

The Centrality of Image in Digital Political Leadership: A Sociological Perspective

Arthur Gugliucciello
University of Salerno

DOI Link: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v16-i4/28098>

Published Date: 30 April 2026

Abstract

Within the framework of structural transformations in modern societies, the emergence of social media as privileged environments of symbolic interaction has profoundly reshaped the ways in which the relationship between political leadership and citizenship is constructed. The growing centrality of the image does not simply represent an evolution of communicative practices, but rather an indicator of broader changes in processes of social meaning making, in forms of mediation, and in the logics underlying the production of consensus. Disintermediation and the rise of a visual culture contribute to redefining the dispositifs through which relationships between individuals and the public sphere are articulated, fostering forms of access to politics characterized by *perceptual immediacy*, *symbolic simplification*, and *emotional intensification*. Within this context, political leadership tends to take shape as a *socio symbolic construction*, in which the individual leader assumes the role of a catalyst for collective identifications, rather than serving as a vehicle for articulated programmatic content. Within this process, the contribution examines the figure of *digital leaders* as the outcome of specific socio technological configurations. In conclusion, the proposed analysis makes it possible to problematize the centrality of the image not only as an aesthetic or communicative element, but as a *sociological dispositif* capable of influencing the forms of political legitimation, the modes of participation, and the collective representations of the public sphere in contemporary societies.

Keywords: Digital Political Leadership, Disintermediation, Consensus Building, Digital Public Sphere, Political Communication

Introduction

Amid an unprecedented systemic transformation, digitalization does not merely appear as a technical innovation, but as a force capable of reconfiguring social ties and power dynamics (Koc-Michalska & Lilleker, 2017). This structural shift directly affects the forms of mediation that have historically ensured the stability of institutional architectures, imposing new interpretative paradigms for the social sciences. The need to analyse this area stems from the continuous and rapid advancement of digital platforms, which risks outpacing our logical understanding, creating gaps in the way we interpret the survival of democratic legitimacy. Within this scenario, social media have emerged as the primary spaces of symbolic

interaction, profoundly altering the nature of the relationship between political leadership and citizenship. This is not simply a transition toward new channels for information distribution; rather, it entails a transformation in processes of social meaning making and in the underlying logics of consensus production (Woolley, 2023). It is of fundamental importance to explore these phenomena in greater depth, since the shift from discursive discourse to a predominance of image-based interaction is not merely a change of style, but forms part of a radical transformation that is reshaping the very foundations of social cohesion. The materiality of traditional structures is progressively replaced by ecosystems in which social validation occurs through the instantaneous sharing of icons and representations, making the image itself the primary locus of public action. At the same time, the gradual decline of traditional parties and other intermediary bodies has created a representational vacuum that is increasingly filled by the personalization of political leadership. The continuous departure from classical standards has accelerated the need to establish an intimate and unmediated connection with the electorate, rendering constant visibility an essential condition for political survival in the digital society. Political leadership, understood as a process of social influence, has entered a new era that requires an interdisciplinary perspective to be fully understood. While it previously evolved through the phases of radio broadcasting and television, the current digital phase has reshaped political interactions on multiple levels (McDermott et al. 2016). The key element of this evolution is the predominance of the visual dimension, which ceases to be a mere aesthetic embellishment and becomes a fundamental sociological device. In particular, forms of digital iconography replace complex textual argumentation with high impact mnemonic flashes, capable of condensing years of ideological positioning into a few photographic frames or short video formats. These function as *cognitive anchors* through which social actors decode the complexity of reality. It is precisely this shift that makes an urgent investigation necessary: when image becomes the primary criterion for entry into political life, it becomes essential to understand how this might affect the quality of public debate. The aestheticization of politics is therefore not simply a stylistic degeneration, but a clear symptom of how mechanisms of meaning production have shifted from a logical discursive plane to an iconic affective one, repositioning the corporeality and performance of the political actor at the center of the public sphere. The dominant visual culture, fueled by the logic of social media, promotes a form of access to politics characterized by perceptual immediacy and strong emotional intensification (Dunaway, 2018). Within this context, the figure of the political actor tends to take shape as a socio symbolic construction: it is no longer primarily evaluated as a vehicle for complex programmatic content, but rather assumes the role of a catalyst for collective identification. The representation of the leader thus becomes a visual synthesis of fragmented communal demands, capable of generating a sense of belonging that bypasses traditional ideological dialectics. Within a novel media architecture, argumentative persuasion is challenged by the continuous extraction of attention. The attention economy (Davenport, 2001) forces political actors to compete in an environment saturated with stimuli, where silence or visual irrelevance may lead to institutional oblivion. This transformation is closely linked to the concepts of political impression management and the politics of perception, in which political actors attempt to carefully control the image projected to the public through the strategic use of metaphors, slogans, and personality traits (Barnes & O'Brien, 2025). However, the definition of digital leadership does not occur within a technological vacuum, but is deeply shaped by the algorithmic logic of platforms. Online political communication often operates under the pressure of mechanisms that favor

simplification, polarization, and in extreme cases, symbolic radicalization. The digital public discourse is thus suspended between the aspiration for a more direct democracy and the risk of a *media tribalism* that reduces the complexity of debate to elementary narrative schemes (Fisher et al. 2018). The infrastructures underlying social media, by granting greater visibility to content that elicits instinctive reactions, function as de facto editors. Consequently, the dissemination of institutional messages depends on external algorithmic logics, leading to adaptation to engagement metrics rather than to in depth argumentation. Having examined this complex scenario, the significance of the study lies in its ability to provide a critical framework for understanding the prevalence of appearances and the erosion of traditional skills. The research proves particularly useful for social science scholars wishing to update their knowledge of new leadership paradigms and, above all, for civil society. By laying bare the foundations of algorithmic logic, the study helps to promote the need for digital (and algorithmic) literacy, so that citizens can recognise the mechanisms used in modern political campaigns. Moreover, the effectiveness and frequency of these communicative strategies vary significantly depending on the systemic context: the structures of accountability and information control typical of different political regimes systematically influence both the tone and the target audience of leaders. While in more democratic contexts communication tends to be more frequent and interactive, in other contexts it may become a tool for control and unilateral projection of power (Steinhoff, 2024). In any case, the sociological illusion of total disintermediation conceals new and constraining forms of dependence on an attention economy structured around the pervasive power of the visual. The aim of this contribution is to critically analyze how the centrality of the image and processes of disintermediation are redefining the devices of political legitimation in contemporary societies. Through a sociological approach, the study seeks to explore the figure of the digital leader not only as the outcome of technological innovation, but as the product of a specific socio technological configuration that shapes collective representations of the public sphere. The analysis will develop through the examination of the theoretical foundations of digital leadership, a review of previous studies on political perception, and the exploration of case studies illustrating how the strategic management of online identity has become the new center of gravity of political participation and consensus building (Auriemma et al. 2023). In this way, a research horizon emerges in which decoding the grammar of the image is equivalent to understanding the new foundations upon which collective cohesion and the very architecture of authority are built. Ultimately, the purpose of this work is not to demonstrate that the intensification of symbolism represents a simplification of public debate, but rather to explain how it has become the basis through which modern democracies reproduce, or put into crisis, their systemic legitimacy.

Theoretical Background: leadership between technological evolution and symbolic construction

To understand the nature of contemporary political power construction, it is first necessary to define it as a complex process of social influence that manifests through multidimensional phenomena (Uhr, 2021). With the advent of the digital era, this trajectory has not merely undergone a change of platform, but a true ontological transformation that requires a new analytical perspective (Battista & Gaeta, 2023). This is essential in order to understand how authority is maintained when traditional institutional pillars are eroded. The literature suggests that leadership has evolved in parallel with the major technological transitions of mass communication: from a phase dominated by radio broadcasting, to a television era, and

finally to the current digital paradigm. In this latter phase, the web and social media do not function solely as transmission tools, but as architectures that reshape democracies and political interactions at every level of the social fabric (Margetts, 2018). Whereas traditional broadcasting logic was characterized by a unidirectional flow and rigid scheduling, the architecture of digital networks follows an interactive dynamic based on algorithmic curation. As a result of this infrastructural shift, the center of gravity of political action moves from physical and institutional spaces to a networked ecosystem, compelling representation into a condition of *permanent campaigning*, where the urgency of content production outweighs the formulation of long term political visions (Joathan & Lilleker, 2023). Online platforms are not merely virtual notice boards for electoral messages, but fully fledged ecosystems that define the rules of engagement. In order to exist politically today, visibility becomes essential. The transition to the internet thus marks the moment in which the visual dimension of political actors ceases to be secondary and becomes central to their public offering. At the core of this transformation lies the concept of representation, which from a sociological perspective is no longer a purely aesthetic element, but a device capable of shaping the forms of political legitimation. The emergence of social media has established them as privileged environments for symbolic interaction, structurally transforming the relationship between leaders and citizens. This shift is driven by the phenomenon of disintermediation, namely the overcoming of traditional mediators such as parties, the press, and intermediary bodies in favor of a direct and apparently immediate relationship between institutional figures and their constituencies (Cooper, 2011). However, the idea of unfiltered direct communication often proves illusory, as traditional barriers are replaced by invisible mechanisms in which attention is measured through likes and shares. The dominance of the visual dimension is embedded within a broader transformation of social meaning making processes, where visual culture contributes to redefining the articulation of the public sphere. Access to politics no longer occurs primarily through the decoding of complex programmatic content, but through perceptual immediacy and symbolic simplification, which foster emotional intensification in political engagement. The digital leader, therefore, is not merely a communicator, but the outcome of a specific socio technological configuration that positions them as a catalyst for collective identification (Jaboob et al. 2025). In practice, individuals increasingly rely less on detailed political programs and more on intuitive reactions triggered by images or short videos. The political figure thus becomes a mirror reflecting fears and aspirations, making the ability to evoke emotions a crucial element in maintaining audience cohesion. This predominance of mediated presence translates into practices of impression management and into a broader *politics of perception* (Harris et al. 2007). The contemporary imperative of transparency often encourages representatives to stage even informal moments, transforming apparent spontaneity into performance. The political actor, stripped of traditional institutional sacrality, becomes a manager of a personal brand. Within this framework, political actors and organizations actively shape the impressions they project, attempting to bridge the gap between political image and marketing strategies. The effectiveness of a digital leader thus depends on the ability to manage elements such as sound bites, physical appearance, and the projection of specific personality traits through media (Sağbaşı & Erdoğan, 2022). Digital leadership, also referred to as e leadership, entails a process of social influence mediated by technology aimed at producing changes in attitudes, emotions, and behaviors. Technology, in this sense, is not a neutral channel: it reshapes the who, what, when, where, and why of leadership, blurring the boundaries between public and private life and imposing the need for constant presence (Wolfsfeld & Tsifroni, 2018). In an

effort to reduce distance from ordinary citizens, political figures increasingly display moments of everyday life, turning daily existence into a continuous campaign. The exhibition of intimacy fosters the emergence of parasocial relationships: by simulating familiarity, political actors can bypass evaluations of competence and instead capitalize on perceived emotional affinity with their followers. However, the construction of political identity in the digital sphere must contend with the algorithmic logic governing platforms. Online political discourse is subject to structural pressures that favor polarization and extreme simplification, often turning communication into a tool of manipulation (Battista & Mangone, 2025). Social network algorithms, optimized to maximize user retention, systematically exploit cognitive biases, confining audiences within echo chambers and filter bubbles. Within these environments, narratives aligned with pre existing beliefs are amplified, while divergent perspectives are marginalized (Ross Arguedas et al. 2022). This form of algorithmic heteronomy contributes to a crisis of subjectivity, reducing debate to rigid narratives and slogans that reinforce media tribalism. In such a context, the centrality of the image may degenerate into forms of symbolic radicalization, where the identity of the leader is constructed in opposition to a demonized other, contributing to the spread of hostile rhetoric and hate speech. Moreover, the progressive datafication of society enables micro targeting strategies that address highly specific electoral segments, fragmenting collective discourse into hyper specialized messages and risking the disintegration of a shared political vision. This dynamic varies across political systems, as structural differences in accountability and information control shape the tone and structure of social media communication (Chadwick, 2019). While in democratic contexts digital communication is often used to build consensus through interaction, in less democratic settings the management of the visual dimension may function as an extension of state control over information (Gallo et al. 2022). In conclusion, digital leadership emerges as a multidimensional construct in which aesthetics and the sociology of power converge. The primacy of representation is not a superficial deviation from serious politics, but the new infrastructure through which legitimacy is constructed. The contemporary leader must navigate between the need to appear authentic and immediate, and the reality of a form of communication deeply shaped by algorithmic logic and oriented toward the continuous management of public perception. This tension defines new forms of participation and collective representations of the public sphere in contemporary societies (Salzano & Battista, 2023). In summary, analyzing this phenomenon means acknowledging that the power of the visual has fundamentally transformed the rules of consensus. Engaging with political content on social media is no longer a secondary activity, but the primary way in which democratic participation is experienced today; consequently, a thorough understanding of the theoretical foundations of this transformation is of paramount importance for anyone wishing to navigate this process and safeguard the future of modern democracies.

The Phenomenology of Digital Leadership

Against this backdrop, digital leadership cannot be interpreted as a mere extension of traditional media, but must be framed within an ontological transformation in the relationship between image and power. While classical reflections on the society of spectacle emphasized representation as a mediator of social relations, in the era of the platform society this projection undergoes processes of fragmentation and algorithmic recomposition (Burrell & Fourcade, 2021). Political leadership no longer inhabits a unified stage, but appears as a hyper real simulacrum whose legitimacy derives less from representing an electorate than

from the ability to generate continuous flows of attention. Within this dynamic, authority takes shape through the logic of platforms, a system in which the habitus of the leader must constantly negotiate with the technical affordances of social media (Altman & Tushman, 2017). This negotiation produces a condition of algorithmic heteronomy: the political actor is no longer the sole author of their public projection, but becomes a semiotic object that users manipulate, reinterpret, and circulate. In this ecosystem, the voter evolves into a political prosumer, no longer a passive recipient of predefined messages, but an active producer who remixes and recontextualizes fragments of the candidate's identity. Institutional communication thus loses its traditional verticality, becoming an open ended process subject to continuous memetic bricolage that inevitably escapes the direct control of communication offices (Halversen & Weeks, 2023). The manifestation of digital power is therefore grounded in interactive visibility, where the distinction between frontstage and backstage dissolves into a performance of programmed authenticity. The media rise of *Kamala Harris* during 2024 offers a privileged sociological case for observing the transition from institutional authority to *liquid leadership* (Linkevičiūtė, 2025). Prior to her official candidacy, Harris's aesthetic was anchored in codes of severity and bureaucratic professionalism that struggled to resonate within digital environments, often being perceived as distant or inauthentic. However, the strategic shift undertaken in 2024 marked the adoption of an aesthetics of proximity that leveraged visual framing and meme culture. The rebranding of Harris was not a top down process, but rather an experiment in stylistic co creation. Through the use of saturated color palettes, unpredictable editing rhythms, and soundscapes drawn from youth subcultures, political communication moved away from programmatic narratives toward the construction of a recognizable *vibe* (McNeal, 2025). A clear example of this dynamic was the incorporation of the visual imaginary associated with the "Brat" aesthetic promoted by *Charli XCX*. By adopting bright green visual schemes and engaging with trending content on platforms such as TikTok, the campaign shifted its focus from policy discussion to the creation of viral atmospheres. This strategy allowed previously awkward moments, such as the well known coconut tree speech, to be reframed as humorous and relatable elements that enhanced perceived authenticity (Connolly, 2025). Rather than resisting potential ridicule, the campaign embraced the chaotic aesthetics of fan generated content, adopting visual languages typical of online fandoms and aligning itself with the cultural codes of younger generations. This form of cultural mimicry neutralized critiques of rigidity, redirecting online engagement toward a narrative of accessibility. Such a process illustrates how networked governance operates through affective intelligence, where voters evaluate not technical competence but aesthetic and identity alignment (Marcus et al. 2000). By repurposing moments of vulnerability into symbols of authenticity, the communication strategy produced a form of radical humanization (Halupka & Brown, 2025). Phenomenologically, this results in a shift where the leader ceases to be a hierarchical apex and instead becomes a node within a network of shared meanings. At the same time, the 2024 case highlights the deeply divisive nature of digital leadership. As studies on affective polarization suggest, the image of political figures acts as a catalyst for *tribal belonging* (Mazzoleni & Bracciale, 2018). While Harris's innovative aesthetic mobilized segments of Generation Z, it also triggered a symmetrical reaction within conservative digital environments. In this context, the leader emerges as an identity signal. *Donald Trump*, for instance, continued to exercise a form of performative dominance grounded in narratives of strength and systemic victimhood. A paradigmatic example of this symbolic appropriation is the mugshot taken in Atlanta in 2023. Rather than concealing what would traditionally be considered an image crisis, it was immediately

transformed into a symbol of resistance (Merrin & Hoskins, 2025). Reproduced across merchandise and digital content, the image ceased to function as a legal document and became a marker of collective identity. This operation represents a striking reconfiguration of stigma: an image originally intended to signify subordination to institutional authority is inverted and recoded as an icon of anti establishment martyrdom. Through the rapid monetization and circulation of this image, Trump consolidated a strong emotional bond with supporters who interpret legal challenges as personal attacks on their worldview. In both cases, the digital environment amplifies symbolic conflict (Hamed & Alqurashi, 2025). Leaders no longer aim to persuade undecided voters through rational deliberation, but rather to activate their own echo chambers through visual and linguistic stimuli that reinforce group identity. Leadership thus becomes an exercise in managing anger and enthusiasm, governed by algorithmic systems that reward the radicalization of images over the moderation of messages (Battista, 2024a). Another key analytical dimension is the development of parasocial relationships between political actors and citizens (Peng, 2022). Through livestreams, behind the scenes content, and informal language, digital leaders simulate proximity that bypasses traditional journalistic and party mediation. This perceived closeness plays a crucial role in rebuilding trust in contexts marked by institutional crisis. However, such proximity lacks genuine otherness: it does not produce a political community in the classical sense, but rather a swarm of individuals reacting simultaneously to the same visual stimuli. Unlike twentieth century party structures, which required sustained ideological commitment and long term engagement, the digital swarm forms and dissolves with the same rapidity as trending hashtags. This inherent ephemerality generates a form of democratic myopia: the constant need to sustain content flows saturates public discourse, leaving limited space for long term deliberation on structural issues (White, 2024). The leadership of Harris in 2024 effectively transformed an institutional figure into a cultural object, yet it raises critical questions regarding the durability of such consensus (Gianolla, 2026). A leadership built on digital trends remains inherently fragile, as it is subject to the rapid cycles of attention that characterize contemporary online environments. In summary, the phenomenology of digital leadership confirms the primacy of aesthetics over praxis. Politics does not disappear, but is reconfigured as a form of total impression management. The American case demonstrates that the success of a leader depends on the ability to become *viral*, integrating seamlessly into everyday user interactions while accepting a partial loss of control over one's image in exchange for unprecedented symbolic reach. For democratic societies, as highlighted in studies on digital leadership (Porfírio et al. 2021), the risk lies in the complete absorption of governance into the imperative of visibility. If leadership is reduced to a sequence of sound bites and iconic images, the role of politics as a synthesis of collective interests may be replaced by competition among aesthetic brands. The central challenge for contemporary political sociology is therefore to decode these emerging forms of power, distinguishing between the mobilizing force of symbols and the emptiness of a purely algorithmic consensus (Battista & Uva, 2025). This phenomenological analysis proves to be a tool of considerable importance and utility for those working to safeguard the essence of democratic governance from the trivialisation of public discourse.

Conclusions

The analysis developed in this work allows for several key conclusions regarding the nature of institutional leadership in the era of digital disintermediation (Lăpădat, 2022). The transition toward a public sphere dominated by the icon does not represent a mere shift in

communication techniques, but a profound reconfiguration of processes of legitimation and democratic participation. The significance of this study lies in its ability to synthesise these complex dynamics, providing a much-needed analytical framework for assessing how democratic legitimacy is maintained or undermined in a platform-driven society. As observed, the prominence of the visual operates as a sociological device that replaces the complexity of political programs with a form of perceptual immediacy capable of generating rapid and deep collective identification. This dynamic signals the decline of politics understood as mass pedagogy or sustained policy debate, replaced by an aesthetics of affinity in which voters engage with the projection of the leader in a manner similar to the consumption of entertainment products. Within this framework, the so called dictatorship of appearance emerges as a concrete democratic concern. When aesthetics fully absorbs public ethics, expertise and administrative competence are relegated to marginal roles, at times perceived as elitist barriers to emotional connection with the electorate. This produces a tendency toward the de professionalization of political elites, where technical merit gives way to the logics of electoral gamification (Loh, 2019). A first crucial point concerns the transformation of the leader from a carrier of content into a socio symbolic configuration (Maldonado, 2017). The politics of perception and strategies of impression management have placed the management of online identity at the center of political action. The body, gestures, and narratives of private life become strategic assets, continuously displayed to sustain the illusion of disintermediation that fosters a sense of intimate connection between citizens and power, while concealing the invisible mediation of platforms. However, this construction presents significant critical issues. The algorithmic logic of platforms imposes structural constraints that reward simplification and polarization. As highlighted by both theoretical analysis and case studies, there is a risk of erosion of the authoritative subjectivity of political actors in favor of viral figures driven by visibility metrics rather than public responsibility (Bliuc et al. 2024). *Media tribalism* and symbolic radicalization emerge as key side effects of a form of leadership that must constantly sustain emotional engagement. In this environment, technical competence is systematically overshadowed by the ability to generate outrage or enthusiasm, transforming the public sphere into an arena where the intensity of affective reactions becomes the primary measure of political success. In light of these developments, it becomes evident that sociological inquiry into political iconography does not concern superficial or merely aesthetic issues. On the contrary, decoding the visual grammar of political actors means analyzing the material and cognitive infrastructures of contemporary power. For the academic community and media scholars, the value of this research lies in its updating of traditional paradigms in political sociology, demonstrating that the visual dimension is no longer a secondary by-product of political communication, but rather its fundamental structural element. To dismiss these processes as digital folklore would mean overlooking the mechanisms that actively construct or undermine institutional credibility. Furthermore, the comparative dimension shows that networked governance is not uniform across contexts. Strategic incentives vary depending on institutional frameworks: while in consolidated democracies digital technologies may foster more direct forms of interaction, in less democratic regimes they are often employed as tools of control and unilateral propaganda. Faced with this asymmetry between those who design visual narratives and those who are exposed to them, there emerges an urgent need for widespread algorithmic literacy. Making the electorate aware of the invisible filters and economic incentives shaping their emotional responses may represent one of the few effective countermeasures against systemic conditioning. Only a citizenry equipped with strong digital

awareness can resist automated reactions and demand more articulated forms of democratic deliberation. This suggests that although digital tools are global, their impact on leadership is mediated by local power structures. In conclusion, the central challenge for contemporary political power lies in managing the tension between perceived authenticity and the systematic manipulation of visual representation (Battista, 2024b). While electoral marketing and professional perception management may strengthen democracy by maintaining alignment with public expectations, dependence on algorithmic logic risks emptying public debate of substantive content (Baltezarević & Battista, 2025). The future of digital leadership will therefore depend on the ability to integrate the symbolic power of the image with new forms of mediation capable of safeguarding pluralism and the quality of democratic deliberation, preventing the reduction of the public sphere to a mere confrontation between digital simulacra. Only by recognizing and neutralizing the mechanisms of this dictatorship of appearance will it be possible to restore depth to a democratic pact increasingly shaped by the logic of virality and instantaneous visual consumption. Ultimately, the true value of this study lies in its role as a diagnostic warning, providing the tools needed to prevent political practice from being permanently supplanted by mere digital aesthetics.

References

- Altman, E. J., & Tushman, M. L. (2017). Platforms, open/user innovation, and ecosystems: A strategic leadership perspective.
- Auriemma, V., Battista, D., & Quarta, S. (2023). Digital embodiment as a tool for constructing the self in politics. *Societies*, 13(12), 261.
- Baltezarević, B. V., & Battista, D. (2025). Artificial Intelligence and Cognitive Boundaries: A Critical Examination of Intelligence, Understanding, and Consciousness. *Knowledge-International Journal*, 69(1), 61-66.
- Barnes, T. D., & O'Brien, D. Z. (2025). Gender and leadership in executive branch politics. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 28.
- Battista, D. (2024a). Comunicazione politica e intelligenza artificiale: un bilancio tra manipolazione e partecipazione. *Rivista di Digital Politics*, 4(1), 71-90.
- Battista, D. (2024b). Political communication in the age of artificial intelligence: an overview of deepfakes and their implications. *Society Register*, 8(2), 7-24.
- Battista, D., & Gaeta, E. (2023). Leadership in the Digital Age: Between Technological Transformations and Fundamental Principles. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 13, 1-5.
- Battista, D., & Mangone, E. (2025). Technological culture and politics: artificial intelligence as the new frontier of political communication. *Societies*, 15(4), 75.
- Battista, D., & Uva, G. (2025). Artificial Intelligence and Politics: Legal Dilemmas and Risks to Democracy. *Journal of Liberty and International Affairs*, 11(1), 42-61.
- Bliuc, A. M., Betts, J. M., Vergani, M., Bouguettaya, A., & Cristea, M. (2024). A theoretical framework for polarization as the gradual fragmentation of a divided society. *Communications Psychology*, 2(1), 75.
- Burrell, J., & Fourcade, M. (2021). The society of algorithms. *Annual review of sociology*, 47(1), 213-237.
- Chadwick, A. (2019). The new crisis of public communication: Challenges and opportunities for future research on digital media and politics.

- Connolly, E. (2025). How does social media content go viral across platforms? Modelling the spread of Kamala is brat across X, TikTok, and Instagram. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, 1-16.
- Cooper, M. (2011). Structured viral communications: the political economy and social organization of digital disintermediation. *J. on Telecomm. & High Tech. L.*, 9, 15.
- Davenport, T. H., & Beck, J. C. (2001). The attention economy. *Ubiquity*, 2001(May), 1-es.
- Dunaway, F. (2018). Images, emotions, politics. *Modern American History*, 1(3), 369-376.
- Fisher, M., Knobe, J., Strickland, B., & Keil, F. C. (2018). The tribalism of truth. *Scientific American*, 318(2), 50-53.
- Gallo, M., Fenza, G., & Battista, D. (2022). Information Disorder: What about global security implications?. *Rivista di Digital Politics*, 2(3), 523-538.
- Gianolla, C. (2026). Emotion narratives of Trump and Harris disputing US political culture in the 2024 electoral campaign. *Emotions and Society*, 8(1), 136-145.
- Halupka, M., & Brown, J. T. (2025). Repackaging and repurposing digital objects: a conceptual model to understand the malleability of politics in digital environments. *Policy & Internet*, 17(2), e430.
- Halversen, A., & Weeks, B. E. (2023). Memeing politics: Understanding political meme creators, audiences, and consequences on social media. *Social Media+ Society*, 9(4), 20563051231205588.
- Hamed, D. M., & Alqurashi, N. (2025). Impact vs. vision: a critical discourse analysis of Trump and Harris' leadership rhetoric in the 2024 presidential election. *Frontiers in Communication*, 10, 1541513.
- Harris, K. J., Kacmar, K. M., Zivnuska, S., & Shaw, J. D. (2007). The impact of political skill on impression management effectiveness. *Journal of Applied psychology*, 92(1), 278.
- Jaboob, M., Al-Ansi, A. M., Al-Okaily, M., & Ferasso, M. (2025). Harnessing artificial intelligence for strategic decision-making: the catalyst impact of digital leadership. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Business Administration*.
- Joathan, Í., & Lilleker, D. G. (2023). Permanent campaigning: A meta-analysis and framework for measurement. *Journal of Political Marketing*, 22(1), 67-85.
- Koc-Michalska, K., & Lilleker, D. (2017). Digital politics: Mobilization, engagement, and participation. *Political Communication*, 34(1), 1-5.
- Lăpădat, M. M. (2022). The influence of media in constructing and deconstructing political imagery. *Revista de Științe Politice. Revue des Sciences Politiques*, (76), 9-17.
- Linkevičiūtė, V. (2025). Shaping the political image: Kamala Harris's case. *Journalism and Media*, 6(2), 75.
- Loh, W. (2019). The Gamification of political participation. *Moral Philosophy and Politics*, 6(2), 261-280.
- Maldonado, M. A. (2017, September). Rethinking populism in the digital age: Social networks, political affects and post-truth democracies. In *Congreso AECPA, Santiago de Compostela* (pp. 20-22).
- Marcus, G. E., Neuman, W. R., & MacKuen, M. (2000). *Affective intelligence and political judgment*. University of Chicago Press.
- Margetts, H. (2018). Rethinking democracy with social media. *Political Quarterly*, 90(S1)
- Mazzoleni, G., & Bracciale, R. (2018). Socially mediated populism: the communicative strategies of political leaders on Facebook. *Palgrave Communications*, 4(1).
- McDermott, R., Lopez, A. C., & Hatemi, P. K. (2016). An evolutionary approach to political leadership. *Security Studies*, 25(4), 677-698.

- McNeal, A. (2025). Existing in the Context: A Conjunctural Analysis of Kamala Harris Memes.
- Merrin, W., & Hoskins, A. (2025). The Pornographic Obscenity of Trump. In *SHARDED MEDIA: Trump's Rage Against the Mainstream* (pp. 45-60). Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland.
- Peng, B. (2022). Digital leadership: State governance in the era of digital technology. *Cultures of Science*, 5(4), 210-225.
- Porfírio, J. A., Carrilho, T., Felício, J. A., & Jardim, J. (2021). Leadership characteristics and digital transformation. *Journal of Business Research*, 124, 610-619.
- Ross Arguedas, A., Robertson, C., Fletcher, R., & Nielsen, R. (2022). Echo chambers, filter bubbles, and polarisation: A literature review.
- Sağbaşı, M., & Erdoğan, F. A. (2022). Digital leadership: a systematic conceptual literature review. *İstanbul Kent Üniversitesi İnsan ve Toplum Bilimleri Dergisi*, 3(1), 17-35..
- Salzano, D., & Battista, D. (2023). Social network e generazione Z: tra empowerment e rischi educativi. *Q-TIMES WEBMAGAZINE*, 1, 47-59.
- Steinhoff, J. (2024). Toward a political economy of synthetic data: A data-intensive capitalism that is not a surveillance capitalism?. *New Media & Society*, 26(6), 3290-3306.
- Uhr, J. (2021). Political Leadership. *The Oxford Handbook of Politics and Performance*, 421.
- White, J. (2024). Technocratic myopia: On the pitfalls of depoliticising the future. *European Journal of Social Theory*, 27(2), 260-278.
- Wolfsfeld, G., & Tsifroni, L. (2018). Political leaders, media and violent conflict in the digital age. In *Media in war and armed conflict* (pp. 218-242). Routledge.
- Woolley, S. (2023). *Manufacturing consensus: Understanding propaganda in the era of automation and anonymity*. Yale University Press.