Comparing Twitter and Instagram as platforms for party leader communication: Findings from the 2017 Norwegian election
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Abstract
While social media have become key in contemporary political campaigns, different platforms feature differing affordances, allowing for varying functionalities. Even more importantly, different platforms are populated by different user groups. As Twitter has received large amounts of scholarly attention, comparisons of how and why different social media platforms are used for political communication are less abundant. This study looks at the differences between Twitter and Instagram as platforms for top politicians, describing and explaining how they allow for interaction with different types of audiences. The study gauges the interaction patterns emerging from activity undertaken by Norwegian party leaders on Twitter and Instagram during the 2017 Norwegian elections and shows how use of these two platforms differ not only in terms of the volume and structure of the activities — but also with regard to what types of other users the party leaders choose to interact with on the studied platforms and why we see differences between them.

Contents
Introduction
Literature review
Comparing interaction across platforms
Method
Results
Discussion
Conclusion
Discussion and conclusion

Introduction
Uses of online media by politicians and parties have been studied intensely in a series of different contexts (e.g., Bekafigo and McBride, 2013; Loveland and Popescu, 2011; Olsson, 2016). Spanning the wide variety of theoretical and methodological perspectives employed to do so, a key aspect in many studies is the interactive nature of the Internet. For example, early work pointed to the potential of interactivity between citizens and politicians as ushering in an era of direct democracy (e.g., Blumler and Kavanagh, 1999; Ward and Vedel, 2006), to help strengthen everyday contacts between citizens and government representatives (e.g., Coleman, 2005, 2004), or — as has been studied quite extensively to rejuvenate the Habermasian public sphere (e.g., Bruns and Highfield, 2013; Papacharissi, 2002).

Following the uses and studies of political candidate Web sites, discussion forums and other comparably early online services, scholars have largely come to the conclusion that the political potential of online services is rarely fully exploited (e.g., Koc-Mikalska, et al., 2016; Larsson, 2013). Indeed, the critical approach adopted by Margolis, et al.
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In the course of the fundamental communication technological developments, many claims regarding the political potential of social media have been raised. While some services have lost their place in the political limelight — consider, for example, the now-defunct MySpace platform (e.g., Kalnes, 2009; Nielsen and Vaccari, 2013) — the microblog Twitter has received plenty of attention from political communication scholars (e.g., Jungherr, 2015; Karlsen and Enjolras, 2016). This attention can partly be explained by the relative ease with which data hitherto could be gathered from that platform (e.g., Burgess and Bruns, 2012; Larsson, 2015b). The current study takes an analytic, comparative approach and looks at the activities of top politicians on Twitter compared to on another social media service — the image-centered platform Instagram.

We do so by placing our empirical focus on Norwegian party leaders and their activities during the 2017 national election campaign. The selection of party leaders and not regular MPs allows us to explore how top politicians, who are often characterized as celebrities and as the front faces of their respective party’s public images (Skogerbo and Larsson, 2015; van Zoonen, 2005), interacted with different user groups on Twitter and Instagram. Based on a literature review, the paper formulates three hypotheses that seek to explain variations in use.

Since our data stem from one political system only, some contextual remarks are in place. The Norwegian political system is a parliamentary multi-party system, largely characterized by a left-right divide. Eight parties were represented in Parliament at the time of the study. The Red-Green/Socialist bloc consisted of, starting from the far left: the Red party (R); the Left Socialist party (SV); the Labour Party, social-democratic (AP), by far the largest in the bloc; and the Green party (MDG). To the right, in the Non-Socialist bloc, we find two minor parties, the Liberal Party (V) and the Christian people’s party (KRF), together with two comparably larger parties, the Conservative party (H) and the far-right Progress Party (FRP). The latter two parties formed the so-called ‘blue-blue’ minority coalition from 2013–2017 under the leadership of PM Erna Solberg (H). The coalition remained in power after the 2017 election and was, by including V and KRF, extended to a majority coalition in January 2019.

With this contextualization in place, we present the following research questions: Which publics did Norwegian party leaders interact with on Twitter and Instagram during the 2017 election campaign? What are the differences in interactive patterns on these two platforms and what explain the differences? By gauging the degrees to which the party leaders chose to connect to various types of other users on two separate platforms, each with its own characteristics, we shed light on the social media prioritizations of politicians. The comparative research design and the Norwegian context are motivated by several concerns. First, there is a lack of comparative studies concerning social media. We follow the suggestion made by Esser and Hanitzsch (2012) that a comparative approach offers “a valuable tool for advancing our understanding of communication processes and [...] opens up new avenues of systematic research” [2]. Relatedly, Felt (2016) performed a meta-analysis of media and communication research engaging with social media and found that only 10 percent of the studies included in her sample examined more than one social media outlet. While the argument for more in-depth, single-platform case studies certainly has merit (e.g., Eranti and Lonkila, 2015), we put forth that comparative research is especially useful for studying online political communication. As political campaigning takes place on several platforms, concentrating the analysis to only one outlet will undoubtedly offer a limited view of party leader engagement (e.g., Chadwick, 2013; González-Bailón, 2013; Jungherr, 2015).

As for our selected case — the 2017 Norwegian parliamentary election — it answers the call from previous research to examine the characteristics of online political campaigning in non-U.S. contexts (e.g., Gibson, 2004; Jungherr, 2016; Xenos, et al., 2015). Norway provides an good case given the high use levels of social media services and of voter turnout (Bergseteren and Kleven, 2013). Within this setting, we study the “changes in the technologies that undergird the [political communication] process” [2], essentially following the suggestion by Raymond Williams (1974) to explore the ways that different technologies are mobilized for certain ends by specific social groups.

Literature review

A common mode for elected officials to approach new platforms has been to employ them as means for political marketing, image control and other, similar practices (e.g., Jackson and Lilleker, 2011; Golbeck, et al., 2010; Small, 2011). Interactive practices have been limited and mainly focused on what Svensson (2012) has referred to as ”virtual
Comparing Twitter and Instagram as platforms for party leader communication: Findings from the 2017 Norwegian election

Recent research has uncovered what appears to be a changing pattern of engagement of politicians across a series of contexts. Studies reporting from Australia (Highfield, 2016), the Netherlands (Graham, et al., 2016), Norway (Larsson and Skogerbø, 2013; Larsson and Skogerbø, 2015) and the United Kingdom (Graham, et al., 2013; Graham, et al., 2016) have found what could be referred to as a slow but steady uptake of the interactive features made available by social media. These studies show a variety of interactive social media practices among politicians and parties; between and within political systems (Skogerbø and Larsson, 2014); between politicians representing small and large parties, or majority and minority views (Skogerbø and Larsson and Larsson). There are variations between and within election periods, and indeed, as phenomena such as the incumbent U.S. President Donald Trump exemplifies, considerable individual variation both between top politicians and between top politicians and regular MP (Highfield, 2016; Kreiss, et al., 2018).

Twitter and Instagram are interesting to compare — as we do in this study — since they differ in a number of ways, yet both appear to be popular by those up for elections (Larsson, 2017a, 2017b). Beyond their basic differences — Twitter primarily text-based, Instagram featuring images — the services are likely to have considerable differences with regards to their users. In Scandinavia, Twitter is often described as an elite medium primarily populated by ‘the chattering classes’ — a twitterati of media professionals, pundits, politicians and others holding similar privileged societal positions (e.g., Enjolras, et al., 2013; Larsson and Skogerbø, 2013). Comparable results have been reported from other contexts leading researchers to employ the label of ‘Twitter elites’ when discussing the uses and users of Twitter (e.g., Bruns and Burgess, 2011; Graham, et al., 2013; Hawthorne, et al., 2013; Rauchfleisch and Metag, 2015). Given this status, it follows that Twitter use in Norway is rather limited, with 5.2 percent of citizens making use of the service on a daily basis (Ipsos/MMI, 2017). Nevertheless, while the elite characterization appears to hold true for the study of hashtags — thematic keywords that allow for threaded conversation (e.g. Larsson and Skogerbø, 2013; Larsson and Skogerbø, 2016; Skogerbø and Larsson, 2012) — party leader activity on Twitter appears to be characterized somewhat differently in the Norwegian context. For example, a study detailing party leaders’ Twitter use during the 2013 Norwegian elections reported that while the studied politicians mostly communicated with a unique set of other users, their respective user clusters contained an unexpectedly large amount of ‘regular citizens’. Varying between different party leaders, from 29 to 50 percent of @mentions — indicating an effort to engage in conversation — were sent to such users (Larsson and Skogerbø, 2015). As such, while the popular image of Twitter as an elite medium might still persist, the empirical advances discussed here suggests a somewhat more nuanced picture.

With regards to Instagram in a Scandinavian context, it appears to have been gradually integrated into political campaigning (e.g., Ekman and Widholm, 2017). Internationally, it has been suggested that the platform rose to global political fame during the 2016 Sanders campaign for the U.S. presidency (Enli, 2017). Primarily associated with younger users, Instagram service should thus be of considerable interest for political actors. Indeed, with close to half of Norwegians over the age of 18 reporting to be Instagram users, and with around 55 percent of such users visiting the service daily (Ipsos/MMI, 2017), this platform should indeed be of clear interest for politicians. While Twitter use at the hands of party leaders appear to have become more geared towards interaction as discussed above, a reverse tendency can be discerned for Instagram. Studying party use of the service at hand during the 2014 Swedish elections, Filimonov, et al. (2016) reported that “the platform was mainly used for broadcasting” [4]. At least for the specified election, then, more interactive uses of Instagram were few and far between.

In sum, these studies show that social media have extended the political space for interaction between politicians and other societal groups. This is true not only in a quantitative sense — by adding to the sheer number of places where communication takes place. It is also valid in qualitative terms, as this plethora of services all feature different affordances allowing for different types of staging, interaction and performances. This comparative study, then, allows for further insights into the prioritizations of Norwegian party leaders as they took to Twitter and Instagram during the 2017 election. While party leader utilization of social media might be changing to more interactive rationales, the question still remains whether or not these interactive appeals are still characterized by inward-facing rationales as discussed above. Unlike studies of how campaign communications are designed and planned (Kreiss, et al., 2018), this study explores what happens when we look at the actual communication efforts of top politicians on two social media platforms.
Comparing interaction across platforms

‘Interactivity’ has been defined in a multitude of ways (e.g., Bucy, 2004; Quiring, 2009). Given our interest in what types of users were addressed by party leaders during the specified time period, the work presented here opts for a user-to-user (McMillan, 2002) or human (Stromer-Galley, 2000) definition of interactivity, which emphasizes “interpersonal communication online” [5]. As the studies suggesting these definitions largely stem from the pre-social media era, the empirical examples provided in them primarily have to do with features typically found on Web pages — for the type of interactivity discussed here, we can think of functionalities such as chats or discussion forums (as discussed by e.g., Chung, 2008; Larsson, 2012). While technologies change and the services and platforms employed for interactive purposes may come and go, the definition still holds value as it points to a more general affordance of use rather than a specific functionality on a specific service (e.g., Evans, et al., 2017). By studying the employment of user-to-user interactive features across platforms, we provide richer results on how interaction is prioritized by the party leaders than if we had focused on one platform only. Linking conceptualizations born from previous technologies to our current context, we establish “systematic links between the existing body of research in the social sciences” [6] and the study of novel online phenomena.

Comparing functionalities across platforms is not without problems. While interactive features that appear similar across platforms might have slight differences (Driscoll and Walker, 2014), and while the situated meanings of such features are ultimately decided by each individual user (Lomborg and Bechmann, 2014), we can nevertheless note some similarities between the two platforms. Specifically, the @-character is frequently employed on both Twitter and Instagram to let users initiate a conversation with or reference a particular other user ([7], 2015a; Marwick and boyd, 2010). Accordingly, the @-character will be treated as an indicator of user-to-user interactivity — an attempt by the party leaders under scrutiny to engage with other users.

The differences between Twitter and Instagram may be attributed to timing. At the time of writing, Twitter could be considered as an “older” social media platform and a foundational element of what Chadwick (2013) calls the “hybrid media system”. Instagram, on the other hand, was introduced into a mature multiplatform, 24/7 media landscape where political parties and their leaders had extensive experience with operating their own communication platforms (Bruns, et al., 2016; Koc-Michalska, et al., 2016). Also related to the longer existence of Twitter is the use patterns identified by previous research where comparably smaller parties are often found to initially exhibit more and what could be considered as more progressive use (in terms of interaction) of novel platforms. Such uses are then often imitated by their larger competitors, mirroring the so-called normalization hypothesis (e.g., Nitschke, et al., 2016; Lev-On and Haleva-Amir, 2018).

The literature reviewed above led us to formulate three hypotheses. First, in line with findings from previous scholarship, we expect that both platforms will mainly be used by party leaders according to an inward-facing rationale. That is, they will seek to mobilize their own members and voters for purposes of mobilization and broadcasting and thereby strengthen the ranks of supporters and colleagues within the party, giving rise to our first hypothesis:

\[ H1 \text{: Party leaders will mainly reach out to and communicate with supporters, followers and members of their own respective parties.} \]

Our second hypothesis is grounded in findings from studies that show that parties of different size will make use of social media platforms in differing ways. Findings from Scandinavia have consistently shown that large and resource-rich parties are, in particular in times of elections, present on all platforms indicating that social media complement other campaigning grounds (Skogerbø and Larsson, 2014; Skogerbø, Larsson and Skogerbø, 2017, Kalsnes, 2016). For smaller, more marginal, parties, which struggle to gain journalistic attention, social media and particularly Twitter have been used as alternative arenas (Skogerbø and Larsson, 2015). For example, small parties and their leaders were comparably “heavy” users of Twitter in election campaigns prior to 2017. They were more active, posted more updates and generally generated more activity on Twitter than the leaders of comparably larger parties (Skogerbø, Larsson and Skogerbø, 2017). Paying attention to these findings, we expect to find similar use patterns on Instagram. This expectation can also be linked to the suggestion that large parties and their leaders enjoy what Davis (2010) has termed “high media capital” — they are likely to run for the top positions, e.g., prime minister, and are attractive sources for mainstream media. For these politicians, social media are complementary to other forms of political communications.
For smaller parties, the situation is often dramatically different: their leaders receive less attention, they are less valuable as journalistic sources and they therefore need to attract attention to both the party and its issues (Skogerbø and Larsson, 2014) on all platforms they can get hold of. Accordingly, we hypothesize as follows:

\[H2\]: Instagram will be used more by small than large parties.

As alluded to, top politicians with high media capital are celebrities (van Zoonen, 2005) who enjoy easy access to the dominant news media — and thereby to larger volumes of potential voters. Our third hypothesis deals with the ‘star power’ of party leaders, as they can be expected to use their status and seek the limelight together with other celebrities, as tools for political marketing and image control. While celebrity endorsements are common in the U.S., Norwegian politics has fewer such examples. However, there is a long history of Norwegian top politicians participating in entertainment programmes, for example talk and game shows led by famous television hosts (Allern, 2011) and similar activities. Following Enli [7], such increased proximity play into the “blurring boundaries between political activism and entertainment in the age of ‘pop politics’”. Ekman and Widholm (2017) point to similar tendencies in their analysis of Instagram postings by 16 Swedish top politicians in 2014 when they discuss the “performative turn” in politics. Their study shows that top politicians used Instagram postings to stage themselves in a celebrity-like manner instead of promoting the parties’ issues. Studies from Italy, both of top politicians’ postings on Instagram (Buscemi, 2017) and of journalists’ sourcing of top politicians’ interaction with the public on social media (Splendore and Rega, 2017) suggest that the affordances of Instagram facilitate individualized political performances. In Scandinavia and other countries, recent election campaigns have featured celebrities such as comedians performing with politicians with and against their will (Skogerbø and Larsson, 2014), and sometimes even running for top positions, indicating that non-traditional political actors are beginning to make their voices heard. Top politicians appeal to fans and followers by associating themselves to idols and celebrities who attract young voters, thereby decreasing the “psychological distance” between themselves and the younger electorate [8]. Taking on celebrity positions and interacting with with pop cultural celebrities is not, as noted above, a novelty in top politics, however, these recent studies and observations of Instagram suggest that this platform reinforces celebrity politics. Regardless of what view one takes with regards to the pros and cons of politics in relation to entertainment, previous research tells us that politicians are likely to use many different opportunities for marketing purposes. With regards to our empirical setting, gauging the differences in users engaged with by Norwegian party leaders on Twitter and Instagram, we propose that the latter of the two platforms will be more clearly used to engage with musicians, actors and other celebrities. As shown previously, Instagram is primarily populated by comparably younger users — precisely the type of potential voters that are often seen as driven by entertainment in supposed combination with engagement. The discussion above leads us to formulate our third hypothesis as follows:

\[H3\]: Party leaders will reach out to entertainment actors on Instagram to a higher extent than on Twitter.

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**Method**

The shifting ways of data collection employed in this paper is representative of the rapid changes that this vein of research continues to undergo. Specifically, access to the application programming interfaces (APIs) of social media such as those studied here fluctuates, making it necessary for researchers to constantly oversee and amend their methods for data collection. For the work presented here, Twitter activity undertaken by the party leaders was collected by means of Digital Methods Initiative Twitter Collection and Analysis Toolkit (DMI-TCAT) developed by researchers at the university of Amsterdam (Borra and Rieder, 2014) while Magi Metrics (2017) was employed for Instagram collection processes. The official party leader accounts on both services were identified and used as starting points for data collection. Using DMI-TCAT and Magi Metrics respectively, data collection was set up to capture all posts emanating from the identified party leader accounts during the one-month period leading up to election day on 11 September 2017. For Twitter, 861 tweets were sent by the studied accounts during this time period, while the number of Instagram posts amounted to 224. While somewhat superficial, this initial result nevertheless says something about the relative importance of the platforms for the studied party leaders.

As mentioned earlier, the @ character focused on here can be employed in different ways. For Twitter, users have the possibility to retweet messages sent by other users, essentially redistributing the original message to potentially go beyond the follower list of the original sender. While similar ‘re-gramming’ plug-ins or work-arounds are available for
Instagram, this type of engagement had not been integrated into the platform at the time of data collection. Nevertheless, as such redistributions on either of the two platforms often involve the mentioning of the original sender (e.g., Walters, 2016), the focus on users called out by means of the @ characters seemed suitable for a comparative study such as the present one. Thus, analysis was undertaken in two ways, described in the following.

First, a series of network charts created with Gephi (Bastian, et al., 2009) that depict the interaction undertaken by the party leaders on both platforms are presented. This visual representation will allow for analysis of the ways in which the studied politicians structure their activities — for example, as tightly knit clusters with little overlap to other leaders and their respective clusters, or as looser networks with no clear core of users interacted with.

Second, these visualizations of party leader interaction networks are complemented with classifications of the users that were interacted with by the studied politicians. Inspired by classification schemas developed by previous, similar efforts (e.g., Larsson and Skogerbø, 2015), each user interacted with by the party leaders was classified according to the information provided on their account profile pages. In uncertain cases, account holders were investigated further before a classification was made. Both authors were simultaneously active in the classification process during a series of sessions, engaging with the data in tandem and resolving any initial differences regarding categorizations. Drawing on the aforementioned similar studies as well as on categories that inductively emerged from the data while engaging with it, users interacted with by the party leaders were classified as Academic, Anonymous, Citizen, Commercial interest, Entertainment/Celebrity, Interest group, Media/Journalist, Other Party representative, Own Party representative and Public admin representative. No identification of users other than party leaders are made here, neither did we compile replies of threads following the posts.

Results

In an effort to provide an overview of the degree to which the @ character was employed, we divided the number of @ characters with the number messages sent for each platform. This approach gives some insight into the different priorities held by the party leaders as they campaign online. For Twitter, the collected 861 tweets contained 1,571 of @ characters indicating interactions, resulting in an average of close to two @ characters (1.82) per tweet sent. For Instagram, the party leaders provided 224 posts, containing a total of 80 @ characters — dividing the numbers provides us with a metric of .36, which must be considered as substantially different from the Twitter metric. From this initial overview we can tell that Twitter appears as highly interactive, with many tweets featuring multiple @ characters, while Instagram was apparently less employed for interaction purposes.

We now move on to examine the structure of the communication undertaken on both platforms. Figures 1 and 2 provide visualizations of the structures emerging from the activities undertaken by the party leaders. Both Figures feature a series of nodes, each representing a specific Twitter user (in Figure 1) or Instagram user (in Figure 2).

Following the principles employed by previous, similar research efforts (e.g., Larsson and Skogerbø, 2012; Larsson and Skogerbø, 2015) the size of each node is dependent on the indegree measure as reported by Gephi — the bigger the node, the more messages was sent that mentioned the corresponding account name. Similarly, outdegree was used to denote mentioning activity by each node — the darker the shade of the node, the more active the corresponding party leader had been at utilizing the @ character to mention other users on either service. Since our interest is primarily in the aggregated level of users approached by the party leaders, the specific users interacted with are not identified in our analyses. The placement of nodes is dependent on the party leader with which each node emerged as more associated with — for instance, a user approached by more than one party leader will appear in Figures 1 and 2 as a node placed in between the nodes representing the party leaders that had initiated communication. Conversely, a user approached by one party leader only will appear as a node placed closely to the specific party leader.
Figure 1: Party leader interaction patterns on Twitter.
As Twitter was used for communicative purposes more extensively than Instagram by the studied party leaders, Figure 1 appears as more densely populated, as more users — nodes — interacted with politicians. Beyond this initial difference, we also note that leaders representing smaller parties emerge as more active on both platforms than those representing comparably larger competitors. This is clearly visible in Figure 1: it features darker shade nodes representing Bastholm and Hansson who shared leadership of the Green party (MDG, which received 3.2 percent of the votes in the 2017 election), Grande of the Liberal Party (V, 4.4 percent) and Lysbakken of the Socialist Left Party (SV, 6 percent). At the same time, the leaders of the ‘catch-all’ parties — Støre of the Labour Party (27.4 percent) and PM Solberg of the Conservative Party (25 percent) emerge as less active, shown in the lighter color and larger sizes of their corresponding nodes. The results for Twitter are in line with the body of research suggesting that smaller political parties tend to be more interactively oriented in their engagement on these platforms (e.g., Koc-Michalska, et al., 2014; Jungherr, 2015). For exact numbers of mentions made by the party leaders, please refer to Tables 1 and 2.

Figure 2: Party leader interaction patterns on Instagram.
Furthermore, each party leader is featured in both Figures as enjoying their own unique cluster of users. Beyond these unique contacts, both Figures show overlapping nodes which indicate users interacted with more than one party leader. For Twitter, these findings are in line with the conception of Twitter as mainly an elite platform. Indeed, while the patterns shown in Figure 1 suggest activities undertaken by party leaders in a sometimes overlapping fashion, reaching beyond their respective clusters, such overlying patterns are rare when assessing the Instagram activities as visualized in Figure 2. Not only do we see a comparably smaller number of users interacted with outside each party leader cluster — these clusters emerge as disentangled from each other to a higher degree than for the Twitter data. Consider, for example, the left-hand side of Figure 2, where the activities undertaken by the coalition partners, the right-wing party leader Jensen (FRP) and PM Solberg (H) emerge as removed from the other party leaders. Similarly, on the right-hand side, we see the account operated by Labour party leader Støre (Ap) isolated in a comparable manner. These representatives of larger parties, then, appear as isolated from the middle section of Figure 2 — which features the intermeshed activities undertaken by the leaders of smaller parties. In sum, our results suggest that the role of Twitter appear as more or less stable — it is an arena for discussion within and across clusters where leaders of comparably smaller parties are more active than their larger competitors. Instagram on the other hand emerges as geared less towards cross-cluster interaction, but leaders of smaller parties seems to enjoy more interaction across ideological boundaries. Next, Tables 1 and 2 reveal the different types of users interacted with by the party leaders on each platform.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Academic</th>
<th>Anon</th>
<th>Citizen</th>
<th>Commercial</th>
<th>Entertainment</th>
<th>Interest group</th>
<th>Media</th>
<th>Other Party</th>
<th>Own Party</th>
<th>Public admin</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bastholm (MDG)</td>
<td>1.7 (6)</td>
<td>2 (7)</td>
<td>6.6 (23)</td>
<td>1.4 (5)</td>
<td>0.6 (2)</td>
<td>13.8 (48)</td>
<td>12.4 (43)</td>
<td>13.5 (47)</td>
<td>47.7 (166)</td>
<td>0.3 (1)</td>
<td>100 (348)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Store (Ap)</td>
<td>2.7 (1)</td>
<td>8.1 (3)</td>
<td>10.8 (4)</td>
<td>2.7 (1)</td>
<td>2.7 (1)</td>
<td>2.7 (1)</td>
<td>21.6 (8)</td>
<td>10.8 (4)</td>
<td>37.8 (14)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>100 (37)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hansson (MDG)</td>
<td>2.5 (4)</td>
<td>1.2 (2)</td>
<td>7.5 (12)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>1.2 (2)</td>
<td>8.1 (13)</td>
<td>8.1 (13)</td>
<td>6.8 (11)</td>
<td>64 (103)</td>
<td>0.6 (1)</td>
<td>100 (161)</td>
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<td>Hareide (Krf)</td>
<td>4.8 (1)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>9.5 (2)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>14.3 (3)</td>
<td>19 (1)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>9.5 (2)</td>
<td>42.9 (9)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>100 (21)</td>
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<td>Lystbakken (Sv)</td>
<td>5 (15)</td>
<td>1 (3)</td>
<td>14.7 (44)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>3 (9)</td>
<td>6.7 (20)</td>
<td>14.4 (43)</td>
<td>17.7 (53)</td>
<td>36.5 (109)</td>
<td>1 (3)</td>
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<td>Moxnes (R)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>2.8 (1)</td>
<td>19.4 (7)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
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<td>5.6 (2)</td>
<td>69.4 (25)</td>
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<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>100 (36)</td>
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<td>Skei Grande (V)</td>
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<td>4 (25)</td>
<td>10.6 (67)</td>
<td>0.6 (4)</td>
<td>1.4 (9)</td>
<td>8.6 (54)</td>
<td>10.6 (67)</td>
<td>14.3 (90)</td>
<td>48.6 (306)</td>
<td>0.5 (3)</td>
<td>100 (630)</td>
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<td>Solberg (H)</td>
<td>23.1 (9)</td>
<td>2.6 (1)</td>
<td>25.6 (10)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>2.6 (1)</td>
<td>5.1 (2)</td>
<td>23.1 (9)</td>
<td>25.6 (10)</td>
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<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>2 (32)</td>
<td>2.7 (42)</td>
<td>10.8 (169)</td>
<td>0.6 (10)</td>
<td>1.7 (27)</td>
<td>9.1 (143)</td>
<td>11.8 (185)</td>
<td>15.4 (242)</td>
<td>45.3 (712)</td>
<td>0.6 (9)</td>
<td>100 (1571)</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**Table 1:** User types interacted with by party leaders on Twitter, in percentage and N.
Our first hypothesis, which suggested that party leaders will communicate more within their own party following an inward-facing rationale, is largely supported as shown in the category ‘Own Party’ across both studied services. The only exception to the pattern was the party leader of the Conservative Party, PM Erna Solberg, who communicated across party lines on both platforms. The explanation lies likely in her position as Prime Minister, which she held both before and after the 2017 election. As PM, Solberg is continuously addressed by other parties and politicians, and although rarely, some of these mentions resulted in replies from the PM or her staff (as shown by Skogerbø and Larsson [2015] who detailed a previous election). In addition, there may be an individual explanation, as Solberg (as opposed to the Labour Party leader) had a specific personal interest and ‘investment’ in social media noted time and again by the news media, communicated more across political party lines than any of her competitors.

Our second hypothesis stated that Instagram, being a new platform, could be expected to be used more by the smaller, more marginal, parties than by the larger ones. This prediction was based on previous patterns of diffusion of social
media among political actors, showing that the small parties with fewer resources to spend have tended to use social media as alternatives to other forms of communication. Our findings are in line with H2 and suggest that Instagram is an add-on or a complementary service for the larger parties, and alternative platforms for the small. Looking at the three party leaders who make use of Instagram to contact media outlets — Moxnes (of the Red Party, 2.4 percent of the 2017 votes), Hareide (of the Christian Democratic Party, 4.2 percent) and Grande (Liberal Party, 4.4 percent) — were all leaders of small parties, a finding that support H2.

Our third hypothesis was grounded in Instagram’s affordances as an image-based platform and the fact that party leaders to some extent can be considered as celebrities. Given the reputation of Twitter as an elite platform, we expected that party leaders would make use of Instagram’s appeal to a younger audience — the fans — to reach out to actors, musicians etc. on Instagram to a higher extent than on Twitter. While the difference in terms of absolute numbers is very large across the platforms, the reported percentages for the ‘Entertainment’ category is indeed larger on Instagram (sum total percentage of 15) than on Twitter (sum total percentage of 1.7).

Discussion

By comparing uses of Twitter and Instagram, our study adds to the field of political communication, expanding our knowledge regarding the uptake and use of social media by political leaders. Returning to our RQs, which publics did Norwegian party leaders interact with on Twitter and Instagram during the 2017 election campaign? What are the differences in interactive patterns on these two platforms and what explain the differences?, our clearest findings are that there were large differences between how much the two platforms were used, and we have argued that timing and affordances could be considered as explanatory factors. Specifically, by the 2017 elections, Twitter was a recognized campaign platform, featuring established networks between political actors, media professionals, interest groups and other societal elites (Skogerbo and Larsson, 2015). By contrast, Instagram emerged as a novel platform on which such networks were far less established (as shown in Figure 2). The ‘newness’, which certainly also meant that most elites would not be there, also explains less use. Indeed, we can assume that Instagram itself, its characteristics and the audiences were less known to the parties than the details relating to Twitter. Theoretically, our hypotheses point to differences in affordances, access and structure of the two platforms as essential for formulating hypotheses for future social media studies. Unlike Twitter, Instagram could be considered as a platform that more clearly allows for marketing and staging of individual politicians, as this and other studies has shown (Buscemi, 2017; Ekman and Widholm, 2017). Indeed, the visuality of Instagram could be seen as aligning with the celebrity cultures of popular artists and idols and the fact that Instagram is largely used by a younger and likely less elite audience than Twitter is likely to be another explanation why party leaders did not prioritize it in 2017. Further, this study strengthens the argument that the political significance of social media needs to be interpreted in context of several different factors of which affordances is only one: in addition, the political and party systems matter significantly, as noted in a number of studies cited earlier (e.g., Larsson and Skogerbo, 2013; Vos and Van Aelst, 2018).

Conclusion

Finally, our findings add insights into the types of networks and clusters that form around political actors on social media. Whereas the networks between politicians, voters and journalists have gained much attention, this study suggests that we should increasingly emphasize celebrity and entertainment as factors explaining top politicians’ social media presence. Further, we should include celebrities from culture and entertainment as political actors and as an important group that politicians draw on when on the campaign trail. While van Zoonen (2005) has argued that politics has indeed provided stories for the entertainment industries and that these stories have functioned as important sources of knowledge for citizens, this aspect appears to have been largely neglected in studies of social media and politics. This is interesting also from the perspective of the apparent campaign strategies that emerge from the data presented here — for instance, as the ‘Entertainment’ category of users interacted with was more common on Instagram than on Twitter, this tells us something about how party leaders want to portray themselves in front of different user groups. As Instagram is primarily popular among comparably younger users, these results thus speak to the apparent message differentiation that is taking place across social media.
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Notes


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