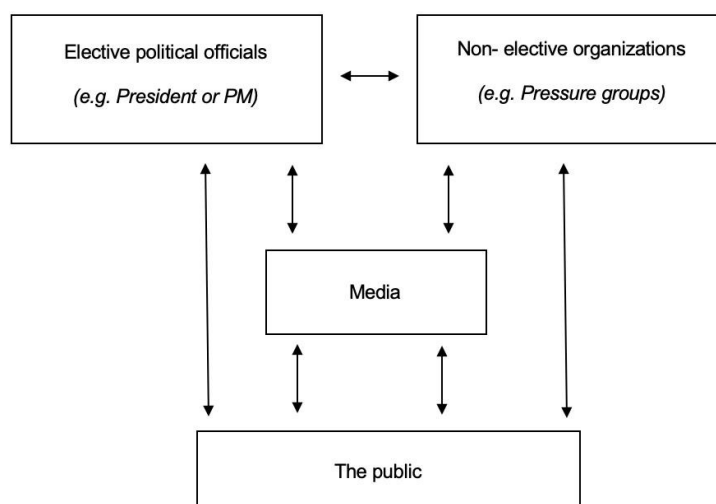


Figure 2 Modern form of political communication by Darren G. Lilleker

1.3 Agenda setting

The agenda-setting theory of McCombs and Shaw (1972) aims to explain how the media influences public opinion (Koa, 2018). It settles on the original idea that the media determines the public agenda. This theory confirms Walter Lippmann's idea that the media forms 'pictures in our heads'. Agenda-setting observes which are the topics media highlights and the reporting of different political affairs and actors. This theory is very relevant when discussing political communication because it is probably the most influential and studied theory concerning this field. Agenda-setting is often reflected as manipulation because of its impact on the general public. This is because news media have the power to decide which essential topics should be discussed and therefore published/externalized. This can be considered manipulation of public awareness because it is the media that establishes a hierarchy of news prevalence that will influence the views. This study is usually driven by media biases, especially in the political field. In summary, agenda-setting focuses on how the media affects the presentation of topics made in the news that influence the public mind.

There are two levels to the agenda-setting theory. The first one is dedicated to investigations that study media uses and the influence it creates on people, which will, later on, lead the public with specific exposure to specific information. The second level of agenda-setting is how the media centers attention on how people should think about specific matters. Here the media uses sensationalization to catch the audience's eye because the media wants to grab the audience's attention and introduce specific thoughts into their minds. This is how the media can turn some news pieces into viral. So, the first level is when the media enacts the common subjects that are most significant. The second is the decision of which are the parts of the subject that are most important.

There are a few concepts that are important to consider when talking about this theory, such as *gatekeeping*, *framing* and *priming*.

1.3.1 Gatekeeping

Gatekeeping is one of the main theories studied in mass communication. This theory analyses how mass media shapes the available messages into a select few that are later on provided to an audience. Gatekeeping can be studied as 'the control of information passing through a gate or a filter' (Nahon, 2009). Essentially, it is a judgment concerning what information should be gathered, evaluated, and eventually shared. It explains how information affects society and helps form a social reality (Nahon, 2009). Therefore, whoever controls the flow of knowledge and information will influence social reality. In

political communication, it is essential to know that the classing gatekeeping model supports the idea that 'mass media are the gatekeepers deciding which political issues and which political actors get public attention' (Bennett & Pfetsch, 2018).

Considering that numerous practices – such as journalism, politics, and advertising- raw data to interact with the public across different communicating networks, the concept of gatekeeping has gained value in the field. This concept was first studied in the 20th century by social psychologist Kurt Lewin, in Iowa, USA. It was created to study the selection and distribution of food items in the early 1940s. Since then, the theory has evolved into various media studies to the modern times. The contemporary study focuses now on how the internet affects this theory (Roberts, 2005).

1.3.2 Framing

Framing is a process of selective control. It focuses on how the media chooses to present a story to the public (Nahon, 2009) and how the audience attaches importance to certain news. It usually has two primary purposes: to shape news content within specific frames of reference and make the audience adopt these frames and, therefore, similarly see the world. By doing this, the public gets instantly attached to a piece of news, and then it will perceive this news in the context in which it was sent.

This is relevant because the "framing" of a story will determine the general public reaction, which can be very influential, especially in politics. Then, the prime function of this theory is to fit stories into frames, often done by specific media outlets or media organizations.

1.3.3 Priming

Priming is how the media's content affects them on their later behavior or judgment related to this same content (Bryant & Oliver, 2009). Simply put, it is how the media gives more importance to specific affairs and how it is then translated to people having the impression that that particular event is the most important one. So, it is related to the selection and presentation of news. It is also understood and the media's responsibility when presenting values and standards in the way topics are presented to gain attention.

1.4 The public sphere

Another concept important to consider is the 'Public Sphere'. This term was introduced into the media studies field over 20 years ago by Jürgen Habermas (Garnham, 2007),

and since then has been a very significant theory in media analysis. This term's relevance lies in its weight on the formation of public opinions (Mwengenmeir, 2014). Moreover, it has been considered a standard and essential work, but other authors have also criticized it. According to Habermas's original work, the public sphere 'is seen as a domain of social life where public opinion can be formed' (Habermas, 1992). Several regards are vital for the public sphere. Probably the main one is that 'it is open to all citizens and constituted in every conversation in which individuals come together to form a public' (Mwengenmeir, 2014). Therefore, the citizen is a private person who acts as an individual dealing with subjects of general interest to form this public sphere. There is no intimidation when forming this, but the citizens can unite and assemble freely and create their own opinions (Mwengenmeir, 2014).

So, public spheres are those spaces in society that allow the circulation of information and ideas and help form a political will and desire (Dahlgren, 2005). These spaces – such as mass media or the newer mediums introduced in recent times – ease the communication and the links between those in power and society. From a political point of view, *the political public sphere* is the term introduced when discussing public discussions related to the state or political practices. In his book, Habermas writes that he considers the state's power as public, and this power is legitimized by elections (Mwengenmeir, 2014). That is why public opinion serves as a control tool for the state and its authority. It is also relevant to conciliate issues between the state and the citizens. Despite it, Habermas's idea contradicts the agenda-setting theory, in which not everyone has a voice and can shape a perspective. Still, in fact, it is the media influence that enters into public debate.

2. Media and politics

An essential element in political communication is media organizations, considered print, broadcasting, and online channels (McNair, 2018). In recent years a rising number of scientific articles acknowledge the importance of media and political relationships (Street, 2001). It is impossible to think about politics without considering media because both practices go hand in hand. Both concepts' connection was framed by 'propaganda' and its impact on society. *Propaganda* is the communication used to influence and manipulate an audience. In propaganda, information is often biased and misleading, and its final aim is to promote a political cause or point of view. Propaganda has strong manipulative powers on society and demonstrates the importance that media has in politics.

Nowadays, political messages in media are studied in order to see the media's power in politics. Many experts in the field also address the impact of mass media on the public's behavior and how politicians and political parties send their messages through mass media. However, as many researchers seek to understand how organizations use media to communicate and persuade the audience to support their cause, many articles are now being written about how the media has also changed political behavior (Street, 2001). This clearly shows how the impact goes both ways: the media is influenced by politics, but the media also impacts politics and political organizations. So, media does not only control politics, but politics shapes the public opinion via the media.

We can observe how the media and politics relationship is related to propaganda and how it is highly influential in political communication (Street, 2001). Another relevant part is the policies that are influenced by the media. However, besides the impact of media on policies, there is a higher effect of policies in media, connected to the political economy of mass media. Here, we can see that the media's capacity to shape politics is moderated (Street, 2001).

2.1 Media's role in political communication

According to Darren G. Lilleker– 'Key concepts in political communication' -, the media plays a very relevant role in political communication. This is because the editors of media outlets choose to broadcast news pieces considering how the piece portrays different groups in society. With this, Lilleker considers that contemporary culture not only aims to reflect society but often aims to shape people's political views (Lilleker, 2006). Political information in the media can inform, but it can also threaten a political system, a political party, or individuals. Lilleker also links political communication and media to popular culture. He states that in modern times few people seek political information by

themselves. There is an increasing demand for entertainment rather than information. So now, an important source of political knowledge is blending politics and popular culture (Lilleker, 2006). This is because pop culture is currently running a broader sociopolitical sphere. One example is Donald Trump's presidency, which demonstrated the thin lines between celebrities and politicians (McCall, 2017). He capitalized on his television fame to launch his political career and utilized the techniques of pop culture to win the presidency. The former president knew how to keep an audience coming back for more, whether they liked him or not. Also, due to his experience in reality TV, he was aware of the nature of mediated messages. So, Trump perceived news reporters as entertainers and creators of messages, not objective transcribers of news events (McCall, 2017).

Most politicians have seen this increasing trend and have recognized the great potential that - mostly television- can offer. Nowadays, political communication aims to show a more personal side through its interactions with mass media. As we said, television is one of the main tools politicians portray themselves to the public on a deeper level. That is why it is essential to mention that with the ever-evolving times we live in, instruments like television – or the internet - have changed politics and political campaigning (Lilleker, 2006).

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2.2 Politics and the media in modern democracies

The case of political communication that is presented in this work, is situated in the United States of America, a liberal democratic country. Despite there being several discrepancies nowadays on this political system, it is relevant that we mention the role the media has in liberal democracies like the one we are going to study. The principles of liberal democracies highlight the separation of powers, an independent judiciary system, and the practice of checks and balances between branches of government. These principles were first born out of bourgeois critiques of autocracy in early modern Europe, culminating in the French Revolution. Nowadays, we can identify a democratic regime regarding constitutionality, participation, and rational choice (McNair, 2018).

In democratic and liberal systems, public opinion and the public sphere are relevant when discussing the media's role. In this system, it is fundamental to have informed and knowledgeable voters. This knowledge and information should circulate freely and should be available to all citizens. Moreover, it must be pursued in 'the public arena' (McNair, 2018). The democratic theory expresses that the public should collaborate when making decisions. Then, citizens' private political opinions become the public opinion of all the people, reflected – for instance- in voting patterns. As we stated before, this Public Opinion is related to German sociologist Jürgen Habermas' theory, and with 'the public sphere' (Mwengenmeir, 2014). The public sphere refers to the essence of society's communicative structures, in which information and views freely circulate and awareness is developed as the foundation for collective political action. The primary way information circulates nowadays is through mass media, which has become the primary source of society's common experience (McNair, 2018).

2.2.1 Functions of the media in democracies

According to Brian McNair in his book 'An Introduction to Political Communication', there are five central roles media has to develop in ideal democracies. These are the following:

- *Media must inform citizens.* It must communicate what is happening. This is also known as the 'monitoring' functions of the media.
- *It must educate citizens.* Education is a very important aspect of media and communication. The media must educate and explain the meaning and significance of valid facts.
- *Must provide a platform for political discourse.* To facilitate the creation of 'public opinion.
- *Give publicity to governmental and political institutions.* This fourth function is where the term 'watchdog' appears, which is a very relevant concept. The watchdog monitors the actions of other bodies – such as individuals, companies, governmental agencies, and so on - to ensure that they are not acting unlawfully or unethically.
- *Lastly, it must be a channel for the advocacy of different political viewpoints.* The media should be open to different political parties, so they have an outlet to spread their message and their policies to a mass audience.

According to Habermas, for these functions to be performed – and therefore for the 'public sphere' to exist- a few conditions have to be completed. The main ones are that 'the

political discourse circulated by the media must be comprehensible to citizens (...) and must also be truthful' (McNair, 2018).

2.3 Media as a political tool

The media is often referred to as 'the fourth state', as an acknowledgment of its importance and the influence of journalists and news outlets among a nation's greater forces (Gill, 2020). The origin of this term is often related to British politician Edmund Burke, who described the rudimentary and not fully developed media of the late eighteenth century as 'the fourth state'. He described the media as an impartial source of knowledge that aimed to inform citizens about politics and protect them from abuses of power (McNair, 2018). The other three states are the executive, the legislative, and the judiciary arms of the state. Nowadays, some authors argue that the term - 'fourth state'- is outdated since the public mostly distrusts the media in modern times. According to a study made in 2019 by the Gallup organization, only 41% of news consumers trust the media (Brenan, 2019).

Hence, the media heavily protects the audience from violations of authority and supports them in being informed with impartiality and objectivity. Here comes the struggle of establishing an independent and free press, which in the United States of America is stated in the First Amendment of the Constitution. This amendment aims to free the press from government control or oversight (Gill, 2020). As we discussed before, the media and journalists also carry the responsibility of being the public's watchdog. It is safe to say the media's purpose would be accomplished if journalists could work in a free, professional, and ethical environment, ruled mainly by objectivity and impartiality. Objectivity denotes a distancing of opinions between political actors and reporters (McNair, 2018) and the idea of letting the audience create their own opinions. Brian McNair also adds that 'objectivity is important to the democratic process because it permits the media to report political events accurately, fairly and independently' (McNair,2018). Consequently, ethical values are essential in the media and distinctively when it comes to reporting in politics. Journalists have to seek separation of facts from opinions.

2.4 Communication theories and politics

Aside from the authors, we have mentioned, many more have brought relevant studies into the field of media and politics and its existential relation. One of these authors is Tocqueville, a political scientist, and philosopher from the 1800s. The French sociologist also had a profound influence on American politics and the making of the Constitution of the United States of 1788. One of his most known works was his essay *Democracy in*

America, published in 1835, where he showed his wish to offer an uninformed public to American society and institutions. Many historians recognize this work as one of the most extensive and insightful books written about the United States. In the essay, his definition of democracy was very influential at his time. Before Tocqueville, democracy was understood as a 'social and legal state', but the French scientist defined it as a 'society dominated not only by equality of conditions but also by the people's sovereignty' (Audier, 2006). Another theme was his view on individualism. For him, being an individualist meant to retreat one's private life with one's family and friends, abandoning the "great community," where one fulfills several civic obligations. Basically, to separate men from their peers (Audier, 2006). He relates this to the private sphere, the opposite of the public sphere we have often stated before. Tocqueville feared that individualism would lead to the private sphere and cause rejection of political participation, exposing a rift that threatened the power of the State. Scholar Richard Sennett criticized Tocqueville's perspective on this idea. The author laments the debilitation of public-spiritedness and the decay of the rules of 'civility' (Audier, 2006). Sennett believes that this 'incivility' that invaded democratic societies would lead to society putting the weight of one's personality on others. Furthermore, he noted that these new ideas would have severe outcomes for politics, altering party leaders' communication methods, who would now be more concerned by their "image," leading to a propensity among the audience to judge them more on their "personality" than their behavior. This would be weakening the structural political communication dynamics. These analyses are relevant to mention to show – according to Sennett- the invasion of public life by private life and the changes in political communication.

On the other hand, another important topic that we should deeply analyze – and that we have stated earlier in this work- is propaganda. As we have mentioned before, propaganda is information aimed to form or change one's mind about a subject. It is often interested in people's feelings and tries to touch emotions like patriotism, fear, or anger to impulse the audience to believe a particular idea (Doeden, 2019). News and propaganda are not the same because the latter does not try to be objective and neutral. On the contrary, propaganda is often misleading and confusing and does not show all the sides to a story, only the ones that will make the public change their opinion.

Two theorists are worth mentioning when talking about communication; Theodor Adorno and Harold Lasswell. Theodor Adorno was a German philosopher and sociologist that studied the orientation of the extremist left-wing in politics. Adorno's ideas were formed at the crossroads of German neo-hegemonism and avant-garde criticism of culture. A big part of his studies was related to capitalism – which he often criticized- and nontransparent

democracy. Another field of study for the German philosopher was fascism and its mass physiological basis. He identified a logic of ego behind fascism and its communication, and he understood prejudice as the structure that fascism depended on (Poe, 2018). Nevertheless, we will focus on the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, the school Adorno attended. This school has an extended relevance in the history of communication and culture. Adorno gave a sole viewpoint to this field of study (Morgan, 2013). The main interest of the Frankfurt School theorists around Adorno's time was the analysis of Marxist social and economic processes. In terms of communications theories, there is a significant relevance to Adorno's idea of the culture industry. According to the philosopher, this culture industry arose as the outcome of a historical phenomenon; the progression of technology. As technology - and also mass media technology- increased, there was a greater consumption of goods. The production of new technological products, particularly film and radio, commenced new ways to create entertainment. The key idea is that with the development of new entertainment purposes, the audience did not consider that the products they consumed could have ideological goals. Consumers tailored their lives around these cultural goods, and the entertainment they absorbed daily deluded them from challenging the dominant system. Therefore, Theodor Adorno's theory showed that the public can not realize that it is being manipulated when it is under the influence of the culture industry.

On the other hand, Harold Lasswell – an American political scientist – created in 1948 one of the most influential theories in communication, mostly known as the *Lasswell model of communication* or *lineal model*. This model is used to analyze and evaluate a communication process and its components (Brenan, 2019). It was first revealed to investigate mass communication and media propaganda – although it is also used nowadays as a tool for interpersonal or group communication. The main idea of the model was to describe a suitable act of communication by defining a number of components that have to be asked and answered: who - says what - in which channel - to whom and with what effects. This is called the “5W” model (Wenxiu, 2015). Lasswell’s model basically divides the communication process into these five elements, and with these components’ researchers can adequately describe a communication process. The model is also used as a tool to analyze these communication processes. Following we will add a deeper understanding of the components and also Lasswell’s explanation of their analysis.

- *Who?* The communicator or sender of the message. Based on ‘control analysis’, which helps the sender own all the power.
- *Says what?* A message and its content. Part of ‘content analysis’, associated with the ultimate purpose of the message.

- *In which channel?* The medium or media. Based on the 'media analysis', to show which is the ideal medium.
- To whom? The audience/receiver. The 'audience analysis' shows how the target audience can be manipulated.
- *With what effect?* Effect/the feedback. The 'effect analysis' which is the "relation between the presentation of facts and how it generates different effects" (Brenan, 2019).

This model is often criticized for being basic and simplistic. It is also said to be based on propaganda and too focused on manipulating media (Wenxiu, 2015). Despite these criticisms, Lasswell's communication model is very relevant in the communication field of study and has been one of the most influential ones since the American theorist presented it.

3. New mediums in politics

The way politics work has changed over time. Nowadays, political messages in media are studied to see the media's power in this field. In the last decade, many experts focused their studies on analyzing the impact of mass media on the public's behavior and how political parties send their messages through mass media. Nevertheless, as many researchers seek to understand how organizations use media to communicate and persuade the audience in support of their cause, many articles are now being written about how the media has changed not only public behavior but also political behavior (Street, 2001).

3.1 Old media and new media relationship

We now live in a mass communication era based on moving images and fast information. In this shift, we see the difference that old media and new media bring to politics in modern eras. In what is now considered 'old media', political candidates used nonpolitical and entertainment media to send their messages. Candidates' priority was to reach those voters who were not interested in print or television (Owen, 2014), which were the primary forms of information at the time. Nowadays, in what we understand as 'new media', political actors seek widespread coverage, which comes from being on the cover of a newspaper or of a fashion magazine and appearing in the news or talk shows (Baum, 2005). This type of change in media laid the foundation for a new kind of personalized soft news coverage that penetrated the twenty-first-century new media and its campaigns (Owen, 2014).

3.1.1 The different phases from old media to 'The Big Shift'

Up until now, we have been mentioning 'old media' and 'new media'. It is easy to see that the way we communicate has evolved throughout the years, hand to hand with technology. Furthermore, with this, media and information have also changed. The American researcher Diana Owen, whom we have mentioned before, established in her paper 'New Media and Political Campaigns', three media phases that throughout history lead to where we are now. From old media to new communication platforms that have created new ways to send political messages across numerous channels. The researcher's main idea is that the configuration of new mediums - and therefore new politics - comes mainly from technological innovations. Owen states that new media arrived in the late 1980s when entertainment platforms in traditional media gave

noticeable space to political information. Politicians took over these mainstream platforms to take over the news agenda. These lead politicians to show a more personal and friendlier side outside of their public role. It was then when the first candidates appeared in the first talk shows and radio entertainment programs. This mix of politics and entertainment created a closer and personal image for the candidate, which set the tone for the campaign and attracted those audiences who were not necessarily interested in political information. In this first phase, a momentous event was in 1992 when Bill Clinton, the Democratic candidate, appeared on Arsenio Hall's television talk show, playing the saxophone and wearing sunglasses (Owen, 2017). His appearance on the show made him more reliable and trustworthy because he left his political persona aside and showed himself as an average person – as normal as his potential voters - for the first time. This performance set the tone for other campaigns and the creation of 'celebrity politicians, leading to the current times with Donald Trump and his popularity.

The significant change arrived in the mid-1990s- in phase two- with the notable technological innovations that emerged at the time. The main one was digital communication, which established new ways of delivering messages through new outlets and content delivery services. Political candidates only had basic websites that had barely any elements besides large text messages (Owen, 2014). A shift was made in 2004 when campaign websites incorporated interactive elements that raised the engagement offering the voters new and easier ways to get information. By that time, new media were these interactive websites and blogs, discussion boards, email chains, and online fundraising platforms. These joined campaigns alongside traditional media such as radio, television, or magazines. With these technological modernizations, the public was able to participate in the production and distribution of political content. Some of them were even responsible for sharing information and influencing their close inner circle. The major technological shift was in 2008, during the third and last phase (Owen, 2014). This was when the use of digital technology expanded and got more sophisticated. Political campaigns already implemented all these technologies at that time, but they also incorporated innovations that lead to 'new applications characterized by higher levels of interactive information sharing, networking, collaboration, community-building, and engagement' (Owen, 2014). What marked these phases was Barack Obama's revolutionary digital campaign strategy in 2008 (Owen, 2014). Obama and his team incorporated social media – and new mediums- because they believed that those could be more powerful than traditional media. They adopted advanced digital features that lead to higher collaboration within his voters, and therefore – mainly through social media- he was able to create a more extensive community led by a political movement. The Obama website on the 2008 elections was cutting-edge because voters did not access it only to get information but

also to share videos, distribute camping ads, post comments, donate, volunteer, etcetera. This campaign was a turning point for all the others that came after, and now it is impossible to think of a political campaign that does not incorporate social media and new mediums into its strategy.

Phase	Main Characteristics	Types of media available
Phase 1: 'Old Media' 1992 – 1994	Basic media formats, easy to use that left room for little engagement with the voters and the audience.	Television, radio, tabloids, newspapers, music, websites, etc.
Phase 2: 'New Media' 1996 – 2006	First internet developments that lead to new forms of interaction.	Interactive websites, emails, boards, blogs, meetups, etc.
Phase 3: 'The big shift' 2008 – present	Sophisticated and expanded use of digital technology that allows to create a greater level of engagement with the user.	Social Media, Full-service websites, Mobile device applications, video sharing, etc.

Figure 3. Phases of new media

3.2 New mediums role in politics or Politics role in new media

The new media environment is dynamic and ever-evolving. So much so that sometimes its growth is too rapid and unanticipated, which has consequences on politics and governance. New media has switched the way institutions operate, how political leaders communicate, how citizens commit to different causes, and political campaigns' approach (Owen, 2017). Moreover, it has also shaped and redefined the role of journalists. New media can send information directly to citizens without the need for editorial intervention or gatekeepers. Politics tries to facilitate the spread of information and political ideas through different platforms that promote interaction and collaboration. New mediums have created unprecedented access to information (Owen, 2017). Now they can reach even disinterested audience members through personalized channels, primarily through social media. New media can foster community building that transcends physical boundaries through their extensive networking capabilities. It explicitly seeks to directly engage the public in political activities, such as voting, contacting public officials, volunteering in their communities, and participating in protest movements. At the same time, the new media era has accelerated trends that undercut the ideal aims of a democratic press. The media disseminates a tremendous amount of political content, but much of the material is trivial, unreliable, and polarizing.

The rise of new media also brings adverse outcomes because these technological innovations have also complicated the political-media system. There are no longer stable formats for sharing information. This new media – digital apps, social media, blogs, etcetera – have 'increased the level of instability and unpredictability into the political

communication process' (Owen, 2017). Also, the creation of these new mediums caused the rise of false information and fake news because information travels faster than ever, without any barriers. On the other hand, new media has expanded and surpassed traditional media's role, adding more assets to information-sharing in a fast-pasting and information-craving world. A positive effect that the creation of these new mediums has brought into the picture is a higher chance for political information to travel from person to person, reaching even those less interested. Opinions are now easily shared, creating avenues for engagement that allow the audience to connect with politics more profoundly (Own. 2014).

Furthermore, the public can now take part in the exchange of political information. Traditional media has also incorporated new mediums into their strategies to spread faster information. Therefore, both traditional and new media transport information simultaneously to get as many interactions as ever. Old media relies on new media to send their messages and fair competition. Even though traditional media audiences are not as robust as in the past, their outcomes are still remarkable (considering the weight that new media and its platforms have in 2021).

3.3 Effects of social media

The new media trends that Barack Obama established in the 2008 campaign were then set in all forms of political communication. Mostly what stuck was the use of social media for sharing political information. Nowadays, social media is a universal force in politics that has altered the communication dynamics between politicians, journalists, and the public (Owen, 2014). It is also used by billions of people globally, and it has marked our current technological era (Appel et al., 2019). Defining the term social media is complex, as it often happens with those terms that have a heavyweight in our society and have many approaches. One easy way to explain it is by stating that 'social media is a group of applications based on the Internet that allows individuals or groups to create, collaborate, and share content with each other' (Miljković et al., 2018). Social media has become more culturally significant in the last years because it has converted into the central arena through which many people get large amounts of information. It is also the place to share material and elements of our life with others and learn about the world, even though information we get might be of questionable dependability. Moreover, these new forms of media are upending how traditional media distributes news and discusses major social and political problems (Yang et al., 2016).

Therefore, social media has seized control in nearly every element of modern human existence, which is surprising given that it has only been around for about a decade. It is not an exaggeration to say that social media has guided the most significant media revolution since the invention of the printing press (Arackal, 2016). It has also been the most potent medium that politicians use to show a more personal side of themselves, wishing to get more interactions and, therefore, more voters. In fact, candidates' social media engagement, particularly during election season, can highly impact their success and careers (Yang et al., 2016). This is because political campaigning on social media includes inter-personal constructs: most voters talk about political issues and candidates with their friends and family, evaluating information and forming their own opinions. Their discussions include information exchange, political debates, and issue-specific news (Arackal, 2016). The youth may be more affected by social media's inter-personal effects since they read more news online and use the internet more frequently than any other source.

Once upon a time, television was widely regarded as the most effective means of political communication. In today's world, social media is the go-to location for individuals to spend their time and discuss topics that interest them (Arackal, 2016). Moreover, politicians and candidates used to employ public relations agencies to interact with their voters, so they did not have to do it personally. However, in the age of social media, a political candidate cannot delegate their social media presence to employees. Their public relations must be handled on a one-on-one basis. Politicians and candidates must engage in social media not randomly but in ways that open communication channels to a demanding public openness. Nevertheless, the interactions with the audience are not always positive. As it is known, social media has good outcomes, but it also has a negative side. For political leaders, this negative side translates to more scrutiny than ever, and that they are held more accountable for their actions because they are constantly sharing – and sometimes oversharing- on their social media platforms. There has also been a shift in the last phase of the quality and quantity offered by political information. Technological advances allow information to travel freely and without limit. Therefore, content can be shared without filtering, checking, or judgment (Owen, 2014). This is why social media is like no other form of media because people with no journalistic abilities or training can reach millions of individuals in a matter of seconds. This idea aligns with Manuel Castells' Mass Self Communication theory. This concept can be defined as a new form of communication capable of reaching global audiences using digital media. The primary approach relies upon the idea that "the message that is sent is self-generated, the definition of the potential receiver is self-directed, and the retrieval of specific messages is self-selected" (Castells, 2009). This is to say that mass self-communication is the use of digital media

in which users can create their own content via chosen sites and potentially reach a global audience (Cooley, Cooley, Kitsch, & Hinck, 2021). Due to this, we are now more exposed to information than any other generation before us. Moreover, political information is hidden in private and entertainment posts, which causes that even those who are not interested in taking part in political activities often find political information in their feed (Gottfried & Shearer, 2016).

3.4 Political digitalization

In the context of a society that is changing due to the digitalization of content and the possibilities that are deriving from this type of change, political communication is also changing. It is changing because it has to adapt to the new regimes, such as the way of interacting with the public, which is no longer like it used to be. Additionally, on the digital side it is harder now to disseminate what are true or false news, and therefore there are more possibilities for false information to circulate.

Digitalization in the modern era has provided more opportunities for the public to participate in information and social spheres (Saud et al., 2020). Especially in the intensified use of social media, which has contributed to the change of the preferences in voting. As we said, sites like Facebook and Twitter -among all the others- are news ways in which we communicate. Moreover, as we have seen, these new ways have been a game-changer that have affected political discourse (Römmele, 2018).

The internet allows everyone to publish at any time because its capacity is limitless. According to Professor Dr. Andrea Römmele, in her paper Digitalization of political discourse and its threat to democracy, social media has revolutionized the political communication field. Dr. Römmele main area of study is analyzing how digitalization is changing how citizens participate in democratic processes. Every new form of communication that appeared opened a new door throughout the years, from the first printed book to the first televised debate. However, now, with new mediums, there is one significant difference. For Dr. Römmele, this big change is the fact that "access to publishing in traditional media was always restricted and thereby easier to regulate. The internet, to the contrary, allows everyone to publish at any time because its capacity is limitless" (Römmele, 2018). Moreover, she adds that it has been a "long-cherished dream" to have unlimited access to information, which leads to a new age of informed citizens. Therefore, Dr. Römmele states that this digitalization of political discourse comes with its risks. One of them is the strength that those in power - so, most politicians- have over this digital discourse, which leads them to control the digital narrative. One example exposed

by Römmele is the hiring of over five hundred people by Philippines' president Rodrigo Duterte, to distort online information and discourse during an electoral campaign (Römmele, 2018). Here is where algorithms come into the picture. Since all the information online is not easily manageable - instead of having traditional gatekeepers such as journalists - political discourse online is structured by algorithms. These mechanisms chose information based on numbers and previous engagements, not based on reliable and ethical ideals. According to Dr. Römmele, Social Media companies offer their clients the tools to identify their audience to appeal to them and reach a broader spectrum of possible voters. Brad Parscale, the digital director of the 2016 Trump campaign, admitted to having used over fifty thousand different advertisements per day on Facebook, to aim at a specific target audience (Römmele, 2018). As the conflicting fronts of the digitalization of the political discourse surface and become more apparent, Dr. Römmele states that regulation has to become 'louder'. However, this will be a complicated process since the regulation of social media is nearly impossible because we do not have enough mechanisms to control it and because companies and political parties are not willing to let go of the power that social media gives them.

In another paper related to political digitalization - 'The Social Media and Digitalization of Political Participation in Youths' - Muhammad Saud and his co-authors state that this new form of digital discourse also affects the public's political participation, especially of the youth (Saud et al., 2020). That is why they admit that Social Media has changed participation among voters and the public since people use the internet daily. Therefore, the authors state that 'the use of the internet as a medium can influence participation in the political process (Saud et al., 2020). The proliferation of digital technologies has changed the political dynamics, which becomes possible due to the widespread social media. Consequently, these new forms of sharing information have been recognized as social change techniques that can be effectively used for political learning and voter socialization and, therefore, affect political participation. Professor Yannis Theocharis suggested in 2015 that political engagement studies must look into digital platform affordances such as social networking sites. However, social media and political participation are methods of distributing material to followers, and the main goal is to share with the followers some specific issues. This type of participation can affect political knowledge and behavior and, most importantly, encourage participation.

4. The politician

4.1 Political figure

The leader in a political party or election is an actor on whom the image of a specific party rests due to the existing *personification*. The person by which voters must place their trust to direct the public administration or a public role. However, the mediatization of political information – either through traditional media or new media - requires an effort from politicians and their advisors because they have to decide which daily political reality to show to potential voters through the media's eyes. Moreover, nowadays, we find that political candidates are not leaders only for their intellectual, economic, or political qualities, but especially for their media capacity (Viounnikoff-Benet, 2017). Most researchers align this idea with the theory of mass culture. This doctrine has the debate between the real and the imaginary as the main components. The symbolism of the messages, their aesthetic, and the playful dimension also play a significant role in this idea. In addition to this, most argue that the public image results from the interaction between the candidate's projects and what the voter perceives. Therefore, the politician's image is the main characteristic that defines the outcome of elections (Viounnikoff-Benet, 2017). An excellent political image is not the one that reflects reality but the one that sends a favorable perception of the candidate, even if this perception is far from the truth. Hence, the political image consists of making up or decorating the politician's identity to persuade the voters. For instance, as we have seen earlier, Obama is known as the president who has best managed his image. He succeeded in annexing the compendium of creating the storytelling of his public character. He knew how to take advantage of every detail of his personal life to show himself to the citizens as the best choice. Through his image, the public achieved to relate with different facets of the candidate, connecting to a more personal and closer Obama.

4.2 Duality between the private person and the politician

4.2.1 Why is private life relevant in an electoral campaign?

The personification of campaigns has forcefully raised the importance of the image for the politician. And more especially nowadays, when there are mediums capable of bringing that image to millions of viewers. This tendency towards spectacularization has gradually incorporated aspects of the private life of political actors into public life. Their personality, feelings, and family have sometimes become general knowledge. These personal elements have managed to capture journalistic attention in a context with solid competition. Even so, sometimes this personal information captures more attention than

the actual political information politicians send. Moreover, these personal insights help the electorate choose according to their desires. Most of those align with the idea that the voters do not want to elect someone perceived as dishonest, clumsy, unfair, immoral, corrupt, or incompetent. Therefore, it is fundamental to have media capacity and know-how to transfer proximity through their actions before the camera since citizens want close leaders (Viounnikoff-Benet, 2017). In modern times the path to understanding the integrity of a person, and its consequent ability to be a good actor in public life, is evaluated through their real virtue and authenticity. In the sense that voters judge leaders' personal characteristics more than their electoral or political programs. Then, they don't base their vote on whether they are aligned with the party's political ideas. Instead, they judge if they can identify with the politician's personal, moral, and sentimental characteristics. People want to recognize themselves with the politicians, and often this ability of identification is more important than politics. Therefore, leadership is based on the idea of identification. We can see this with the intention of some leaders to discredit their political opponents, not for their political qualities, but for their individual abilities. Generate an image of the adversary with which no one can or wants to feel identified.

This is why the personification of the candidate has become the successful formula to get voters. This idea is what Sandra Orejuela defends in her research 'Personalización política: La imagen del político como estrategia electoral'. The academic states that 'proximity is key' and that it is essential to send persuasive messages that symbolize personal attributes and aspects of the politician's private life. This personalization technique is an electoral strategy because it requires the intentionality of whoever directs an election process. On the other hand, personalization implies a skill through which it is sought to achieve a specific purpose: to publicize a political project through personal and private qualities (Orejuela, 2019). Like any electoral strategy, personalization aims to persuade, to convince a target audience of the benefits of a political project. To do this, it uses all the media resources and techniques available. Then, they send the personal image of the candidate, which becomes a symbol and a message within the complex universe of electoral communication. Therefore, Orejuela's personalization idea is that the candidate is the center of a campaign strategy. Consequently, it is safe to affirm that the candidate is also in the center of what is being said and is the reason for persuasion in this theory. In personalized election campaigns, the politician becomes the main context of the message (Orejuela, 2019), more than their political beliefs. Then, personalization is used as the common thread between the figure and the qualities of the candidate.

4.2.2 *Private and political spheres*

The political image is the sum of what the candidate is, but also what they project, and, above all, what the voters perceive (Orejuela, 2019). Electoral campaigns essentially are the mix of combining the citizens' expectations with the actual figure of the candidate. Hence, in the personification strategy, the image of the politician moves in two areas. The first is one - which configures the entire creation of the image- is the personal sphere. The second is the candidate's political sphere, where the political messages are sent. The blend between both is when that private and public image becomes part of a communication strategy. We speak of areas to distinguish two spaces in which the politician moves. In both, the candidate's image is part of a political communication process and is a message because it communicates (Orejuela, 2019).

Every politician has a public image, and this in itself already constitutes a message. However, not all political campaigns count on personalized messages, which means that the candidate's image and *persona* are not used as a communication strategy in all campaigns. It is essential to reinforce this distinction to distinguish the difference between the personalization of the message - understood as a communication strategy- and the personalization caused by other factors. For example, the media can provide a more significant dose of personalization in a campaign if the media decides to focus the information on personal matters of the candidate, which in their opinion provides data about them. It could also happen that the candidate's image captures the attention of the campaign debate without it being part of the electoral plan. On the other hand, a politician's personal performance and life can also lead to personalizing the political dialogue. This has happened, for example, with President Sarkozy, following his divorce and the remarriage with the model Carla Bruni. The news focused world attention on the figure of the French ruler and not precisely because of his government activities. In this, we see how personalization was not a communication strategy but rather that the personal image of the candidate jumped to the forefront of the information due to other circumstances and captured the attention of the media and citizens.

4.2.3 *The private sphere as a political tool*

Some politicians choose to showcase their private lives - and their families and day-to-day activities - to the world. They mainly do so to get more votes; therefore, they use their lives as a communication strategy. They show a series of content that is part of one more element of the communication approach of the permanent campaign or the electoral campaign. It is a common practice nowadays in politics for candidates to post images of

their lives. Most of which are of their families or friends (Medero, 2013). A good photo of a politician surrounded by his own that proves that he is a family man - the prototype of what too many societies, here and there, want to see in the presidency of their countries- can be more potent than a televised interview (Medero, 2013). This is because the candidate is then shown as a role model that inspires the nation. And in current times, with social media and permanent campaigning, politicians have to offer a private life that lives up to their citizens' expectations. That is why most male candidates in a presidential election have the image of an endearing and protective father. This picture has been repetitive because if the candidate can prove that he takes care of his family, the public instinctively believes that he can take care of his country. Although it seems difficult to believe, this tremendously paternalistic vision of politics has made it difficult for single and divorced people to access higher political positions. However, what is seen in private life is not limited to these types of images. Other personal scenes are used to complete the portrait of politicians. Most decide to show that in their private life - "away from politics" - they go to cultural events, do positive things for the environment, exercise and have a healthy lifestyle, take care of their loved ones, and more (Medero, 2013).

If the candidate decides to share these personal messages, it shows that they are transparent. Citizens see those inputs as a way into the politicians' way of thinking, and - when they know more about their personal life- it makes them believe they know the candidate personally. Even if the information they have received has only been sent for political reasons. Also, we now live in a time where it seems as if politicians want to show and present their private lives more than before. They do so by posting on social media, as any other citizen would. But, of course, we have to keep in mind that they are not like any other citizen because they work for the public administration. This leads to two ideas:

- *Politicians have always been seen as serious and protective individuals.* Historically, we have always seen personal information of politicians' flow through different media outlets. But – as we have seen in this research- old and new media are not the same. Hence, when they post on social media, it sends a different message to when they share something on national television. Usually, when they post personal assets of their lives on social media, it can be even more personal than what they can share on traditional media.
- *Also, everyone can post on their social media – and mostly everyone does - but not everyone can do a personalized interview on television or radio stations.* This is why, when politicians share personal posts on their social media it makes them closer to their audience. The reason behind it is because they are seen as less

distant and formal, and they are perceived as more 'mundane', just like any other citizen (Jakić, 2021).

However, we have to keep in mind that they do not only post because they want to, but because they know it will get them more voters. Posting and sharing personal information raises the engagement, especially of the youth (which is the part of society that tends to disassociate from politics the most). Moreover, they send political messages hidden between these personal posts/messages, hoping to raise engagement and get their message sent to more people.

Therefore, the primary way to show these private parts of the candidates' life is through the media – and nowadays through social media. And there are a few democratic consequences of the appearance of the private life of political actors on social media and the media. One has to do with the humanization of politicians, which allows them to establish close ties with citizens that can lead to the creation of *emotional* relations. This, in addition to contributing into the construction of the leader's image, can reduce disaffection and citizen withdrawal from politics. Political actors intentionally use personal self-presentation as a communicative strategy to establish connections with citizens, especially during the electoral campaign (Casero-Ripolles, Ortells, & Rosique, 2014). On these occasions, they do not hesitate to show their most human side and present their family members to the whole of society. Something that brings out contradictions between the speeches and practices of politicians. The use of the intimate self-presentation strategy by political actors to facilitate their connection with voters can become a double-edged sword. This is because it can be challenging to maintain the boundaries between private and public when access to specific intimate details has been voluntarily allowed.

5. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez

For this bachelor's thesis case study, I chose to analyze the American politician Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. I decided to study AOC - name as she is also known for - because I have been very interested in her political and communication strategies for the last couple of years. She has become a 'celebrity' and a popular subject. She attends some of the most exclusive parties in fashion and movies, has worked with magazines such as Vogue, and even has a documentary on Netflix. And on top of all of this - and much more- she manages to have a solid political career, despite being a young woman and daughter of immigrants, characteristics that are not common in the American political sphere. I wanted to discover how she manages to duel her political career with being one of the most known and popular politicians in current times. And how she uses traditional media and her personal accounts to reach her followers and the rest of the nation.

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez is an American politician and activist, mostly known for being a member of the United States Congress for the Democratic Party. The thirty-one-year-old Congresswoman was elected to represent New York's 14th congressional district in 2018 and was reelected in 2020. The section the U.S Representative serves includes: The eastern part of the Bronx, Portions of north-central Queens and Rikers Island in New York City.

In her first term, AOC took office at age twenty-nine, making her the youngest woman to ever serve in the U.S Congress. Both her elections have gathered a large amount of media attention. Nevertheless, she won most of her popularity in the 2018 midterm elections, when she defeated Joe Crowley, who had led the office for over ten terms (Kraemer, 2019). This, mixed with her young age, her narrative, and political solid and socialist beliefs, has kept her in the spotlight ever since. Also, her background plays an essential role in her politics and her career. Representative Ocasio-Cortez grew up experiencing the reality of New York's rising inequality since she lived in the Bronx. Moreover, her mom is from Puerto Rico, making AOC American but also Latina ("Biography," 2021).

AOC is now being considered as a big part of the Democratic Party's future. Moreover, as a young Latina woman, she has filled a political seat that has always been empty. This is a reason why now many Americans feel a connection with her. She represents the more progressive beliefs inside her party, identifying herself as a democratic socialist (Alter, 2019). She has become very popular for her strong anticapitalistic ideas, especially among progressive millennials, therefore, part of the country's youth. This new generation of democrats accords with AOC's most relevant issues such as "the Green New Deal,

Medicare for All, tuition-free public colleges, a federal job guarantee and abolishing ICE" (Alter, 2019). In this set of policies - most popularized by Bernie Sanders's 2016 campaign - she threatens the status quo, bringing a youthful collection of ideas and perspectives into the American political system, often considered archaic and old-fashioned.

In current times, she is seen as a 'political phenomenon' since she is considered an activist, legislator, and a 'celebrity or star' (Alter, 2019). AOC is also known for her social media presence, which is significantly higher than her fellow members of Congress.

5.1 Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's political communication

As of 2021, Representative Ocasio-Cortez has over 21 million followers between personal Twitter and Instagram accounts combined. Weekly she reports about policies on Instagram live streams while she waters her plants in her apartment or eats a pint of ice cream lying on the couch, with thousands of viewers on the line. She has already been on the cover of Time Magazine, in the feature 'Time 100 most influential people of 2019'. She stars in a Netflix documentary – 'Knock Down the House'- along with three other working-class women in politics. She is portrayed as a 'villain' – replacing Hillary Clinton – in the popular right-wing news outlet, Fox News. Her signature look – red lips and hair slicked back - is copied and known worldwide. Moreover, the same day she revealed on Instagram the name of her favorite red lipstick, 'Beso by Stila', it sold out. Before the 2020 election, she was named 'the second most talked American politician', and she was not even a candidate (Lewinstein, 2019). Furthermore, she is known as the 'meteoric star' of the Democratic Party. But, what has she done to be this influential? As we will mention in this chapter, the answer most researchers give is that her communication style is different from everyone else's.

AOC is often compared to Barack Obama since they are both charismatic and seem visually intelligent and sharp (Shaw, 2019). We have to remember that Obama has been mentioned before in this work for his pioneer form of communication. Rep. Ocasio-Cortez is the cutting-edge of politics, as she moves away from traditional and standard practices as one of the first members of Congress to be part of the generation of digital natives (Lewinstein, 2019). She knows the media and knows how to make it play in her favor. This is because she is an intelligent consumer of media and often leverages coverage of herself in her values and policies. Moreover, the fact that she went from being a waitress in a Bronx bar in months to being an elected official has helped expand the public's view on her and other lawmakers. We can describe her communication strategy as one based on 'far-left political activism' and 'anti-elite rhetoric in the name of the people' (Shaw, 2019).

A large amount of her communication strategy is guided by visuals (Shaw, 2019). Her use of photography and videos to tell her story has played a vital role in all her elections, and it is still relevant in her imagery. Therefore, we can say that she heavily relies on visual narratives. Margherita Rasulo describes AOC's communication as 'home-style politics', in her work 'Experience Doesn't Pay the Bills'. The author also describes her narrative as 'unapologetic' and 'controversial'. In his article 'The visual power of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez', Michael Shaw argues that the politician's communication strategy is 'surprisingly intimate'. She has mastered what is known as digital-intimacy, a term coined by David M. Perry (Cheung, 2019). Mireya Jacuinde in 'Queen of Clackback' portrays Ocasio-Cortez as a 'young-modern day politician'. All of these inputs she represents have shaped her political and communication identity, setting her apart from traditional American politicians.

The fact that she is often seen as an *outsider* also differentiates her from others. Michael Shaw and Jenna F. Lewinstein both agree on this idea, noting that Ocasio-Cortez is seen as an outsider because of the way we imagine a political insider. An *insider* is a member of a major block party and an elite member with economic interests with a long political career who tends to be a heterosexual white man with a postgraduate degree (Lewinstein, 2019). However, AOC represents almost the opposite of these ideas.

5.2 Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's media coverage

To understand her communication and the imagery around AOC, it is also helpful to look into how the media portrays her character. In this case, Rep. Ocasio-Cortez's media coverage is especially interesting due to her symbiotic interaction with traditional media and becoming a political celebrity (Beaupre, 2019). The different media outlets' views and political positionings can shape public opinion about a character in different directions. AOC herself once admitted that she is seen as 'America's number one villain' or 'the new hope,' depending on the news media and how they differ the information about her (Jacuinde, 2019). Fox News - a conservative and right-wing news outlet- tends to criticize every aspect of Ocasio-Cortez's life, from her politics to her makeup, clothes, or even her boyfriend. Moreover, this outlet mentioned AOC more than any 2020 Democratic presidential candidate (Jacuinde, 2019). Consequently, all conservative news media in the United States portray her negatively. That could explain why in Quinnipiac's University Poll in 2019, 74% of Republican voters' view on Rep. Ocasio-Cortez was unfavorable, and only 2% viewed her as favorable. Although she is seen detrimentally in conservative media, AOC is also seen as a role model or a leader in other outlets. Hence, among Democrats, she is seen as favorable for a majority (Jacuinde, 2019). However, after her

first election and her quick rise to fame - and her immediate strong coverage in news outlets - did not sit right with other Democratic leaders. She was seen as a threat to the House of Representatives and the presidency since all the coverage was about her and not other consolidated possible candidates.

5.3 Rep. Ocasio-Cortez's use of Social Media

In order to send her messages – political or personal – Rep. Ocasio-Cortez established an identity-based connection with her constituents (Rasulo, 2020). She does it through her social media accounts, especially Twitter and Instagram, and she uses mainly these two platforms as an agenda-setting tool. Therefore, the primary strategy used by AOC to frame her messages is sharing information through Instagram and Twitter. Indeed, these are two of the most popular social media platforms worldwide (Jacuinde, 2019). Through these platforms, she has made a name for herself and has created her own identity and political stance, making her a successful public figure in the media world.

We live in the digitalization era, where politicians use different mediums to speak and behave in a mediatized environment. In AOC's case, she uses social media as coverage for her identity and her values and policies (Shaw, 2019). In fact, her Instagram, Twitter, and Youtube are her leading platforms used for agenda-setting and effective self-representation.

Moreover, - as we mentioned- her strategy is highly related to the connection she has with her electorate and other supporters - because she has a more extensive reach than just her district since she also discusses other local, national, and international issues on her platforms. In addition, on her social media, she is open about her struggles, and often shows 'behind the scenes' of what it is like being a member of Congress. Something that a significant majority of politicians do not feel comfortable doing. This is why Jacuinde notes that 'AOC is not your ordinary politician'. It seems as if she plans to create a sense of transparency on her social media accounts, allowing her followers to feel more included, and therefore, more engaged in her content and beliefs. This matches the idea mentioned before in this work, stating how politics is becoming more accessible and transparent to the public. And Rep. Ocasio-Cortez can be considered a pioneer in this new imaginary. Moreover, she has managed to obtain a large following, not because of her experience as a political figure, but because she knows her audience and how to interact and engage with them.

Since she entered the political sphere, she has been very vocal on social media, which has led to many supporters and critics (Beaupre, 2019). A big part of her social media

followers are Millennials and Gen Z (Jacuinde, 2019). Her use of these platforms has blended into this new and emerging political spectrum of the youth in America. Her slang, use of emojis, casualness, and bitterness against her rivals - among other aspects- has made her popular among the younger demographic, who also feel related to her political views.

5.3.1 Instagram

We are mainly going to focus on Instagram for reasons we will further explain in the following chapters. This famous social media platform was created by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger in October of 2010 and has later on been sold to Facebook Inc. (Jacuinde, 2019). The application has evolved since the beginning, when users could only share photographs on their 'feed'. Now, they can share these digital photographs with their followers, but they can also post temporary clips on 'My Story,' which are only available for twenty-four hours (unless they are permanently saved or archived). In these 'Stories,' users can do polls, share music, locations, other posts, and much more. Another new feature on Instagram is the possibility to live-stream video footage with their following. It has also recently launched IGTV for longer-form videos, similar to the Youtube format. According to Schmidbauer, Rösch, and Stieler (2018), 60% of Instagram users are 18-35, implying that this social media platform interests a younger demographic.

Instagram is also commonly used nowadays in the political field. Users follow politicians to feel more connected to them. And politicians use it to share images of their personal life - as well as politics - which creates a higher engagement and makes the audience feel part of the journey. Jay David Bolter - from The Atlantic - notes that this platform is AOC's more effective social media. On Instagram, she is casual, personal, and more approachable. Andrea González-Ramírez also states that her presence on this app has made her accessible 'in a way no other lawmaker has in the past'. Rep. Ocasio-Cortez's casual use of Instagram has humanized her experience as a modern politician in America. She uses the platform during campaigns but also during her day-to-day life in Congress. AOC has used her social media presence to make politics accessible to the average citizen since she also uses it to brand policies - she often mentions policies like the Green New Deal or racial inequality on this application. Her Instagram stardom began shortly after her first election - when she started sharing and documenting parts of her political role and lifestyle in Congress - offering her audience a peek into a process that remains foreign to many people outside the political sphere.

6. Analysis of AOC's communication

6.1 Methodology

This bachelor thesis will base its analysis on a case study of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's social media profile. The case study is based on a deep analysis of AOC's social media presence. The methodological approach allows in-depth, multi-faceted explorations of complex issues in their real-life settings, and will use a based on mixed method approach because it uses more than one form of data. According to researcher Nicholas Chileshe, there are five different stages in the case study methodology. First, to define the research question, which we have previously done and settled. Second, find the instrument to develop the research question. Third, gather all the data and forth; analyze this data. Lastly, disseminate the data.

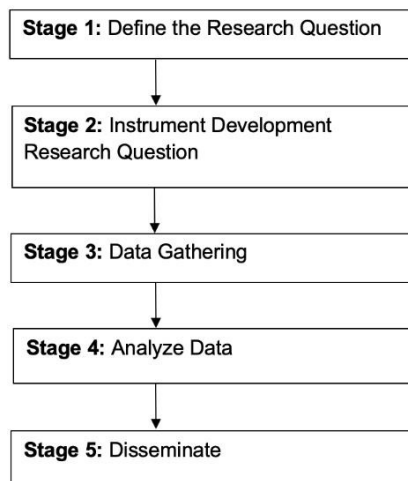


Figure 4. Five stages of the Case Study methodology

Therefore, we will analyze her discourse, messages, and feedback through her Instagram posts in different periods. Consequently, the analysis will have different phases:

- **First phase.** *Discourse analysis.* What does AOC say and do?
- **Second phase.** Messages analysis. Which is her political language? Does AOC address the world of political ideas or appeals to personal experience? Alternatively, how is she able to combine both.
- **Third phase.** *The feedback, the responses, or reactions from the public.* Check which kind of reactions AOC is getting to find out which kind of relationship she is building with her public (relationship thought ideas, emotions, her personality, etc).

Why Instagram? As we have seen in this paper numerous times, Instagram - alongside Twitter and Facebook- is one of the most relevant and used apps in today's time.

Moreover, it is an app that AOC uses frequently and can show us a clear picture of what we are seeking, and also it can give us the answers to our questions.

When will we gather the data? We will do the case study during two different short time periods - mid-November and mid-December - to better understand her use on Instagram and how and what she posts.

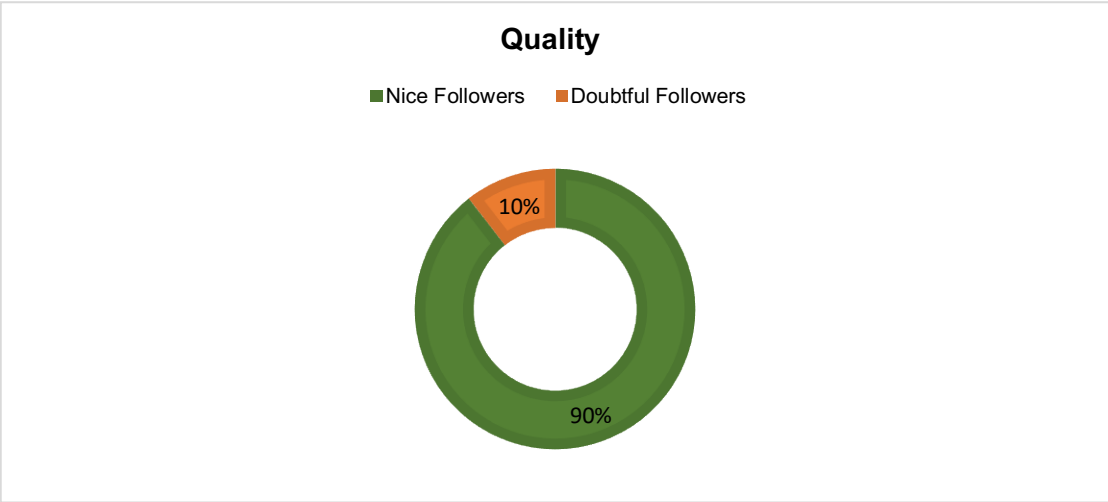
6.2 Information about AOC's Instagram account

Before doing our analyses, it is key to research how Ocasio-Cortez's Instagram account looks like, its main components, and detailed information. To do so, we used *Influency*, one of the most completed AI-powered Influencer Marketing platforms. This platform is used for worldwide brands and agencies because it gives a whole stack of solutions to manage and optimize influencer campaigns at scale. Therefore, *Influency* gathers information and breaks down – with statistics- different social media accounts and gives its clients an overview of specific creators. In this case, we looked up AOC's Instagram account - @aoc – to have a more detailed knowledge of her use of Instagram.

- ***What we found out:***

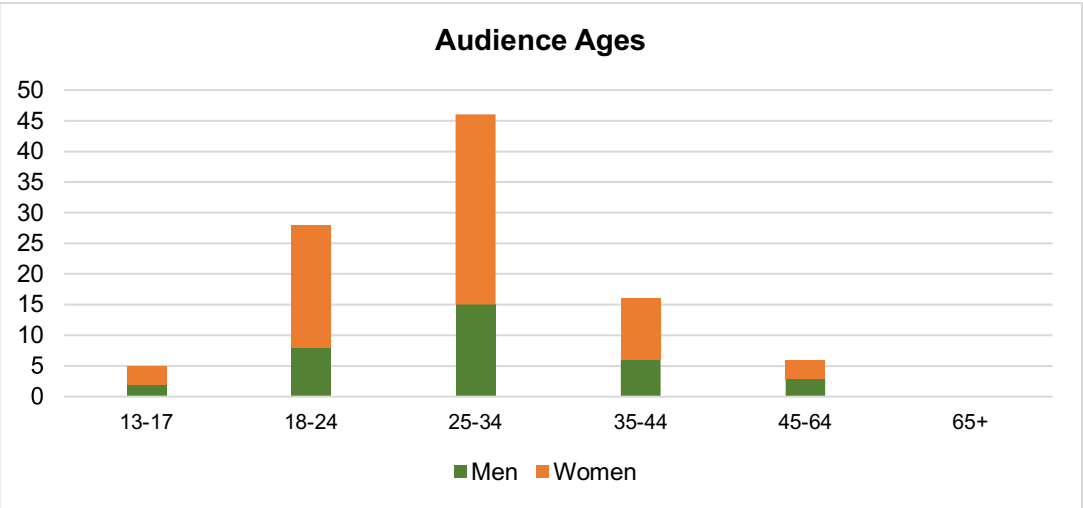
On the day we used *Influency* to gather the information – which was November 13th, 2021- @aoc had 8.690.000 followers, she was following 2.000 accounts and had a 4,88% engagement with her followers and 424.000 average interaction. *Engagement* is the average likes divided by followers. Compared with other 'influencers' of the same community size, AOC has a median engagement rate.

Influency, can also tell the quality of the followers the account has. It knows it by establishing the follower's credibility score for historical followers and considers factors such as an account's avatar and bio description, the number of posts, or the number of accounts followed compared to the following ratio. In our case, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez has 7.780.000 'nice followers' and only 911.590 'doubtful followers'. The platforms established that 'influencers with a genuine audience will attain scores of 80 or above'. Therefore, we can guess that AOC has a positive and genuine following.

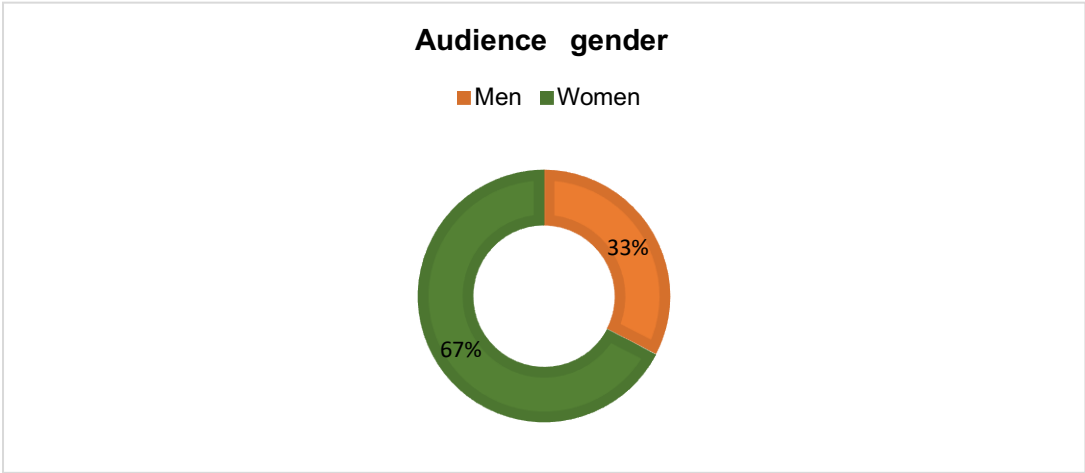


In terms of the average activity split – which is the average reaction to expect in one post-AOC gets an average of 826.780 video views, 418.170 likes and 5.980 comments. They get this information based on the activity on her posts. Her most used hashtags are: #greennewdeal, #stayhome, #nowarwithiran, #raisethewage, #medicalcareforall, #notmeus, #internationalwomensday, #chanukah, #gengnd, #payourinterms, #sotu, #georgefloyd, #teamaoc, #callmeradical and #cop26.

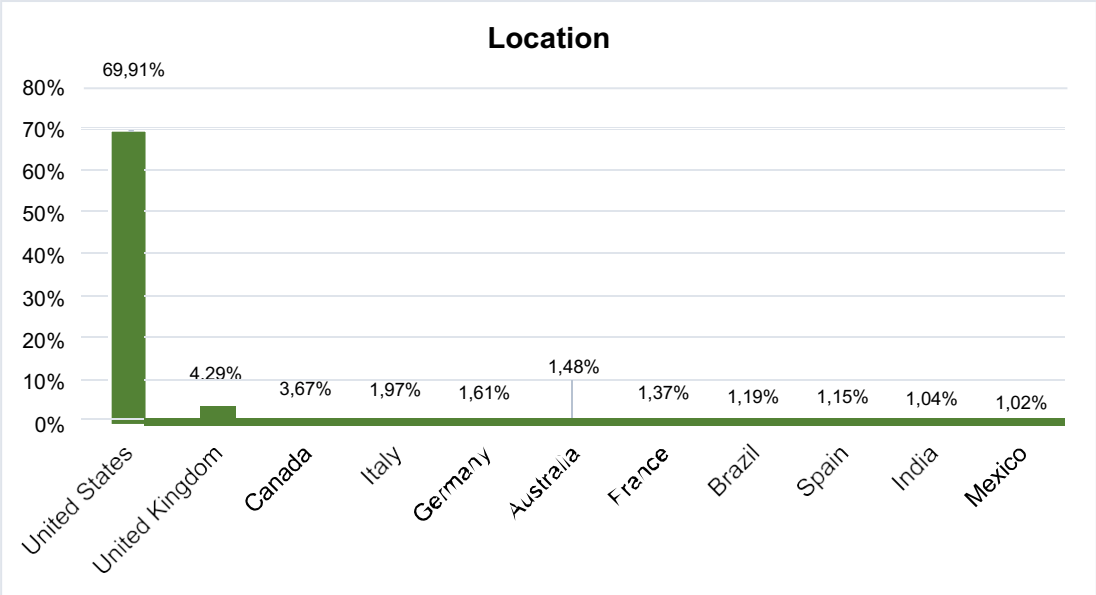
The ages – and specific sec by age - of her audience are the following:



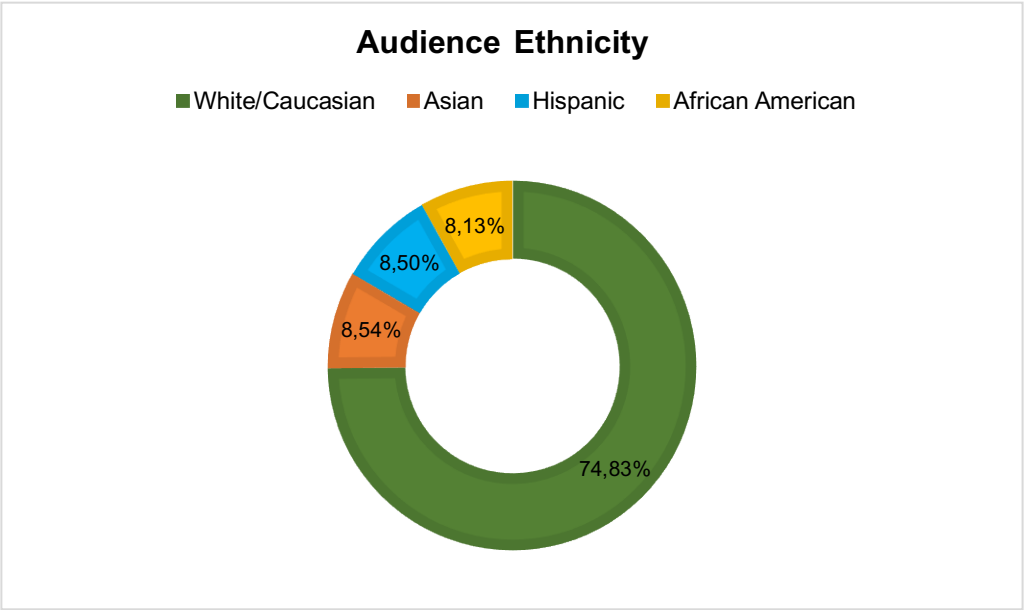
But, overall, the gender of her audience is 33% men and 67% women:



The location of her audience, which is determined by analyzing the follower's location tags, language, and captions, as well as their profile's bio – is the following:



And the audience's top cities are: New York City (8,04%), Los Angeles (5,90%), Chicago (2,08%), London (1,99%) and San Francisco (1,61%). The most common languages are English (89,93%), but also Spanish (2,91%), Italian (1,27%) and Portuguese (1,20%). Also, the audience ethnicity – which is determined by analyzing the profile picture, text in the bio, and selfies in recent posts of her audience – is the following:



Her audience lookalikes – accounts with a similar audience- we find other politicians and activists. In other, according to *Influency*, Rep. Ocasio-Cortez’s lookalikes are Michelle Obama (@michelleobama), Barack Obama (@barackobama), Kamala Harris (@kamalaharris), Greta Thunberg (@gretathunberg), Trevor Noah’s The Daily Show (@thedailyshow) and Bernie Sanders (@berniesanders).

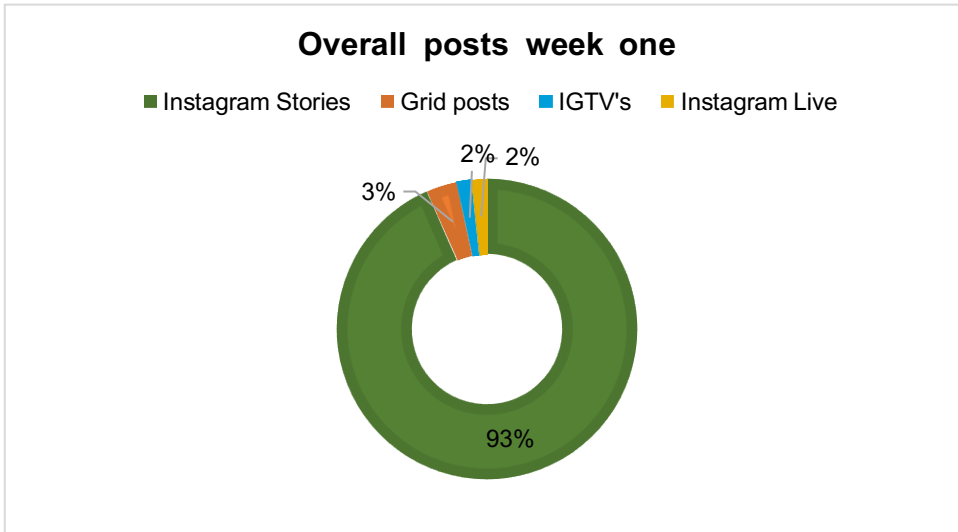
6.3 What Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez posted:

As we mentioned, we decided to base our research on two specific weeks. We decided to do so; we had established closed and short periods to focus on what we found intensely. The first week we based our research on was utterly random, and previous to it, we did not know what AOC was going to share on her account. This first week was from Monday, November 8th to Sunday, November 12th.

- **Research Nov. 8th to Nov. 14th**

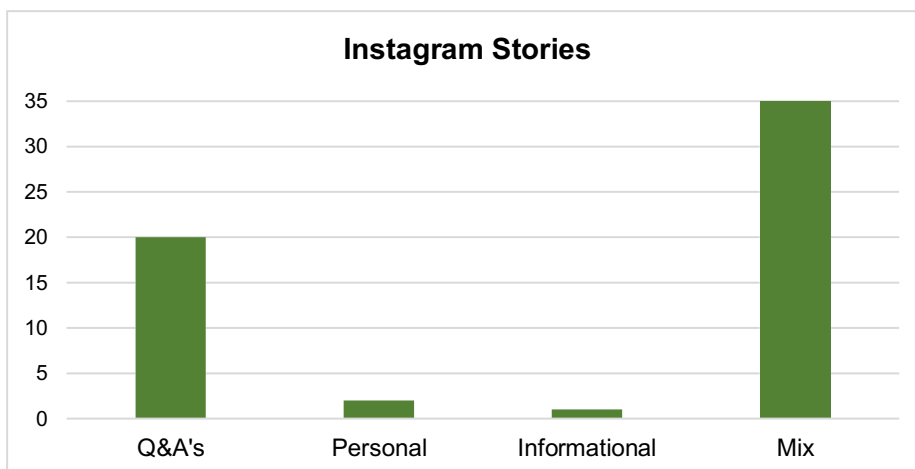
During the week we analyzed, AOC went on a trip to Scotland. It was a CODEL (congressional delegation trip), because of the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26). She went there as a member of congress, and throughout the five days she was in Scotland, she gave her followers a 'behind the scenes' of her trip.

We observed that she mostly shares Instagram Stories more than any other posts. To be accurate, throughout the week, she posted fifty-seven Instagram Stories, one IGTV, one Instagram Live and two grid posts.



We divided the Instagram stories into four groups: Q&A's, Personal, Informational, and Mix (personal and political). (The Q&A's, is an option that Instagram gives its users to add 'boxes' on their stories, where followers can write down questions, and the account can answer some of them.) During the week, AOC added two of these 'boxes' for questions, and answered twenty from her followers. Informational posts are the ones that were solely for sharing information, with no opinion or personal text, videos, or photos. Throughout the week, she only posted one of these.

Consequently, she only posted two personal posts – which are posts that had no political content. The kind of Instagram stories she shared the most were the ones that fall inside the 'Mix' category, which are the posts that are both personal and political at the same time. She posted thirty-four of this kind. We found that even when AOC shares political posts, she adds a personal touch to them.



Therefore, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez mixes many personal and political information in her posts. One example is one Instagram post on November 9th, where she is answering what the purpose of the trip was. She explains it– in text form- but also adds in a pink font and on a corner that on the radio, they are playing an Adele song and discussing the Great British Baking Show. Therefore, we can see how in a post where she mainly answers a 'political/work-related question', AOC also adds personal things she notices, likes, or wants to point out. By doing so, she makes it seem less political, less strict, or rigid and adds a more personal touch to it.

In her posts, she uses a 'modern' vocabulary. By that, we imply that she uses 'slang' commonly used on social media by Gen Z and millennials. She also adds some pop culture references, such as lyrics of popular songs or popular Television shows. Moreover, she writes in a friendly way, more than academic or political, which sets her apart from her 'political persona' and aligns better with her image of a young-modern politician. Also, she uses many emojis, even on posts that are more informational rather than personal. Again, this is a way of giving a more relaxed touch to more serious topics.

One way she makes her Instagram stories more personal is by posting self-made videos and photos. Therefore, she takes all of the videos and photos she then shares, making it more casual. In all of the videos, photos, Live's, and IGTV's, where she shows herself are laid back. She often appears with no makeup, her glasses on, and it does not have much apparent preparation prior to the shot. We can see this in the first Instagram story of the week, where she recorded herself – selfie-style- to explain her week. In those videos, it seemed as if she was sitting on the floor at her home. In her posts, she lets her followers take part in her congresswoman's life. Rep. Ocasio-Cortez brings them in by showing the behind-the-scenes of her days and allowing them to ask specific questions about her day-to-day life. Moreover, she adds much explanation of what she – and other congress members- do for work. In the week that we analyzed, she gave detailed information about CODEL's and how they work. Something that most politicians don't do, or at least they don't do it with such a transparent approach.

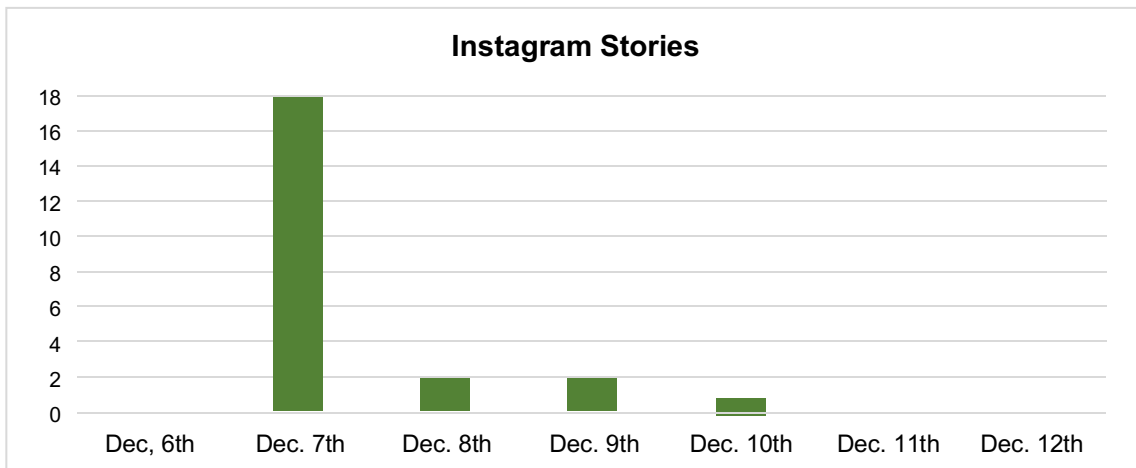
One specific event that we should mention is the posts related to *Irn Bru*, and what it caused. Irn Bru is a typical Scottish soda that from the first day she arrived in the country Rep. Ocasio-Cortez mentioned she was looking for it and wanted to try it. Later in the week, she posted an Instagram TV video (IGTV) – which are longer format videos you can post on the social media app – of herself trying the soda for the first time. In the video, she gives her raw reaction to trying the drink for the first time. This video got thousands of comments and interactions. However, one notable action worth mentioning is that Nicola Sturgeon – Scotland's Prime Minister- brought a can of Irn Bru specifically to AOC

because the Scottish leader saw on AOC's social media accounts how excited she was to try the soda. Both politicians took a picture with *Irn Bru*, and Sturgeon posted it on her social media accounts.

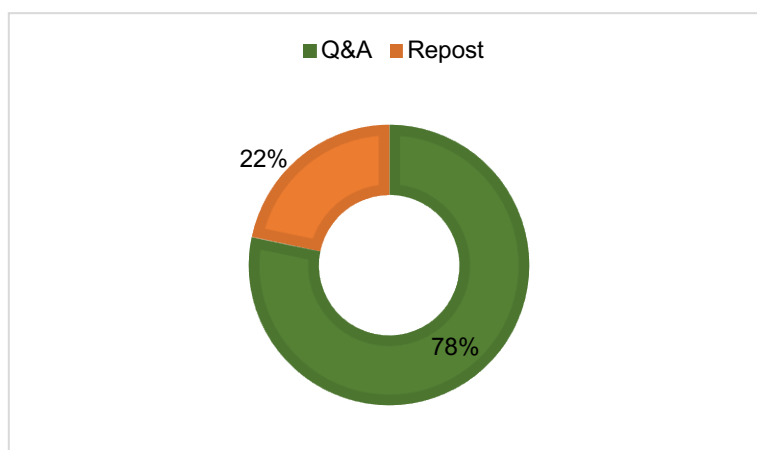
- **Research Dec. 6th to Dec. 12th**

In this second week, we diagnosed a significant difference compared to the previous one. From November 8th to 14th, Rep. Ocasio-Cortez went on a CODEL trip to Scotland for work. In this last one, she was more regular, with not that many political or relevant events. This is captured on the number of posts and the content of these.

Therefore, we detected that she only posted Instagram stories this second week. In total, twenty-three of them. Most of the stories were shared on Tuesday, December 7th. She either shared just a couple of posts or none at all the rest of the days.

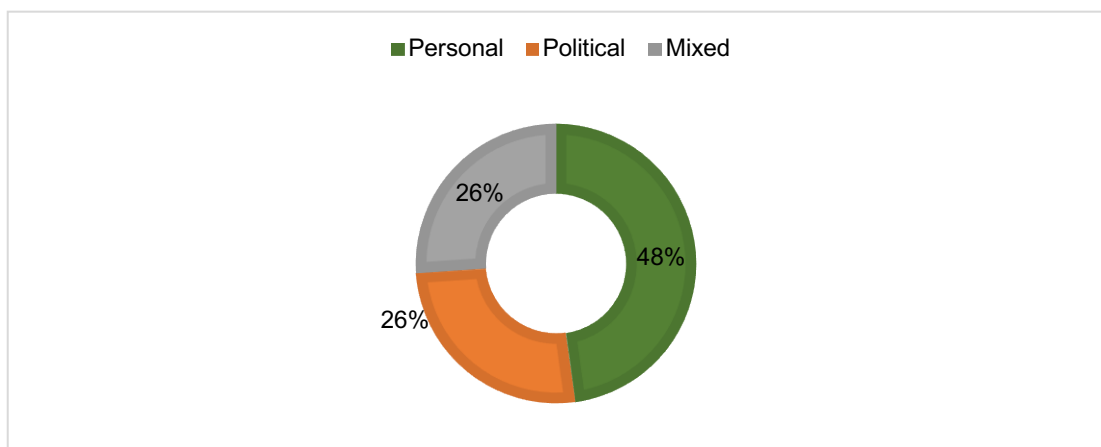


These posts were either answers to questions sent by the followers or reposts from posts shared by her public political account (@repaoc) or by fellow congresswomen or activists.



She responded to all of her Q&A box questions on December 7th. If we take a look into these answers, we see that, similar to the previous week analyzed, most are related to personal ideas, some are strictly political, and some have a mix of both. One clear example of a more personal post is when she adds the Q&A box. In this one, she adds it along with a video of herself eating a cookie at an airport and adds: “Stuck at the airport ask me anything”. And later, the following post – a question from a follower- is: ‘very important q: WHAT KIND OF COOKIE’. She responds with a picture of the plastic that wraps the cookie, answers the flavor, and adds: ‘it’s good G’. Once again, this gives a more personal flank to her image and carries her closer to her followers by sharing uncomplicated and day-to-day actions. This week, we observed that she also utilized juvenile slang, using emojis, and phrases commonly used on social media. Another clear case that shows her more relatable and out-of-politics side that we should mention is when she is asked about what she will do after politics. ‘I would like to have a home with a yard where I can grow food and read and write and rest as much as I can’, she answers. This is a very ‘mundane’ and relatable answer that many people can connect with. It also proves that she just wants the same things as everyone in life in the end. She is also asked about the movie series ‘Star Trek’ and gives her honest answer, which is also a popular culture side of her, showing what she likes and what she thinks on more relaxed topics. Along with these lighter topics, she also answers tough political questions, such as the Build Back Better Plan or capitalism and communism. Another way she posts is by mixing political and personal content like she did the previous week. All Instagram stories that are re-posts from other accounts are strictly political content.

Overall, among all the posts from this second week, she posted eleven personal posts, six political and six mixed.



6.4 What we discovered:

Rep. Ocasio-Cortez uses her non-political persona to connect with her audience. She does so by being active on social media – especially Instagram- and letting her followers discover her life through her lens. Personification is clearly visible in how she communicates through her account, giving insights and personal opinions outside of her political role.

She tries to portray herself as a young and open person. Nevertheless, mostly, AOC wants to connect with her audience through proximity and similarity. She aims it by sending messages about specific details of her life, which she knows many of her followers would connect and identify with. One example is how she tries to tie herself with the working class, mentioning several times how she was a waitress just a few years back – and now she is in Congress. With this, she means to say *'I am like you'*, *'I was in the same place you are now'*, *'I understand you'*. Ocasio-Cortez uses data from her past experiences and life to give the possibility of identification to a collective that can be reflected on her. It is a move to relate with the working class. To prove that she came from the same place as them, and that she is also young and part of the working class collective. Therefore, this is why she is the best candidate to represent them in Washington DC. With this said, it is also clear how she wants to connect to the younger audience, which are a big part of her voters and followers. She wants to connect with them not only by using social media but also by the language she chooses to use and how she approaches politics in a simple and more effortless perspective.

Hence, there are different analytical axes to be approached. All are related to the persona Ocasio-Cortez tries to represent on her social media account. One is this relationship of similarity AOC tries to establish with the working class and the younger generations. Another is the way she portrays herself. AOC seems youthful but also professional and hardworking on her Instagram. Some patterns that we can see are how her language on social media is connected to her work but also other social media trends. This way, she mixes 'both her worlds', by talking about politics but also current culture at the same time. AOC mixes lighter topics with politics and economic talk.

Some messages are more political and less personal. Still, we have to keep in mind that – even though she has a large following on Instagram - she is still a member of Congress, and despite her willingness to separate her personal and political ideals, she is still a public person in office and acts accordingly. Therefore, Rep. Ocasio-Cortez does post a lot of personal beliefs and points of view on her socials, but they are always related to her work as a congresswomen. Maybe her personal beliefs are more of a 'hook' to get more

views – or even followers- but the main reason she uses her Instagram account is to share her work and her political life.

Conclusion

The goal of this Final Degree Project was to analyze the communicative impact of AOC, and how she manages her personal and political self on her Instagram account. Moreover, we wanted to learn how AOC takes advantage of the new and popular mediums to get her message through her followers and American society.

We first had to understand how politicians communicate and, therefore, study political communication and its role in modern times. Currently, more than ever, personification has a significant impact on how political leaders share information, and essentially, get more votes. Personal traits such as moral and sentimental characteristics are often more impactful than actual political programs when voting. We learned that new mediums – especially social media- are shaping political communication in times where there are endless ways to receive and send information and content. We also had to analyze new media to comprehend the new forms of transmission that shape current political times.

In the analysis of AOC Instagram's communications during two separate weeks of December 2021, we discovered that the relation between the politician and the voter/follower is better when the political leader is active on social media. But more importantly, this relation is better when the politician shows personal traits and insights so that the follower can feel identified with the leader. This creates a closer bond, which becomes more relevant than the political content itself. Therefore, personification is crucial when communicating. Sharing personal information and political content is also key to having a good connection with the voters. Digitalization and the use of social media have also proven to bring more opportunities for fellowship and personalization with the political figure.

Rep. Ocasio-Cortez uses her Instagram as both a political and a personal outlet. She indeed uses her account to reach millions of followers – and potential voters- and shares information so the public can feel identified with her. She emphasizes how she is a young woman from the Bronx and worked as a bartender a few years ago, so her followers can associate with her life and feel recognized with her journey. This makes her more relatable and more reliable. AOC mixes personal content – which goes from pictures of her dog, opinions about pop music, or food reviews- with some political content. With this, she shares both worlds but also 'hides' the political content between personal posts, ensuring the public gets all of the information she is trying to send.

AOC wants her followers to observe her as a 'close' leader. Someone open, whom they can trust. Not a regular politician that only talks behind closed doors and does not share information of any kind if it's not strictly political. She does this by talking to her audience

regularly through her Instagram account. Often letting the public ask her questions of any topic, and doing Instagram Lives, to share her insights on popular topics. Moreover, she brings her followers behind the scenes of her political journey, giving them exclusive content that politicians usually do not share.

How publications are generated is guided by the politician's experiential and real life, not a communicative mechanism. When the subject's life becomes a vital element of their communication strategy, it is clear that there will be more communication when the leader has more experiences. So, it is true that there are weeks when there are more communications than others, but this is linked to what the politician is going through. This gives strength to the creation of AOC as a subject. In the end, what marks AOC's communication is her actual experiences.

In general evaluation of this analysis, we can say the hypothesis stated at the beginning of this Thesis is proven correct. The role of communication has once more been established to be crucial in politics. And the use of new mediums, to share personal information, allows a better connection between the leader and the follower. Observing how Rep. Ocasio-Cortez uses social media to interact with her followers, we can see she created a stronger bond. Especially by letting the public in on her individual ideas and journey. We can observe how this contributes to a political change in the communication field. And proves how the way political leaders express themselves is relevant not only during elections, but also on a regular basis.

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Annex I – Analysis week 1 (Nov.8th to Nov. 14th)

November 8th.

Instagram stories:

- Selfie style videos, explaining she is in Scotland for the COP 26, as part of a congressional delegation trip.
 - She explains what she is doing in Scotland and takes the follower 'behind the scenes', and shows what her day has been like. In a laid back style, no makeup, glasses on her head, and no apparent preparation.
- Picture with text, explaining how her day started at 5 am to drop off her luggage, and then how she waited for the other members (along with a picture of the bus). In the same posts, she also explains what CODELS are (congressional delegation trips) and how they travel when they are on these trips. - *Mixing her personal life and information about politics.*
- Video of the train ride, with text: 'despite this craziness and media frenzy, I was still a waitress 3 years ago. So I still have moments in my life where it hits me that I'm actually in Congress.' 'This is one of these moments. Idk what I was expecting but it wasn't this (laughing emoji) - *She writes in a friendly and not academic way. Also proves that she is just like her followers.*
- Picture the plane with text, explaining more how CODEL work and how many people are on these trips.
- Picture of a binder inside the plane. Text with emoji's, explaining that the binder was at her seat, and how she has explained before how big binders are always set up to congress members. - Letting in the followers into part of the congress-women's life and work.
- Video of a covid kit they also get at the plane. She shows and opens the kit, and explains what its inside.
- Picture when it landed. It explains how she wanted to film the landing, but it was a 'tarmac' situation and she was 'trying not to fall down those stars'. The picture is of the Covid Test instructions. These instructions are tests done by the NHS (national public health system of the UK). Here she takes advantage of it, and points out that it's from the NHS and writes how much she wishes they had a public health system (a big part of her political ideals). She also explains what the Covid process (test and confinement) is for the members of the trip.

- Black picture with text (explaining what she has to do for the rest of the day) and adds an Instagram Question Box, asking people to write down any questions, and that she will answer them tomorrow.
- Next post, she already answers a question related to 'if she has a diplomatic passport'. Explains it, with a modern typo, used by millennials and GenZ, mostly on social media.



Image 1. Example of modern typo used by AOC

- Answers another question about 'if republicans also go on these trips'. She points out that some do, but did but with their private sponsors (for fossil or companies interests), instead of going as part of the US delegation.

November 9th.

Instagram stories:

- 24 Instagram story posts. Answers to the questions and answers box she added in Nov. 8th + explanation of what her day in the COP has been like.
 - Question about what the purpose of the trip is. She explains it in a long text. But also adds (in a pink font), that in the background they are playing Adele and the Great Baking British Show on the radio). *Again, mixes info with personal things she likes, notices and wants to point out.*
 - Video she recorded of her colleagues walking through the COP facilities + explaining what they are going to do next.
 - Photo of a room, where they are going to get a private briefing. *More behind the scenes. Even she writes BTS in the text.*
 - Picture of one of the zones of the COP. And an explanation of the different zones in the building. And that in the same room as the picture Biden and Obama were doing a speech the day before.
 - Picture of the week's schedule of the COP. She explains what topics have been dealt with so far.

- Video of COP's president doing a speech on Gender. Then in the same video she explains what gender has to do with climate change.
- Screenshot of a news piece. There it explains that 'AOC highlights the plight of Indigenous women'. And goes on to explain that this is one of the main reasons she is there (to talk about this topic). And explains how thought about it.
- Another screenshot of another news piece that talks about the topic. She adds a link where her followers can access the piece.
- Video of Angélica Poste - Bolivian indigenous women - doing a speech in the COP. She adds that she didn't need translation for this one because she speaks Spanish, but she needed it for the French conferences.
- Video of Pelosi doing a speech. (+ Explanation).
- Only (long) text posts. She explains that so far, this has been only half of the day, and that the second part is more private, and that she doesn't have as many photos (and explains what it will consist of).
- A repost from a Grid Post from her @repaoc account, of a picture of the 'group' with president Obama.
- Video of her table space in a meeting. Explains what the meeting is about, and adds that a lot of her job is not public, that it also has to do with pushing and influencing (and explains more about her job).
- Video of a conference - where Pelosi is taking part of. She explains what the conference is about, and the US situation on the topic.
- Post of text (saying that the day was hectic, and she did it get the chance to take many photos). And adds another Q&A Box.
- First question: about if her dog traveled with her. She posts a picture of the dog, and status that no but that she 'gets daily updates'.
- 2nd question: About climate change.
- 3rd: Question about her thoughts about Rep. Paul Gosar's posts (he shared an anime video of himself killing AOC). She responds: 'That man couldn't add two single digits together if he tried'.
- 4th: Question about if she has already tried a typical beverage from Scotland. She answers, no because she hasn't had much 'independent time'. She also asks where she can find it, and if they have bodegas over her (laughing emoji). Bodegas as one of NY's statements, and also much linked with AOC.
- 5th: Question about if she is the youngest on the trip? Yes, plus she explains that the average age in congress is 58.

- 6th: If she has brought anyone from her trip. Again, she uses 'young slang', used in social media.

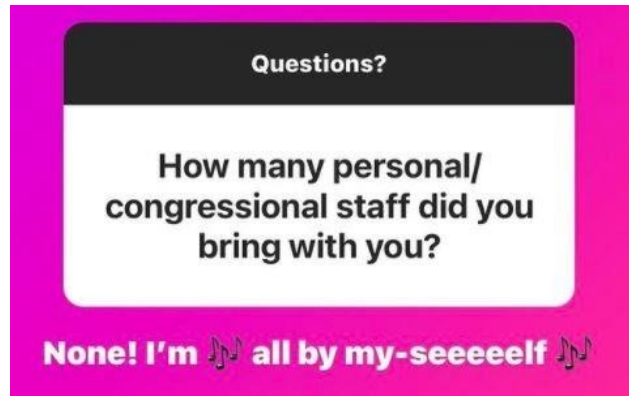


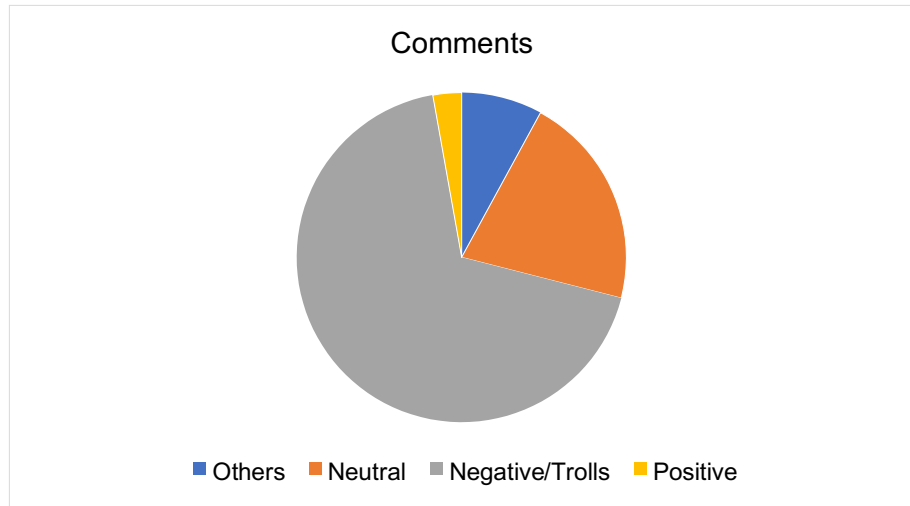
Image 2. Another 'young slang', used by AOC.

- 7th: About if she will get to explore Scotland. She says that her schedule is packed, but she will try to get free time and 'find some Irn Bru, touch Harris Tweed and see a castle (laughing emoji)'.
- 8th: If she has met Greta Thunberg? No, but she links a remote interview they did together for The Guardian + says she is a 'badass' + says many ask her about her thoughts about the COP, and says she will do a deep reflection soon.
- 9th: If it's her first international trip? Explanation again of how CODELs work, and that it is her first one.

November 10th.

IGTV post:

- A video of her trying Irn Bru (the Scottish drink that she was asked about the day before, and that she also mentioned in a question and answers box's answer). The video is 1.06 minutes long, and it shows her sitting on a couch at the COP (wearing her work suit), trying the beverage for the first time. Kind of like trying it with her followers for the first time. She gets excited about the drink, because it reminds her of a Latino cola drink.
 - Within 16 hours it had 1.397.667 views and 4.431 comments. About 80% of the comments were positive (about the video, her smile, her reaction, etc...), the rest were mostly related to politics (asking her when she will run for presidency, climate change questions, etc.). Not many mean or troll comments.



- With this she switches the conversation of the COP to the drink, since many comments are now more related to the drink and Scotland, than the actual trip.

- Examples of 'negative comment':



Image 3. Negative comments.

- Examples of 'positive comment':



mulliganvinny Hardest working congresswoman in Washington. If you worked in the hospitality industry especially in New York you know what being in the weeds is. You know what a rush is. You know what cheap customers are and still smile.

18 h 10 Me gusta Responder ***



shaunsheep88 Welcome to Scotland ❤️

31 min Responder ***



emersancaetano ❤️

33 min Responder

Image 4. Positive comments.

- This post became very 'internet famous'. And because all the post she did about Im Bru:
 - Nicola Sturgeon brought her a can, and posted it on her Instagram and twitter accounts.



Image 5. Nicola Sturgeon post.

- Irm Bru's twitter and Instagram accounts shared AOC's IGTV on their twitter, captioning: 'Kola Champagne...that's a new one! We're glad you liked it @AOC #letsjustagreeittastesmagic'.



Image 6. Irm Bru's post.

- And she was on the front page of British newspaper The Guardian.

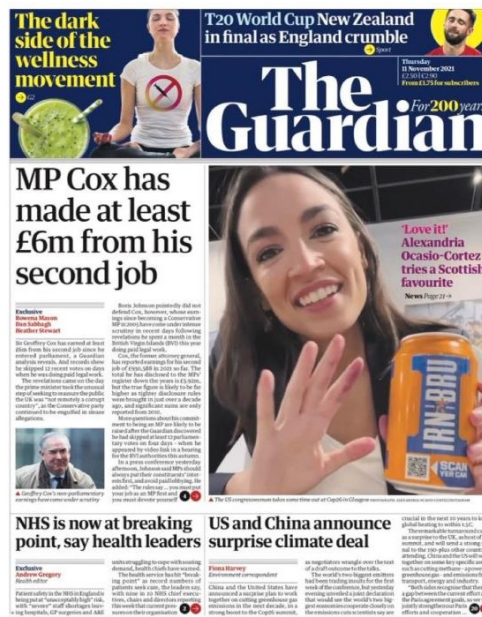


Image 7. The Guardian front page.

November 11th.

Instagram Story posts:

- Repost of an IGTV from @r29somos (a Latina/women empowering Instagram account). The video is of American singer-songwriter, Selena Quintanilla, speaking Spanish. AOC writes: "It's a vibe".

- Next story is from a video of the COP, and she writes: ‘So yesterday at @COP26 here’s what we were up to...’ (The next stories will be about the behind-the-scenes of her day as a congresswoman at the trip).
- Video of a conference, and text saying which conference it is.
- Photo of a meeting, with explanation text. ‘And we began a total marathon of meetings...’ + explanation of what the first meeting was about (‘with US-based activists + grassroots orgs’, which she says there are her favorite meetings).
- Video of the second meeting, ‘with international NGOs’, and explanation of it + explanation of how the microphones are very cool because you can plug in your headphones and listen to the translation in any language.
- Picture with the president of the COP26 (Alok Sharma), since ‘all other meetings were pretty sensitive so I didn’t take photos’.
- Then a picture with the UN secretary (General Antonio Guterres).
- Then with US EPA administrator (Michael S. Regan) + text about how passionate she is about Coal Ash (an environmental justice issue Regan fought for before being the EPA administrator), and what this issue is.
- Then a picture of her meeting with the First Minister of Scotland Nicola Sturgeon, with an Irn Bru in her hands that she brought for AOC. She writes ‘AND SHE BROUGHT ME A CAN OF IRN BRU (crying face emoji and drink emoji). Plus an explanation of what Irn Bru is, and how the head of state in Scotland brought one to her because she knew AOC was looking for it).
- Reposts her IGTV of her trying Irn Bru for the first time. Writes; ‘It tastes like Cola Champagne just with a little bit of - spice – ‘ → this is from a viral Tick Tock sound.
- Lastly a picture of ‘One of my favorite moments of the day (heart emoji)’. Some community leaders that she was able to bring to the COP, to contrast with all the politician representation (+ further explanation on it).
- A video of what riding a motorcade is like. And an explanation of what it is like to be in high security situations. A deep personal insight of what it’s like being her (in the professional aspect).
- A picture of the Edinburgh Castle, that she got to go because one of her meetings fell through.
- Video of the castle, saying they paid their respects for Remembrance Day.
- Story post of a Q&A box, and saying she is off, back to the US.
- If her dog (Deco) will get some COP26 swag? No, but she bought a Harris Tweed jacket from the castle + a picture of the dog wearing it.

- Question about her wardrobe, and if she gets to choose what clothes she wears? Yes, she plans it in advance.
- Question about 'what changes in regard to real action will we see from COP26'. Long paragraphs of text explaining her point of view.
- Question about 'what's CODEL?' She explains it again in text.
- Question about if she was free to voice her opinion at the COP. Text explaining yes.
- Text story answering a question she says many asked about 'Why couldn't the meeting have been held via zoom?' Long explanation why it would be tricky to have negotiations via zoom.

November 12th.

Instagram Story:

- A repost from @ninagualinga, an indigenous/climate change activist (with no text, only the repost of the picture). Gualinga's post, AOC reposted, is about a march in NYC captioned: "Global 'leaders' at #COP26 are proposing a deal on Article 6 that threatens Human Rights and Indigenous Rights, and undermines the Paris Agreement!". A topic AOC had mentioned before via insta story on Nov. 9th.

Instagram Live:

- Then an Instagram live at approximately 9.30 p.m. central European standard time, or 3.30 p.m. Eastern Standard Time. She actually did two separate ones because her first live stopped suddenly. Between both, she was live for about 1 hour and 30 minutes, talking and answering questions about the COP. Basically, as she said 'telling the good and the bad things about the COP'. This was a more political live, but it was -again- in a laid-back setting. She spent 1h30h of her Friday talking to her followers about her trip, or COP. As said, as much as she is explaining a political topic, she does it in a 'mundane' and easy way. Also giving her followers one more insight into what her work in politics is like, and what some decisions that have been made mean. She does this while sitting on her desk in her apartment. This live talk was mostly about talking about climate change, a topic she has established as one of her main goals to fix in her political career.

Grid posts:

- Then she posted on her grid the two lives, so people/followers could see the live when it was done. Otherwise, if you don't save it and post it, it goes away. So she

posted it so other followers who could not join the live can watch it later on. As we said she had to cut the live in 2 parts, because the first time it shut down suddenly, therefore she posted the 2 parts:

1. Captioned: 'Let's Talk About #COP26 🌍', is 28 minutes long. 20h hours after she posted it, it has 201,658 views and 678 comments.
2. Captioned: 'Let's Talk About #COP26 🌍 pt 2'. 20h hours after she posted it, it has 118,964 views and 511 comments.
 - They both have fewer comments than her last post (the IGTV trying I'm Bru). But it is true that there are less comments, but most of them are positive (or there are fewer trolls).

November 13th.

Instagram Story:

- Repost on her story of a @qplnyc (Queens Public Library) post that gives information about Child Tax Credit.

November 14th.

No posts.

Annex II – Analysis week 2 (Dec.6th to Dec. 12th)

December 6th.

No posts.

December 7th.

Instagram Story:

1. A video of her eating a cookie at the airport and a Q&A box that says: 'Stuck at the airport ask me anything'. A very personal video, you could send to your friends, of AOC eating a cookie.
2. First question: 'very important q: WHAT KIND OF COOKIE'. She responds with a picture of the plastic that wraps the cookie, and answers the flavor and adds: 'it's good G'.
3. 2nd question: 'Worried about losing child money every month. Where we at with BBB plan?'. She responds with a video of her on a shuttle and adds on the top 'had to change terminals', and then on the bottom she responds the political

- questions, adding that the 'BBB has passed the House and Majority Leader Schumer has said the Senate is working to pass it'.
4. 3rd question: 'Do you ever get nervous being in a so called "man's world"?. Answers with a video oh herself laughing, and adds: 'Nervous? No. Annoyed at times? Yes 😊'.
 5. 4th question: 'Do you invest in Bitcoin?' She answers with a picture of herself, and a text that essentially says that she doesn't for ethical reasons, since she is a member of Congress, and has access to sensitive information.
 6. 5th question: 'What is your plan after politics?', answer: 'I would like to have a home with a yard where I can grow food and read and write and rest as much as I can'. Very 'mundane' and relatable answer.
 7. 6th question: 'I'm a recovering Republican will y'all take me in and forgive me?'. She responds with a video of herself – again, at the airport- and says 'Make yourself at home! (And more text along these lines", and adds a bit of the song 'Welcome home', by Mase. Ironic and funny joke and answer.
 8. 7th question: 'I know you love Voyager but when can we talk about TNG?? Pls watch you'd love it'. This is a Star Trek question, and she answers: 'Ok TNG is classic and the Q episodes were my absolute favorite growing up!!'. Again very personal, takes back to her memories and her childhood. Also relatable.
 9. 8th question: 'How many times have people asked you 'what type of cookie is that?'. She answers with a picture of her dog on the streets of New York City, and texts: 'Like 300x '.
 10. 9th question: 'DO u see why people have a problem when you say things like birthing/menstruating people and not women?'. She again responds with a picture of her dog and writes a long text where essentially AOC stated that she does notice that people have problems with 'including trans and non-binary people in conversations of reproductive health'.
 11. 10th question: 'Can my mom ever leave the death cult of Q anon and trump? Tried everything. She's just gone'. A follower is asking how to make his/her mom stop supporting the Republican Party. AOC adds: 'Let's talk others have been there for help or insight', and punt in a box for answers with the question: 'Have you/someone u know deracialized from right wing? What helped?'. This this a clear example of how she uses Instagram to get closer with her followers, but also share a political message.
 12. A screenshot of the first answers to the previous questions.
 13. More answers.
 14. 'One last one. Hope this helps'. One last screenshot of the answers.

15. 11th question: 'Tricks for keeping long hair looking professional?'. And she responds with a very long text of how she keeps her hair healthy. Here we can see an example of how she is more than a politician, almost seen as an 'influencer' to some of her followers, that don't only ask about politics, but also looks.
16. 12th question: 'is it okay to throw shade on the floor? If so, would the republicans understand it?' She responds with a video of herself giving ideas to her follower, about what to do. Very personal, since it is a video – selfie style- of herself taking in the couch.
17. 13th question: 'AOC you're killing me with the cookie choice'. Again back to the first questions about the cookie. She answers with a video of herself singing, also in selfie style video, and adds: 'No auto tune can you believe it'. Again very different from what we are used to see politicians share on the social media.
18. 14th question: 'Why are you Socialists Communists but enjoy your Capitalists benefits \$\$\$?'. This is a different question from what we are used to see her answering, since it seems to be from someone who does not vote for AOC or share her political beliefs'. She responds with a very long text that essentially says that it is because of the society we live in, and that 'no one questions capitalists mooching off public systems'.

December 8th.

Instagram Story:

1. Repost on the Instagram Story of a post shared by @maketheradny (an account that aims to empower immigrant, Black, and brown communities to achieve dignity & justice), of a picture they posted of AOC with kids, on a march they did on the same day, to call on the Senate to include citizenship in the Build Back Better Act. She adds: '¡Sí se puede!', which means: 'Yes we can' in Spanish.
2. Another repost of an Instagram Story post from @nice4workers. They shared a picture of AOC speaking to citizens and media about pathway to citizenship. They add: 'Thank you, AOC. For your commitment to our community's future'.

December 9th.

Instagram Story:

1. Repost of a grid post shared by @rashidatlaib (Congresswoman for Michigan). It is a picture of Rashida holding hands with another Congresswomen, giving a speech and adds: 'Sisterhood is powerful.'

2. Repost of an IGTV posted on the political/public account (@repaoc). It is a video of her doing a speech in Spanish in front of citizens and media. The speech is about the pathway to citizenship in the Build Better Act.

December 10th.

1. Another repost of an IGTV also shared by @repaoc. It is a video of AOC talking in Congress about: 'Cancel student debt.'

December 11th.

No posts.

December 12th.

No posts.

