

Electoral campaigning in a hybrid media environment

A case study of two Danish party leaders' social media campaigns and online news presence during the 2022 parliamentary elections

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Abstract

In the current hybrid media environment, politicians have manifold opportunities to be in contact with voters during elections. Legacy news media still constitute an important campaign tool for politicians, but a range of social media have gained ground in electoral campaigning over the last decades as well. Against this backdrop, the aim of this study is to shed further light on politicians' campaign practices in a hybrid communication environment, and whether the introduction of social media have introduced new dynamics into election campaigns. The study does so through a case study of Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen and opposition party leader Alex Vanopslagh's social media campaigns and online news presence during the 2022 national election. The study finds that Frederiksen was more in the news during the election than Vanopslagh, but that social media was central in both campaigns. However, Vanopslagh was on a broader set of social media and to a greater extent capitalised on the platform affordances than Frederiksen.

KEYWORDS

political communication, election campaigns, hybrid media system, social media, parliamentary election

Introduction

Over the last decades, it has become more complex for politicians to plan election campaigns, because voters can be reached through many different channels in the current hybrid media environment (Chadwick, 2017). In politics, one of the most profound changes is the emergence of a still growing number of social media, counting platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok. These media have given politicians new opportunities to reach voters directly, without journalists as intermediaries, and try to impact their vote decision-making during election times (for overviews, see Bruns et al., 2018; Jungherr et al., 2020). Politicians have seized on this opportunity, and studies find that social media have become an integral part of politicians' election campaigns in many countries over the last decade (see e.g. Bruns et al., 2018; Jungherr et al., 2020; Lilleker et al., 2015). Concurrently, politicians still perceive legacy news media a crucial campaign tool (see e.g. Lilleker et al., 2015; Magin et al., 2017).

Within the Nordic context, we have some knowledge of how the changing political communication landscape impact the campaign dynamics. Among other things, it has given political challengers with poor opportunities to be in legacy media new means to reach voters during elections and can make the battle for attention and votes more equal (Blach-Ørsten et al., 2017; Larsson & Kalsnes, 2014). Furthermore, politicians experience greater freedom to define their own political agendas on social media and can opt out of legacy media (Skovsgaard & van Dalen, 2013). Finally, it has paved the way for more personalized campaign communication, where politicians can promote more individual causes, independent from their parties, and give insights into them as persons (Enli & Skogerbø, 2013; Enli & Moe, 2013).

However, to get further insights into these new dynamics, it is important to examine politicians' cross-media campaign practices and not just campaign communication on single platforms (e.g., Bode & Vraga, 2018; Enli & Moe, 2013). A newer vein of studies has provided valuable insights into politicians' cross-media communication during elections from different perspectives, but they are mostly quantitative and report findings on the aggregate level (for an overview, see Severin-Nielsen, 2023). By comparison, there are fewer in-depth case studies of single politicians' election campaigns across media (for exceptions, e.g., Casero-Ripollés et al., 2016; Fisher et al., 2018; Mendes & Dikwal-Bot, 2022; Ridge-Newman, 2020). Such an in-depth qualitative perspective is important to gain a deeper understanding of the role social media fill in politicians' campaigns, how

it impacts the broader campaign dynamics, and interplays with legacy news media.

The current article adds to the limited qualitative literature through a case study of Danish Prime Minister (PM) Mette Frederiksen (The Social Democratic Party) and opposition party leader Alex Vanopslagh's (Liberal Alliance – LA) cross-media campaigns during the 2022 parliamentary election. These politicians were selected because they are good illustrative examples of different approaches to campaigning in a hybrid media environment. Frederiksen, on the one hand, was the PM in power and received much coverage in the news media during the election (Lange, 2022). At the same time, it is well known that she uses Facebook and Instagram actively for political communication as well (Bohr, 2021). Vanopslagh, on the other hand, was the leader of a small opposition party, which had only three mandates in the parliament. He was less present in legacy news media during the election but was active on multiple social media, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok. Especially his and LA's success on TikTok received much attention during the election (Fallentin et al., 2022). I selected party leaders as the focal point of the study rather than parties because campaigns have been personified in the digital age. An implication of this is that party leaders often function as the faces of the party in the public (e.g., Filimonov et al., 2016; Van Aelst et al., 2012).

In the article, I examine the following three research questions: RQ1) *What are the different social media platforms used for in Vanopslagh and Frederiksen's election campaigns?*, RQ2) *How are Frederiksen and Vanopslagh's social media campaigns related to their presence in legacy news media?*, and RQ3) *What are the similarities and differences between the campaigns, and what can explain the differences?*

Campaign dynamics in a social media age: The Nordic literature

Over the years, many scholars have been concerned with how the introduction of social media in politicians' election campaigns impacts the campaign dynamics. In general, the studies find that social media do not alter politicians' campaign practices drastically (Enli & Moe, 2013; Jungherr et al., 2020). Previously, legacy news media, such as tv, newspapers, and radio, was the main outlets for politicians to get their campaign communication out widely, and politicians within the Nordic context continue to perceive legacy media as important campaign tools in the social media age (Guðmundsson, 2016, 2019; Karlsen & Enjolras, 2016; Larsson & Skogerbø, 2018; Skovsgaard & van Dalen, 2013).

Since journalists control the access to legacy media, politicians cannot choose whether they are present in these media during elections or not. They can increase the likelihood of getting coverage by adjusting their campaign communication to fit journalistic news criteria and speak into the current media agenda (Strömbäck, 2008; Strömbäck & Esser, 2014). Despite such efforts, research has shown that politicians have unequal access to legacy news media. While politicians in powerful positions have easy access to the news media, it is often more difficult for politicians with lower status to obtain presence here (e.g., Hopmann et al., 2011; van Dalen, 2012).

Although social media have not revolutionised the way politicians campaign, the new media have brought about some new dynamics (Enli & Moe, 2013; Jungherr et al., 2020). The most important change is that social media have given politicians a platform to disseminate their campaign communication directly to voters without relying on journalists. In the early days of social media, this possibility was particularly exploited by younger, lesser-known politicians with poor legacy media access, because it gave them alternative ways to disseminate their campaign communication. Some scholars argued that this contributed to equalize politicians' opportunities during elections (Larsson & Kalsnes, 2014; Larsson & Skogerbø, 2018; Blach-Ørsten et al., 2017; Skovsgaard & van Dalen, 2013). As social media have become more established campaign tools, however, they are increasingly adopted and used by high status politicians as well (Guðmundsson, 2016, 2019; Linaa Jensen et al., 2015) – especially during the heat of elections (Sandberg & Öhberg, 2017). Scholars have attributed this a process of normalisation, where the power balance returns to the way it was before the new media emerged (Sandberg & Öhberg, 2017). Still, research finds that politicians with lower status more quickly adopt new social media platforms, like when SnapChat emerged in 2011, because they seek all opportunities to get competitive advantages over established politicians (Guðmundsson, 2019).

In the Danish case, only very few politicians deselect social media as a campaign tool altogether. In 2020, only three of the 179 MPs (< 2 %) did not have a public page on neither Facebook nor Twitter or Instagram¹. Political reasons for deselecting social media can for instance be lack of technical competencies, that they have good access to legacy media and therefore find social media less relevant, or because they prioritize non-mediated, personal meetings with citizens (Karlsen & Enjolras, 2016; Larsson & Kalsnes, 2014; Skovsgaard & van Dalen, 2013).

A second new dynamic is that the power balance between politicians and journalists has tipped more towards politicians. With social media, politicians can opt to bypass journalists and their critical

questions and instead set their own agenda on social media (Skovsgaard & van Dalen, 2013). Political issues play an important role in vote decision-making processes today, and, according to the issue competition literature, politicians and political parties will try to secure votes by “emphasis[ing] issues that are advantageous to themselves, while [...] ignor[ing] those that are disadvantageous” (Green-Pedersen & Mortensen, 2010, p. 257). Social media has given politicians a platform to set their own agenda, but as emphasized by Green-Pedersen & Mortensen (2010), politicians from government and opposition parties have different prerequisites for their political communication. While politicians in opposition are free to address the issues advantageous to the party, politicians in government are often held accountable for societal problems and must address all kinds of issues to avoid accusations of: “being in trouble and unable to deliver the expected policy solutions” (Green-Pedersen & Mortensen, 2010, p. 262). Furthermore, social media have given politicians a tool to impact the legacy media agenda – especially on platforms like Twitter, where journalists are highly present (for an overview, see Jungherr, 2016).

A third new dynamic is that politicians can use their social media for more personalized campaign communication, where they can promote their own candidacy and show a more personal and private side of themselves during the election to appear more authentic politically. Scholars have argued that it reinforces already ongoing personalization trends in politics (Enli, 2015; Enli & Skogerbø, 2013; Enli & Moe, 2013; Skogerbø & Larsson, 2021). Despite the more personalized communication climate on social media, the existing Nordic literature on the topic find that politicians still mainly promote party-political agendas on social media (Karlsen & Enjolras, 2016; Van Dalen et al., 2016), but with a personal twist to fit with the social media genre (Enli & Skogerbø, 2013). Especially party leaders, who are the politicians under scrutinization in this article, use their social media platforms to promote their parties (e.g., Filimonev et al., 2016). The effects of politicians’ social media communication during elections remain more debatable (Karlsen & Enjolras, 2016; Blach-Ørsten et al., 2017).

Based on the literature review, I expect that Frederiksen and Vanopslagh both use social media actively during the 2022 election, but that Vanopslagh is more proactive in his use of the platforms, given his poorer access to legacy media. Furthermore, I expect that Frederiksen to a greater extent than Vanopslagh uses her social media to address critiques of her and the government during the election, because she as the PM in power is held more accountable for current societal problems.

Finally, politicians can use different strategies when communicating across multiple media. To conceptualise these different strategies, I draw on two concepts from the broader cross-media literature, that is, *a diversification strategy* and *a transmedia storytelling strategy* (Ibrus & Scolari, 2012). The concepts were not developed in a political context, but I still find them useful to describe different overall approaches politicians can take to communication across multiple media. Politicians, who adopt a diversification strategy, use the different media in their campaigns for diverse purposes and often do so to capitalise on the affordances of each of the media concerned. By contrast, they deploy a transmedia storytelling strategy, when the different media are used for similar purposes with the aim of conveying a common narrative across media. The concepts are mainly relevant to describe the social media part of Vanopslagh and Frederiksen's campaigns since they are in control of the published content hereon.

The Danish study context and the 2022 election

The study was conducted in Denmark during the 2022 parliamentary election. The election was announced by the PM the day after the reopening of the parliament after the summer break, that is, on October 5, 2022. The election was on November 1, except for citizens on The Faroe Island.

The Danish parliament consists of 179 members most of which are organised in political parties. Prior to the election, the parliament was comprised of ten parties: the governing party The Social Democratic Party, the supporting parties The Social Liberal Party, Green Left, and The Red/Green Alliance, and the opposition parties The Liberal Party, The Conservative People's Party, LA, The Alternative, The Danish People's Party, and New Right (for Danish party names, see Table A1 in Appendix 1).

Danish elections are held with an interval of four years, but the PM can decide to call an election earlier, for example if the PM deem the political situation favourable for his/her party or difficulties in the government's parliamentary situation (The Danish Parliament, 2023a, 2023b). The latter was the case in the 2022 election, where one of the supporting parties, The Social Liberal Party, demanded an election. If the PM did not meet the demand, they would supposedly have withdrawn their support to the government after the reopening of the parliament and force them to resign (Wind, 2022).

The background to the demand for an election was the government's decision to put down Danish mink during the COVID-19 pandemic to avoid mutations of the disease. However, it later came

out that they did not have the proper legal basis for the decision; an incident that is often referred to as *The Mink Scandal* in Danish media. Following this, the PM's role in the decision and whether she knew it was illegal has been discussed heavily and has also been scrutinised by a commission. Based on the commission's report, The Social Liberal Party decided not to vote for an impeachment against the PM but instead demanded an election (Wind, 2022).

For a comprehensive account of the Danish election system, see Blach-Ørsten et al. (2017).

Methods and data

The aim of this article is to provide an in-depth qualitative perspective on the new campaign dynamics at play in the current hybrid media environment. To obtain this aim, a case study of the Danish PM and opposition party leader Vanopslagh's campaigns was conducted during the 2022 parliamentary election.

I used two data sources for the purpose of the case study: i) Data on their social media use during the election and ii) Data on their presence in online legacy news media. Data on Frederiksen and Vanopslagh's social media use is comprised of posts from their public social media accounts from the announcement of the election on October 5 up to and including the election day, November 1. For Frederiksen, this included her Facebook page (www.facebook.com/mettefrederiksen.dk) and Instagram account (@mette) ($n = 53$ Facebook posts; 55 Instagram posts). For Vanopslagh, data was collected from his Facebook page (www.facebook.com/AlexLiberalAlliance), Instagram account (@alexvanopslagh), and Twitter profile (@AlexVanopslagh), and from the party's TikTok profile (@liberalalliance_)² ($n = 54$ Facebook posts; 33 Instagram posts; 33 tweets; 71 TikTok posts³). I decided to collect this part of the data manually to be able to include the visual elements in their social media posts, such as pictures or videos, in the analysis as well (on the importance of the visuals on social media, e.g., Farkas & Bene, 2021).

Second, I obtained data on their presence in online legacy news media during the election through the collection of news articles from six Danish news media. More specifically, news articles were collected from the political online sections of DR, TV 2, Politiken, Berlingske, Ekstra Bladet, and Jyllands-Posten (see URLs in Table A2 in Appendix 1). The data thus does not offer a complete overview of Frederiksen and Vanopslagh's news presence, but it covers some of the most influential and read online news media in Denmark (Schröder et al., 2022, p. 46). Additionally, the online news media

refer to key news stories and events in other legacy media, such as articles about televised election debates among party leaders. Therefore, it seems reasonable to assume that the data can serve as a proxy for the party leaders' broader presence and the main themes discussed in relation to their person in legacy news media during the election.

The articles were collected via an automated web-scraper in Python 3.0 with the permission of the media companies. The scraper was developed for the research project and was set up to check if new articles had been added to the news sites every 2 hours. If new articles were detected, information on the title, publication date, article hyperlink, the presence of a paywall (yes or no), and article text was added to the dataset. Afterwards, data was cleaned to minimise the number of duplicates and irrelevant articles in the dataset prior to the analysis. Finally, two variables were added to the dataset through a simple dictionary method, that is: i) A dummy variable indicating whether one or more Danish parliamentary members (MPs) were mentioned in the article (yes or no)⁴ and ii) A string variable listing the MPs mentioned in the article. Since we did not have much article text from paywalled articles, the variables only contain reliable information for non-paywall articles. Thus, it was decided to only include non-paywall articles that either mentions Frederiksen ($n=666$ articles) or Vanopslagh ($n=142$ articles). The omission of articles behind a paywall may cause me to overlook some themes discussed in relation to the party leaders and can impact the scalability of the results. As a validity check, I examined the headlines of the paywalled articles and found that many of them contained more in-depth content for paying customers, such as political analyses of the election by commentators or experts, interviews with politicians and the like, but the free-to-read articles still covered key election themes and events. Furthermore, all content is freely available on the public service media DR 1 and TV 2 and can cover potential blind spots in data from other media, especially since the news media cross-reference each other's content as mentioned earlier. Taken together, I believe the most important themes have been covered by this methodological approach.

The analytical approach was inspired by thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I started by familiarising myself with the data through multiple readings of the material. Afterwards, I coded the documents inductively. The coding was visualised on a timeline from the start to the end of the election to be able to detect similarities and differences in how the case politicians used different social media, how it was related to mentions of them in legacy media, and developments over the course of the campaign. The social media posts were coded individually, while the newspaper articles were

coded together for each day of the election to get an overview of the main issues, which the politicians were mentioned in relation to that day (for a visualisation of the coding procedure, see Table A3 in Appendix 1). After the first coding round, some codes were merged to form broader themes in Frederiksen and Vanopslagh's social media campaigns and their online news presence. This part of the coding was informed by the literature review, and the code "Personal and private updates" was for instance inspired by the personalization literature. In the final stages of the analysis, I used the concepts of diversification vs. transmedia storytelling to analyze the overall strategy, the party leaders utilized in their campaigns across different social media. For end code lists, see Table A4 and A5 in Appendix 1.

The analysis was conducted in two steps. The first step answers RQ1 and RQ2 and is an analysis of respectively Frederiksen and Vanopslagh's online news presence and social media campaigns. Each of these analyses begin with a quantitative content analysis of their presence on social media and in legacy media during the election to provide initial overviews of their communication during the election. Following this, I conduct a qualitative analysis of the overall strategic approach (i.e., a transmedia storytelling or diversification strategy) and underlying themes in Frederiksen and Vanopslagh's social media campaigns, and how their communication on social media is related to mentions of them in legacy media during the election. In the second step, which answers RQ3, I analyse similarities and differences in their campaigns and discuss possible explanations with the paper's literature review as the offset. This part of the analysis is presented in the concluding discussion.

Results

Frederiksen's campaign

Frederiksen had a high presence both in the news and on social media during the election (for a full overview, see Appendix 2). As displayed in Figure 1, Frederiksen received much attention in online legacy media throughout the entire election campaign. In the figure, the blue line is the number of political news articles published over the course of the election, while the orange line is the number of articles mentioning Frederiksen at least once. She was more present in the news in the beginning and end of the election, however, there were also published more articles during these periods.

In legacy media, Frederiksen was frequently mentioned in relation to political events, such the opening debate in the parliament or televised party leader debates, and political analyses of the

election because of her position as PM. Additionally, she received coverage when The Social Democratic Party proposed new policy, such as their plan for how to improve wages and work conditions in the Danish public sector on October 25. Third, she was present in online legacy news, when she responded to other parties' political statements or policy proposals during the election, for example when she refused The Liberal Party's proposal to sell parts of Ørsted A/S on October 7, that is, Denmark's largest energy company with the state as majority owner. Fourth, she received coverage when she and/or the government was criticised in the media.

Regarding the latter, Frederiksen particularly received critique on three areas. In the beginning of the election, the Mink Scandal and Frederiksen's role in it received some coverage in legacy media. This was especially the case during the opening debate in the parliament, where other parties asked Frederiksen to elaborate on the matter and her role in it. Frederiksen did not respond directly to the critique in the online news articles, I have analysed. However, several articles cite Frederiksen's response to her political opponents during the opening debate, where she declared that it was the right decision to close the Danish mink industry but admitted that mistakes were made in the effectuation of the decision, with reference to the missing legal basis for the decision. Second, Frederiksen and the government were criticised for not having done enough about quality problems in the Danish health and eldercare system, among other things due to problematic work conditions in the sector.

This was particularly debated in legacy media during two periods of the election, that is, i) when the news came out that the number of temporary workers in the healthcare system increased under Frederiksen's government on October 10 and ii) after the tv documentary "Outcry from the old people's home" was sent on TV 2 on October 20. The documentary provided examples of severe quality problems in Danish eldercare, and since a documentary two years earlier had revealed similar problems, the media questioned whether Frederiksen and the government had done enough to solve the problems over the last two years. Frederiksen responded to the critique in the online legacy news in both cases. In the first case, she referred to a coming proposal from the Social Democratic Party that would improve the working conditions and wages for healthcare workers. In the second case, she acknowledged that the government had not succeeded in solving the issues in the eldercare system but also stressed that: "what we see in this documentary is some people that do not treat other people properly, and no elder law can solve that" (Lorensen & Frost, 2022).

Lastly, Frederiksen and the government was criticised in the wake of a book publication on October 13. The book was authored by the

former head of the Danish Intelligence Service, Lars Findsen. He was exempted from service in 2020, and, in the book, he accuses the government of having political motives for doing so. In the Danish public, this is often referred to as *the FE case*. Frederiksen did comment on the case in online legacy media but merely referred to her professional secrecy and that it was a case for the Danish system of justice.

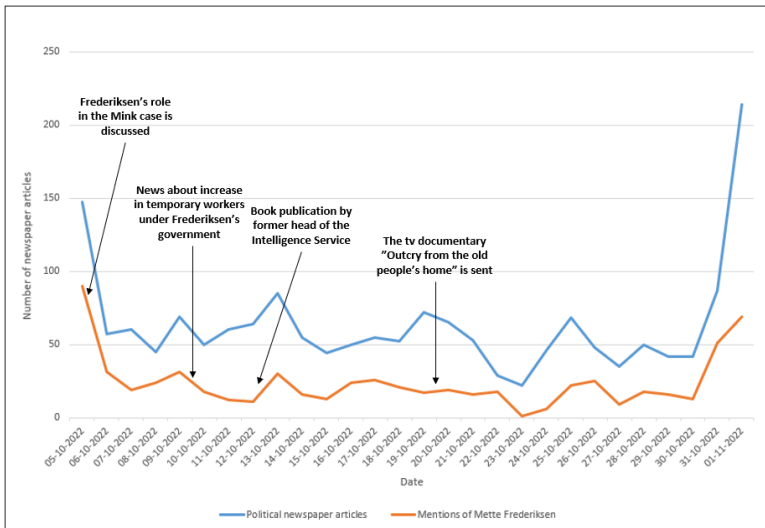


Figure 1: Number of political newspaper articles and mentions of Mette Frederiksen per day

Even though Frederiksen received much coverage in online legacy media during the election, she used the social media Facebook and Instagram actively in her election campaign as well. On average, she posted between one and three updates on each of these platforms during an election day, as displayed in Figure 2. However, she posted updates more frequently on the first and last election days.

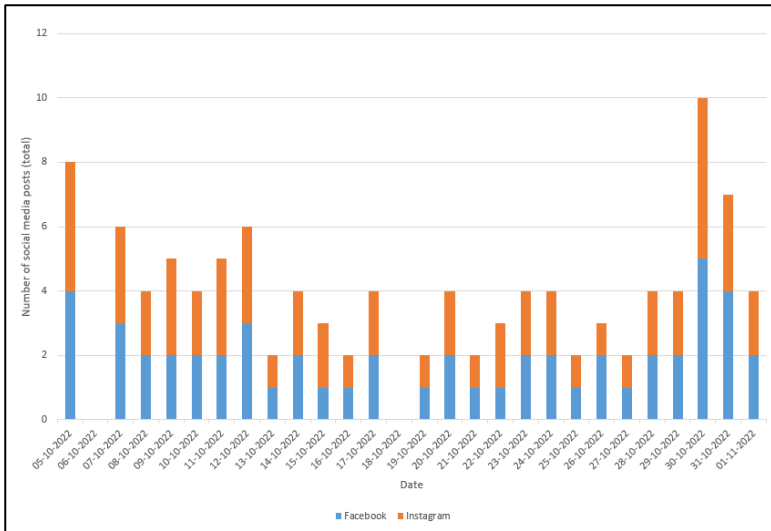


Figure 2: Number of social media posts per day (Mette Frederiksen)

Overall, she utilised a transmedia storytelling strategy on her social media platforms, in that she posted the same content on Facebook and Instagram during the election. The only differences between her Facebook and Instagram were that i) Live question sessions with voters were only hosted on Facebook and ii) A series of shorter videos from face-to-face meetings with voters during the election were only uploaded to Instagram. Apart from these smaller differences, the content was similar across her social media, and she conveyed the same overall narrative.

One of The Social Democratic Party's election campaign slogans, "Safely through uncertain times", captures the overall narrative in Frederiksen's social media campaign well. A lot of Frederiksen's social media communication during the election is centered around the current polycrisis situation in Europe, with the war in Ukraine, the energy crisis, and the rising inflation, and her party's solutions to these challenges; or at the least how to alleviate the consequences for Danes' private finances. The first post uploaded to her social media after the announcement of the election introduces this narrative in her election campaign⁵. The post is a video, where Frederiksen sits behind a desk, there are clips to Danes in different age groups, and solemn piano music is playing in the background. Talking directly to the Danes, Frederiksen begins by saying: "I understand if you are worried about the future"⁶ (October 5, 2022). She continues to elaborate on the polycrisis situation in Europe and concludes the video by saying that the Danes ought to vote for the party, which

they believe can steer Denmark “safely through uncertain times” (October 5).

According to Frederiksen, a key element in solving the challenges is broad interparty collaboration, and she uses the polycrisis narrative as a steppingstone to appeal for collaboration across the political left- and right-wing in Danish politics after the election. As an example of this, Frederiksen writes on her social media on the day of the announcement of the election: “The election campaign is underway. This of course means that the political differences are drawn up. But when the election campaign is over, we must find solutions for the Danes together. And we must go safely through uncertain times” (October 5). This should be seen in the context that Frederiksen and The Social Democratic Party went to the polls on a broad government across the political middle after an election (Ritzau, 2022).

Within the overall polycrisis narrative, Frederiksen’s social media campaign can be divided into five broader themes, that is: i) Election campaign updates, ii) Welfare updates, iii) International updates, iv) Climate updates, and v) Personal and private updates. The first theme is comprised of posts, where Frederiksen updates her followers on ongoing campaign activities, such as which Danish cities she will be visiting during the day or participation in televised events, and her reflections about the election. The second theme is posts concerning the Danish welfare state, its present challenges, and how to solve them. As mentioned, Frederiksen and the government is criticised for not having done enough about the problems in the healthcare and eldercare system in legacy media, and Frederiksen direct special attention to these two welfare areas in her social media campaign as well. For example, she writes the following on social media on October 20: “Except inflation in Europe and the rising prices, the challenges in our healthcare system and eldercare system are some of the most important issues right now. That is why we have made a master plan that goes over it all”. The quote is extracted from a longer post, where she reflects upon problems in Danish eldercare in the wake of the documentary “Outcry from the old people’s home”. The post reflects that she is aware of the critique of the government’s work in the media, and she addresses the critique explicitly in the post by writing: “I know some will think: These problems are not new. Why have you not solved them? We have started, but it is not enough. That is the honest answer”. This shows that Frederiksen not only uses social media to bypass the media and set her own agenda but also responds to critiques of her and the government in legacy media.

A third theme in Frederiksen’s social media is updates about her participation in international meetings as Danish head of state,

such as when she participated in a European Council meeting on October 7 to discuss the European crises with other heads of state. A fourth theme is updates where she addresses the climate crisis and initiatives to support the green transition. A final theme is updates concerning Frederiksen's personal traits and private life. Throughout the campaign, we learn that Frederiksen attends spinning in the morning (posts on October 14 and 30), loves animals (October 19), and enjoys a Sunday walk in the woods with her husband (October 23). These posts contribute to make Frederiksen appear more relatable to ordinary Danes. Additionally, the portrait of her as an animal and nature enthusiast also supports her party's profile as a party engaged in the green transition.

There are some overlaps between Frederiksen's online news presence and her social media campaign, in that she utilizes her social media platforms to distribute news about policy proposals and political announcements from her party. When it comes to negative press stories, however, the picture is more mixed. Frederiksen uses her social media to respond to the critique of the government's work regarding problems in the health- and eldercare system like she does in traditional media. However, the Mink Scandal and the FE case are not mentioned with one word on her social media, and she tries to set another agenda instead.

Vanopslagh's campaign

Vanopslagh was not very present in online legacy news during the election, while social media played a profound role in his election campaign (for a full overview, see Appendix 3). As displayed in Figure 3, he received no or very limited attention in the news media on average. However, there are some fluctuations in his presence in online legacy news media during the election campaign, and he is more present on October 10-12, again on October 18-19, around October 22 and during the last days of the election.

The first two spikes in his online news presence are due to two negative press stories related to him and LA. The first concerns Vanopslagh's personal housing conditions. After his election to the parliament in 2019, he moved address from Copenhagen, where the parliament is located, to West Denmark. By doing so, he got free accommodation in Copenhagen and additional payment for double housekeeping by the parliament. In the media, he has previously been accused of moving address for his own financial gain, and the issue got renewed attention during the election in connection with his repayment of the funds. Vanopslagh has acknowledged the mistake in legacy media and explained that it was due to his insufficient knowledge of the housing rules in the parliament. The second story

concerned the party’s attitude towards an older policy proposal by New Right, which gained new attention during the election when the Danish right-wing parties hosted a joint press conference. New Right’s suggestion was to give Danes in older homes the right to de-select home carers with a headscarf, and Vanopslagh initially expressed LA’s support to the proposal. However, Vanopslagh later withdrew the party’s support, and the media framed it as an attitudinal U-turn by the party. On October 22, the increase in Vanopslagh’s online news presence was because of the news that his party stood well in the most recent opinion polls. During the last days of the election, he was mentioned in broader articles about the election and its outcome.

In addition to these spikes in his presence, he did receive *some* coverage over the course of the election. Like Frederiksen, he was mentioned in relation to political events and political analyses, and when he presented new policy on behalf of LA or responded to other parties’ political statements. He also received some coverage because of his and LA’s success with the social media TikTok. However, his general exposure was much lower than Frederiksen’s.

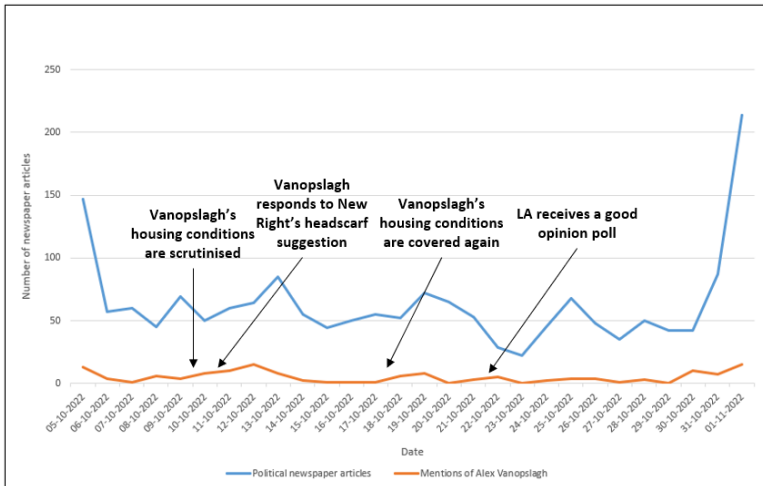


Figure 3: Number of political newspaper articles and mentions of Alex Vanopslagh per day

Social media played a profound role in Vanopslagh’s 2022 election campaign. As shown in Figure 4, Facebook and TikTok were the platforms used most actively in his campaign⁷. He used TikTok even more towards the end of the campaign, perhaps because he and LA had success using the platform early in the campaign among younger citizens. His use of Instagram and Twitter was somewhat

more sporadic, in that he some days posted several updates on these platforms, while he did not post anything other days.

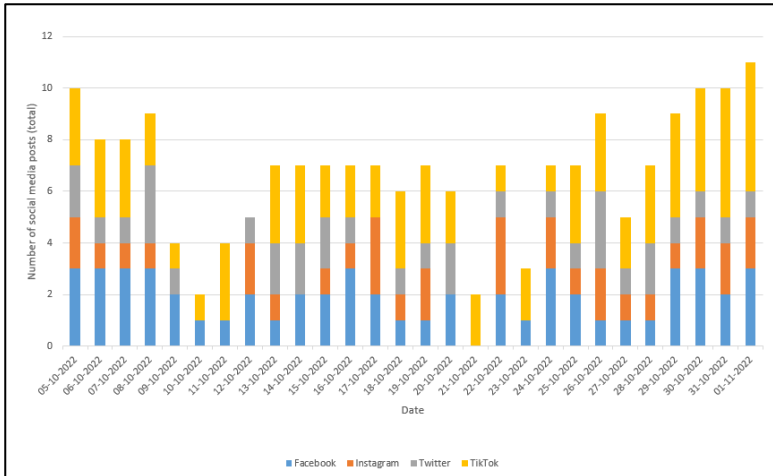


Figure 4: Number of social media posts per day (Alex Vanopslagh)

Vanopslagh utilised a combined transmedia storytelling and diversification strategy in his social media campaign. The transmedia storytelling strategy was expressed in a common narrative across his social media. Unlike Frederiksen, who mainly focused on her party's own policy, Vanopslagh's narrative on social media was built around a critique of the PM and the government. This critique is comprised of two aspects. The first aspect is a general critique that Frederiksen has abused the power as PM. Here, he uses the Mink Scandal as the prime example of the said abuse. The second aspect is connected to the first and regards Frederiksen's election campaign narrative. According to Vanopslagh, Frederiksen adopted the polycrisis narrative to instil fear into the Danes and thereby shift the focus away from her alleged abuse of the power. As an example of this, he writes the following in a Facebook post on October 5: "The government is de facto overthrown and forced to announce an election (...). The [PM] of course wants the election to be about something entirely different. About that the Danes ought to be afraid and seek security in the mother of the country's arms", the mother of the country being Frederiksen. He uses the abuse of power narrative as a steppingstone to depict LA as a party that offers the opposite of the government: transparency, the rule of law, hope, optimism, and a fundamental believe that the Danes are capable of much themselves without state interference. As he writes later in the post referred above: "[LA] will not cultivate Judgment Day rhetoric (...) to make

the voters scared. (...) I am and will continue to be incurably hopeful on Denmark and the Danes' behalf".

Even though Vanopslagh conveys a common narrative across his social media, he also draws in part on a diversification strategy. This is expressed in some variations in the content uploaded to his social media platforms during the election. Facebook is his broadest platform, used to share many kinds of content from election campaign updates to requests for donations to LA's election campaign, promotion of classical liberal political causes (such as lower taxes, increased liberty of choice in the Danish welfare state, and less bureaucracy), and more personal and private updates with a humoristic tone. There are some resemblances between the content on his Facebook and the Instagram and Twitter profiles, however, with some nuances.

Generally, the content on Instagram is lighter and less political than on Facebook, and the platform is mostly used to share continuous campaign updates, humoristic videos, and personal anecdotes. The content on Twitter is more political like Facebook but is used more to comment on the everyday issues brought up over the course of the campaign; perhaps with the aim of being cited in legacy media. An example of such a political issue is the previously mentioned FE case. Vanopslagh try to capitalise on Findsen's book publication to support the abuse of power narrative in his campaign and spent much time dissecting the case on his Twitter. For example, on the day of Findsen's book publication, he writes the following on Twitter: "It seems as if the government top wanted to get rid of Lars Findsen at any cost (...)" (October 13).

The posts on TikTok adheres to the overall narrative as well, but the specific content on the platform is more unique and appears to be a separate track in his social media campaign. The platform is comprised of a combination of i) political content, for example shorter clips of Vanopslagh's speeches in the parliament or televised debates, ii) shorter humoristic videos with a political element, and iii) more personal content around Vanopslagh's person. The main user group on TikTok is younger citizens (The Danish Ministry of Culture, 2021a), and a profound difference to the other platforms is that the content is much more centred around issues of interest to the young, such as free choice in youth education, possible solutions to the climate crisis, and low youth well-being. His dissemination of the issues is supported by a playful and humoristic communicative style, which mirrors other content the young meets on the platform.

Like Frederiksen, there is a moderate overlap between mentions of Vanopslagh in the news and his social media campaign. Vanopslagh uses his social media profiles to share news of policy

proposals, political announcements, and good opinion polls to LA, but unlike Frederiksen he completely refrains from commenting on negative press stories on social media. Instead, he tries to set another political agenda on his online platforms.

Concluding discussion

In this article, I presented the results from a case study of two Danish party leaders' social media campaigns and online news presence during the 2022 national election. As expected, the study found that the PM in power was more present in online legacy news during the election than opposition party leader Vanopslagh. Both party leaders used social media actively in their campaigns, but Vanopslagh was on a broader set of social media than Frederiksen.

Both party leaders utilised a transmedia storytelling strategy in their social media campaigns but adopted different narratives. Frederiksen, on the one hand, adopted a *polycrisis narrative* and focused on the European crises, and how to get Denmark safely through them in her campaign. Vanopslagh, on the other hand, used an *abuse of power narrative* and centred his campaign around a critique of the PM and the government for abusing their power with the Mink Scandal as the most profound example. Vanopslagh also, in part, drew on a diversification strategy in his social media campaign, in that he utilised the platforms for different purposes within the overall narrative. Especially TikTok was a separate track in his campaign, used to communicate to the young generation.

In online legacy media, Frederiksen and Vanopslagh were both mentioned i) in relation to political events and political analyses during the election, ii) when they presented new policy on behalf of their parties or responded to other parties' proposals, and iii) negative press stories concerning themselves or their party. For Frederiksen, the negative press stories included the Mink Scandal, the FE case, and critiques of the government for not having done enough to solve issues in the health- and eldercare systems. For Vanopslagh, the main negative press story regarded his personal housing conditions and that he, according to the media, wrongfully received state funds for double housekeeping.

The party leaders used their social media profiles to share positive news with their followers. When it came to negative press stories, however, Vanopslagh refrained from commenting on them on social media. For Frederiksen, the picture was more mixed. She did not touch upon the Mink Scandal or the FE case but did respond to the critique of the government in relation to the problems in Danish health- and eldercare on social media. That she replies to some

issues, which are unfavourable to her party, is perhaps due her current position as PM and that she is held more accountable for societal problems – especially on a Social Democratic core area like welfare.

Thus, there were both similarities and differences between the party leaders' campaigns. An important similarity is that social media played a profound role in both campaigns, even though they had different prerequisites in terms of news exposure during the election. This supports findings in the previous literature that social media are increasingly used by both major and minor candidates and points towards a process of normalization. However, an important difference is that Vanopslagh used a broader set of social media and to a greater extent capitalised on each of their affordances than Frederiksen. Based on existing research, a likely explanation to this is that he experienced poorer access to legacy media and needed alternate ways to disseminate political messages on behalf of himself and the party.

However, it is also important to consider that their parties have different voter bases, and that they may prioritise different campaign tools for this reason. Whereas LA's voter base are young citizens, the average Social Democratic voter is older comparatively speaking (Hansen, 2021). From existing research, we know that citizens have different media habits depending on their age (The Danish Ministry of Culture, 2021b). While middle-aged and older citizens mainly use legacy media for news consumption, social media is a larger news source for the young (Schrøder et al., 2022). In addition to this, there are also differences regarding the social media they use. Middle-aged and older citizens are on Facebook and to some extent Instagram, while TikTok is a popular platform among the young (The Danish Ministry of Culture, 2021a). Thus, the reason that social media play a profound role in Vanopslagh's campaign is likely also related to the party's young voter base and that it is an important mean to reach this base.

Another important reason for differences in the party leaders' campaigns regards their parties' parliamentary positions and election goals. Vanopslagh and LA aimed for more mandates in the parliament after an election and were likely, at least to some extent, vote-seeking in their campaign with a concept from Strom (1990). To achieve this goal, they tried to capitalise on the widespread public critique of the PM and the government by adopting the abuse of power narrative on social media. By comparison, Frederiksen's concerns were wider. The Danish Social Democratic Party has traditionally been an office-seeking party (Larsen et al., 2020), and the 2022 election was no exception. However, to remain in power at the 2022 election, they needed new government partners, since The Social

Liberal Party had announced that they would not support a Social Democratic one-party government again. This is likely part of the reason why Frederiksen adopted the polycrisis narrative in her social media campaign: Because it gave her a stepping-stone to appeal to broad collaboration.

The current study has some strengths that are worth mentioning. First, the small-N design enabled me to cover a large part of the case politicians' campaigns during the election, whereas previous research tends to analyse data from one or few media outlets. Second, I utilised a qualitative methodological approach to gain in-depth knowledge of new campaign dynamics at play in a hybrid media environment and the interplays between legacy media and social media. However, the study also has its limitations. First, the external validity of the findings is relatively low, given that it is based on analyses of two election campaigns. However, I expect the findings to be generalisable to major and minor candidates like Frederiksen and Vanopslagh. Second, the article only covers parts of the legacy media content published and does not provide an all-encompassing overview of Vanopslagh and Frederiksen's legacy media presence during the election. However, the study included content from some of the most influential and used legacy media in Denmark, and it is not expected to deviate markedly from other legacy media content, at least in the national news press. Future research is encouraged to include a broader set of legacy news media in the analysis, including outlets like tv and radio, as well as regional, and local news media to broaden the findings.

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NOTES

¹ The figures originate from a prestudy to my PhD dissertation, where I did a quantitative content analysis of Danish parliamentarians' presence on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram in 2020.

² It was decided to collect TikTok posts from the party's profile because this is where posts about Vanopslagh were shared and not on his personal profile. Only posts featuring Vanopslagh were included in the dataset.

³ The TikTok data was collected from a personal device and did not involve the use of any Aalborg University hardware.

⁴ The dictionary considered that politicians sometimes are mentioned by middle name and other times only by last name in the media.

⁵ The video can be accessed here: <https://www.facebook.com/mette-frederiksen.dk/videos/646504900340275/> (latest accessed on May 26, 2023).

⁶ All quotes are translated from Danish to English by the author.

⁷ The average number of posts per day on Vanopslagh's social media profiles were as follows: 1.9 posts on Facebook, 1.2 posts on Instagram, 1.2 posts on Twitter, and 2.5 posts on TikTok related to Vanopslagh.

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