EMOTIONALIZATION AND PRIVATIZATION OF POLITICAL COMMUNICATION ON FACEBOOK: STIMULATING FACTORS FOR CITIZENS' INTERACTIONS?

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ABSTRACT *Social media are usually accused of being one of the major forces for personalization of political communication and consequently for depolitization of recent politics. However, personalization seems to stimulate certain users to pay more attention to political issues and to act more responsively to such highly personalized political profiles. This article presents the results of a longitudinal analysis of online presence of Barack Obama to assess his political communication through Facebook. It also answers if presence of emotional appeals and private life cues in the posts have any effect on users' responses in terms of numbers of their likes, comments and shares. Based on a quantitative analysis of 2804 Facebook posts, published in the period from 2008 to 2016, the results of content analysis revealed that Obama used his Facebook fan page almost exclusively to communicate about political issues instead of his personal life. The analysis also confirmed that a smaller number of posts, which contained emotional appeals or cues from private life had significantly higher numbers of users' responses than posts that were not emotionalized or privatized. While personalization of Obama's political figure is part of a wider debate, this study confirms that the presence of private cues and emotional appeals stimulates greater responsiveness from Facebook users.*

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INTRODUCTION: PERSONALIZATION OF POLITICAL COMMUNICATION DEFINED

Personalization of politics is a topic which is often referred to by scholars. Actually, personality politicy has been drawing political and communication scientists' attention for decades. For instance, Rahat and Kenig (2018) in their recent and very extensive study find that we are witnessing a general trend towards political personalization. Personalization of politics is most often defined as growing prominence of individual politicians at the expense of parties and collectives (Karvonen, 2010). The phenomenon is multidimensional, and it most often refers to a growing importance of individuals in political power, voting behaviour and political communication. In this paper, we intend to discuss personalization of political communication, which has been mostly concerned with commonly increasing media attention given to individual politicians, at the expense of parties as collectives, programs and issues, and with the growing visibility of the candidates in their strategic communication (Grbeša, 2010). The growing visibility on individuals in media coverage and strategic communication can be divided into focus on the individual's political personality traits and into her/his private personality traits (*ibid*). A phenomenon that is related to the increasing interest in the private traits of politicians, and in their private lives, is known as the privatization of politics, or the politicisation of the private persona (Langer, 2007).

In such context, privatization as a new strategy in relation to potential voters or supporters seems to achieve four main goals: humanization, emotionalization, simplification and distraction, and striving for celebrity status (Holtz-Bacha, 2004). The main focus of this study is on humanization and emotionalization of political communication in the social media which are considered to be controlled media environment. In a narrower sense, the study is concentrated on former US president Barack Obama and how he used his private life and how his team managed to infiltrate emotions in his communication on Facebook. His campaign in 2008 was revolutionary in many aspects, and in 2012, he once again broke conventions, when he publicly announced his re-election bid with a YouTube video and a tweet on 4 April 2011 (Gerodimos and Justinussen, 2015: 113). This announcement gave a clear sign that in this campaign, he would go even a step further in finding a new innovative solution to dominate the Internet for the second time and to motivate citizens once again when the early enthusiasm was dissipated. In 2012, Obama again succeeded, this time employing large-scale data analytics and behavioural modelling (Bimber, 2014: 131). His campaign exploited data analytics to engage in an unprecedented level of personalized message targeting (*ibid*).

Although communication of Barack Obama on social media has been widely studied (Bimber, 2014; Bronstein, 2013; Cogburn and Espinoza-Vasquez, 2011; Gerodimos and Justinussen, 2015; Goodnow, 2013; Katz *et al*. 2013; Stromer-Galley, 2014), he still attracts both academic and the general public's interest. Obama is observed as the first successful Facebook political persona, who tried to combine his political position with his more personalized self. In the context of privatization of politics, it is interesting to study how he communicated and what made him so popular, at the time when his wife, Michelle Obama,

the former first lady, was selling her memoirs entitled *Becoming* in astonishing numbers (Yehuda Rahmanan, 2019). But what remains is the question as to whether political actors lose their fans and supporters' attention in such cases or, on the contrary, users' greater response in a way forces politicians to present themselves in a more personalized way.

The paper aims to show – through a content analysis of Obama's Facebook posts – how he balanced between communicating issues, emotions and his private life. It also intends to show in what sense emotions appeal to Facebook users in order to rethink the potential relationships between personalization of politics, emotions and citizens/ users' reactions through social media communication. Previous studies have confirmed that Obama's communication on social media was personalized (Bimber, 2014; Bronstein, 2013; Gerodimos and Justinussen, 2015). However, most of these studies examined personalization during the two election campaigns (in 2008 and 2012), while our intention is to look at different aspects of personalization in an eight-year period, specifically from 2008 to 2016. Following such larger timeframe, the aim of this paper is twofold. First, by conducting quantitative content analysis of posts from Barack Obama's Facebook fan page, it will be examined how often Obama communicated about political issues and how often his Facebook posts were focused only on his persona. In the context of personalization of political communication, specific focus will be on emotionalization and humanization. Second, the analysis will try to identify if the examined indicators of privatization and emotionalization have any effect on citizens' reactions.

PERSONALIZATION OF POLITICAL COMMUNICATION ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Some studies differentiate between personalization of political communication and "media personalization" (Rahat and Kenig, 2018). While personalization in controlled media can be associated with personalization of strategic communication, mainly exercised in campaign ads and on social media, personalization in uncontrolled media is mainly associated with the personalization of media coverage. While the former is more often present in social media context, the latter is mainly manifested in traditional media systems. Research in the field of the personalization of political communication on the social media has only recently emerged (Bronstein, 2013; Enli, 2017; Enli and Skogerbø, 2013; Kruikemeier *et al*, 2013; Metz *et al.,* 2019; Lalancette and Raynauld, 2019). "Personally-kept web platforms" (Vergeer *et al.*, 2011) have personalized communication even more due to their specific nature, logic, and infrastructure. Ekman and Widholm (2014: 520) argue that focus on politicians' personal characteristics, rather than the politics they represent, seems to be a growing trend in political communications practice on social media platforms. Vergeer *et al.* (2013: 481) similarly note that instead of candidate-centred campaigning of the pre-modern period, with social media, a more personality-centred campaigning goes beyond conveying political messages, sending out posts on what occupies politicians from a more personal or even private perspective. Such trends are in line with specific social media logic, which also enabled politicians to appear in a more simple and ordinary way, attracting citizens and voters with the insight into their ordinary

lives. Consequently, such personalized presentation helped politicians to be "more humanized" and to appear to be "one of us" (Larsson, 2015; Manning *et al.*, 2016).

A picture which depicts a leader shopping with children is aimed at showing a piece of that leader's routine, thus making the leader more human, less institutional, and, as a result, less alien to the ordinary person (Ciaglia and Mazzoni, 2014: 451). This value corresponds with the idea of rise of authenticity (Enli, 2017) and informalization (Wouters, 2012) in politics, which may bring notable changes also to the perspective of citizens' expectations, their aims and views about how politicians should be presented in social media environment.

EMOTIONAL APPEALS AND HUMANIZATION: FORMS FOR ATTRACTING CITIZENS

In parallel with the changing focus within online political communication and its personalization, research on new forms of citizens' engagement via social media is expanding (Cogburn and Espinoza-Vasquez, 2011; Gerodimos and Justinussen, 2015; Gil de Zu´niga *et al.* 2010; Katz *et al.*, 2013). Enli and Skogerbø (2013) explain that social media have enabled personalization of politics because of the new ways of political engagement and different forms through which citizens and politicians can connect. Smith (2009), for instance, emphasizes that social media have empowered citizens and enabled them to participate in many new ways in political processes, including going online to read political news, and to view official campaign videos. In addition, citizens are more eager to use social networking sites to engage in campaigns, to interact with and obtain information from others (Smith, 2009: 2011). However, Gerodimos and Justinussen (2014) were among the first to study how content and rhetoric in social media posts stimulate interactivity and responses by their users.

Defining communication on Facebook as posting the content, on the one hand, and reacting to it by using social buttons, on the other (2014: 11), their study clarifies, why people like something. Posting a 'like' is an expression of the endorsement of posted content, an expression of affirmation, and an acceptance of the post, 'like' stands for 'congratulations' and 'awesome' (Gerodimos and Justinussen 2014: 11). Yet, social network platforms are not fixed entities, but constantly changing products (van Dijck, 2013). From 2016 onwards, Facebook, for instance, introduced six different emoji-based reactions, which include 'love', 'haha', 'yay', 'wow', 'sad' and 'angry', accompanied with the matching emoji picture.[1] Besides liking, also sharing is, in a way, an even stronger type of engaging to post (*ibid*), because it assumes the importance of its content. In this constellation, commenting can be considered the third level of 'reacting' on Facebook, because it assumes an action that is more demanding than only pressing a button, such as 'like'.

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[1] Since this research includes time periods before these new reactions were introduced we will rely on the interpretation according to which "a post with many interactions has evidently grabbed more attention and spread more widely, whereas a post with fewer interactions has not been deemed worthy or interesting to engage with" (Gerodimos and Justinussen, 2015: 117).

Humanization is defined as a "classic image strategy which makes politicians appear more personable, more like the lay person, and thus seemingly close and familiar to voters" (Holtz-Bacha, 2004: 49). Emotionalization is seen as a strategy aimed at generating sympathy and building emotional ties with voters (2004: 49-50). Simplification and distraction imply that politicians oversimplify issues and try to distract us from the important ones. Lastly, striving for celebrity status refers to "the notion that politicians want and have the potential to acquire celebrity status normally reserved for the show-business stars which consequently may make them more attractive to broader audiences" (Grbeša, 2008: 36). Here, only humanization, and emotionalization are deeply explored, while striving for celebrity status and simplification are not examined.

EMPIRICAL RESEARCH: OBAMA'S CASE STUDY

Aims and research questions

The intention of this study is to examine how often emotional appeals and private traits were communicated on the Facebook fan page of Barack Obama who revolutionised political communication in the online sphere and was consequently dubbed "social media president" (Katz *et al*, 2013). For the purposes of this study, personalization refers to growing visibility of individuals in media coverage and in strategic communication, which further refers to political and private personality traits of these individuals. More narrow focus of this analysis is on private life and infiltration of private personality traits in Facebook communication of Barack Obama. Exposure of Obama's private life is based on Langer's definition of privatization of political personae (2010) and Holtz-Bacha's (2004) differentiation between four goals of privatization. The goal is also to reveal how these traits affected interaction of citizens on his fan page in terms of numbers of likes, comments and shares.

This study therefore interrogates the extent to which Obama's presence on his Facebook fan page is related to political, private and emotional traits. Furthermore, the empirical analysis is intended to establish to which extent Barack Obama used political, private and emotional appeals in his Facebook posts? The main goal of our analysis is to identify the frequency of different types of traits, published on his Facebook profile in order to explore the degree of personalized images of Obama as a political actor, by separating the identified elements of humanization on the one hand and emotional appeals on the other. The assumption is that Obama used his Facebook fan page mainly to communicate political issues.

In the next step, the analysis is deliberately focused on elements of interactivity on the users' level, expressed in numbers of likes, comments and shares. The aim is namely to check if private traits and emotional appeals may stimulate Facebook users to be more engaged in relation to such posts. Accordingly, the empirical analysis intends to answer if private and emotional appeals communicated in Facebook posts encourage Facebook users to like, comment and share? The assumption is that posts with private and emotional appeals will have more likes, comments and shares then the posts without such appeals.

Methodology: method, sample and measurements

The method used in this study is quantitative content analysis and analysis of variance (ANOVA). The unit of analysis was a Facebook post published on the official Facebook page of Barack Obama. The final sample included all available posts published in the period from 2008 to 2016 on Obama's fan page,[2] amounting to 2804 examined posts. The data obtained by using the program language Python[3] also included the code of the original posts, which served for getting the original posts from the fan page including photos. Subsequently, the photos were coded as an integral part of the post. Examining the photos was an important part of this study and, compared to most other studies, this is one of the first in which visual elements of Facebook posts were carefully examined, together with the study conducted by Metz *et al.* (2019).

The original coding sheet that was developed included the measurements of visibility, humanization and emotionalization.[4] The first one, *i.e.*, visibility, was employed on two levels either as presence of Obama in the photos or as references to his political or private profile. To measure the first level of visibility, each post that contained a photo was coded for presence or absence of Obama in the photo. The second level of visibility was operationalized as references to political or private life in the overall focus of the post. Humanization was operationalized as presence of Obama in different settings, as presence of family members in the photos, as references to private life and specifically to family life in the posts. The third category, emotionalization was captured through the identification of presence of emotional appeals within the posts themselves. More detailed explanation of each category measurement is provided further below.

Visibility of the political actor

The category 'Overall focus' was introduced to reveal how often political and private profiles of Barack Obama were in an overall focus of the post and how often other content was in focus. The category itself was taken from Grbeša's article about the personalization of political communication in the Croatian parliamentary elections in 2003 and 2007 (2010) in which she partly relies on Kaid and Johnston's (2002: 18) differentiation between image and issues. Relying on this main differentiation between image and issues, values added to the Overall focus category are extended and can be divided into two groups; those that relate to political content and those that relate to a personal profile (political and private). Yet, it has to be emphasized that it is often hard to make a clear distinction between image and issues, because these two categories are not exclusive, as Kaid and Johnston (2002) found in their research about image-related video ads and issue-related video ads.

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[2] Although Obama's Facebook fan page has been analysed numerous times, the researchers almost never emphasize that his official Facebook page (www.facebook.com/BarackObama) was managed by the OFA team. For instance, Gerodimos and Jusstinussen, (2015: 114) also studied the same fan page, but never mentioned that it is administrated by the OFA team. OFA here stands for Obama for America, Organizing for America and Organizing for Action (see Vučković, 2020: 164).

[3] A Python script that utilized Facebook's official Graph API to collect posts from Obama's fan page was created. The structured data in Excel files were obtained, including numbers of comments, likes and shares for every post that was scraped.

[4] The presented data was generated from the first author's PhD dissertation *Private, Popular and Political on Social Media: Analysis of On-line Communication of Barack Obama, David Cameron and Ivo Josipović*. The data used in this article represent only a smaller part of the whole doctoral research and of the accompanying dataset.

The personal profile (image) is divided into two main values: the political profile and the private profile (Grbeša, 2010), wherein the political profile implies a focus on the political actor's political qualities or characteristics which are, according to Wattenberg (1991: 81-82), integrity, reliability, competence and charisma. The private profile concerns a focus on the candidates' private features or private lives, and refers to a candidate's appearance, age, family, hobbies, childhood, habits, *etc*. In this research, it refers to the private and political profiles of Barack Obama. Values connected with the political content are those that Grbeša (2008) refers to as: the "electoral process" (procedures related to suffrage, electoral system and the like) and campaigning" (which is defined as activities related with the canvassing, donor dinners, meetings with supporters, testimonials). Bearing in mind the role of social media in permanent campaigning, this value is expected to be found very often during different time periods. Also, the value Rebuttal is included in the category Overall focus and it refers mostly to attacks and quarrels between candidates. Additionally, since research involves periods during the terms and not only the election period, we added code values that relate to different kinds of Announcements regarding upcoming events, logistics, anniversaries, and other official events and duties that statesmen carry out during their terms.

The second indicator of visibility was presence or absence of Obama in the photos posted on examined posts.

Humanization of political actor
Holtz-Bacha (2004: 49) defined humanization as a "classic image strategy which makes politicians appear more personable, more like the layperson, and thus seemingly close and familiar to voters". Relying on this definition, categories in this section were designed to detect Obama's attempts to "familiarise" with voters on Facebook by appearing "human" and to identify techniques used to achieve this particular goal. Different values were used as indicators of humanization. The first one was the setting in which Obama was featured in the photos. More specifically, an indicator of humanization was if he appeared a) familiarly interacting with citizens, as "one of us"; b) or if he appeared "behind the scenes". The value "behind the scenes" was introduced as a result of the pilot analysis, which revealed that this value should be added in order to capture photos that looked as though they are "unintentional", spontaneous, or even "amateurish" (Enli, 2017) while most of the time they were carefully planned. These photos were meant to look as though the political actor did not even know that he was being photographed in different situations, while he was preparing for his speech, while he was adjusting his tie, making a phone call, *etc*. This value corresponds with the idea of the rise of authenticity (Enli, 2017) and informalisation (Wouters, 2007) in politics.

The first indicator of humanization, which referred to private lives was the value Private profile within the category Overall focus. Coding posts for having Private profile in the Overall focus and not some other of nine values, which were offered in this category was a clear indicator of the presence of privatization in the examined posts. Further, it was examined if Obama's family life was mentioned in the posts referring specifically to his family members. Likewise, it was analysed whether there were any references to other

aspects of his private life like hobbies, special talents, private feelings, good looks, favourite music, college days, *etc.* Another indicator was the presence of his family members and pets in the photos posted in the examined posts. Although family life is by definition part of one's private life, we tried to make a distinction between explicit mentions of family members and references to his family and other aspects of his private life.

Emotionalization of communication

Emotionalization defined as one among four directions in which privatization can operate, according to Holtz-Bacha, "aims at generating sympathy and building emotional ties with voters" (2004: 49-50). In this study, indicators of emotionalization were in the first-place types of appeals or arguments that were used in the Facebook posts. The categorization of appeals is taken from Kaid and Johnston (2001, 2002) who differentiate among emotional, logical and ethical appeals. "Emotional appeals use language and imagery in order to evoke certain feelings, whereas logical appeals use the language of evidence and facts to prove a point", while ethical or source credibility appeals try to convince the voter of a candidate's trust-worthiness and credibility (2002: 288). Although the authors tailored this classification primarily for the video ads, a pilot analysis[5] confirmed that the same classification works equally well for Facebook posts. In this study, only emotional appeals were thoroughly examined.

Data analysis

Following the constructed coding book, the data were statistically analysed on a sample of 2804 posts posted in the period from 2008 to 2016. Descriptive statistics helped to provide simple counting of frequencies of presence or absence of traits to answer how frequently and in what way Barack Obama communicated private and emotional traits on his Facebook fan page. Subsequently, it was explored if these specific variables could be predictors of higher responsiveness of Facebook users in numbers of likes, comments and shares. In this respect, specific One-Way ANOVA tests[6] were conducted to identify 1) if presence of Obama in different settings in the photos could be a predictor of a number of citizens' interactions; 2) if there was any relationship between the private posts and a number of citizens' interactions?; 3) if the presence of family members in the photos could be a predictor of a higher number of shares, comments and likes among the citizenry, and 4) if emotional appeals could predict a number of shares, comments and likes as well. The results are thoroughly presented in the subsequent section.

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[5] A pilot analysis was conducted on a set of 350 randomly chosen posts. Furthermore, to test the validity in terms of accuracy in coding, an intercoder reliability test was conducted by using the Holsti method for agreement (1969) on 350 randomly chosen posts. Two independent coders coded the posts. The results showed the average reliability score of 0.83 with a variance in reliability across categories from 0.72 to 1.00.

[6] The ANOVA test was used because it indicates if there is a statistically significant difference between groups of the dependent variable on the independent variable. In this specific case we were looking at two groups for each variable, where one group included posts which were coded for the absence of the trait, and in the other group there were posts which were coded for the presence of that same trait. In this way it was possible to compare if presence of examined traits in the posts had positive or negative effect on numbers of shares, comments and likes.

RESULTS

By using descriptive statistics, the results of content analysis are first presented on a level of visibility, which was examined through the overall focus of the post. Here, attention was paid to Obama's private and political profile, through his presence in posted images. In addition, the focus was on the elements of humanization wherein the focus was on privatized posts and, eventually, on emotionalization of published posts. Subsequently, the indicators of visibility are presented, then indicators of humanization are revealed and lastly indicators of emotionalization are shown. The results of several ANOVA tests reveal if and to what extent specific variables can figure as predictors of higher responsiveness of Facebook users in numbers of their likes, comments and shares.

## Political, private and emotional in the posts

Political in the posts

The findings show that Obama communicated about political issues most of the time, while only a very small amount of posts (8.66% of all) had his private profile in their overall focus (see Figure 1). Specifically, the results show that issues were in an overall focus of more than half (54%) of all of the examined posts on Obama's fan page. In addition, analysis revealed that only a few times it was the case that others' political or private profiles were in focus. In the category 'political profile', for instance, Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela were mentioned a few times, together with all the qualities they had as great visionaries and fighters. Joe Biden, as Obama's vice-President, was mentioned in the political and private profile, on his birthdays, for instance. However, almost all of the posts in these two categories were about Obama's political and private profiles, with twice as high percentage of posts which were focused on Obama's private profile.
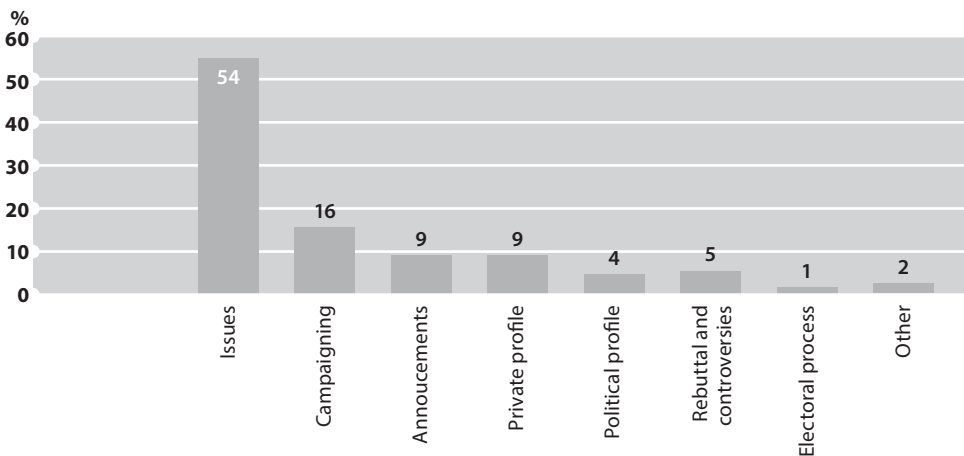
▲ *Figure 1.*
Overall focus in the Obama's post (%)

Secondly, the study also made it possible to disclose in which settings Obama appeared in the photos. Without including the photos in this analysis, it would have been almost impossible to test one of the most important dimensions of personalization, which is the visibility of the individual (Holtz-Bacha *et al.*, 2014). For this reason, the photos were coded as an integral part of the post, or as one whole. The results surprisingly showed that Obama was not present in almost half (44.11%) of the examined photos, which means that the majority of the posts were actually without his image at all (he was not present in 1,161 out of 2,804 examined photos). In Figure 2, it is more evident, in which settings Obama appeared: mostly in political settings, and only then together with ordinary citizens.
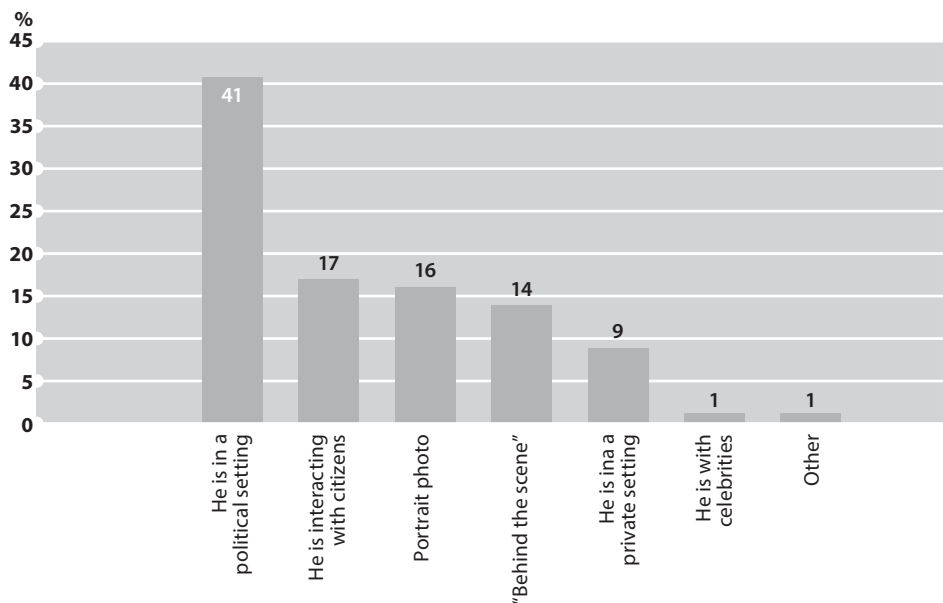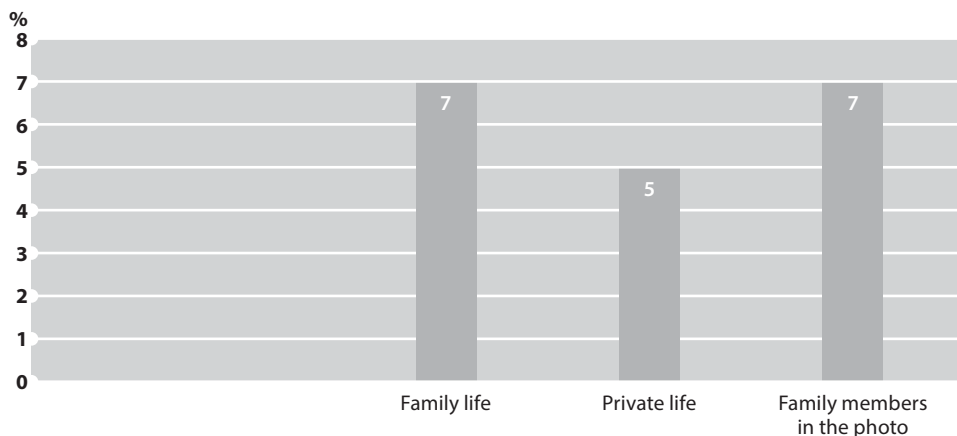
▲ *Figure 2.*
Obama in different settings (%)

Viewing more carefully to his photos, Obama used to be very spontaneous and authentic. That was especially the case when he was meeting ordinary citizens. He always behaved as if they were completely equal. Another way of appearing as an average citizen were posts in which he was playing baseball and basketball, typical American games. It is also interesting that, in such photos, he played in old sneakers, a grey and old T-shirt, and old trousers or a tracksuit, looking even more a typical American, as "one of them". Politicians use this technique of humanization because it is believed that citizens will vote for someone with whom they can identify, for someone who looks like them and who does the same things they do, because he certainly understands their problems and will do everything to help them (Holtz-Bacha, 2004).

The third most frequent image was a portrait photo, which served as an indicator of strongly expressed personalization and image building. This value was added in the coding sheet because Obama's portrait photos were a powerful tool of communication. His illustrated portrait photos in different colours became actually a brand. In his portrait photos, he often had very strong facial expressions, being very serious, worried, or, on the contrary, very optimistic and happy. Also, these photos in many cases came retouched, sometimes for instance with black background if the message he wanted to communicate was serious. Further qualitative analysis of all photos could possibly provide more detailed answers. It is interesting to note that a similar amount of posts were in the category 'behind the scenes'. Here, he appeared even more authentic, informal and sometimes the impression was that the photos were "amateurish" (Enli, 2017). Such cases can be interpreted as a beginning of the 'de-professionalisation trend', which according to Kreiss and Jasinski, started with the 2012 Obama campaign (2016:15). Since a great majority of such photos (64.33%) were actually posted from 2009 to 2012, this finding confirms that such form of 'de-professionalisation' was used much before the campaign in 2012.

Private in the posts

When it comes to private cues from his life, it is shown that he appeared in private setting in less than 10% of all photos in which he was present, while his family members were present only in approximately 7% of all examined posts (see Figure 3). In addition, references to his private life (5% posts) and to family life were rare (in nearly 7%). However, family members were more often present in the photos in election years than during the presidency: This is especially significant in the election year 2012, when family members appeared in 19.1% of the posts, while in the second term they appeared in only 4.3%. However, it is most interesting to note that, in this period, the Obama family dogs Bo or Sunny were present in 27 while Michelle and his daughters were present in eleven posts.

▲ Figure 3.
Privatization in Facebook posts (%)

Furthermore, the photos of the Obama family during Obama's presidency show the same closeness between the family members. One of the most liked posts ever was "The new Obama family portrait", posted in 2011. This was not the usual portrait, in which everyone usually stands beside each other, but they are very close to each other - Sasha sits on Barack's lap, and they all hold each other's hands. This could be characterized as a new level of privatization, where the family members are in physical contact all the time. Also, we can see parts of his private life and other segments, for instance the Obama family recipe for chili, which reveals how his family prepares and likes chili. Another thing that his team was pointing to is the fact that he is left-handed. Even by wishing a happy 'Left-Handers Day' and by putting into focus his hands while they are signing some documents, or playing baseball, they wanted to stress that part of his private persona as something that is special about him.

Emotionalization in the posts

Social media platforms have often been accused of trivialization and of bringing too much emotion into the public sphere (Kellner, 2009). As confirmed in Figure 4, a great majority of posts (64.29%) contained emotions. His PR team used several different tactics to emotionalize the posts. The first is language, which was full of emotional expressions and words. The second is the use of photographs, in which Obama appears with an emotional expression on his face - either smiling and being happy, or with a very cold and strict facial expression, demonstrating his anger or unhappiness with something. Yet, these findings call for more in-depth analysis using qualitative methods.

Emotions were most often used in the posts with an overall focus on the Private profile (90.95%) and the Political profile (85.84%). Emotions have also been found in 60.87% posts that had issues as their overall focus. Obama's team added some emotional appeals to issue-related posts, and especially to casual posts, which had the purpose of cheering up and presenting Obama as an emotional, fun guy, who is especially loved by the youngest. Another set of highly emotionalized posts were those posts in which he appeared with children. Most of the photos in which children are present do not have any other content, the focus is mostly on those children, who smile and look very happy, which suggests that the main goal of these photos was to evoke emotions. It is a well-known strategy, and politicians employ it during the campaigns by taking an effort to be photographed with children while they are at rallies. However, Obama did that during his presidency years, and not only during election years. In relation to the examined settings in which Obama appears, emotional appeals could be found in all different settings. This means that even when in a political setting, Obama was skilful to add emotions to his appearance. Yet, emotions were most often present in the photos coded as: 'private setting', 'portrait photo', 'behind the scenes', and 'with ordinary citizens'. The results also revealed that he appeared with celebrities in only 1% of all photos in which he was present.

Emotional appeals and private life as drivers
of Facebook users' interactions

In the second part of the analysis, the focus is primarily on citizens' interactions on Obama's fan page in order to examine if presence or absence of specific traits affects

numbers of likes, comments and shares. The results are shown in four stages: 1. how the presence of Obama in the photos in different settings is stimulating responses (Figure 4); 2. How private life in the overall focus impacts their reactions (Figure 5); 3. How the presence of family members in the photos is stimulating the responses (Figure 6) and 4. How presence of emotional appeals affects citizens' reactions (Figure 7).

The results of the first ANOVA test, presented in Figure 4, show interesting results. At first sight, we can see that only the photos in which Obama is featured in a private setting can be distinguished as being predictors of greater numbers of interactions. Moreover, this is the only category of photos that shows a positive and strong effect on the number of 'likes'. While it was expected that some other categories, like the category "'Obama with celebrities', would be predictors of the higher numbers of interactions, the analysis shows that this was not the case.
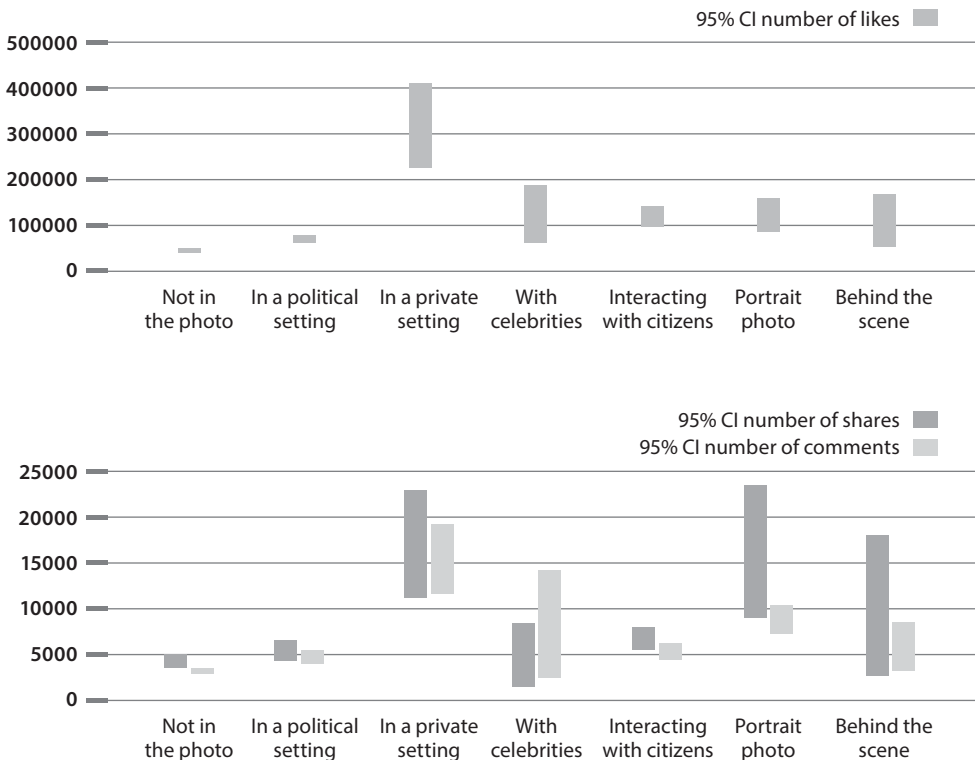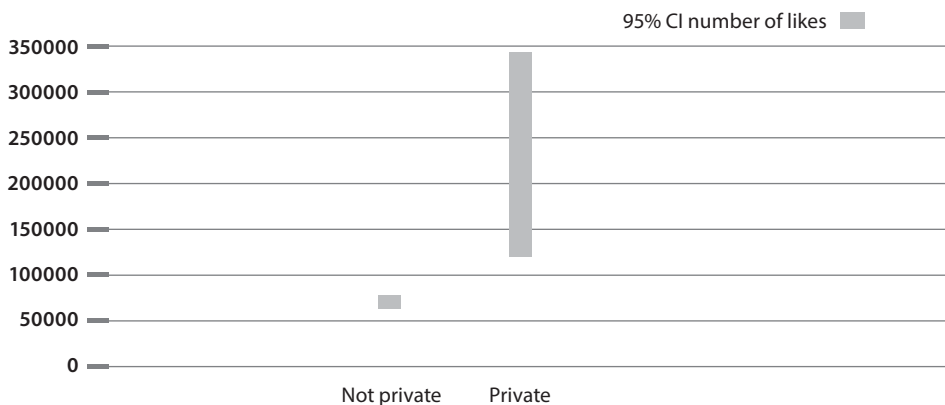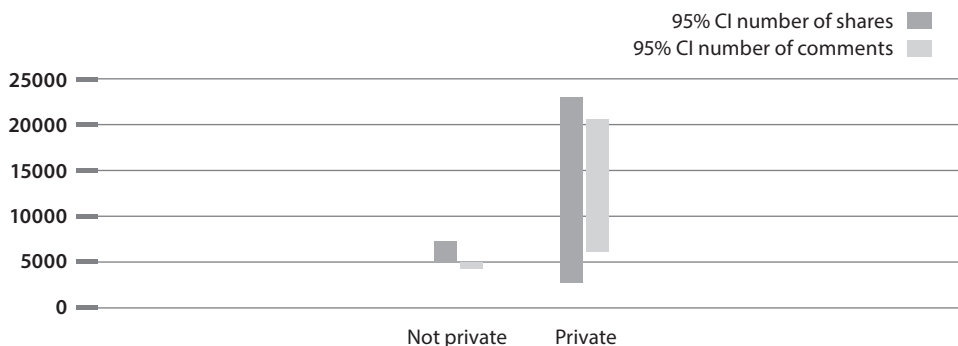
▲ *Figure 4.*
Settings in the photo and numbers of interactions
('likes', shares and comments)
Note: F=88,369, p < 0.001, Note: F=24,172, p < 0.001, Note: F=90,613, p < 0.001

Another unexpected finding is that the photos featuring Obama "behind the scenes" did not have any effect on the number of interactions. This category included coded photos in which Obama was photographed to look very spontaneous, often in an everyday setting, in the halls of the White House, while preparing speeches, signing papers, with his associates in everyday activities, but also literally behind the scenes before entering conventions to give a speech, or before media hosting. Considering that these photos are meant to present a new dimension of spontaneity and authenticity in such a way that it does not show setup photos, it was assumed that these photos would act as an engaging factor. However, it appears that citizens appreciate photos that are retouched, and carefully planned more than the "authentic" ones. Bearing in mind the culture of the time in which we live, perhaps, this should not be surprising. The whole philosophy and the tremendous success of Instagram is grounded on "fake" photos, and often on fake lives.

The results of the second ANOVA test show that posts with Obama's private life as an overall focus, in comparison to those with no private life in focus, have more comments and 'likes', *i.e.*, that private life is a strong predictor of a higher number of comments and 'likes' (Figure 5). The probability tests indicate that this prediction is statistically highly significant ($p < 0.001$). The results also reveal that the mean values of the number of 'likes' range between 120,000 and 350,000 'likes', while other posts have an average of between 50,000 and 100,000 'likes'. Yet, when we look at the shares, we can see that private life is no longer a significant predictor of the numbers of shares ($p < 0.182$).
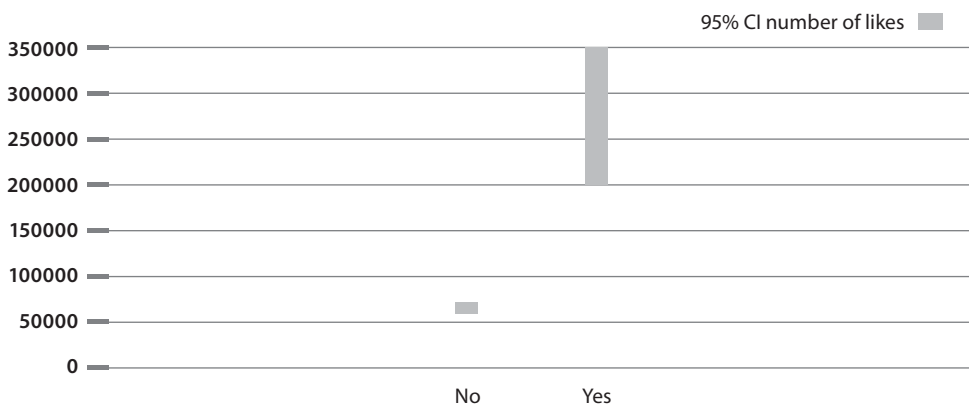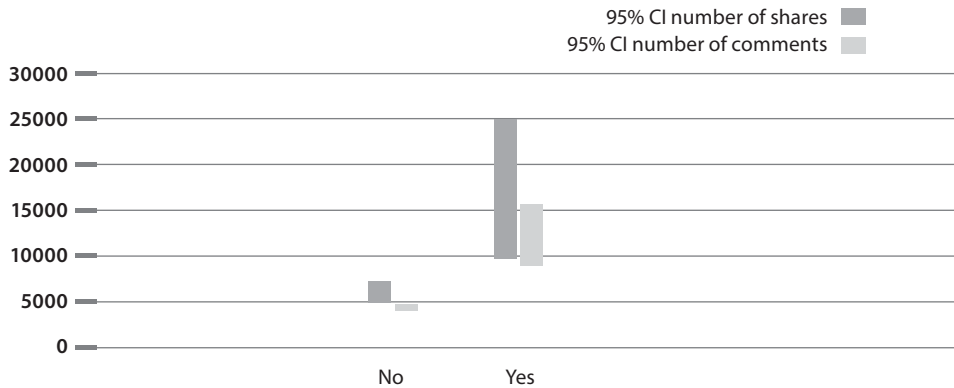
▲ *Figure 5.*
Private life in focus and number of interactions
('likes', shares and comments)
Note: F=36,239, p < 0.001, Note: F=1,778, p < 0.182, Note: F=57,561, p < 0.001

When exploring whether posts in which family members are present in the photo trigger higher numbers of shares, comments and 'likes', the data confirm that family members cause higher responses (Figure 6) (with p value for all being below 0.001). Also, the F-test was conducted to examine whether two population variances were equal: posts which do not have family members in the photo, and posts which have family members in the photo. By comparing the ratio of the two variances, we see that the differences between them are significant, especially when looking at likes and comments. Statistically, F tests show that there is a significant difference in the number of interactions between the posts with any of the mentioned traits and posts without traits.

95% CI number of shares ■
95% CI number of comments ■

▲ *Figure 6.*
Family members in the photos and the number of interactions
('likes', shares and comments)
Note: F= 211,905, p < 0.001, Note: F= 38,131, p < 0.001, Note: F= 137,887, p < 0.001

The last examined variable was emotional appeals in the posts. Figure 7 shows the statistically high significance of emotionally dyed content. It clearly demonstrates that posts which did not contain emotional appeals had significantly lower numbers of interactions. For instance, looking at the mean values of the number of 'likes' with posts which contained emotional appeals we can see that these numbers are somewhere between 90,000 and 115,000, while posts with no emotional appeals had an average of between 20,000 to less than 30,000 'likes'.

To sum up, the results of ANOVA tests show that presence of private cues in the posts, presence of family members in the photos and presence of emotional appeals in the posts are predictors of higher numbers of likes, comments and shares.

95% CI number of likes ■
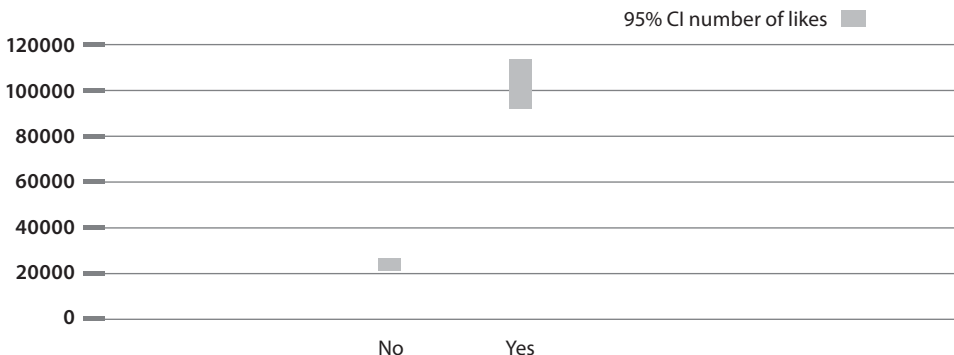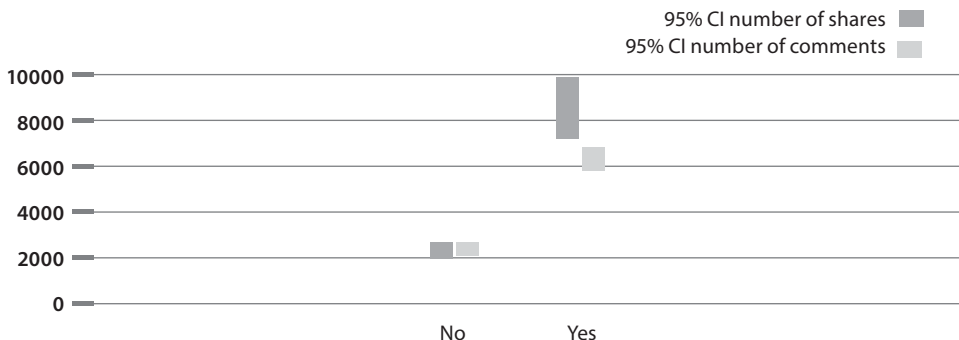
▲ *Figure 7.*
Emotional appeals and interactions
('likes', shares and comments)
Note: F= 108,942, p < 0.000, Note: F= 42,117, p < 0.001, Note: F= 118,866, p < 0.000

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

One of the main goals of this study was to reveal how often and in what way Barack Obama used his private life and emotional appeals as a strategy through which to get closer to citizens. The results reveal that his private profile was in an overall focus of only a very minor share of posts. On the other hand, he used emotional appeals very often in his Facebook communication. In addition, the results revealed that Obama mainly communicated about the issues and other themes on his Facebook fan page, while Private and Political profiles were rarely in focus. Yet, when it comes to other indicators of visibility, like the presence of Obama in the photos posted on his fan page, it is revealed that Obama was present in more than half of all of the published photos on his fan page. When testing the personalization through privatization thesis and different goals of privatization, the findings showed that infiltration of private cues, as an online communication strategy, was used very modestly on Barack Obama's Facebook fan pages of. Privatization was tested through the visibility of family members in the photos, also through the references to other aspects of private lives, for instance, hobbies, childhood, favourite food, books, TV shows, music. The findings showed that privatization was rarely used as a communication strategy during his two terms as President, but it is was used as a campaign strategy during the election campaign, when his family members appeared in the photos much more often than during the terms in office.

Furthermore, emotionalization was overwhelmingly used by Obama in his Facebook posts. Obama managed to emotionalize his online communication to a great extent, firstly, by using photos with emotional appeals, often with quotations that contained emotionally imbued words. Emotions have so far been something that has been hard to control in the public sphere, but with the advent of social media, use of emotional

appeals in communication becomes a necessity. Social media have emotionalised political communication, probably in the same way as, decades ago, television did (Hart, 1998; Meyrowitz, 1985). Obama knew how to appear as "one of us", as ordinary American and he knew how to use social media to spread a picture of him as "an ordinary man". While appearing with ordinary citizens, shaking hands with them, lifting children are all well-known techniques of humanization, Obama again went a step further. He often appeared as a "President to hug". During his presidency, Obama hugged so many people, from his family members, his colleagues, like Joe Biden, Hillary Clinton, children, ordinary citizens, representatives of interest groups, *etc*. It can be said that hugging was one of his trademarks. And he was not giving official polite hugs but, in most cases, these were long, warm and strong hugs that often became headlines in news sections.

Although, the results showed that his private and family life were not often in the focus on Facebook, the study also revealed that some other goals of privatization were overwhelmingly used on Obama's Facebook page. That is primarily emotionalization which appeared to be present not only in the posts related to his personal profile (image), but also in posts related to issues and other themes. One of the main tools which enabled him to emotionalize communication to that extent without referring much to his private life, were the photos. A characteristic of these photos was also that they were often photographed from a distance, or he was photographed from the back. Furthermore, the White House official photographer, Pete Souza, named some "behind the scenes" photos, that were used as a strategy to get media attention, but also to get closer to citizens by giving them the insights into what is happening "behind the scenes". The Guardian, in 2012, published an article entitled *Barack Obama's presidency: behind the scenes – in pictures*, stating that "The photographs offer a rare portrait of what it is like to be President of the United States (Stone, 2012)." In addition, our findings exposed that emotional appeals and references to private and family life had a significant and strong positive effect on the numbers of 'likes', comments and shares. This important finding supports the results from the latest study by Metz *et al*. (2019), who, by applying a comprehensive, conceptual model of different types of self-personalization, found that, in Germany, emotional and private self-personalization positively affects the audience's engagement. Judging by the numbers of interactions, citizens positively reacted to the presence of emotional appeals and private traits in posts.

The findings of this study bring us to conclude that privatization in most cases is driven by the intention of politicians to 'please' citizens who 'like' to see their emotions, their private side, who look at them in the way they look at celebrities. It is also shown that even a politician like Obama, who was indeed a true celebrity and whose private life was followed all around the world, uses private and family life very rarely as communication strategy, and most often only during elections. Also, huge presence of emotional appeals in the posts suggests that he found another way of emotionalizing his communication on Facebook, which, according to the number of interactions, worked well in his case, enabling him to show his family members and talk about his private life, only on a few occasions.

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EMOCIONALIZACIJA I PRIVATIZACIJA POLITIČKE KOMUNIKACIJE NA FACEBOOKU: FAKTORI KOJI STIMULIRAJU INTERAKCIJU GRAĐANA?

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SAŽETAK *Društveni mediji su često optuživani kao jedan od glavnih stimulatora personalizacije političke komunikacije, a posljedično i kao jedan od faktora koji utječu na depolitizaciju suvremene politike. Ipak, personalizacija može potaknuti određene korisnike da više pažnje posvete političkim temama te da djeluju responsivnije prema personaliziranim političkim profilima. U ovom članku su prezentirani rezultati longitudinalne analize političke komunikacije Baracka Obame na njegovoj Facebook stranici. Istraživanje je pokušalo odgovoriti na pitanje u kojoj mjeri je Obama putem Facebooka komunicirao političke teme, a u kojoj mjeri osobni profil, te ima li prisutnost emocija i referenci na privatni život u postovima određeni efekt na korisnike Facebooka, mjereno kroz broj lajkova, komentara i dijeljenja koje ti određeni postovi dobiju. Oslanjajući se na rezultate kvantitativne analize sadržaja koja je provedena na 2804 Facebook posta koji su objavljeni na Obaminoj stranici u razdoblju od 2008. do 2016., istraživanje je otkrilo kako je Obama svoju Facebook stranicu koristio prvenstveno za komuniciranje političkih tema, a tek onda i osobnog profila. Dok je personalizacija Obamine političke komunikacije na Facebooku predmet opširnije rasprave, ovo istraživanje potvrđuje kako postovi koji sadrže emocije i reference na privatni profil privlače veći broj odgovora (lajkova, komentara, dijeljenja) korisnika Facebooka od postova koji ne sadrže emocije ili reference na privatni profil.*

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