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**Pseudo-Discursive, Mobilizing, Emotional, and Entertaining:
Identifying Four Successful Communication Styles of Political Actors on Social Media
during the 2015 Swiss National Elections**

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Abstract

Political actors are adapting their communication styles to the network media logic of social media platforms with varying success. This study investigates the communication styles used during the Swiss national election 2015 and their success in triggering digital reactions. In a quantitative content analysis of the “top 20” most reacted to messages on Facebook (n = 2170) and Twitter (N = 1796) of 246 Swiss parliamentarians and 11 parties we analyzed the impact of a pseudo-discursive, mobilizing, emotional and entertaining communication style. Whereas the pseudo-discursive style is the most common on both platforms, it leads on Facebook to fewer interactions. The entertaining style fosters reactions on Facebook but not on Twitter. Though the emotional style is used the least, it is the most beneficial. The paper concludes by discussing how these four communication styles alter communication between political actors and citizens.

KEYWORDS: Political communication, Facebook, Twitter, social media, Switzerland, quantitative content analysis

Political actors have embraced social media platforms as a promising way of circumventing traditional gatekeepers to reach citizens directly. But how do they communicate on these platforms? Do they try to engage their followers in serious debate, or do they simply aim to entertain them? And how successful are these new styles of communication in motivating citizens to react to politicians' activities on various social media platforms? From the perspective of network media logic (Klinger & Svensson, 2015, 2016), this quantitative study investigates which communication styles political actors used on social media platforms during the 2015 Swiss national election and how these styles fostered digital reactions on Facebook and Twitter.

Previous research shows that discussions between political actors and citizens on social media platforms are rare (Kalsnes, 2016), and if they do occur, they seldom constitute deliberation (Wessler, 2008). However, citizens very commonly react to politicians' public messages (e.g., public Facebook posts or tweets on Twitter) with a like, share, comment, or retweet, mirroring the general user habits on these platforms (Puschmann & Peters, 2014). These reactions, even without a response from the political actor, have the potential to spread messages virally through the network (Klinger & Svensson, 2015).

Political actors seek to obtain as many of citizens' reactions to their posts and tweets as possible for three main reasons. First, on social media platforms, such as Facebook, a large number of reactions increase the likelihood that political actors' posts will be seen by their followers and fans because of the algorithm that organizes the news stream (whereas on Twitter, most tweets are shown in the order in which they were sent (van Dijck, 2013)). Second, each reaction from a fan or follower to a political actor's post or tweet further circulates the post through the fan's or follower's network. These networks are likely to include citizens with similar interests and political positions and who are comparatively likely to be persuaded by the politicians' posts to become fans themselves. Third, exposure to a

politician's tweet has been shown to have strong effects on voting intentions (Kobayashi & Ichifuji, 2015) and political participation (Dimitrova, Shehata, Stromback, & Nord, 2014).

Therefore, this study explores whether political actors have successfully adapted to network media logic by using styles of communication that generate the maximum number of reactions. Although network media logic is an established theoretical concept, few studies have explored its impact on political actors' communication styles. In our empirical study, we thus focus on the content of political actors' public social media messages and the digital reactions they generate.

We investigate the use of the following four distinctive communication styles that are particularly well suited to network media logic (Klinger & Svensson, 2015): pseudo-discursive, mobilizing, emotional, and entertaining. We conducted a quantitative content analysis of the posts and tweets of all 246 elected members of the Swiss Parliament that received the most reactions on Facebook (N = 1,796) and Twitter (N = 2,170). These posts and tweets received the most reactions between six months before and ten days after the 2015 Swiss national election, and the purpose of choosing them is to identify how successful the aforementioned communication styles are in provoking reactions.

Political Actors on Social Media Platforms

Previous studies on the behavior of political actors on social media platforms have found that most of them fail to exploit the interactive potential of Web 2.0 platforms; they mainly broadcast information (Filimonov, Russmann, & Svensson, 2016; Graham, Broersma, Hazelhoff, & van 't Haar, 2013) and rarely debate with users. They use such platforms in a Web 1.5 manner (Jackson & Lilleker, 2009): Regardless of how lively citizens' comments on their posts may be, political actors seldom respond, let alone engage in a serious exchange of thoughts or opinions.

These findings are often framed negatively based on the normative expectation that political actors should embrace this chance to debate with citizens. However, previous research has shown that politicians lack the resources (such as time or a social media team) to cope with the flood of comments on social media; they fear losing control over the communication situation, which might trigger offensive online behavior and negative media attention, particularly because their original statements may become more politically controversial with the ensuing discussions (Coleman & Blumler, 2009; Stromer-Galley, 2000). Furthermore, citizens are not used to receiving responses from political actors, which means that politicians are not punished for restricting themselves to top-down communication and thus do not feel obliged to respond to citizens' comments (Tromble, 2016).

Nevertheless, Facebook and Twitter users themselves also shy away from discussions on these platforms. About 90% of online communities consist of lurkers who read other members' posts but do not comment on or react to the posts (Schneider, Krogh, & Jäger, 2013). For these reasons, even the widespread adoption and use of important social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, have not led to more public debates between political actors and citizens.

As political actors do not want to spend many resources when responding to comments, and users—most of whom are lurkers—do not strongly demand conversation, the one-sided communication from political actors provokes one-sided responses from users. We argue that these digital reactions (e.g., likes, comments, retweets, etc.) by fans on Facebook and followers on Twitter are a better reflection of users' general social media habits than the expectation of vibrant public political debates.

A like on Facebook does not remain a simple sign of acknowledgement (Larsson, 2015); the liked post also spreads through the network of the one who liked it. The same applies to other reactions, such as a comment or share on Facebook or a like, retweet, or reply

on Twitter. Although these may represent different *qualities* of interactions between politicians and citizens, we consider them all to be reactions because they all increase the visibility and reach of the original public messages within the networks.

If multiple users react to a post or tweet, the original message can go viral (Klinger & Svensson, 2015) and reach even those people who are not fans or followers of the political actor who wrote it (Vaccari & Valeriani, 2015). Depending on individual users' habits and on Facebook and Twitter newsfeed algorithms, not all fans and followers will see all the posts a friend reacted to, but the larger is the overall volume of reactions, the higher are the chances that they will (Karlsen & Enjolras, 2016).

Studies of politicians and parties that rely heavily on social media platforms—and thus on their potential to spread posts and tweets virally—have highlighted the impact of successful communication on these platforms (e.g., Casero-Ripollés, Feenstra, & Tormey, 2016). Especially in combination with other media, such as television, the potential of these platforms can be exploited to achieve political success (Chadwick, 2013). Mere exposure to a politician's tweet has been found to generate a more positive attitude toward the political actor (Kobayashi & Ichifuji, 2015). Previous experiments have found that tweets have a more positive impact compared with newspapers or television coverage: exposure to politicians' tweets heightens citizens' feeling of social presence, which leads to a favorable impression and stronger voting intention (Lee & Jang, 2013; Lee & Shin, 2014).

The use of social media also has a stronger effect on political participation than the use of online news sites, party websites (Dimitrova et al., 2014), and websites without social information has (Margetts, John, Hale, & Yasserli, 2016). Therefore, political actors are eager to spread their posts and tweets to as many citizens as possible, particularly throughout the networks of their fans and followers, where their messages are more likely to fall on fertile ground (because these networks tend to consist of like-minded peers; see Klinger

& Svensson, 2015). As political actors are interested in triggering as many digital reactions as possible with their public messages, we define the success of posts and tweets as the total number of reactions.

Political Actors' Communication Styles on Social Media Platforms

Political actors have historically adjusted their communication strategies, of which communication styles are an important part, to traditional media logic to ensure that journalistic gatekeepers include them in their reporting and that they reach a large audience (Altheide & Snow, 1979). While these gatekeepers are absent on social media platforms, politicians nevertheless face substantial obstacles to achieving their goal of reaching “maximal attention” (Klinger & Svensson, 2015, p. 1247). Because of the vast number of posts and tweets on social media platforms, a popularity score, which is reflected in, for example, the number of fans, likes, or retweets, moderates the visibility of an actor and his/her posts while enabling him/her to spread messages (van Dijck & Poell, 2013). Thus, social media communication needs to be adapted to network media logic (Klinger & Svensson, 2015, 2016). That is, political actors need to adjust their communication styles to platforms' unique characteristics and to the expectations and motivations of their users in order to reach their target audience via (many) reactions to their posts and tweets. *Focusing on the successful social media contributions of political actors*, we therefore pose our first research question, which is as follows: *To what degree do political actors use four possible social media communication styles (pseudo-discursive, mobilizing, emotional, and entertaining) on Facebook and Twitter?*

The two platforms differ in their user community, as well as in their users' motivations for using the platform and for reacting to social media contributions. Facebook is the largest social network site in Western society (Newman, 2017). Its user community encompasses slightly more younger than older Internet users, but due to its enormous size, it

represents Internet users better, overall, than any other platform does (Gruzd, Jacobson, Mai, & Dubois, 2018; Kovic, Rauchfleisch, Metag, Caspar, & Szenogrady, 2017; Pew Research Center, 2016). By contrast, in many countries, such as Switzerland, for example, Twitter users are a more specific community: they tend to be younger, better educated, and more media savvy; they oftentimes belong to a political or economic elite or to the media sector, and they commonly use Twitter in a professional capacity (Davis, Holtz-Bacha, & Just, 2017; Metag & Rauchfleisch, 2016; Pew Research Center, 2016). In other countries, such as in the UK, it is used by a broader population (Graham, Jackson, & Broersma, 2014). To our knowledge, however, in most countries, the user community of Twitter is not as representative of the general population as that of Facebook is. Users' motivations and expectations differ, as well: Facebook use is mostly determined by the desire to belong and the need for self-presentation (Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012); correspondingly, digital reactions on social network sites are mainly explained by the need to be a part of a group (Ho & Dempsey, 2010). By contrast, Twitter use is explained by the need for news and for tracking real-time events (Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2012). It is often used by journalists to observe political actors and gather quotes and information for their articles (Parmelee, 2014). Tweets are shared (retweeted) to amplify a message or to publicly agree with someone (boyd, Golder, & Lotan, 2010). The general use of Facebook and Twitter and the reactions to posts and tweets are thus triggered by quite different motives. The success of the messages posted by political actors on both platforms, i.e., whether these messages will reach as many people as possible by being spread via digital reactions, seems to strongly depend on the fit between the message and the motives of the platform users. Our second research question therefore explores how *the four aforementioned communication styles differ between Facebook and Twitter*.

Pseudo-discursive communication style. Given the interactive potential of social media platforms, their rise sparked the hope that political actors and citizens would use them to debate political issues as they did on the Athenian Agora (e.g., Coleman & Blumler, 2009). However, empirical research has found that political actors' proclamations on the potential for debates on social media platforms are mostly symbolic (Jungherr, 2016). In practice, cyber-rhetoric is common (e.g., Stromer-Galley, 2014), i.e., the debates tend to be staged by political actors and their close supporters to help spread their message. For the most part, traditional top-down communication dominates: social media platforms are used as just another website to disseminate information. Politicians' use of Web 2.0 platforms in such a Web 1.0 manner has christened the term "web 1.5" style of use (Jackson & Lilleker, 2009). However, political actors are aware of the discourse potential of these platforms, as well as the democratic hopes and expectations connected to them (e.g., Enli & Skogerbø, 2013). Responding to citizens on these platforms can lead to substantial goodwill and to positive responses (Lee & Shin, 2012; Tromble, 2016). Yet political actors shy away from public online interactions because of time constraints or their fear of losing control (Kalsnes, 2016; Stromer-Galley, 2000). Thus, we argue that they use certain communicative elements to make it at least look as though they are willing to engage in public debates on these platforms, i.e., they use a pseudo-discursive communication style.

For instance, they address other political actors or journalists in their posts. As the addressed person will be notified of this, opportunities for debate are created; even more importantly, doing so signals a willingness on their part to enter into a political discourse. In reality, however, mentioning other politicians is most often used as a form of negative campaigning (Druckman, Kifer, & Parkin, 2010). Political actors might also address the media directly to deliver quotable statements, especially on Twitter, or to try and set the media agenda (Jungherr, 2016; Parmelee, 2014). They respond and comment to media

coverage to correct or spin the news in their favor (Lischka, 2017). Political actors may also address citizens in their posts and tweets to ask for feedback or support, attempting to get a better feel of their concerns and opinions in order to win their votes (Jungherr, 2016).

Given the different user structures (the general public on Facebook vs. a high proportion of professional users on Twitter) and usage motivations (need to belong vs. observe news and political actors), we expect the demand for the pseudo-discursive style to be higher on Twitter. Additionally, we assume that this style is more appreciated by users on Twitter in the form of digital reactions than on Facebook.

H1a: The pseudo-discursive communication style is found more often on Twitter than on Facebook.

H1b: The pseudo-discursive communication style leads to more digital reactions on Twitter but not on Facebook.

Mobilizing communication style.

Social media platforms offer politicians a very useful channel for their mobilization attempts, which were previously mostly limited to interpersonal canvassing and restrained by their financial resources. Free social media platforms with a large user community are thus used extensively to mobilize for protests, national elections, and other events (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Bond et al., 2012). A mobilizing post or tweet can consist of a call for action, such as a reminder of an upcoming national referendum or election (e.g., ‘Vote for the social democrats!’, ‘Don’t forget to vote!’, or ‘It is your decision—go vote!’). It can also encompass the key points of why people should vote for a specific politician or party (e.g., supports green energy, lowers taxes, or fights for more social security) and thus reinforce the importance of casting one’s vote. These reminders may not only activate those using social network sites for political reasons (Gil de Zúñiga, Jung, & Valenzuela, 2012) but also convince past non-voters to vote, especially if they receive the message from a friend, for

example, via a share or a like (Baek, 2015). These calls for action can be decisive in a tight race: citizens who receive a mobilizing message are reminded of their civic duties and are more likely to vote. This effect is comparable to those of traditional get-out-the-vote tactics (Teresi & Michelson, 2015) and also influences offline participation (e.g., Vissers & Stolle, 2014). Another way of mobilizing is to include calls for digital action, such as likes and retweets. We expect that users do their part and react to a message when a political actor they follow publishes a mobilizing post or tweet.

As Facebook has a larger user community (5.24 million Swiss users) than Twitter has (1.42 million Swiss users), we assume that politicians will focus their mobilization efforts on the platform where these efforts are likely to reach more citizens. We also expect this to lead to more digital reactions because of the larger secondary audience on Facebook than on Twitter.

H2a: A mobilizing communication style is more often found on Facebook than on Twitter.

H2b: The mobilizing communication style leads to more digital reactions on Facebook but not on Twitter.

Emotional communication style. Political actors have historically used emotions to make their communication to the public more effective and persuasive, particularly on platforms without gatekeepers. Political communication has long involved public displays of emotion (Richards, 2004). Social media platforms invite an emotional communication style: they have no professional gatekeepers imposing the use of a more professional language; posts and tweets are expected to be composed quickly using authentic and informal language. Although users do turn to social networks for information, emotional motives also play a major role (Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012). Correspondingly, previous research has already

pointed out that emotional messages are more likely to go viral (Dobele, Lindgreen, Beverland, Vanhamme, & van Wijk, 2007).

An emotional communication style is characterized by posts and tweets that focus more on emotions than on political issues: they are more concerned about conveying an emotional state than an issue. That is, they can contain information on political issues, such as immigration, but they try to persuade citizens by focusing on the emotions connected to these issues, such as fear (e.g., connecting immigrants to crime rates or lowering taxes to unemployment). This emotional framing of political issues is one reason why populist parties' messages can persuade citizens and make their parties successful (Wirz, 2018). Another less political way of focusing on emotions is the use of (phatic) expressions; for example, a cheering political actor might tweet, "Thank you so much for all your votes! I love you all!" (Miller, 2008). Emotions are often shown online with emoticons or emojis, which are understood by the recipients as clarifying the message intent (Thompson & Filik, 2016). Therefore, emoticons also signal an emotional communication style.

As political actors adjust their communication style to the platform involved, they should use an emotional style more often on Facebook than on Twitter because of Twitter users' higher interest in news-like information. Nevertheless, as emotions can cause a message to go viral independent of the platform involved, we expect that the emotional style used leads to more digital reactions on both platforms.

H3a: An emotional communication style is more often found on Facebook than on Twitter.

H3b: The emotional communication style leads to more digital reactions on both Facebook and Twitter.

Entertaining communication style. Political actors have long used entertainment as a tool to reach a broader audience. Hybrid television shows opened doors for political actors

to inform and entertain at the same time (Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999). Politicians appear in late-night shows (e.g., *The Tonight Show*) and are frequently the subject of political satire shows (Kleinen-von Königslöw, 2013). Humor has become a part of their communication strategy: they use humor in their political ads and statements, and they appear in political comedy shows to be laughed at and to laugh *with* the host and the viewers. Furthermore, humorous content is particularly suited to social media platforms: it allows the easy posting of funny snippets from political actors' appearances in late-night shows or similar events, which can spread more easily through supporters' networks (Dobele et al., 2007).

But an entertaining communication style does not need to be humorous. A more conventional approach may be to use two forms of personalization: individualization and privatization. By focusing on themselves (and not on the party as a whole or on political issues), political actors may aim to make their posts and tweets more accessible (individualization, van Aelst, Sheafer, & Stanyer, 2012). They might publish statements outlining their personal opinions or post pictures as they canvass in the streets. They may also include details from their personal lives to stress that they are normal citizens who lead normal lives (privatization, van Aelst et al., 2012). For example, they can show pictures or videos of themselves celebrating at a fair or in a beer tent. As previous research has shown, these forms of soft news are more often shared on social media platforms than hard news is (Imhof, 2015).

Political actors may choose to talk about everyday or currently popular non-political topics in order to appear more like a normal citizen. They may simply post a beautiful landscape or seasonal messages, such as "Best wishes from Lake Zurich" (so-called phatic communication, see Miller, 2008), to keep in touch with their followership. Such contributions will stand out among their more on-topic posts, but at the same time, these do

not feel out of place to their social media audience, which sees many similar posts from their non-political friends.

We assume that we will find this entertaining communication style more often on Facebook than on Twitter because we expect political actors to have adapted their style to Facebook users' interest in entertaining posts (compared with Twitter users' expectations of more news-like information). Furthermore, we expect users to reward these entertaining posts more on Facebook, where they more closely correspond to the general tone of the platform.

H4a: An entertaining communication style is more often found on Facebook than on Twitter.

H4b: The entertaining communication style leads to more digital reactions on Facebook but not on Twitter.

---- Table 1 ----

These four communication styles might occur in different combinations. For example, the mobilizing style could be complemented with the emotional style to stress the importance of voting, or the pseudo-discursive style might be combined with some entertaining elements showing how a political actor is affected personally by an issue. While other combinations are possible, we focus on the ones that often occur together in the most successful posts.

Therefore, our third research question is as follows: *Which combinations of communication styles occur most often in the most successful Facebook posts and tweets, and do they lead to more reactions?*

Methods

To address our research questions, we conducted a quantitative content analysis of the most successful social media posts of political actors in Switzerland. We chose Facebook and Twitter because they are considered the most important social media platforms for political communication in many Western democracies (e.g., Larsson & Kalsnes, 2014), especially in

Switzerland (Authors, 2015). About 63% of the resident population of Switzerland (8.33 million) use Facebook, and about 17% use Twitter (Latzer, Büchi, & Just, 2015). For both platforms, the user share is higher among the younger cohorts: among 14- to 19-year-olds, 79% use Facebook, whereas 24% use Twitter; the usage is even higher among 20- to 29-year-olds (FB: 88%, Twitter: 25%). In the older age brackets, the share of Facebook users is still rather high and consistently higher than that of Twitter users (for 30- to 49-year-olds, FB: 62%, Twitter: 16%; for 50- to 69-year-olds: FB: 43%, Twitter: 12%; for 70- to 84-year-olds, FB: 16% and Twitter: 11%) (Latzer et al., 2015). Whereas Facebook represents the broader Swiss public, Twitter can be considered more as a network for professional users, particularly journalists and politicians (Kovic et al., 2017; Metag & Rauchfleisch, 2016). However, it should be noted that not all of these users are Swiss citizens, as foreigners make up about a quarter of the total population of Switzerland (Federal Statistical Office, 2016). However, we assume that these foreigners are less likely to be among the followers and friends of Swiss political actors than their Swiss neighbors are and, more importantly, that Swiss political actors tailor their communication to the potential voters among their followers and friends. In fact, Swiss political actors consider these platforms to be increasingly important (Brändli & Wassmer, 2014). The country's political system of direct democracy leads to multiple referenda per year, encouraging permanent campaigning by political actors for which social media are a convenient, cheap, and useful tool to be close to voters continuously.

Sampling procedure. We searched Facebook and Twitter for the pages and accounts of all 246 elected members of the Swiss Parliament and all 11 parties represented therein; we identified 104 Facebook fan pages (41%) and 126 Twitter profiles (49%). With the aid of R and the packages Rfacebook (Barberá, Piccirilli, Geisler, & van Atteveldt, 2015) and twitterR (Gentry, 2015), we downloaded all their posts from six months before until ten days after the election (April 1, 2015 to October 28, 2015) in the first week of November 2015. Within this

time period, there was also a national referendum on four issues (a federal law for radio and television, inheritance tax, reproductive medicine, and scholarships). On average, Swiss political actors posted 88 Facebook posts (SD = 105, median = 51), drawing about 51 reactions per post (SD = 75, median = 25). Even with retweets excluded, politicians were more active on Twitter publishing, on average, 187 tweets (SD = 289, median = 75), yet they are receiving only 3 reactions per tweet, on average (SD = 3, median = 2). We took a sample of the top 20 posts of each actor on each platform (the ones that generated the most reactions in terms of likes, shares, and comments on Facebook and in terms of favorites and retweets on Twitter; posts with no reactions were excluded). Not all Swiss political actors published 20 posts or tweets in the election campaign which received at least one digital reaction: 24 Facebook users only posted between 2 and 19 posts, and 36 Twitter users posted only between 1 and 19 tweets, leaving us with a final sample of 1,796 Facebook posts and 2,170 tweets. Other studies have shown that the distribution of (politicians') online activity and popularity is heavily skewed with a long tail (Nielsen & Vaccari, 2013), with only a few political actors usually responsible for the majority of activities and reactions. Thus, not only the activity of politicians but also the number of reactions to their top 20 messages differs strongly, ranging on Facebook from 1 to 3,043 (mean = 143, median = 49) and on Twitter from 1 to 195 (mean = 13, median = 7). Although posts and tweets with only one reaction are not particularly successful, this range enables us to find differences in the impact of specific communication styles.

Measures. Our dependent variable is the number of digital reactions per post and tweet, respectively. The sums of all likes, comments, and shares and the sums of all likes and retweets were calculated for each post and tweet, as we were interested in determining which of them triggered any form of reaction (and thus increased their visibility on the platform) and not in identifying the type of reaction they triggered. Replies to tweets were ignored

because they could not be downloaded with the package `twitterR`. Basing on previous research, we included the number of fans and followers (e.g., Heiss, Schmuck, & Matthes, 2018), whether the party belongs to the ideological right or left wing (e.g., Gibson & McAllister, 2015; Larsson, 2014), and if the Facebook post or tweet had a picture in it (e.g., Bene, 2016) as control variables.

We developed a coding book to identify the differences in the communication styles used in the most successful posts and tweets. For the pseudo-discursive style, we coded whether the post/tweet addressed a political actor, journalist, or citizen. The mobilizing elements were calls for action, calls for digital action, or references to the national election and to the national referendum. For the entertaining style, we coded non-political topics, individualization, privatization, and humor. Finally, the emotional style consisted of emotionalized posts, as well as posts with emoticons (see Appendix A).

Three student coders with previous content analysis experience learned the codebook and were trained in five sessions. They received their sample in an Excel spreadsheet that contained the original Facebook post and/or tweet, including the URL, so that they can see the message on Facebook/Twitter in its original environment. They were instructed to base their coding decisions only on the content of the Facebook post and the tweet, respectively. The reliability test based on a coding of 10% of the sample showed satisfactory results: the variables for the pseudo-discursive style reached a Krippendorff's *alpha* of 0.71; mobilizing style, 0.9; emotional style, 0.89; and entertaining style, 0.78. The variables humor and addressing citizens were just below the established threshold, with a Krippendorff's *alpha* of 0.65. However, considering the high level of complexity of these two variables, we considered the achieved *alpha* values as just acceptable (see Appendix B).

Results

The pseudo-discursive style is used most commonly in successful public messages on Facebook and Twitter (75% of all messages, see Table 2). Politicians address one another to counter their arguments, thank citizens for their votes, or address journalists in order to comment on the latest news in over half of all posts and tweets that received the most reactions (Facebook: 52%, Twitter: 53%). Whereas in Facebook posts, politicians also speak to citizens more often than they do on Twitter (39% to 29%), such as to thank them for their support or to appeal to them directly, journalists are more frequently addressed in tweets (16% to 9%) in the hope of triggering more media coverage or to spin the news in their favor. In sum, the pseudo-discursive style appears especially often on Twitter: in 79% of all successful tweets, a politician, journalist, or citizen is addressed (compared with 70% on Facebook, supporting H1a).

On Facebook, the entertaining style is found just as often as the pseudo-discursive style is (70% of all successful posts in the sample). The posts are often individualized, with a focus on single politicians (65%), they address non-political topics, such as sending best wishes for Easter or birthday greetings or giving comments on sports events (20%), and they less often contain privatization, i.e., information on politicians' private life (4%), or humor (3%); thus, they mirror the hybrid character of communication on Facebook. In the Twittersphere, it is also the second most frequently found communication style (47% of the successful posts in the sample, supporting H4a). Most of the entertaining tweets contain individualization (37%) or non-political topics, such as tweets about eating national dishes (14%); privatization and humor are, again, rare (1% and 3%, respectively).

Although the study period includes only two relevant dates for mobilization—the national referendum on June 14, 2015 and the national election on October 18, 2015—mobilizing posts and tweets are rather ubiquitous: 48% of the most successful posts on Facebook and 34% of those on Twitter contain a mobilizing element (supporting H2a). The

most frequent mobilizing element was references to the national election (which include statements explaining why someone is running for office, reminders to vote, and public messages thanking people for all the votes after the election), with 40% on Facebook and 26% on Twitter. More specifically, calls for action offering arguments on why citizens should vote for the respective candidate/party are the second most frequent mobilizing element (17% on Facebook and 7% on Twitter). References to the national referendum are rarely found in the most successful posts (4%) and tweets (5%), indicating that voters were focused on the national election. In addition, calls for digital action, such as sharing the post or tweet in one's own network, do not appear often in these Facebook posts (4%) or on Twitter (1%).

An emotional style occurs the least often on both platforms, which is 31% of Facebook posts and 20% of tweets (a total of 25% of all successful messages). The content of these posts strongly focuses on emotions instead of issues, especially on Facebook (30%) (Twitter: 19%, supporting H3a). For example, politicians accused their opponents of showing their ugliest side in a debate or emphasized a statement about human rights with several exclamation marks. Emoticons (6% and 4%) do not often appear in the posts and tweets in the sample. All Facebook posts and tweets contain at least one element of a communication style.

---- Table 2 ----

A cluster analysis for each platform revealed which communications styles are often combined. Whereas the pseudo-discursive style is often combined with an entertaining style on Facebook, the mobilizing style is often used with the emotional style in successful posts on both platforms (research question 3). That is, 59% (N = 1,740) of all pseudo-discursive messages contain entertaining elements, and 52% (N = 515) of all emotional messages contain mobilizing elements. These combinations illustrate the special communicative potential of these platforms: because politics is publicly visible in an environment where

private, public, political, and entertaining elements collide, political communication has to adapt and stand out to achieve reactions. Discussions, combined with entertaining elements, represent a low-threshold opportunity for fans and followers to react. Combining mobilizing communication with emotion adds importance and urgency to the calls for political participation.

To determine which style produces the most reactions, we conducted a negative binomial regression analysis using the number of reactions as our dependent variable; the number of reactions per post/tweet is an over-dispersed count variable. The four negative binomial regression models showed a goodness of fit between 1.785 and 2.449 (Pearson chi-square), the omnibus test revealed significant likelihood ratio chi-squares between 719 and 1.548, and neither of the parameters' 95% confidence intervals included zero, suggesting over-dispersion, which supported the decision to conduct negative binomial regressions. As a robustness check, the models were also run separately for likes, comments, and shares on Facebook and for likes and retweets on Twitter, and no contradictory results were found (see Appendix C).

On Facebook, each additional 100 fans produce a 2.57% increase in the expected number of reactions ($\text{Exp}(B) = 1.000257$, $\text{SE} = 0.000008$, $p < 0.001$, see model 1 in Table 3), regardless of whether the message includes a picture or is posted by a wing party member. The entertaining style increases the number of reactions by 12.7% ($\text{Exp}(B) = 1.127$, $\text{SE} = 0.048$, $p = 0.026$), the mobilizing style by 33.8% ($\text{Exp}(B) = 1.338$, $\text{SE} = 0.048$, $p < 0.001$), and the emotional style by 36.3% ($\text{Exp}(B) = 1.363$, $\text{SE} = 0.051$, $p < 0.001$, supporting H2b, H3b, and H4b). By contrast, the pseudo-discursive style has no significant impact ($\text{Exp}(B) = 0.925$, $\text{SE} = 0.054$, $p = 0.149$), thus rejecting hypothesis 1b.

In model 2, interaction effects are included for the often-combined communication styles (see Table 3). Neither the entertaining–pseudo-discursive style nor the mobilizing–

emotional style has a significant impact on the number of reactions. Yet the mobilizing style still has robust positive main effects of 37.5% ($\text{Exp(B)} = 1.375$, $\text{SE} = 0.058$, $p < 0.001$) and, for the emotional style, 42.8% ($\text{Exp(B)} = 1.428$, $\text{SE} = 0.075$, $p < 0.001$).

---- Table 3 ----

On Twitter, the number of reactions increases by 1.07% per additional 100 followers ($\text{Exp(B)} = 1.000107$, $\text{SE} = 0.000005$, $p < 0.001$, see model 1 in Table 4). Uploading a picture also increases the number of reactions by 36.5% ($\text{Exp(B)} = 1.365$, $\text{SE} = 0.044$, $p < 0.001$). Of the four communication styles, only the emotional style stimulates reactions significantly ($\text{Exp(B)} = 1.180$, $\text{SE} = 0.049$, $p < 0.001$, supporting H3b but rejecting H1b). Whereas on Facebook, the entertaining and mobilizing styles *increased* reactions, on Twitter, entertainment ($\text{Exp(B)} = 0.759$, $\text{SE} = 0.041$, $p < 0.001$) and mobilization ($\text{Exp(B)} = 0.904$, $\text{SE} = 0.042$, $p = 0.015$) *decreased* the sum of reactions by a factor of 0.76 and 0.9, respectively (supporting H2b and H4b).

For model 2 in Table 4, the interaction effects between the mobilizing and emotional styles as the most common style combination were added to the model. The number of followers ($\text{Exp(B)} = 1.000116$, $\text{SE} = 0.000005$, $p < 0.001$) and a tweet containing a picture ($\text{Exp(B)} = 1.375$, $\text{SE} = 0.044$, $p < 0.001$) increase the number of reactions. The negative impact of the entertaining style also persists ($\text{Exp(B)} = 0.752$, $\text{SE} = 0.041$, $p < 0.001$). Mobilizing elements still hinder reactions by 14.2% ($\text{Exp(B)} = 0.858$, $\text{SE} = 0.047$, $p = 0.001$), and the emotional style is no longer significant ($\text{Exp(B)} = 1.076$, $\text{SE} = 0.073$, $p = 0.238$). However, the combination of these styles changes by 26.3% ($\text{Exp(B)} = 1.263$, $\text{SE} = 0.098$, $p = 0.018$), i.e., the decrease in reactions from a mobilizing tweet without an emotional element of 14.2% becomes 26.3% less negative when emotions are added.

---- Table 4 ----

Discussion and Further Research

Analyzing four communication styles in the successful posts on social network platforms enhances our knowledge of how political actors adapt their communication to network media logic and prompt digital reactions (e.g., likes or retweets) from their fans and followers to spread their public messages. The dissemination of these messages exposes social media users to more posts and tweets from political actors, which, in turn, may influence their political participation and voting intention (Dimitrova et al., 2014; Kobayashi & Ichifuji, 2015). Although we found empirical support for all four communication styles among the posts and tweets most reacted to on Facebook and on Twitter, respectively, the usage and impact of these styles vary significantly.

The pseudo-discursive style is most commonly used in posts and tweets with the most reactions. However, although the posts and tweets include discursive style elements, political actors rarely follow up on them in their comment sections. This finding represents a neglected opportunity for political actors to sharpen their political profile. Furthermore, despite its omnipresence, the pseudo-discursive style is not very successful at generating reactions: on Facebook, it appears to be the least successful of the four styles, whereas on Twitter, it is at least more successful than the emotional or mobilizing style in motivating users to react.

Even if cyber-rhetoric (Stromer-Galley, 2014), symbolic use (Jungherr, 2016), and Web 1.5 communication (Jackson & Lilleker, 2009) are common on these platforms, on the basis of our results, the pseudo-discursive communication style should not be seen only in a pessimistic way: it might serve as the happy medium for political actors between *ignoring* and *reacting to all* input from other political actors, journalists, and citizens. In the long run, this pragmatic pseudo-discursive style may pay off for political actors by increasing their vote shares. Or other political actors might turn to a fully discursive communication style,

particularly for newer political actors aiming to sharpen their profile, as British and Dutch Members of Parliament discussed with citizens during the 2010 election (Graham et al., 2013). The pseudo-discursive style should thus remain on our research agenda.

The second most often used communication style among the posts and tweets most reacted to consists of entertaining elements; individualized, privatized, and humorous posts and tweets or posts on non-political topics occur in more than half of all messages in the sample. The human side of a political actor, in particular, generates reactions on Facebook but not on Twitter. This result emphasizes the differences between social media platforms and how political actors need to adjust their communication styles to suit users' motivations in using a specific platform. Whereas entertaining elements as a part of one's self-representation are widely used and accepted on Facebook, they lower the number of reactions on Twitter because they do not correspond to the platform users' dominant need for news and live events.

In particular, posts and tweets focusing on individual politicians or containing private information about politicians, which are indicators of the entertaining communication style, are worthy of further investigation because social media platforms appear to increase the reach of such public messages by political actors. Political actors use these posts and tweets to show their fans and followers that they are "like you and me." And if their message also contains a personal action frame (e.g., "We are the 99%") that users can identify with, users may be more willing to become politically active. They can modify the political actors' message to their own situation (e.g., by establishing a hashtag on Twitter) and share it in their network (Bennett, 2012), which will facilitate the spread of their general political message. Thus, scholars need to dig deeper into communication processes involving posts that individualize political actors.

The mobilizing style ranks third and occurs in 40% of the most successful posts. Calls for (non-)digital action and mentions of a national referendum or election activate fans and followers. During an election campaign, political actors need to mobilize their (online and offline) social networks. If their fans and followers share their call for action, the post or tweet may spread virally. Mobilization works on both platforms studied, but in combination with the emotional style, it works on Twitter only. Citizens thus respond to mobilization messages by playing their part on social media platforms. This is crucial for the success of political actions and makes these platforms an important tool to reach and mobilize their followership. Mobilizing posts on social media platforms might be able to compensate somewhat for the general decline in party membership by allowing political actors to mobilize people quickly outside traditional party channels.

The emotional style is used in only 25% of all posts and tweets in the sample, which might reflect how carefully Swiss political actors formulate their public messages. Fear of creating a scandal might prevent politicians from sending an emotional post or tweet. In some cases, emotional posts, even exaggerated or uncivil posts, can be a crucial part of one's political communication style. Although populist actors very successfully use emotional rhetoric (Wirth et al., 2016), in social media and beyond, this type of communication style is not the norm for Swiss political actors on social media platforms.

When the broader picture is analyzed, although only a marginal number of posts and tweets include emotional elements, they are a strong predictor of reactions on Facebook and Twitter, thus supporting the notion that emotions help a message go viral (Dobele et al., 2007). Thus, although the emotional style is used the least often of the four styles, it is the only one that consistently produced more digital reactions on both platforms.

Although we investigated only one country (cf. Methods), these results may be generalized beyond the Swiss case in a number of ways. In countries with a similar platform

user structure, we expect to find similar differences in the prevalence of the communication styles between the two social media platforms (e.g., Austria and Sweden, see Ausserhofer & Maireder, 2013; Larsson & Moe, 2011). By contrast, in countries where Twitter is used by elites, as well as the broader population, the use of entertaining and emotional messages should be more similar on both platforms (e.g., Netherlands, the US, and the UK, see Graham et al., 2014; Tromble, 2016). Regarding the success of different communication styles, our results are more likely to be universal. In particular, the platform-independent success of emotional messages is probably due to general psychological mechanisms. However, to confirm this, we would need both comparative studies of the success of political communication styles, as well as more psychological studies assessing the underlying mechanisms that lead to reactions on social media platforms.

Future research should also explore how politically disinterested citizens perceive entertaining political messages. They might serve as a bridge to reach more than just the politically interested citizens who already follow politicians on social network platforms. This issue calls into question whether mobilizing messages have the same impact on politically disinterested readers who receive such messages only via their personal network as they do on people who are already following a political actor. We must also critically investigate the degree to which bots and other fake digital reactions might drive or prevent the true spreading of posts and tweets. As Twitter introduced the reply count at the end of 2016, this measure should be included in future research. Additionally, our models only included those three control variables that were considered the most important in recent research; other personal or structural characteristics of politicians might also play a role and thus should be considered in the future. Finally, we encourage scholars to analyze why messages on these platforms sometimes receive no reactions.

All four successful communication styles adapted from established political communication in traditional media channels to network media logic enable digital readers to easily react to a post or tweet, which significantly changes what kinds of political messages social media users are exposed to, as well as how they perceive (and participate in) politics.

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Tables

Table 1. Four communication styles of political actors on social media platforms

Communication style	Indicator
<i>Pseudo-discursive style</i>	Addressing political actors Addressing journalistic actors Addressing citizens
<i>Mobilizing style</i>	Call for digital action Call for action Election National referendum
<i>Emotional style</i>	Emotionalization Emoticons
<i>Entertaining style</i>	Individualization Privatization Humor Non-political topics

Table 2. Occurrence of media elements and pseudo-discursive, entertaining, mobilizing, and emotional communication style in the most successful public messages on Facebook and Twitter

	<i>Facebook posts (%) (N=1,796)</i>	<i>Twitter tweets (%) (N=2,170)</i>	<i>Total messages (%) (N=3,966)</i>	<i>X²</i>
Media elements				
Text***	87	99	93,5	254
Picture***	53	30	40	216
Video***	5	1	3	54
Hashtag***	8	31	21	315.2
Link	41	42	41	0.1
Pseudo-discursive style***	70	79	75	40
Addressing				
political actors	52	53	53	1.3
journalistic actors***	9	16	13	41.7
citizens***	39	29	34	42.9
Entertaining style***	70	47	58	219.4
Individualization***	65	37	50	304
Privatization***	4	1	3	26,9
Humor	3	3	3	1.6
Non-political topics***	20	14	17	24.9
Mobilizing style***	48	34	40	84.8
Call for digital action***	4	1	3	95.3
Call for action***	17	7	12	46.5
Election***	40	26	34	86.3
National referendum	4	5	4	1.3
Emotional style***	31	20	25	64.1
Emotionalization***	30	19	24	58.4
Emoticons*	6	4	5	4.3

Notes. ***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05 (Chi-squared test). Communication styles summarize the subsequent variables below and are counted if at least one variable is present. All variables were dichotomized (present or not present). Numbers are rounded.

Table 3. Estimating the impact of different communication styles of Swiss political actors on the number of social media reactions on Facebook during the 2015 national election

	<i>Model 1:</i> <i>Facebook</i> <i>Exp(B) (SE)</i>	<i>Model 2:</i> <i>Facebook</i> <i>Exp(B) (SE)</i>
Fans	1.000*** (0.000)	1.000*** (0.001)
Picture	1.022 (0.048)	1.023 (0.048)
Wing party	1.063 (0.047)	1.066 (0.047)
Pseudo-discursive	0.925 (0.054)	0.903 (0.088)
Entertaining	1.127* (0.048)	1.104 (.086)
Mobilizing	1.338*** (0.048)	1.375*** (0.058)
Emotional	1.363***(0.051)	1.428*** (0.075)
Pseudo-discursive*Entertaining	-	1.033 (0.105)
Mobilizing*Emotional	-	0.919 (0.1)
<i>Intercept</i>	30.75*** (.058)	30.77*** (0.067)
<i>Goodness of fit (Chi-Square)</i>	2.447	2.449
<i>Omnibus test (Chi-Square)</i>	1,548***	1,548***
<i>95% Wald CI</i>	0.794 and 0.897	0.794 and 0.897
<i>N</i>	1,748	1,748

Notes. ***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05 (negative binomial regression). Dependent variable: digital reactions. Odds ratios and standard errors are displayed.

Table 4. Estimating the impact of different communication styles of Swiss political actors on the number of social media reactions on Twitter during the 2015 national election

	Model 1: Twitter Exp(B) (SE)	Model 2: Twitter Exp(B) (SE)
Follower	1.000*** (0.000)	1.000*** (0.000)
Picture	1.365*** (0.044)	1.375*** (0.044)
Wing party	0.999 (0.039)	1.002 (0.039)
Pseudo-discursive	1.035 (0.047)	1.035 (0.047)
Entertaining	0.759*** (0.041)	0.752*** (0.041)
Mobilizing	0.904* (0.042)	0.858** (0.047)
Emotional	1.180*** (0.049)	1.076 (0.062)
Mobilizing*Emotional	-	1.263* (0.098)
<i>Intercept</i>	7.609*** (.054)	7.753*** (0.055)
<i>Goodness of fit (Chi-Square)</i>	1.785	1.789
<i>Omnibus test (Chi-Square)</i>	719***	725***
<i>95% Wald CI</i>	0.647 and 0.735	0.645 and 0.733
<i>N</i>	2,170	2,170

Notes. ***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05 (negative binomial regression). Dependent variable: digital reactions. Odds ratios and standard errors are displayed.