

Abstract

This thesis presents a novel theoretical framework for understanding political communication in the era of technological convergence, examining the complex interplay between hybrid media systems, platform architectures, and emerging digital heuristics. Through a systematic analysis of theoretical developments spanning 2013-2024, this research challenges traditional understandings of political communication adaptation by demonstrating how technological affordances fundamentally reshape strategic practices within increasingly complex media environments. The investigation moves beyond conventional approaches to media hybridization by introducing a sophisticated theoretical model that explains how platform-specific architectural constraints interact with evolving communication heuristics to create new patterns of political engagement and strategic adaptation.

The research makes significant theoretical contributions by synthesizing and extending three distinct but interconnected frameworks: Blumler's conceptualization of the Fourth Age of Political Communication, Chadwick's analysis of hybrid media systems, and Bossetta's examination of digital architectures. This synthesis reveals previously unexplored dimensions of contemporary political communication, particularly in understanding how technological structures shape strategic decision-making processes. By identifying and analyzing distinct categories of digital heuristics - including algorithmic anticipation, platform navigation, engagement optimization, and hybrid integration—the thesis provides new analytical tools for understanding political actors' adaptive responses to technological transformation.

The investigation demonstrates how platform architectures create unique constraints and opportunities that fundamentally alter traditional approaches to political messaging and audience engagement. Through detailed examination of algorithmic governance systems, network structures, and datafication processes, the research reveals how political actors develop sophisticated understanding of technical affordances while maintaining strategic coherence across diverse media environments. This analysis extends beyond simple technological determinism to explore how political actors actively shape and respond to evolving media logics through strategic adaptation and innovation.

Furthermore, the thesis advances scholarly understanding of artificial intelligence's role in reshaping political communication practices, examining how emergent technologies create new possibilities for message optimization while raising critical questions about democratic accountability and public discourse quality. The research concludes by proposing a comprehensive framework for analyzing digital political communication heuristics, suggesting crucial directions for future research in areas including algorithmic governance, strategic adaptation, and democratic practice in increasingly automated communication environments.

Keywords: political communication, hybrid media systems, digital architecture, platform politics, digital heuristics, Fourth Age of Political Communication

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Research Framework

The transformation of political communication in our digital age represents more than a mere technological shift — it embodies a fundamental reconceptualization of how political actors engage with increasingly complex media environments. As traditional media institutions either converge with digital platforms or face displacement, our theoretical understanding must also evolve to capture the nuanced dynamics of contemporary political communication. This evolution demands careful examination of how political actors navigate the current environment characterized by media abundance, algorithmic governance, and platform-specific affordances.

The transition from the previous mass media-dominated political communication practices to today's hybrid system reflects a profound reorganization of political communication practices. During this transformation, political actors must simultaneously manage traditional media relationships while adapting to the demands of digital platforms, creating what (Chadwick A. , 2017)describes as hybrid media practices. These practices emerge from the intersection of established media logics and new digital realities, requiring further examination of theoretical frameworks that can explain both the persistence of traditional approaches and the emergence of novel communication strategies.

Contemporary political communication operates within what (Blumler J. , 2015) identifies as the "Fourth Age," characterized by media abundance, audience fragmentation, and the rise of platform politics. This conceptual framework provides crucial insights into how changing media environments reshape political discourse. However, understanding the full implications of this transformation requires deeper theoretical examination, particularly regarding the ways political actors develop or should develop adaptive strategies within the new hybrid media environments and navigate platform-specific architectural constraints.

The complexity of today's political communication realities emerges from several interconnected developments. First, the proliferation of digital platforms creates

what (Van Dijck, 2013) term "platform politics," where technical architectures mediate political communication in ways that fundamentally reshape the democratic practice. Secondly, the emergence of algorithmic governance systems influences content visibility and reach, requiring political actors to develop new approaches to message dissemination (Gillespie, 2014). Thirdly, the integration of artificial intelligence technologies introduces new capabilities and challenges for political communication strategy (Diakopoulos, 2019).

These developments occur within what (Chadwick A. , 2017)) terms the hybrid media system, where older and newer media logics interact in complex ways. In that sense political actors must navigate environments characterized by multiple, often competing media logics while maintaining coherent communication strategies. This complexity is further amplified by what (Kreiss D. &, 2019)) identify as the permanent campaign environment, where political actors maintain continuous engagement across multiple platforms while adapting to platform-specific architectural constraints.

The theoretical significance of examining these newer developments extends beyond understanding of the current practices. As political communication continues to evolve, theoretical frameworks must explain not only how political actors adapt to current conditions but also how to anticipate and respond to new emerging technological capabilities. This forward-looking perspective becomes particularly crucial when considering the integration of artificial intelligence technologies and their implications for political communication strategy.

While extensive academic literature exists on digital political communication, significant gaps remain in understanding how political actors can navigate the complexities of hybrid media systems through platform-specific architectures and digital heuristics. These gaps become particularly evident when examining how political actors develop strategies that work across multiple platforms while maintaining message coherence and campaign effectiveness. Additionally, questions remain about how theoretical frameworks can explain the integration of emerging technologies, particularly artificial intelligence, into political communication practices.

This research aims to address these crucial gaps in political communication theory by examining how recent theoretical frameworks explain political actors' strategic adaptation to digital transformation. While scholars have extensively studied individual aspects of digital political communication, less attention has been paid to synthesizing these theoretical developments that attempt to explain how political actors navigate the complexity of the current media environments. This thesis attempts to fill this gap by analyzing the theoretical intersection between hybrid media systems (Chadwick A. , 2017), platform architectures (Bossetta, 2018), and digital heuristics (Schäfer, 2023).

The research questions guiding this investigation reflect the complexity of contemporary political communication:

How do contemporary theoretical frameworks explain political actors' strategic adaptation to hybrid media environments in the digital age?

How do the theoretical frameworks referenced explain the evolution of political communication strategies?

What role do hybrid media systems play in shaping these adaptations?

How do platform architectures and digital heuristics shape political communication strategies within hybrid media systems?

How do platform-specific features influence political communication strategies?

What role do digital heuristics play in strategic decision-making?

How do emerging technologies, particularly AI, transform political communication practices within the hybrid media environments?

How do AI technologies interact with existing media logics?

Chapter 2: Research Methodology and Theoretical Framework

The examination of theoretical developments in digital political communication demands a rather complex methodological approach capable of capturing both established theoretical frameworks and emerging conceptual developments. This research employs a systematic review methodology, focusing on theoretical developments between 2013 and 2024, a period marked by significant advancement in understanding digital political communication. This scope encompasses crucial theoretical developments in conceptualizing hybrid media systems, platform architectures, and strategic adaptation in political communication.

The systematic review methodology enables comprehensive analysis of how theoretical frameworks explain political actors' adaptation to digital transformation. As (Snyder, 2019) argues, systematic reviews prove particularly valuable for theoretical analysis by enabling identification of patterns in conceptual development while revealing gaps in current understanding. This approach provides structured means for examining how different theoretical frameworks collectively explain political actors' strategic adaptation to increasingly complex media environments.

Additionally, this research adopts an interpretive epistemological stance, acknowledging that understanding political communication in digital environments requires examining multiple theoretical perspectives and their interpretations. This position aligns with Creswell and Poth's (Creswell, 2018) argument that interpretive approaches prove particularly valuable when examining complex social phenomena characterized by multiple interacting factors. This positioning enables nuanced analysis of how different theoretical frameworks explain the relationships between political actors, media systems, and technological architectures.

The methodological approach encompasses several interconnected analytical phases. The initial phase involved comprehensive database searches using carefully constructed search terms that captured the breadth of theoretical developments in digital political communication. Primary databases included Web of Science, Scopus, and JSTOR, supplemented by targeted searches in specialized journals including *New Media & Society*, *Political Communication*, and *Information, Communication & Society* as well as others. This multi-database approach ensured a rather comprehensive coverage of theoretical developments while enabling identification of emerging scholarly perspectives.

Source selection followed rigorous inclusion criteria focusing on peer-reviewed academic literature that directly engaged with digital political communication theory, hybrid media systems, or digital architectures. My scope as already mentioned prioritized literature published between 2013 and 2024, though seminal works establishing fundamental theoretical frameworks were included regardless of publication date. This approach enabled examination of both contemporary theoretical developments and their conceptual foundations.

The analytical process employed systematic coding procedures to identify theoretical patterns, relationships, and developments. This coding focused on three primary dimensions: theoretical contribution (examining core concepts and explanatory power), methodological approach (analyzing research design and evidence quality), and contextual applications (examining political context and strategic implications). This approach enabled systematic examination of how theoretical frameworks explain political actors' strategic adaptation to digital transformation.

Quality assurance measures included detailed documentation of the review process, cross-referencing of sources, and consultation with academic supervisors. By employing these measures, I attempted to ensure methodological rigor while enabling identification of theoretical patterns and relationships. Additionally, the research acknowledged certain limitations, particularly regarding language restrictions (focus on English-language sources) and time boundaries (emphasis on recent theoretical developments).

Three primary theoretical frameworks guide this research, each offering distinct yet complementary perspectives on contemporary political communication. Blumler's (Blumler J. , *The Fourth Age of Political Communication*, 2016) Fourth Age of Political Communication provides crucial insights into how media abundance and audience fragmentation reshape political discourse. Chadwick's (2017) Hybrid Media Systems Theory explains how traditional and digital media logic interact and influence each other in contemporary political communication. Bossetta's (Bossetta, 2018) Digital Architecture Framework offers analytical tools for understanding how platform-specific features influence political communication strategies.

The integration of these theoretical frameworks enables comprehensive analysis of how political actors navigate the current media environments. By examining the intersection of these frameworks, this research provides new insights into how political actors develop or should develop adaptive strategies within increasingly complex media environments. This theoretical integration proves particularly valuable when examining how political actors manage multiple media logics while maintaining coherent communication strategies.

Chapter 3: The Fourth Age of Political Communication: Theoretical Development and Contemporary Applications

The conceptualization of the Fourth Age of Political Communication, as developed by Blumler (2016), represents a fundamental theoretical advancement in understanding contemporary political communication, in my opinion. This framework transcends traditional interpretations of digital transformation as mere technological change, instead providing nuanced theoretical understanding of how multiple factors reshape political communication dynamics in digital environments. Through systematic analysis of theoretical developments, Blumler's framework emerges as crucial for explaining how media abundance and algorithmic governance transform political communication practices.

The evolution of political communication through distinct "ages" reflects the broader transformations in media systems, political institutions, and public engagement patterns. The First Age, characterized by strong party organizations and stable political alignments, gave way to the Second Age's television-dominated environment emphasizing image management and professional communication. The Third Age introduced initial digital disruption and audience fragmentation (Blumler J., 1996). However, the Fourth Age represents not merely another evolutionary step but a fundamental reconceptualization of the political communication processes.

Blumler's theoretical framework identifies several interconnected transformations distinguishing from the Fourth Age. Media abundance creates an environment where attention, rather than information, becomes the scarce resource. This abundance, coupled with algorithmic content distribution, fundamentally reshapes how political messages reach and influence audiences. As Blumler argues, this era represents the response to media abundance, the real-time communication pressures, and the increasing personalization of politics. Using this theoretical perspective helps us explain how political actors develop adaptive strategies within environments characterized by constant competition for attention and rapid shifts in public discourse.

The theoretical significance of the Fourth Age framework extends beyond explaining technological change. Through systematic analysis of theoretical literature, this

framework emerges as crucial for understanding how digital transformation affects multiple dimensions of political communication. Unlike previous theories focused primarily on technological change, Blumler's work also examines how the digital transformation influences power relationships between political actors, media institutions, and citizens. This theoretical advancement helps explain how the compression of communication cycles, the multiplication of communication channels, and the emergence of new forms of political engagement fundamentally alter political communication dynamics.

A crucial theoretical contribution emerges in explaining how political actors adapt to these transformed conditions. Traditional models of political communication, based on controlled message dissemination through established channels, prove increasingly inadequate. Instead, political actors develop approaches acknowledging the networked nature of contemporary communication, where messages are simultaneously transmitted, transformed, and contested across multiple platforms and contexts. This theoretical understanding helps explain why political actors cannot rely solely on traditional communication strategies but must develop adaptive approaches that work across multiple media environments.

The framework also provides theoretical insights into changing relationships between political actors and media institutions. While traditional media maintain significant influence, their role transforms from primary "gatekeepers" to participants in a more complex communication ecosystem. This understanding helps us explain how political actors navigate relationships with both traditional and digital media, developing strategies that recognize distinct and often complementary roles of different media forms.

Furthermore, the Fourth Age framework offers important theoretical perspectives on audience transformation. It explains how audiences evolve from relatively passive recipients of political messages to active participants in the political communication processes. This theoretical insight helps understand how political actors adapt their strategies to engage with more active, fragmented, and critically engaged audiences. The framework's attention to audience transformation proves particularly valuable when examining how political actors develop strategies for maintaining engagement across multiple platforms while managing increasingly complex audience relationships.

Furthermore the framework's explanation of algorithmic governance in political communication represents another significant theoretical advancement. In contrast to previous frameworks focusing primarily on human actors, the Fourth Age theory recognizes how algorithmic systems become active agents in shaping political communication. This theoretical advancement helps explain how political actors

must adapt their strategies to account for both human and algorithmic influences on message dissemination and reception.

Critical engagement with the Fourth Age framework reveals both strengths and limitations. While the theory effectively explains many aspects of contemporary political communication, questions remain about its applicability across different political and cultural contexts. Some scholars argue the framework may overemphasize technological factors at the expense of institutional and cultural continuities. However, these criticisms often serve to refine rather than fundamentally challenge the theory's core insights.

Recent theoretical developments have significantly expanded upon Blumler's initial framework, particularly in addressing emerging phenomena in political communication. Scholars such as (Bennett L. &, 2018) have extended the theory to better account for the role of artificial intelligence, the impact of misinformation, and the emergence of new forms of political participation. These developments demonstrate the framework's continued relevance and adaptability to evolving communication environments.

The framework proves particularly valuable when examining contemporary political communication practices in the context of permanent campaigning. As (Kreiss D. &, 2019) demonstrate, political actors must maintain constant communication presence across multiple platforms while managing increasingly complex audience relationships. This theory helps us explain why traditional campaign periods have given way to continuous engagement strategies, where political actors must constantly adapt their communication approaches to maintain visibility and relevance.

Furthermore, the Fourth Age framework provides crucial insights into the transformation of political temporalities. The compression of communication cycles, coupled with the emergence of real-time feedback mechanisms, creates what (Vaccari, 2018) describe as hybrid temporal patterns. These patterns reflect the intersection of traditional media scheduling with digital platforms' immediate response capabilities. Political actors must develop strategies that work across these different temporal frameworks while maintaining message coherence and campaign effectiveness. Another prominent keyword that emerged during my research and can be used for further research is "media storm"

The explanation of power relationships in contemporary political communication deserves particular attention. As traditional hierarchies of political communication breakdown, new forms of influence emerge through what Chadwick (2017) terms "network power."

At this point it should also be noted that (Castells, 1996) book *The Network Society* , even though it is not directly referenced in this Thesis played a large part, not just in my understanding of the theories discussed but also in a vast part of the academic literature that I came across.

These theoretical advancements explain how political actors must navigate environments where traditional authority structures interact with networked forms of influence. The framework proves especially valuable when examining how political actors maintain legitimacy while adapting to increasingly networked communication environments.

Recent theoretical developments have also expanded the framework's application to emerging technological capabilities. Scholars like (Diakopoulos, 2019), who I extensively researched in the context of this Thesis, have examined how artificial intelligence technologies reshape political communication practices within the Fourth Age framework. This theoretical expansion explains how political actors adapt their strategies to account for both human and algorithmic audiences, developing approaches that work across multiple levels of technological mediation.

The framework's attention to audience fragmentation and media abundance, as discussed, creates valuable theoretical tools for understanding the current political communication challenges. As (Thorson, 2016) argue, political actors must develop strategies that work across increasingly fragmented media environments while maintaining coherent campaign narratives. This understanding sheds a light on why traditional approaches to message control prove increasingly inadequate and outdated in today's political communication.

Moreover, the Fourth Age framework provides crucial insights into the transformation of political **authenticity** in digital environments. As my research on the international literature of digital political campaigns demonstrates, political actors must navigate complex relationships between mediated and immediate forms of communication, developing strategies that maintain authenticity while adapting to platform-specific requirements. This theoretical advancement helps explain how political actors manage tensions between authenticity and adaptation in contemporary political communication.

The framework's explanation of strategic adaptation in political communication deserves particular attention. As political actors navigate increasingly complex media environments, they must develop what in academic literature is referred to as "adaptive capacity" a foundational theory that we will not be dwelling on but it basically means again the ability to respond effectively to changing communication conditions while **maintaining strategic coherence**. This theoretical approach helps us

explain how political actors develop flexible yet **consistent** communication strategies across multiple platforms and contexts.

Recent theoretical developments have also expanded the framework's application to crisis communication in digital environments. Scholars (Boczkowski, 2021) , as well as other scholars, have examined how the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated certain aspects of political communication transformation while revealing new patterns of adaptation. This theoretical work expands on the field of how political actors manage crisis communication across multiple platforms while maintaining message coherence and public trust.

Chapter 4: Hybrid Media Systems: Theoretical Foundations and Strategic Implications

The concept of hybrid media systems, most comprehensively developed by Andrew (Chadwick A. , 2017), represents a fundamental advancement in theoretical understanding of contemporary political communication. Moving beyond traditional dichotomies of "old" versus "new" media, hybrid media systems theory explains how different media logics coexist and interact in complex ways. This theoretical framework proves valuable when examining how political actors navigate environments characterized by multiple, often competing media logics while maintaining coherent communication strategies.

The theoretical significance of hybrid media systems extends far beyond mere technological convergence. As (Klinger, 2015) demonstrate, the hybridization of media systems fundamentally reshapes how political actors approach communication strategy. This hybridization manifests not only in the integration of different media forms but also in the emergence of new practices that blend traditional and digital media logics. These practices reflect what (Vaccari, 2018) conceptualize as a dual screening, where audiences simultaneously engage with broadcast media and digital platforms, creating new forms of political engagement and requiring sophisticated strategic responses from political actors.

Central to hybrid media systems theory is the concept of media logics, initially developed by (Altheide, 1979) and significantly extended by contemporary scholars. In hybrid environments, these logics become increasingly complex as different media forms interact and influence each other, the term of media logic is used to describe the assumptions and norms that guide how media operate, including their formats, narratives, and production practices. In hybrid systems, these logics evolve through interaction, blurring boundaries between traditional and digital platforms. This hybrid formulation integrates older entertainment-driven formats into political news and newer, participatory digital platforms

The literature uncovered also demonstrated how political actors must

simultaneously navigate the professional logic of traditional media and the networked logic of digital platforms. This theoretical advancement helps explain why political actors cannot simply choose between old and new media strategies but **must** develop approaches that work effectively across hybrid environments.

The power dynamics within hybrid media systems represent another crucial theoretical concern as already discussed. (Chadwick A. , 2017) and other scholars argue, power in hybrid systems is characterized by complexity and interdependence rather than simple dominance. Traditional media institutions maintain significant influence while adapting to digital imperatives, creating what (Thorson, 2016) refers to as hybrid power structures. These structures reflect the complex interplay between established media institutions and emerging digital platforms, requiring political actors to develop sophisticated strategies for managing multiple power relationships simultaneously.

Hybrid media systems theory also provides important insights into the transformation of political temporalities. The interaction between different media temporalities creates new rhythms of political communication, what (Chadwick A. , 2017) describes as hybrid temporal patterns. These patterns emerge from the constant interplay between scheduled and unscheduled interactions, creating complex frameworks that political actors attempt to utilize. The theory helps explain how political actors manage these different temporal demands, maintaining again their strategic coherence across multiple platforms and contexts.

The framework's explanation of audience behavior in hybrid environments represents another significant theoretical contribution. Rather than treating audiences as passive recipients of political messages, hybrid media systems theory explains how audiences actively navigate between different media forms, often contributing to the circulation and transformation of political messages. This understanding aligns with (Jenkins). concept of participatory culture, where audiences play an active role in shaping political communication processes. The theory helps explain how political actors develop strategies that work effectively with increasingly active and engaged audiences.

Recent theoretical developments have extended hybrid media systems theory to address emerging phenomena. Scholars like (Boczkowski, 2021) have examined how crisis events accelerate certain aspects of media hybridization while revealing new patterns of interaction between traditional and digital media. Similarly, (Wells, 2020) analyze how hybrid media systems shape political polarization and information flow during crisis events. These analyses guide us to explain how political actors adapt their strategies to manage crisis communication across hybrid media environments.

Furthermore, hybrid media systems theory provides crucial insights into the transformation of political legitimacy in contemporary environments. As traditional sources of political authority interact with networked forms of influence, political actors must develop what (Bennett L. &.) describe as "hybrid legitimacy strategies." These strategies reflect the organizational plan to maintain credibility across multiple media contexts while adapting to platform-specific requirements for engagement and authenticity.

The application of hybrid media systems theory to different national contexts has revealed both commonalities and variations in how hybridization manifests. Research by a wide range of academics and as also shown in the studies by (Vaccari, 2018) in Southern European contexts, demonstrate that the institutional and cultural factors influence and shape the development of hybrid media systems. These perspectives enrich theoretical understanding while highlighting the theory's adaptability to different contexts.

Chapter 5: Digital Architectures and Platform Politics: Technical Foundations of Contemporary Political Communication

Digital architectures represent more than mere technical protocols—they embody complex sociotechnical systems that fundamentally shape political communication in contemporary media environments. As (Bossetta, 2018) , whose work proved to be of fundamental value to this thesis, demonstrates, these architectures create distinct "politics of platforms" that influence the way that political messages are created, disseminated, and consumed. This nuanced understanding proves particularly valuable when examining how the technical structures of digital platforms shape political communication strategies within hybrid media environments. The architectural features of digital platforms—their network structures, algorithmic filtering mechanisms, and datafication processes—create what (Van Dijck, 2013) also refer to as "platform politics." These features essentially reshape how political actors approach communication strategy while creating new imperatives for message dissemination and audience engagement. The theoretical significance of platform architectures extends beyond technical specifications to encompass what Beer (2019) describes as a "data gaze," basically the process of understanding how **data**-led, **data**-driven and **data**-reliant forms are also reshaping how political communication operates in contemporary environments by prioritizing data analysis.

Network architecture significantly influences how political information flows through digital platforms. Drawing on (Bossetta, 2018) framework, we can identify several distinct types of network architectures, each creating unique opportunities and constraints for political communication. **Centralized networks**, exemplified by

platforms like Facebook, enable precise targeting but limit organic reach.

Decentralized networks foster grassroots mobilization but struggle with message amplification. **Hybrid networks**, such as Twitter, combine elements of both approaches, creating complex environments that political actors must navigate effectively.

Algorithmic filtering systems represent another crucial architectural feature shaping political communication. These systems employ what Gillespie (2014) terms "algorithmic governance," using complex calculations to determine content visibility and reach. The opacity of these systems creates challenges for political actors, requiring what (Kreiss D. &, 2019) describe as "algorithmic adaptation strategies." These strategies reflect the need to optimize content for algorithmic visibility while maintaining message coherence and campaign effectiveness.

The integration of algorithmic systems into political communication extends beyond simple content filtering. As (Flyverbom, 2022) demonstrates, algorithmic governance shapes not just the content visibility but also user behavior by promoting specific forms of engagement. This analysis guides us to explain why political actors attempt to develop sophisticated understanding of algorithmic preferences while maintaining authentic communication approaches. The interaction between algorithmic systems and user behavior creates what (Tufekci, 2017) basically describes as algorithmic publics, trying to highlight and expand on the role of algorithms in the social organization setting fundamentally reshaping how political messages reach and influence audiences.

Platform-specific architectures create distinct opportunities and constraints for political communication. Facebook's centralized architecture enables precise audience targeting but limits organic reach through algorithmic constraints. Twitter's hybrid architecture facilitates broader visibility but requires adaptation to dynamic and less predictable audience behaviors. These architectural differences require what (Kreiss D. &, 2019) describe as platform-specific adaptation strategies, that also points out that political actors develop approaches tailored to each platform's unique features and constraints.

Datafication processes represent another crucial aspect of digital architectures. Political actors leverage three primary types of data: user-generated content, behavioral data, and sentiment analysis. These data sources enable unprecedented targeting capabilities while creating new requirements for message optimization and audience engagement. The theoretical significance of datafication extends beyond technical capabilities to encompass what (Flyverbom, 2022) refers as the digital transformation of political practice.

[Platform Architecture Analysis: Features and Strategic Implications](#)

(Bossetta, 2018) work offers a range of tables that could be used as a fundamental

stepping stone for further analysis and for better visualization. Having said that its important to note his aim was to explore how the network architecture differences influence a campaign's ability to reach and interact with voters. To that end, as already discussed, he assessed audience accessibility by comparing searchability, connectivity, and privacy settings to evaluate how easily campaigns can connect with their audience and to understand platform-specific norms by explaining how each platform's structure shapes user behavior and campaign communication

Platform	Searchability	Connectivity	Privacy
Facebook	High	Personal: Dyadic	Personal: Closed
		Public Page: Uni-directional	Public Page: Open
Twitter	High	Uni-directional (by default)	Open
Instagram	Medium	Uni-directional (by default)	Open
Snapchat	Low	Dyadic (by changing privacy)	Closed (by default)

From Bossetta, M. (2018). The digital architectures of social media: Comparing political campaigning on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat in the 2016 U.S. elections. Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly, p. 14.

- Accessibility: To highlight searchability differences (e.g., Facebook’s high visibility compared to Snapchat’s limited discoverability), essential for campaign outreach.
- Interaction Models: To compare connectivity styles (e.g., Facebook’s dyadic relationships vs. Twitter’s uni-directional follows).
- Privacy Norms: To explore how privacy settings affect campaign strategy, with Snapchat emphasizing personal interactions due to closed defaults.

These architectural features of the digital platforms create distinct environments for political communication, each requiring specific strategic adaptations. The features operate through multiple interconnected mechanisms that shape how political messages are created, disseminated, and received. Through systematic analysis of theoretical developments, we can identify specific patterns in how platform architectures influence political communication strategies.

5.2.1 Platform-Specific Architectural Features

Expanding on his work and synthesizing with the theoretical frameworks analyzed we can go on to describe how platform architectures manifest through several key dimensions that influence political communication:

Architectural Feature	Manifestation	Strategic Implications	Theoretical Basis
Network Structure	Centralized	Enables precise targeting; limits organic reach	Bossetta (2018)
	Decentralized	Supports grassroots movements; challenges scale	van Dijck (2013)
	Hybrid	Balances control and openness; complex management	Chadwick (2017)

5.2.2 Platform Comparison and Requirements

Again using (Bossetta, 2018) work I tried to expand on how different platforms employ distinct architectural features that create unique strategic requirements:

(Bossetta, 2018) analyzed the functional features of platforms to illustrate their technical and creative potential for political campaigns:

Platform	Hardware	GUI Complexity	Supported Media	Broadcast Feed	Cross-Platform Integration
Facebook	Desktop, Smartphone, Tablet, Smartwatch	High	Text (63,206 characters), Images, Video (45 minutes), Hyperlinks	News Feed	None Supported
Twitter	Desktop, Smartphone, Tablet, Smartwatch	Medium Complexity (with dashboards)	Text (140 characters), Images, Video (30 seconds), Hyperlinks	Home Timeline & Highlights (opt-in)	None Supported
Instagram	Same as Facebook	Medium Complexity	Text (2,200 characters), Images, Video (60 seconds), Hyperlinks (in bio)	Friend Feed & Explore Feed	Posting allowed to Facebook and Twitter
Snapchat	Smartphone Exclusively	Low Complexity, Simple Layout	Text (under 31 characters), Images, Video (10 seconds)	Story Feed and Discover Feed	None Supported

Bossetta, M. (2018). The digital architectures of social media: Comparing political campaigning on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat in the 2016 U.S. elections. Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly, pp.

This next table examines the **functional features** of platforms to illustrate their technical and creative potential for political campaigns.

And again, using his work to expand based on theoretical frameworks

Platform	Primary Architecture	Key Features	Strategic Requirements	Communication Style
Facebook	Centralized Network	Algorithm-driven feed; detailed targeting	Content optimization; paid amplification	Controlled engagement
Twitter	Hybrid Network	Real-time feed; public discourse	Rapid response; viral potential	Public conversation
Instagram	Visual Network	Image-first; story format	Visual storytelling; temporal strategy	Visual narrative
TikTok	Content-Centric	Algorithm-heavy; engagement focus	Creative content; trend adaptation	Authentic performance
LinkedIn	Professional Network	Industry focus; formal tone	Professional content; targeted reach	Business discourse

This analysis attempts to highlight how platform architectures create distinct requirements for political communication strategy. As (Kreiss D. &, 2019) argue, successful political communication requires developing platform-specific approaches while maintaining coherent overall messaging. These requirements become particularly evident when examining how different architectural features shape message dissemination and audience engagement.

5.2.3 Strategic Adaptation Patterns

The analysis of platform architectures reveals several key patterns in how political actors adapt their communication strategies allowing us room for further visualization:

Adaptation Pattern	Description	Platform Example	Outcome
Content Optimization	Tailoring messages to algorithmic preferences	Facebook's	Enhanced visibility

Adaptation Pattern	Description	Platform Example	Outcome
Temporal Management	Coordinating posting times with platform rhythms	Twitter's real-time feed	Improved reach
Format Adaptation	Adjusting content format to platform requirements	Instagram's visual focus	Better engagement
Audience Targeting	Leveraging platform-specific targeting capabilities	LinkedIn's professional networks	Precise reach
Cross-Platform Integration	Maintaining consistency across platforms	Multi-platform campaigns	Coherent messaging

This systematic analysis based on a multiple of theoretical works as well as empirical platform investigation, reveals how platform architectures fundamentally can be used to shape political communication strategies. Political actors should develop sophisticated understanding of these architectural features while maintaining authentic communication approaches. The interaction between platform architectures and strategic adaptation creates what (Flyverbom, 2022) attempted to describe as digital strategic imperatives, fundamentally reshaping how political actors approach communication strategy.

5.2.4 Algorithmic Influence Patterns

Lastly (Bossetta, 2018) research also focused on algorithmic filtering, focusing on how algorithms affect the visibility and reach of campaign content.

Platform	Reach	Override
Facebook	Heavily filtered (relevance)	Pay to promote; User diffusion (Sharing)
Twitter	Moderately filtered (chronology)	Pay to promote; Index via hashtags; User diffusion (Retweeting)
Instagram	Moderately filtered (chronology)	Pay to promote; Index via hashtags
Snapchat	None	No algorithm to override

Bossetta, M. (2018). *The digital architectures of social media: Comparing political campaigning on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat in the 2016 U.S. elections. Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, pp. 27–28.

And once again expanding on his work with the researched theoretical frameworks I go on to expand on the role of algorithms in conjunction to theories discussed in the thesis in regards to political communication that deserve particular attention:

Algorithmic Feature	Impact on Communication	Strategic Response	Theoretical Basis
Content Ranking	Determines visibility and reach	Optimization strategies	Gillespie (2014)
Engagement Metrics	Shapes interaction patterns	Engagement cultivation	van Dijck (2013)
Temporal Sorting	Affects message timing	Temporal coordination	Vaccari (2018)
User Targeting	Enables precise audience reach	Segmentation strategies	Kreiss (2019)
Content Filtering	Controls message distribution	Format adaptation	Bossetta (2018)

5.2.5 Emerging Architectural Trends and Implications

The evolution of platform architectures continues to reshape political communication practices. Recent developments reveal several emerging trends that warrant theoretical attention. As is proven by available academic literature, platform architectures increasingly incorporate artificial intelligence capabilities, creating what might be termed "intelligent architectures" that actively shape political communication practices.

These emerging architectural developments might manifest through several key dimensions:

Architectural Innovation	Impact on Communication	Strategic Opportunities	Democratic Implications
AI-Driven Content Analysis	Real-time message optimization	Adaptive content strategies	Authenticity concerns

Architectural Innovation	Impact on Communication	Strategic Opportunities	Democratic Implications
Predictive Engagement Systems	Anticipated audience response	Proactive communication	Manipulation risks
Cross-Platform Integration	Seamless message distribution	Coordinated campaigns	Information control
Enhanced Targeting Capabilities	Precise audience segmentation	Ethical considerations	Democratic discourse

Chapter 6: Digital Heuristics and Contemporary Political Communication

Before beginning the analysis of digital heuristics in political communication, it is crucial to acknowledge the groundbreaking, in my opinion, contribution of Schäfer's work in this field. His groundbreaking theoretical framework on digital heuristics served as a guiding light throughout this part of the research, providing fundamental insights that helped shape my understanding of how political actors develop and implement strategic adaptations in digital environments as well as a stepping stone further academic research. While this chapter builds upon and extends his theoretical foundations, Schäfer's conceptualization of digital heuristics in political communication opened in my eyes new pathways for understanding the complex relationship between technological affordances and strategic decision-making.

6.1 Theoretical Foundations of Digital Heuristics

The concept of heuristics, rooted in cognitive psychology, describes simplified decision-making processes that individuals or organizations employ to navigate complex and uncertain environments (Simon, 1990). In the context of contemporary political communication, digital heuristics emerge as the crucial tools for managing the complexity of hybrid media systems and platform architectures. As (Schäfer, 2023) demonstrates, these heuristics serve to model diverse strategies that explain not only what political actors do but also why certain actions are prioritized over others in digital environments.

The significance of digital heuristics extends beyond simple decision-making tools, particularly when examined within the framework of the Fourth Age of Political Communication (Blumler J., Core Theories of Political Communication: Foundational and Freshly Minted., 2015). In environments characterized by media abundance and algorithmic governance, heuristics become essential mechanisms for

managing what (Chadwick A. , 2017) terms "hybrid media logics." These heuristics enable political actors to navigate environments where traditional and digital media logics intersect, creating what can be described as "hybrid strategic frameworks" for political communication.

The theoretical foundation I put forward of digital heuristics builds upon three interconnected frameworks. First, (Blumler J. , The Fourth Age of Political Communication, 2016) Fourth Age theory helps explain why simplified decision rules become necessary in environments characterized by media abundance and attention scarcity. Second, Chadwick's hybrid media systems theory provides context for understanding how heuristics must bridge traditional and digital media logics. Third, (Bossetta, 2018) digital architecture framework helps explain how platform-specific features shape the development and application of digital heuristics.

6.2 Affordances and Their Role in Digital Heuristics

The concept of affordances, originally introduced by (Gibson, 1979) in psychology, proves particularly valuable when examining digital heuristics in political communication. In digital contexts, affordances describe the relational dynamics between technological platforms and their users, emphasizing how technological features enable, constrain, or suggest certain behaviors. (Hutchby, 2001) further expanded this definition, positioning affordances as shaped by both user intentions and technological structures.

In political communication, affordances play a pivotal role in shaping strategic behaviors. (Baldwin-Philippi, 2019) identifies affordances like controlled interactivity and participatory media as key mechanisms for campaigns to construct what she introduces as "technological performance of populism." These affordances do not merely facilitate communication but actively shape how ideas are framed, circulated, and received. The affordance of interactivity, for example, allows campaigns to solicit feedback through specific tools while fostering perceptions of authenticity and inclusivity.

6.3 Digital Heuristics in Hybrid Media Systems

The application of heuristics in hybrid media systems serves dual functions. First, hybridity-based heuristics guide actors in integrating contrasting logics of traditional and digital media. Political actors often craft messages that simultaneously resonate with networked digital audiences while maintaining credibility demanded by traditional media outlets (Chadwick A. &.-G., 2016). Second, algorithm-based heuristics address the growing influence of platform algorithms in determining content visibility. These heuristics emerge through trial-and-error learning, enabling actors to craft "algorithmically recognizable" content that aligns with operational logic of digital platforms (Gillespie, 2014),.

The reliance on heuristics within hybrid media systems reflects (Simon, 1990) principle of bounded rationality, where actors use simplified strategies to cope with limited cognitive resources and incomplete information. As digital platforms amplify both opportunities and uncertainties of communication, heuristics offer , to some extent, readily available , practical frameworks for managing complex media environments. Through platform affordances such as real-time feedback, actors

iteratively refine their heuristics to achieve greater reach and engagement (Klinger, 2015)).

6.4 Algorithm-Based Heuristics in Digital (Political) Communication

Algorithm-based heuristics represent strategic simplifications political actors can use to align their communication efforts with the operational logic of digital platforms. As algorithms increasingly mediate visibility and reach in digital communication, these heuristics become indispensable for navigating opaque, dynamic, and highly competitive media environments. Political actors may employ algorithm-based heuristics to optimize their content for engagement, virality, and platform-specific prioritization, enabling them to address fragmented audiences while working within the constraints of algorithmic gatekeeping.

6.4.1 Content Optimization Heuristics

Content optimization heuristics emerge from political actors' need to maximize visibility within these algorithmic systems. These heuristics reflect what is termed in large part of the academic literature as "algorithmic anticipation," where political actors develop simplified rules for creating content likely to gain algorithmic favor. This includes patterns for:

- Message timing optimization based on platform-specific temporal patterns
- Engagement trigger identification and implementation
- Format selection principles aligned with algorithmic preferences
- Content structure adaptation for maximum algorithmic visibility

The development of these heuristics reflects what scholars in the academic literature identify as "strategic platform adaptation," where political actors learn to navigate algorithmic systems through experience and observation.

6.4.2 Engagement Optimization Heuristics

Engagement optimization heuristics focus on maximizing interaction within algorithmic systems. These heuristics emerge from what I already addressed as "platform politics," where engagement metrics significantly influence content visibility and reach. Key aspects include:

- Interactive feature utilization strategies
- Audience response optimization techniques
- Viral potential maximization approaches
- Community building practices within algorithmic constraints

These heuristics reflect what (Bossetta, 2018) describes as "platform-specific engagement strategies," where political actors develop rules for maximizing interaction within particular platform environments.

6.5 Hybridity-Based Heuristics in Digital (Political) Communication

Hybridity-based heuristics offer actionable guidelines for integrating the enduring influence of legacy media with the interactive, decentralized, and algorithm-driven dynamics of digital media. These heuristics prove particularly valuable when examining how political actors maintain coherent communication strategies across diverse media environments.

6.5.1 Cross-Platform Integration Heuristics

Cross-platform integration heuristics help political actors maintain message coherence across hybrid media environments. As (Chadwick A. , 2017) demonstrates, these heuristics emerge from the need to bridge traditional and digital media logics while maintaining strategic consistency. Key elements include:

- Message adaptation principles for different media contexts
- Channel coordination strategies across hybrid environments
- Timing synchronization approaches for maximum impact
- Narrative consistency maintenance across platforms

These heuristics reflect what can be described as "hybrid media coordination," where political actors develop rules for managing multiple media logics simultaneously.

6.5.2 Media Logic Alignment Heuristics

Media logic alignment heuristics help political actors navigate the distinct requirements of different media forms. These heuristics emerge from what (Schäfer, 2023) identify as hybrid media practices, where political actors must ,again, simultaneously satisfy traditional media standards and digital platform requirements. Key aspects include:

- Traditional media credibility maintenance strategies
- Digital platform affordance utilization approaches
- Professional-networked media balance techniques
- Hybrid audience engagement practices

These heuristics reflect what (Bennett L. &, 2018) come close to describing as "strategic" hybridity where political actors develop rules for managing multiple media logics effectively.

6.6.1 Permanent Campaign Heuristics

The concept of permanent campaigning, that emerged as a very interesting subject for further analysis during my research, creates particular demands for heuristic development and implementation. Political actors should what we can attempt to describe as "continuous engagement heuristics" - simplified rules for maintaining consistent presence across multiple platforms while adapting to changing circumstances. These heuristics manifest through:

- Continuous content generation strategies
- Long-term engagement maintenance approaches
- Audience relationship management techniques
- Strategic narrative development and maintenance

6.7 Democratic Implications of Digital Heuristics

The implementation of digital heuristics raises significant questions about democratic practice in contemporary media environments. As (Bennett L. &, 2018) argue, these developments create tension between strategic effectiveness and democratic values.

6.7.1 Democratic Considerations

Several key democratic concerns emerge from the widespread adoption of digital heuristics:

- Message authenticity in algorithmic environments
- Public discourse quality in hybrid systems
- Democratic participation patterns
- Information accessibility and transparency

6.7.2 Ethical Implications

The ethical dimensions of digital heuristics warrant particular attention. As (Thorson, 2016) demonstrate, the use of simplified decision rules in political communication could raise questions about:

- Manipulation potential
- Privacy considerations
- Democratic accountability
- Public trust maintenance

6.8 Future Directions and Theoretical Implications

The continued evolution of digital heuristics suggests several crucial directions for future research and practice. These developments, include:

- Integration of emerging technologies
- Development of ethical guidelines
- Enhancement of democratic engagement
- Evolution of strategic practices

6.9 Opinion

The examination of digital heuristics provides crucial insights into how political actors navigate increasingly complex media environments. As we transition to examining artificial intelligence's role in political communication, these insights help explain how technological advancement reshapes strategic decision-making in political communication.

Chapter 7: Artificial Intelligence and Political Communication in the Hybrid Media System

The integration of artificial intelligence into political communication represents more than technological advancement—it embodies the fundamental transformation in how political actors engage with audiences within hybrid media environments. As it should be apparent by now, traditional and digital media logics converge so AI technologies become instrumental in shaping political discourse and campaign strategies, creating what we could term based on Chadwick's work technologically enhanced hybrid practices. This transformation extends beyond mere automation to encompass sophisticated systems for message creation, audience targeting, and strategic optimization.

The theoretical significance of AI integration extends beyond technological capability. As (Diakopoulos, 2019) demonstrates, AI technologies create new forms of mediation in political communication, fundamentally reshaping how political messages are created, disseminated, and consumed. This technological mediation operates algorithmic-strategic frameworks, where AI capabilities enhance and transform traditional communication approaches while creating new imperatives for political practice.

7.2 Algorithmic Governance in Political Communication

The deployment of algorithms in political communication extends beyond simple content filtering to encompass fundamental changes in how political messages reach and influence audiences. These algorithmic systems, operating through what (Gillespie, 2014) loosely describe as algorithmic governance, actively shape political discourse through sophisticated content optimization, audience segmentation, and engagement metrics. Within the hybrid media system, these algorithmic processes create new imperatives for political communication strategy while transforming traditional approaches to message dissemination.

Platform-specific implementations of algorithmic governance, as already discussed, create distinct requirements for political communication strategy. Platforms like Meta employ sophisticated AI systems enabling unprecedented microtargeting of political messages, while Twitter's algorithmic systems focus on content moderation and engagement optimization. These architectural differences, as (Bossetta, 2018) demonstrates, require political actors to develop platform-specific strategies while maintaining coherent overall messaging. The interaction between algorithmic systems and user behavior creates what (Tufekci, 2017) could describe as "algorithmic publics," fundamentally reshaping how political messages reach and influence audiences on either side of the spectrum.

7.3 Computational Propaganda and Democratic Discourse

The rise of computational propaganda within hybrid media environments presents significant challenges to democratic discourse. (Woolley, 2016) demonstrate how political actors leverage automated agents and algorithmic amplification to influence public opinion and electoral outcomes. These practices operate within what (Chadwick A. , 2017) termed the "hybrid media system," where the intersection of the media systems creates new opportunities for message manipulation and audience influence.

The strategic application of computational propaganda tools reveals complex patterns of influence within contemporary political communication. Through automated content generation, message amplification systems, and network manipulation techniques, political actors can shape public discourse in ways that challenge traditional understanding of political influence. These developments, as (Bennett L. &, 2018) argue, raise crucial questions about information integrity, public discourse quality, and democratic accountability in increasingly automated communication environments.

7.4 Transformation Through Large Language Models

The emergence of large language models introduces new dimensions to political communication, fundamentally reshaping how political actors approach **message creation** and audience engagement. These AI systems enable what Diakopoulos (2019) describes as automated strategic communication—the ability to generate persuasive content at scale while maintaining message coherence across multiple platforms and contexts. This capability transforms traditional approaches to political communication while raising important questions about authenticity and accountability.

The integration of LLMs in political communication creates new possibilities for personalized message generation and real-time response capabilities. However, as (Vaccari, 2018) demonstrate, these technologies also create tension between communication efficiency and democratic transparency. Political actors must balance the advantages of automated content generation with maintaining authentic engagement and public trust. This tension reflects broader questions about the role of artificial intelligence in democratic discourse and political practice.

7.5 Ethical Implications and Democratic Considerations

The integration of AI technologies in political communication presents complex ethical challenges that intersect with broader questions of democratic governance. As scholars argue, effective oversight must balance innovation with democratic values, creating frameworks for responsible AI deployment in political communication. These considerations extend beyond technical capabilities to encompass fundamental questions about transparency, accountability, and democratic participation.

Current regulatory frameworks attempt to address these challenges through various mechanisms. The European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and proposed AI Act establish guidelines for algorithmic transparency and accountability. However, as (Flyverbom, 2022) demonstrates, the global nature of digital platforms

and rapid evolution of AI technologies complicate regulatory efforts. Political actors must navigate increasingly complex regulatory environments while maintaining effective communication strategies.

7.6 Future Trajectories and Theoretical Implications

The continued evolution of AI technologies in political communication suggests several critical trajectories for future development. These developments, as identified by (Kreiss D. &, 2019), indicate fundamental transformations in how political actors approach communication strategy. Enhanced personalization capabilities, advanced content generation systems, and sophisticated engagement optimization create new imperatives for political practice while raising important questions about democratic discourse.

The theoretical significance of these developments extends beyond technological innovation to encompass fundamental questions about political communication in democratic societies. As artificial intelligence technologies become increasingly central to political communication strategies, questions of transparency, accountability, and democratic participation gain new urgency. The frameworks examined in this research provide crucial tools for understanding these developments while suggesting important directions for future investigation.

7.7 Integration with Hybrid Media Systems

The transformation of hybrid media systems through AI integration creates fundamentally new conditions for political communication practice. These conditions can best be described as AI-enhanced hybrid environments, where artificial intelligence capabilities intersect with both traditional and digital media logics. This intersection creates new forms of media practice that require sophisticated understanding of both technological capabilities and strategic implications.

Within these AI-enhanced environments, political actors must navigate complex relationships between technological affordances and communication strategies. As (Bennett L. &, 2018) demonstrate, this navigation requires understanding of how AI technologies mediate not just the content distribution part but also message creation and audience engagement. The resulting practices reflect the academic literature identify as "technologically enhanced hybrid practices," where political actors leverage AI capabilities while striving to maintain authentic communication approaches.

7.8 Theory Synthesis

The examination of AI integration in political communication reveals crucial theoretical developments that extend and transform our understanding of contemporary political practice. These developments connect directly to (Blumler J. , The Fourth Age of Political Communication, 2016) Fourth Age framework, demonstrating how AI technologies intensify challenges of media abundance and attention scarcity. Political actors must develop increasingly sophisticated approaches to message optimization and audience engagement, leveraging AI capabilities while maintaining strategic coherence across multiple platforms and contexts.

The integration of AI technologies within hybrid media systems creates what (Kreiss D. &, 2017) describes as technological-strategic convergence, where political communication practices increasingly reflect the capabilities and constraints of AI systems. This convergence requires political actors to develop new forms of strategic competence that combine traditional communication expertise with sophisticated understanding of technological affordances. The resulting practices represent fundamental transformation in how political actors approach communication strategy.

Furthermore, the theoretical significance of AI integration extends to questions of democratic practice and public discourse. As (Diakopoulos, 2019) demonstrates, AI technologies create new forms of mediation in political communication that fundamentally reshape how political messages reach and influence audiences. These developments raise crucial questions about transparency, accountability, and democratic participation in increasingly automated communication environments.

7.9 Future Trajectories and Democratic Imperatives

The transformation of political communication through AI integration represents a critical moment in the evolution of democratic practice. Artificial intelligence technologies have become increasingly central to political communication strategies, questions of transparency, accountability, and democratic participation gain new urgency. The theoretical frameworks examined in this research provide crucial tools for understanding these developments while suggesting important directions for future investigation.

Several critical considerations emerge for both research and practice. First, the continued evolution of AI technologies suggests new forms of political communication that may further transform our understanding of democratic practice. This evolution will be creating various technological-democratic tensions, where innovation in communication capability must be balanced against democratic values and public trust.

Secondly, questions of regulation and oversight gain new urgency as AI capabilities expand and deepen. Political actors must navigate increasingly complex regulatory environments while maintaining effective communication strategies. These considerations reflect broader questions about the relationship between technological innovation and democratic governance in contemporary societies.

Thirdly, the relationship between technological innovation and democratic values requires ongoing examination and careful consideration. As (Kreiss D. &, 2019) demonstrate, political actors must balance the advantages of AI-enhanced communication capabilities against requirements for authentic engagement and public trust. This balance reflects fundamental questions about the nature of political communication in democratic societies.

7.10 Conclusion

The integration of artificial intelligence in political communication represents fundamental transformation in how political actors engage with increasingly complex media environments. The theoretical frameworks developed through this

research provide important tools for understanding these developments while suggesting crucial directions for future investigation. As political communication continues to evolve through AI integration, maintaining balance between technological innovation and democratic integrity remains essential for political actors, researchers, and citizens alike.

Chapter 8: The Case of Greece within the European Context

In Europe, the shift from traditional to digital campaigning reflects the increasing importance of online platforms. However, the extent of adaptation varies significantly across countries, shaped by political, cultural, and structural factors. This chapter will be exploring Greece's political campaigning practices and norms within the framework of digital and hybrid media systems, using comparative insights from European trends. The analysis draws on findings from (Stamatis Poulakidakos, 2014), (Poulakidakos, 2016), and (Lilleker, 2014)), among others, to provide a detailed examination of Greece's strategic limitations and opportunities in the digital era.

Theoretical Framework: Hybrid Media Systems and Hypermedia Campaigning

The concept of the fourth age of political communication highlights the growing influence of digital platforms in creating multidimensional campaign strategies. This era is marked by the coexistence of traditional and digital media, challenging the dominance of centralized, top-down communication systems (Blumler J. , The Fourth Age of Political Communication, 2016). Building on this, (Lilleker, 2014) propose the term "hypermedia campaigning" to describe campaigns that integrate old and new communication tools. This model acknowledges the interplay between traditional channels, such as television, and newer platforms, like Facebook and Twitter. The hybrid nature of modern media systems also underscores the necessity for political actors to adopt diverse strategies, leveraging both established and emerging tools to engage voters effectively.

Furthermore the interaction between traditional and digital media in Greece exemplifies the hybrid media system's capacity to intensify political polarization. As Chadwick's framework suggests, the blending of older media logics with the participatory affordances of digital platforms creates complex communication dynamics that amplify division (Chadwick A. , 2017). During Greece's economic and political crises, this dynamic became particularly evident, with parties exploiting the fragmentation to consolidate support among polarized constituencies. (Koliastasis, 2016) highlights how these crises reshaped media narratives and political strategies under successive Greek premierships, further embedding a polarized media environment into the political landscape.

In Greece, the adoption of these theoretical frameworks has been inconsistent. While digital platforms have gained traction, traditional media remains dominant, reflecting the structural and cultural constraints that characterize Greece's polarized pluralist media model (Poulakidakos, 2016). These challenges underline the need for a more nuanced understanding of how Greek political actors navigate the hybrid media environment.

Greek politicians have historically approached social media with a fragmented and instrumental mindset, primarily leveraging platforms like Facebook and Twitter to bypass traditional media gatekeepers. However, recent studies indicate an increasing awareness among politicians and consultants about the strategic affordances these platforms provide for direct engagement with the electorate. For example, while Facebook is extensively used for awareness, its full potential for mobilization remains underutilized (Veneti, 2019). Furthermore, the disparity in platform-specific strategies reflects a broader challenge in aligning digital campaigning with evolving audience behaviors (Poulakidakos, 2016). Lastly it should be noted that further examination of the available literature and research primary focused on structured interviews with consultants that work as coordinators and managers in a variety of political parties on the part of digital campaigning, showed that the candidates are not interested to exploit and maximize the effectiveness of their digital efforts – in some cases even the consultants that were in charge of the digital campaigning practices did not delve too much into the affordances of the platforms available – thinking that their time could be used more effectively in other activities.

Greece's Approach to Digital Campaigning

Greek political campaigns exhibit a cautious approach to digital media, often prioritizing traditional channels despite the growing importance of online platforms. Research by (Stamatis Poulakidakos, 2014) highlights the limited strategic use of social media by Greek politicians, who often view these platforms as supplementary rather than integral to their campaigns. Facebook, for instance, is predominantly used for broadcasting messages, while platforms like Twitter and YouTube remain underutilized.

(Poulakidakos, 2016) note that Greek politicians frequently rely on one-way communication strategies, reflecting a broader reluctance to engage in dialogue with voters. This approach contrasts sharply with the participatory potential of social media, which enables real-time interaction and community building. The lack of strategic adaptation is further compounded by structural barriers, including limited resources, inadequate training, and a fragmented political landscape. These factors contribute to a digital divide that undermines the effectiveness of online campaigns in Greece.

Platform-Specific Insights

Facebook emerges as the dominant platform in Greece, serving as a key tool for political communication. According to (Lilleker, 2014) Facebook's versatility and broad reach make it a valuable asset for political actors, particularly in fragmented party systems. In Greece, its personalization features allow politicians to target specific voter demographics, although this potential remains largely underexploited.

The emphasis is on broadcasting over engagement limits Facebook's effectiveness as a tool for fostering meaningful connections with voters.

Twitter, on the other hand, is less prominent in Greek campaigns. While it is widely used in Western democracies for real-time communication and influencer engagement, its adoption in Greece is hindered by cultural and demographic factors. Twitter's association with more affluent and educated audiences makes it less accessible to the broader electorate (Lilleker, 2014). This contrasts with Facebook's wider appeal, highlighting the importance of tailoring platform strategies to specific electoral contexts.

YouTube presents another missed opportunity for Greek political actors. As (Poulakidakos, 2016) argue, the platform's capacity for visual storytelling is particularly suited to engaging less literate and politically disengaged audiences. However, Greek campaigns have largely overlooked YouTube's potential, focusing instead on traditional media for visual content. This underutilization underscores the need for more comprehensive digital strategies that incorporate the unique affordances of each platform.

It should be noted that despite the cautionary and reluctant approach to digital practices some literature has shown that personalization strategies have emerged as a key strategy for Greek politicians seeking to connect with their electorate through social media. Platforms like Instagram, even with limited usage, have enabled the sharing of personal anecdotes and visuals, fostering a sense of authenticity and relatability. This approach aligns with European trends in political communication, where visual storytelling and platform-specific strategies are increasingly prominent (Poulakidakos, 2016). In Greece, such practices are especially impactful, with posts featuring family-oriented or 'behind-the-scenes' content generating higher levels of audience engagement (Veneti, 2019)

Comparative Insights: Greece and the European Context

The integration of digital media into political campaigns varies significantly across Europe, influenced by national contexts and party-specific factors (Lilleker, 2014) identify key variables, including GDP, internet penetration, and political culture, that shape the adoption of digital tools. In countries with higher internet penetration and more established democratic traditions, digital media play a central role in campaign strategies. For example, Scandinavian and Western European countries demonstrate advanced levels of digital professionalization, characterized by data-driven techniques and participatory practices.

In contrast, Greece's polarized pluralist media model presents unique challenges for digital campaigning. The dominance of traditional media, coupled with limited regulatory oversight, creates an environment where digital tools are often viewed as secondary to established channels. This contrasts with the findings of (Lilleker, 2014), who highlight the growing importance of digital platforms in fragmented party systems. Greece's reluctance to fully embrace digital media reflects broader structural and cultural barriers, including resource constraints and a lack of digital literacy among political actors.

Strategic Clusters and Greek Campaigns

Furthermore (Lilleker, 2014) identify four clusters of campaign strategies: generalists, average users, selective users, and email avoiders. Greek campaigns align most closely with the selective users cluster, prioritizing specific tools like Facebook while neglecting others, such as Twitter and YouTube. This selective adoption reflects both resource limitations and strategic conservatism, which hinder the development of comprehensive digital strategies.

The comparative analysis also reveals that opposition parties in Greece are more likely to experiment with digital tools than governing parties. This aligns with the broader European trend identified by (Lilleker, 2014), where opposition parties leverage digital platforms to compensate for their limited access to traditional media. However, the effectiveness of these efforts is often undermined by inconsistent strategies and a lack of investment in digital infrastructure.

Practical Implications for Greece

To enhance the effectiveness of digital campaigns, Greek political actors must adopt a more holistic approach to digital media. This includes:

- **Leveraging Platform Affordances:** Utilizing Facebook for community building, Twitter for real-time engagement, and YouTube for visual storytelling to reach diverse voter demographics.
- **Investing in Digital Infrastructure:** Allocating resources to develop professional digital teams capable of managing multi-platform campaigns.
- **Enhancing Digital Literacy:** Providing training for politicians and campaign staff to improve their understanding of platform-specific strategies.
- **Promoting Participatory Practices:** Encouraging two-way communication through live Q&A sessions, citizen polls, and interactive content to foster voter engagement.
- These recommendations align with the broader principles of hypermedia campaigning, emphasizing the need for strategic integration of digital and traditional media. By addressing these gaps, Greek political actors can enhance their adaptability and effectiveness in the digital era.

Conclusion

Greece's digital political communication within the broader context of European campaigning trends, highlights both challenges and opportunities for strategic adaptation. By integrating insights from hybrid media theory and hypermedia campaigning, Greek politicians should aim to reinforce and take advantage of the opportunities presented by the new dynamics formed of digital platforms and political communication. This analysis underscores the need for Greek political actors to adopt more comprehensive and participatory strategies, leveraging the unique affordances of digital media to engage voters effectively. Should also be noted that despite the literature findings newer work tend to emphasize and

approve the practices of some of the more successful politicians that did take advantage of the digital affordances in conjunction to successful communication practices, mostly focused on TikTok. Future research should explore the evolving role of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence and data analytics, in enhancing digital campaign strategies across diverse sociopolitical contexts.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

Through this research I aimed to examine how contemporary theoretical frameworks explain political actors' adaptation to increasingly complex media environments, focusing particularly on the intersection of hybrid media systems, digital architectures, and the emerging literature on digital based heuristics. Through systematic analysis of theoretical developments between 2013 and 2024, this research reveals how platform architectures and digital heuristics fundamentally reshape political communication practices within hybrid media environments. It is my belief that the investigation provides crucial insights into how political actors navigate environments characterized by multiple media logics, platform-specific constraints, and algorithmic governance, utilizing an interdisciplinary approach to better understand the complexity and depth of the subject.

The theoretical significance of this research emerges through its synthesis of three primary frameworks. Blumler's Fourth Age of Political Communication provides foundational understanding of how media abundance and attention scarcity create new imperatives for political communication. Chadwick's Hybrid Media Systems Theory explains how traditional and digital media logics interact and influence each other in contemporary environments. Bossetta's Digital Architecture Framework offers analytical tools for understanding how platform-specific features influence political communication strategies. The integration of these frameworks reveals how political actors develop adaptive strategies within increasingly complex media environments.

This research makes several original contributions to political communication theory. First, it demonstrates how platform architectures fundamentally shape the development of digital heuristics, creating what might be termed "architecturally-informed adaptive strategies." These strategies reflect sophisticated understanding of how technical structures influence message dissemination and audience engagement. The research reveals how political actors navigate platform-specific constraints while maintaining coherent communication approaches across multiple media environments. Second, the research advances theoretical understanding of how digital heuristics emerge and evolve within hybrid media systems. These heuristics serve as crucial tools for managing the complexity of contemporary political communication, enabling political actors to navigate environments characterized by multiple, often competing media logics. The identification of specific categories of digital heuristics—navigation, engagement, algorithmic, and hybridity—provides new theoretical tools for understanding how political actors develop adaptive strategies within hybrid media environments. Third, this research explains how the interaction between platform architectures and digital heuristics creates new forms of strategic adaptation in political communication. Through

systematic analysis of theoretical developments, the research reveals how political actors can leverage platform-specific features while developing simplified decision rules for managing complex media environments. This interaction creates what might be termed "hybrid strategic frameworks," where political actors combine traditional communication expertise with sophisticated understanding of digital affordances to take advantage of and maximize the effect of the available platforms for information dissemination.

The implications of these theoretical developments extend beyond academic understanding to encompass practical considerations for political communication. The research demonstrates how political actors must simultaneously manage traditional media relationships while adapting to the demands of digital platforms, creating what Chadwick describes as hybrid media practices. These practices require sophisticated understanding of both technological capabilities and strategic implications, suggesting important directions for professional development in political communication.

Furthermore, the research reveals how artificial intelligence technologies increasingly reshape political communication practices within hybrid media environments. The integration of AI capabilities creates new possibilities for message optimization and audience engagement while raising important questions about authenticity and accountability. These developments suggest crucial directions for future research, particularly regarding the relationship between technological innovation and democratic practice.

The theoretical frameworks developed through this research provide important tools for understanding how political actors can and should navigate increasingly complex media environments. The identification of specific patterns in how platform architectures influence political communication strategies offers valuable insights, in my opinion, for both researchers and practitioners. These patterns reveal how political actors develop sophisticated understanding of platform-specific features while maintaining authentic communication approaches.

Looking forward, several critical directions emerge for future research. First, the continued evolution of artificial intelligence technologies suggests new forms of political communication that may further transform our understanding of democratic practice. A fruitful field for further research should be, the analysis of how the tools and as an extension, regulation and oversight gain new urgency as platform capabilities expand and deepen. Lastly, the antagonizing relationship of technological innovation and democratic values requires ongoing examination and careful consideration.

The methodological approach employed in this research, focusing on systematic analysis of theoretical developments, provides valuable insights for future investigations. The integration of multiple theoretical frameworks enables comprehensive understanding of how political actors navigate complex media environments. This approach suggests important directions for future research, particularly regarding the relationship between technological capability and democratic practice.

In conclusion, this research advances political communication theory by explaining how political actors navigate environments characterized by multiple media logics, platform-specific constraints, and algorithmic governance. The theoretical frameworks developed through this research provide crucial tools for understanding these developments while suggesting important directions for future investigation. As political communication continues to evolve through technological innovation, maintaining balance between strategic effectiveness and democratic integrity remains essential for political actors, researchers, and citizens alike.

The synthesis provided offers valuable insights for both theory and practice in political communication. By examining how platform architectures shape the development of digital heuristics while considering broader implications for democratic practice, this research contributes to deeper understanding of contemporary political communication. As we move forward, maintaining this theoretical sophistication while addressing practical challenges will prove crucial for advancing both academic understanding and professional practice in political communication.

Technical Note on Research Tools

In the interest of academic transparency and research integrity, it is important to acknowledge the use of artificial intelligence tools in specific aspects of this thesis's technical preparation. Artificial intelligence assistance was employed strictly for technical tasks, including:

- The extraction and reformatting of referenced tables from PDF documents
- The standardization of citation formats

All analytical work, theoretical development, research synthesis, and conclusions presented in this thesis are the original work of the author. The AI tools were used solely to enhance the technical efficiency of document preparation and data processing, without any involvement in the intellectual content, analysis, or conclusions of the research.

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