

Young Platforms and Old Politics: Quantitative Analysis of Parties' Instagram Posts During the 2022 French Legislative Elections

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Abstract

The French legislative elections of 2022 saw President Emmanuel Macron's majority in the National Assembly being dramatically tilted. This was driven by youth votes that favoured the left-wing group NUPES and the far-right party Rassemblement National. The literature on young people's online political communication, on the characteristics of social media campaigns and on political outreach to young people usually assumes dichotomies of political engagement and age. The aim of this study is to challenge these dichotomies and establish a baseline of communication characteristics for each of these areas, as well as for the areas of political campaigning on Instagram and political campaigning for young people. The content of the Instagram pages of the parties in the elections and their youth branches was analysed quantitatively. A codebook combining a priori, inductive and deductive knowledge was used to highlight patterns in the use of social media, visual and campaign features. Statistical tests were conducted to examine their relationship to the pages of youth and traditional parties, and to the pages of parties more or less successful in mobilising young voters. Statistically significant features were arranged in a matrix that summarises them visually. The results show that youth parties and the parties that are more successful in mobilising young voters have similar visual approach to information structure and presentation. Additionally, while youth and more successful parties might follow different strategies in their choices of topics and issues, they follow similar trends identifiable only by considering the strategies employed by their counterparts.

Keywords: political campaigning, Instagram, Quantitative analysis, content analysis

1. Introduction

“A News Revolution for Young People Takes Root in France. YouTubers in the country are finding success by delivering political content to an audience that tends to shun traditional media.”

– New York Times, June 2022

“When a far-right candidate has ‘le buzz’, France shouldn’t take young people for granted”

– The Guardian, December 2021

“Are we ready for social media influencers shaping politics?”

– The Guardian, April 2021

“TikTok Is Shaping Politics. But How?”

- The New York Times, June 2020

Headlines like the above have multiplied in recent years. The alleged increasing use of social media for news and political information by young people, the declining voter turnout among them, and the increasing attention to youth activists have simultaneously sparked interest. In France, the low turnout of young people in the 2022 presidential and legislative elections and the heavy use of social media by parties and candidates are consistent with these trends. This dissertation seeks to identify whether, and which features of social media campaigns, especially on Instagram, can be associated with younger people and/or parties that are more successful in mobilising them.

1.1 Relevant Scholarship

This dissertation explores social media political campaigning – specifically on Instagram - and aims to contribute to the literature on the political communication preferences of young people. This study incorporates the concepts of social media communications, youth political engagement and political campaigning, and findings available at the intersection of their fields to examine features used by, and to target young people politically on Instagram.

1.1.1 Disconnect Between Youth and Politics

Young people today are generally theorized to be disconnected and distant from traditional forms of politics such as elections and voting. Dobbs (2019:5-7) highlights five theories which have been developed to attempt to elucidate this phenomenon. They posit that the following factors influence young people's voting participation: a lack of socioeconomic resources, a lack of connection to politics, a lack of sense of responsibility toward voting, a lack of mobilizing efforts targeting young people and more cynical political attitudes than their older counterparts (ibid.). These theories suggest factors that might influence the voting patterns of young people, but the studies they stem from tend to make assumptions about them that should be challenged. Notably, literature on the political engagement of young people has tended to focus on their participation in protest and activism, at the expense of institutional political processes such as voting (ibid. 8). This has also prevented the literature to integrate different kinds of engagement in assessing young people's political participation. On the other hand, studies which consider the youth voting often do so without regard to corresponding patterns among older generations (ibid. 9).

The traditional approach to measuring whether an individual is politically engaged has revolved around the activity of voting (Inthorn, et. al 2013:338). However, young people today increasingly participate in protests, perhaps because thanks to globalisation and neoliberalism that can more easily acquired a global, and detailed awareness of the world they live in today (Epstein, 2015:19). This implication in everyday politics, a stage where there is today heightened opportunities for young people to get involved, does not seem to transmit to the governance-level politics (Bowman, 2016). Instead, the youth has become depoliticized in the traditional sense of politics – Bowman explains they are marginalized and blamed for their own marginalization (ibid.). Indeed, when they do not vote, young people are criticized for not being politically engaged – and when they take part in activism and protests, they are not given credit for participating in politics either.

Different solutions have been suggested to increase youth voting turnout, and their participation in traditional politics. Compulsory voting, for instance, would have encouraged parties and candidates to address the demands of the youth more extensively – but reinforces the marginalization of young people and the blame put on them (Henn & Foard, 2014). Quotas of young members in political cabinets would address the critical lack of young adults in elected assemblies, in the hope to increase intergenerational representation (Stockemer & Sundström, 2021:447). Both solutions, like many others, fail to adequately account for the different political behaviours of young people – and to make use of those they already partake in.

Social media and the information age seem to have emphasized the effects of globalization and neo-liberalism on youth activism. They have 'enhanced global awareness of world events', they have played an important logistic part in organising and promoting protests, and they have offered the youth with a place to share their opinions and find the support they need to commit to them (Epstein, 2015 :12-13). Social media has notably become a prominent 'cyberspace' for the youth to fuel their engagement and to organize events (Velasquez and Larose, 2015 :900). Young citizens have been using the affordances of social media in connective and disruptive ways. However, the study of this transition to digitally savvy politics has often revolved around "dichotomies of engagement in participation and civic life" which has prevented it from fully understanding young people's political motivations, expectations and uses of online platforms (Mihailidis, 2014:1061).

This dissertation proposes that by accepting that young people do engage in politics, and accounting for how they might do so in their everyday life, gap between their engagement and traditional and institutional processes should be challenged before it can be bridged. This project seeks to use Instagram campaigning as one of the political moments in which this bridge should be challenged, and challenges it from the lens of political communication strategy. We believe that using a platform frequently used, particularly for personal and entertainment purposes, in the context of a traditional political process, such as campaigning for an election will nuance the "dichotomies of engagement in [...] civic life" (ibid.). This dissertation integrates literature on young people's online political communication, features of social media campaigning, and political targeting of young people to address and illuminate features of online political communication that are relevant to young people. It does so without assuming these features are specific to either traditional or alternative political engagements, and without assuming they are specific to either young or older generations.

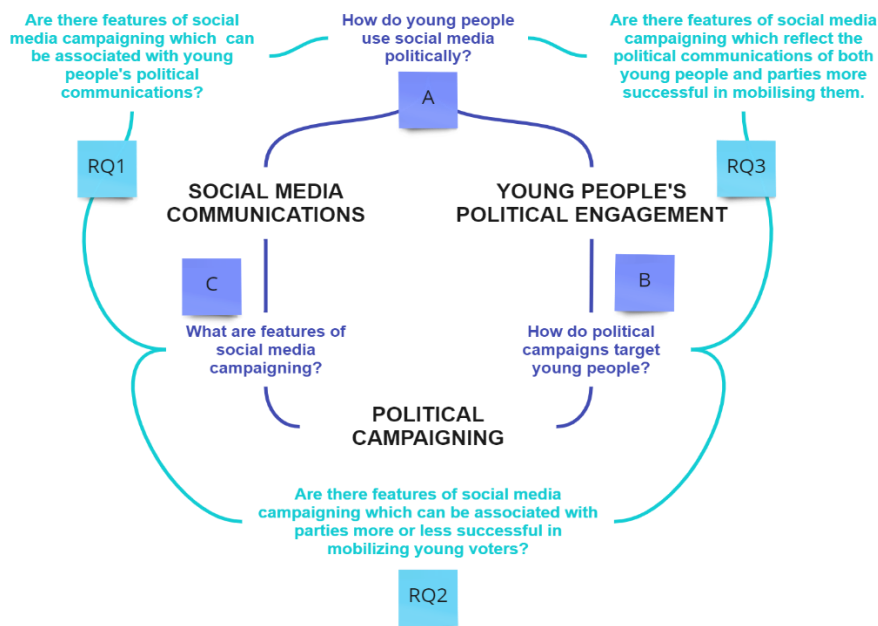


Figure 1. Conceptual Visualisation

Figure 1 provides a visual representation of the connections between the concepts, available knowledge supporting this dissertation, as well as its research questions. This section will attempt to summarize available insights from existing literature at the intersection of our key concepts, and what this dissertation aims to contribute to them. The questions that structure this project exist in their overlap – they are the outermost text on the figure and correspond to the research questions laid out further.

1.1.2 Political Uses of Social Media by Young People

Research on the political use of social media by young people has often revolved around the impact of social networking sites on the formation of their civic attitude. Bakker & De Vreese (2011) and Vromen et.al. (2015), for instance, pointed out the focus on issues, rather than hierarchy on social media platforms. They suggested such characteristics could boost young people’s interest in politics, by providing them with information and interaction opportunities online. Notably, while publicly posting about their political thoughts and views on a social media might be beyond the comfort zone of some young people, they are still able to access those of others, and interact more or less privately with them if they wish to discuss them (Storsul, 2014; Ekström, 2016; Velasquez & Larose, 2015).

Schwartz et al. (2013) found that social media users displayed variations in their language choice which could to some extent be associated with their age. This has often been considered as a negative evolution in political language (Tagliamonte, 2015), rather than a fruitful avenue for political campaigning, to grasp and acknowledge the political communication choices of youth people. Articulating their campaign strategies around them might be useful if the aim is to mobilize them in traditional political processes such as voting.

The available literature has focused on youth activists, the way they produce content and what happens to that content. The nature of the content itself, i.e., what these youth activists say and how they do it, has received less attention. When they have focused on the content itself, however, studies have suggested that the internet can also how young people communication politically online, and why this might be read as harmful or intelligible by older generations (Fourcade, 2021:3). As with 'internet language', the forms of political participation of today's youth have been assumed to be less efficient and meaningful than those generations currently in charge. However, if it is the case that those generations cannot accurately and fluently read the political expressions of their younger counterparts, a vicious cycle of mutual misunderstanding and misinterpreting is bound to strengthen the distance between traditional and youth political communications (Hoffman & Mitchell, 2016).

This dissertation explores whether and to what extent the existing literature on young people's political use of social media can be nuanced by examining traditional political contexts. In particular, this dissertation argues that political party campaigning in the context of elections may be a context in which the use young people make of social media politically can be better read across generations. As traditional political parties remain an area that is

further removed from everyday political life for young people, we hope to find common ground: The campaign will be anchored in traditional political processes, but the communication will be influenced by the digital architecture and norms of social media.

1.1.3 Political Targeting of Young People

Multiple patterns are visible in the campaign strategies today. A heightened interest in specific issues, rather than national or international politics fuels the personalisation of political information-seeking and engagement (Raynaud & Lalancette, 2021:213; Bennett, 2012:37). The participatory opportunities present on social media platforms favour them as spaces for the political conversation, information, and involvement of young people (Loader et al., 2016:415). This offers political parties and candidates with new channels through which to reach out to the younger members of their electorate. Rekker (2022) found that young people particularly sense, respond and at times forecast variations in voting patterns of the general population (Rekker, 2022). Ensuring that political communications reach and satisfy them is therefore particularly important: involving and activating young people in traditional politics will no doubt require adjustments but appears to be a productive investment for political actors today (Abid, et al. 2021:368).

Available findings in the literature indicate that young people positively respond to open and personal styles of communication from candidates (Loader et al., 2016:416). This seems to translate, for instance, into preferences for less solemn, and more visual campaign material (Raynauld & Lalancette, 2021:223). Generally, informal and personal political campaigning, rather than institutional and ceremonial communications like debates and official manifesto seem productive in catching the interest of the youth (Abid et al. 2021:367). This can be facilitated in the participatory and interactive context of social media, which this dissertation suggests have a somewhat untapped potential in better understanding and involving the youth into politics (Ohme et al. 2018:3257).

On the other hand, this project acknowledges that simply using social media will not be enough to engage young people. Findings in the field have also revealed that 'attempts to be cool', 'professionally written advertising styles' (Loader et al. 2016:416) and 'persuasive messages' (Abid et al. 2021:367), even when used on social media, generated negative perceptions in young people. Political communications, when they take place on platforms preferred by the youth, also need to respect their norms and styles. Notably, campaigns that focus on information and display empathy should be particularly efficient (*ibid.*; Gherghina & Rusu, 2021:1329). In other terms, this essay is grounded in the dual expectation that only educated and skilful political communications will be useful in tapping into the potential of social media platforms to partly bridge the gap between traditional politics and young people. The "expectations and performative demands of young network citizens" (Loader et al., 2016:414), as well as the social media platforms norms (Haßler et al. 2021:4) should be researched and accounted for in campaigns wishing to mobilise the youth online and offline.

The aim of this dissertation is to further identify which features of social media campaigns are particularly relevant to young people - either because young people use them and/or because parties that successfully mobilise them use them. This dual consideration of young people on both sides of the spectrum of producers and recipients will further contribute to the above literature by combining it with the literature from the previous section. Indeed, the characteristics identified in this way should guide both young people's online political communication strategies and the ways in which young people can be targeted in online political communication.

1.1.4 Characteristics of Social Media Campaigning

Political campaigns on social media reflect the dynamics we have mentioned in the previous sections. The "more fluid tactics of outreach and interaction" (Raynaud & Lalancette, 2021:213) somewhat address the shift towards permanent campaigning in traditional politics (*ibid.* 223). Against this backdrop, Instagram is a platform that is visually centred, designed for use on mobile devices such as smartphones and frequently used by young people (Haßler et al. 2021: 5). This dissertation notes that Instagram has less frequently been studied than platforms like Twitter and Facebook (*ibid.*:4). While we admit that the digital architecture of Instagram does not facilitate research projects, we believe that it is one of the platforms most relevant for and influential on young people today and should not be neglected in the field going further.

Research in the field of social media campaigning has attempted to pinpoint characteristics of social media which may have an impact on how political content is created and shared. Markers, notably tags and hashtags were identified as features facilitating the dissemination and structure of content (Brown et al., 2017). They allow users to interact with others and with topics (*ibid.*) and have the potential to generate what Zappavigna (2011:801; 2014) described as 'ad hoc social groups'. This research therefore accounts for the multimedia and metadata characters of Instagram content, given that the platform's focal point is to share and circulate visual posts. As political campaigning typically revolves around the communication of complex stances on complex topics, the adaptation

of content to fit the platform challenges campaign norms. Compromises are being found by campaigners, for instance through the use of text alongside visual elements, be it in the posts or their captions, which show signs of these adjustments in political informative messaging (Haßler et al. 2021:6).

This project uses insights from this section to create a codebook for our research. It will also contribute to the field by creating a matrix that summarises which of the studied features of social media campaigning are used by traditional and young parties, and by those that are more or less successful in mobilising them. The analysis chapter of this dissertation will be particularly focused on this intention.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

1.2.1 Terminology

Youth and Traditional parties

In this dissertation, we use the term "traditional parties" to refer to the official parties that fielded candidates for legislative elections. The term is not associated with any normative expectations; rather, it is used in contrast to "youth parties", - branches of traditional parties that are led by young party members and focus on appealing to young people.

More and Less Successful parties

The parties considered to be more successful in mobilising young voters are the parties of the NUPES group and Rassemblement National - they are highlighted in blue in Figure 5. This is due to the now known results of the 2022 legislative and presidential elections in France and polls such as those mentioned in the previous section. Parties that are more and less successful in mobilising young voters were sometimes referred to as "more successful" and "less successful" - this was not done to evaluate these parties but was a shortened version of their tedious denomination.

1.2.2 Inductive and Deductive Considerations

A deductive and an inductive approach were used to select specific measures. Deductively, findings from the literature strands highlighted above were adapted to the context of this research. Inductively, the variables were inspired by Instagram pages dedicated to news and/or political information popular with young people. The two pages in Figure 2 serve as examples: They are by no means representative of all online political communication by young people but give us a general idea of what can be expected from political and news-oriented Instagram pages that are either run by and/or targeted at young people.



Instagram account @hugodécrypte, content posted between 2022 March 24 and March 28

Instagram account @youthforclimatefr, content posted between 2022 June 1 and July 12

Figure 2. Screenshots from two French, youth-oriented, news and political Instagram pages (2022 August 1st)

In France, the page @hugodécrypte was mainly used by young people for their information searches. On the page, news highlights are posted daily - and new series originated during the 2022 presidential elections. The account's administrator, Hugo Travers, was the first to interview presidential candidates on social media in an official and recognised manner, with their speaking time counted towards their official media appearances. The above screenshots of the page during the presidential elections period show that the content was structured, with templates that continued the page's usual postings, and templates that marked series of posts that related to the elections. Posts consisted of multiple slides, with the first slide used to identify the series of the post and highlight parts of the content. Videos, which are either excerpts from interviews filmed specifically for social media or explanations of a news topic, are no more than 60 seconds long. The page of @youthforclimatefr, the French branch of Greta Thunberg's Fridays for Future, shows more diverse formats. While it also makes use of Instagram features through the use of tags and hashtags, the posts on this page respond to specific events and news stories and do not seem to use templates and/or conform to series. Rather, the focus here is on adapting each post to the particular information it conveys, often with more complex text and an illustration. This suggests a different approach to political information by and for young people: Unlike @hugodecrypte, @youthforclimatefr is a page with its own stated agenda, and does not claim to disseminate supposedly neutral and objective news. Taken together, these two Instagram pages have helped to inductively describe some of the potential features of young people's political communication on Instagram - and to specify the variables in the codebook of this research.

1.3 Research Questions

The general motivation behind this project is to identify online and, in particular, Instagram campaign strategies that appear effective in mobilising young people. In order to understand which features might be successful in doing so, it is important to first look at the political campaign strategies of the youth - that is, how young people themselves use social media for campaigning. In a second step, the features used by parties that are more successful in mobilising young people should also be looked at - and compared to find out what works and whether it is the same for youth parties and more successful parties.

The following intermediary research questions structure the project:

- RQ1: what features are used differently in the online political campaigning strategies of youth and traditional parties on Instagram?
- RQ2: what features are used differently in the online political campaigning strategies of more and less successful parties on Instagram?
- RQ3: are there features significantly more used by youth also significantly more used by parties more successful in mobilising them?

After statistical testing, the features will fall into one of the categories in Figure 3. The results section will describe them accordingly, and the analysis section will discuss the trends that emerge from the feature repartition.

	Differences Between more and less successful parties	No Differences Between more and less successful parties
Differences Between youth and traditional parties	Features similar or different between youth and more successful parties	Features particular to youth or traditional parties
No Differences Between youth and traditional parties	Features particular to more or less successful parties	Features not significantly different

Figure 3. Feature Categorisation Table

1.4 Operationalisation

To ensure that the variables we examine are appropriate and useful in terms of the research questions, a codebook was developed for the study based on a combination of a priori, deductive, and inductive knowledge. This study therefore draws on the existing literature, but also draws on the specific and under-researched context of campaigning on Instagram and young people's political campaigning on the platform.

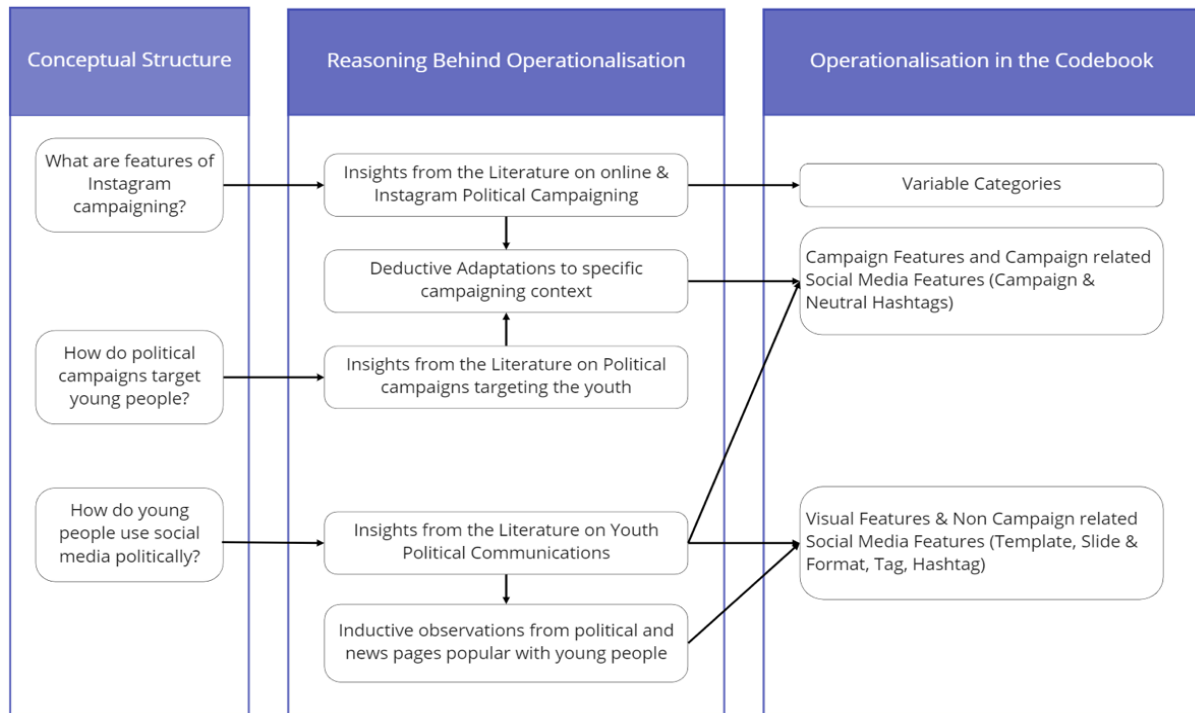


Figure 4. Codebook Operationalisation

Findings from existing research on Instagram political campaigning have helped articulate and structure the codebook developed for this study. The codebook created for this essay is inspired by various projects on political campaigning on Instagram. Haßler et al. (2021:9) suggested three characteristics relevant to our study: Instagram-specific features, the use of text and images, and of political information. Three other elements, inspired by a study of Justin Trudeau’s Instagram account complemented those characteristics: the structure of content in Instagram images, in their description, and the way the situations in photos were constructed (Raynaud & Lalancette, 2021:215). The variables in our codebook are structured along three categories, guided by these findings as well as those in the literature on social media campaigning presented in the previous chapter.

1.4.1 Social Media Features

Informed by the literature on social media communication, social media features refer to the digital architecture of Instagram as a platform. Features such as tagging or hashtagging, found in most social media platforms, can be used to make a post findable by searching for a topic or page on the platform. As Instagram is a visually oriented platform, features such as format (video or image) and the presence or absence of multiple slides are also considered as they indicate how parties are using the platform visually in their campaign.

1.4.2 Visual Features

Because of this visual quality, Instagram posts are particularly interesting to analyse for their visual characteristics. Features such as the composition of the picture - i.e., whether photos, graphics or text are used - as well as their relative visual role are indicative of the parties' campaign strategies. The degree of complexity of the information the text contains is also significant: posts that contain more text, either visually or because they contain complex information, bypass the visual-centric condition of the platform. It is interesting to see how and why they might do this. It is important to note here that videos were coded only for their format (i.e., the only variable for which they were visually considered was that they were not pictures - this is because there were too few videos in the

sample. This suggests that they are not the preferred format for online political campaigns - unlike channels such as television, which almost always rely on videos.

1.4.3 Campaign Features

This category considers references to various topics in the posts. The variables were selected to reflect our interest in young voters and potential young electorate. Features such as references to youth, social and environmental issues were selected because they are relevant to young people. References to campaign objectives, opposition and actions were less directly related to young people but remain interesting as they point to campaign strategies in general. Moreover, interactivity is particularly high in social media. Therefore, as in other media, reference can be made to voting, but also to alternative actions such as signing online petitions or clicking on links to access other content or liking and sharing posts. This is a possible way to engage and activate young people in political actions that might be closer to their interests.

2. Method

2.1 Research Context and Population

Initially, the context of the 2022 presidential elections in France was chosen for the study. This was an exciting context because all the major candidates had both personal and campaign accounts on Instagram - and because young people's votes in the elections had shown relevant patterns. Unfortunately, after the elections, many candidates' campaign accounts were deleted from the platform. We had collected some data, but wanted to respect the ownership of the content and decided not to use data from the deleted accounts. This left us with a sample that was far too small to be representative of the population - we focused instead on the 2022 legislative elections in France.

The legislative elections were a fruitful successor to our previous plan, as all the parties of the presidential candidates also fielded candidates for the legislative elections. Moreover, this shift allowed us to examine Instagram pages of parties rather than individuals or campaigns, which are not only more long-lived but also less likely to be deleted at any point before, during or after specific elections.

We were able to find verified Instagram pages for 11 of the parties that received the most votes in the elections, as well as for the grouping of parties NUPES. Furthermore, all but 1 of these parties (Parti Socialiste) had verified and/or official youth party accounts on the platform. The youth party accounts are managed by the youth branches of the parties, often with the aim of reaching out to other young people. In this way, we studied here both the traditional party pages and the youth-managed party pages of most parties participating in the legislative elections in France.

The 2022 legislative elections were not only a productive context for data collection, but also particularly relevant to this project because of their results. The overall majority that Emmanuel Macron and his party had won in the previous presidential and legislative elections was overturned. A coalition of left and ecological parties, the Nouvelle Union Populaire Ecologique et Sociale (New Popular Ecological and Social Union - NUPES), was founded. The party's aim was to prevent President Emmanuel Macron from being supported by a majority of deputies in the National Assembly. This would supposedly make it more difficult for his government to implement his agenda. Instead, it proposed that Jean-Luc Mélenchon, the candidate of the left-wing party La France Insoumise in the presidential elections, become prime minister if the group wins a majority of seats in the assembly. As La France Insoumise had received the highest share (34.8%) of the votes of 18-24-year olds in the first round of the presidential elections (Statista, 2022), the creation and campaign of the NUPES parties were particularly important to study the youngest segments of the French electorate. Marine Le Pen's party, Rassemblement National, would also be an interesting starting point for study, as the candidate received 18% of the votes of 18-24-year olds and the highest proportion (30%) of the vote among 25-34 year olds in the same elections (ibid.).

NUPES and Rassemblement National were successful in capturing youth votes in the legislative elections. An estimated 42% of 18-24-year olds reportedly voted for one of the NUPES candidates and 18% of them for Rassemblement National, both ahead of the presidential majority group Ensemble (Ipsos, 2022). This continuity in the youth vote suggests that NUPES and Rassemblement National benefited from the support of young people prior to the legislative elections. The impressive results of both parties allow us to deductively examine what parties that are successful in mobilising young voters might be doing in their Instagram campaigns. Abstention from voting among the 18-24 age group remained high - an estimated 69% of them did not go to the polls (compared to 52.3% of the general population) (ibid.). Those who did vote, however, voted overwhelmingly for NUPES and Rassemblement National and thus had a significant impact on the elections results: NUPES won the

second most seats and Rassemblement National the third most - a 10-fold increase over the last general elections (2017) for the far-right party.

The 2022 French legislative elections therefore combine data collection opportunities specific to Instagram and youth parties with outcomes relevant to young people's voting behaviour. As explained in the sampling strategy below, the aim of the research is to analyse a sample of posts representative of parties' Instagram campaigning during the elections. While limited to this context, this study aims to identify patterns of political campaigning on Instagram that may be relevant to other research contexts and the overall field. Future research using variables similar to those in the codebook used here, as well as variables specific to other contexts, would extend the findings of this research to this end.

2.2 Sampling Procedures

The sampling strategy was to collect a similar number of posts from the different parties so that they would be comparable. If a party had less than 50 posts from the first official day of the campaign (30 May 2022) to the last day of the campaign (second ballot, 19 June 2022), they were all analysed. If a party had more than 50 posts during this period, 50 were selected so that they were proportionally representative of these periods. The sample also included 10 posts before the official start of campaigning and, if available, up to 15 posts after the end of the elections. This was done not only to increase our sample but also to take into account the fact that campaigning is an ongoing process that continues before the official start of campaigning and continues after the elections results.

For youth parties, the sample was adjusted because they had many fewer posts. To make the sample size comparable for each party, the number of 50 post we had for the traditional parties was reduced to 12, and again 10 items before these 12 were selected to take into account the ongoing campaigns. The distribution of posts per party is summarised in the Table 1. Note: parties highlighted in Blue are those considered as more successful in mobilizing young voters.

2.2.1 Subsamples for Hypotheses Testing

Posts were coded using the variables in the codebook below, and statistical tests were conducted to determine the relationships between the type (youth/traditional) or level of success (more or less successful in mobilising young people) of the parties and the way in which the feature was used.

Within the general sample, the distributions of posts according to their test subsamples are visualised in Figure 6. It is important to note that only traditional parties were considered to test the relationships with the level of success - this is so that the results about the more successful traditional parties can be compared with those of youth parties without overlap.

Table 1. Contribution of each party to the sample of posts

Group	Party	Type	Account Handle	Posts	% Total	
Ensemble	Horizons	Traditional	horizonsleparti	22	3%	
		Youth	horizonsjeunes	12	2%	
	Mouvement Démocrate	Traditional	mouvementdemocrate	26	4%	
		Youth	j_democrates	12	2%	
	Renaissance	Traditional	enmarchefr	43	6%	
		Youth	jeunesmacron	12	2%	
	NUPES	Europe Ecologie Les Verts	Traditional	eelvfr	55	8%
			Youth	jeunesecologistes	12	2%
Génération(s)		Traditional	generationslemvt	23	3%	
		Youth	lesjeunesg	12	2%	
La France Insoumise		Traditional	franceinsoumise	51	8%	
		Youth	lesjeunesinsoumis.es	21	4%	
NUPES (group)		Traditional	nupes_2022	60	9%	
		Youth	jeunesnupes	12	2%	
Parti Communiste Français	Traditional	pcfparticomunistefrançais	47	7%		
	Youth	_mjcf	27	5%		
Parti Socialiste	Traditional	partisocialiste	30	5%		
	Youth	N/A		0%		
Solo	Les Républicains	Traditional	lesrepublicains	75	11%	
		Youth	lesjeunesrepublicains	19	4%	
	Rassemblement National	Traditional	reconquete_officiel	27	4%	
		Youth	jeunesmarine_	12	2%	
	Reconquête	Traditional	rassemblementnational_fr	42	6%	
		Youth	generation_zemmour	12	2%	

Figures 6 and 7 show the distribution of posts within the traditional and youth parties by group and level of success. This is to indicate that while the traditional subsample was larger, posts were evenly distributed with respect to other party variables. For both comparisons, the P-value corresponds to a chi-square conducted to test the relationship between party type and the proportion of posts in the sample coming from each group/level of success. Both P-values indicate that there were no statistically significant differences in the success and group distribution of posts between the traditional and youth sub-samples at a 1% significance level.

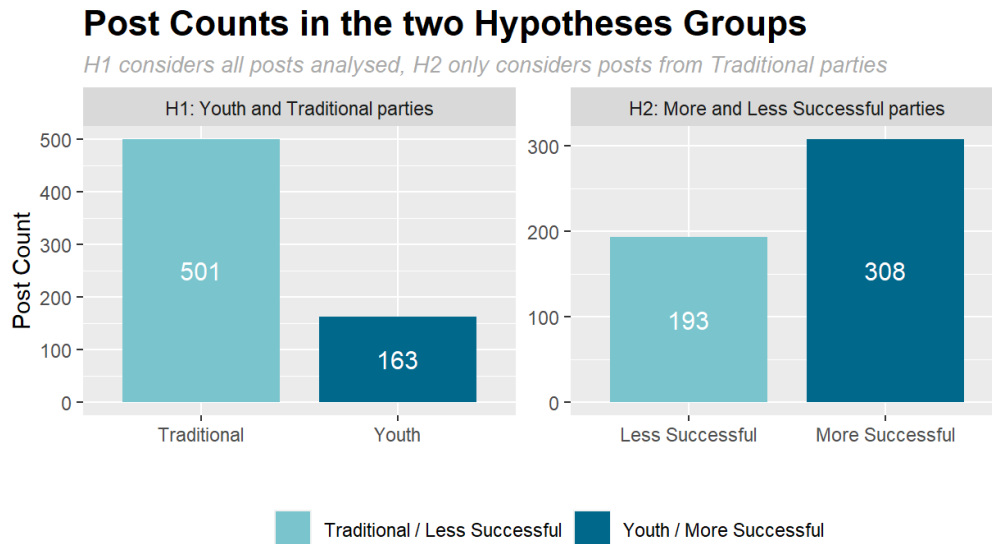


Figure 6. Number of posts in the Sub-samples



Figure 7. Distribution in the Youth and Traditional sub-samples according to party Group and Success Level

2.3 Measures and Analytical Approach

We chose quantitative content analysis as our method because we are interested in finding patterns and drawing comparisons in our sample that are representative of all Instagram campaigning during the French legislative elections. Collecting quantitative data through post analysis allowed us to create a dataset that we could use for statistical testing.

2.3.1 Codebook

The operationalisation of our codebook is described in Table 2. A pilot study was conducted earlier in the year, and the variables in the final codebook for the study were revised where necessary to improve intercoder reliability. The original codebook, and a summary of those revisions can be found in the Appendix.

2.3.2 Statistical Testing

Pearson's Chi-square tests (Pearson, 1900) were conducted to see if there was a relationship between our subsamples and how the parties in them used each feature. For each feature, the following null hypotheses were tested:

- NH1: There is no relationship between the type of party (traditional or youth) and the proportion of posts using the feature or the way the feature is used.
- NH2: There is no relationship between the success of the party in mobilising young people (more or less successful) and the proportion of posts using the feature or the way the feature is used.

Where one of the cells had a value of less than 5, Fisher's exact test (Fisher, 1934) was performed instead. A p-value < 0.001 was considered statistically significant. Where we could not reject the null hypothesis at a significance level of 0.1%, we did not note the test results. All analyses were conducted in R. The results are summarised in Tables 3, 4 and 5 in the next chapter.

2.3.3 Missing Values

There were no missing values in any of the sub-samples. The variables within the Visual Features category (with the exception of the Logo variable) only considered picture posts. Therefore, for these variables, posts whose format was "video" were excluded from the analysis. This affected the number of posts in the sub-samples as follows:

- In the total sample (H1): 439 of the 501 posts from traditional parties (87.6%) were analysed, and 123 of 163 posts from youth parties (75.5%).
- In the traditional sample (H2): 177 of the 193 posts from less successful parties (91.7%) were analysed, and 262 of 308 posts from more successful parties (85.1%)

The proportion of pictures among the posts was only significantly different between youth and traditional parties - and since the variables concerned were only tested for the values that were reported, this does not affect the outcome of our statistical tests.

2.4 Ethics and Reflexivity

2.4.1 Privacy & Creative Content

Data collected in this study publicly available on Instagram and free of privacy restrictions as per the Terms and Conditions of the platform, which can be found in the Appendix. The pages used do not focus on the identity of the administrator (with the exception of @hugodécrypte, which remains a public and verified page). In our statistical analysis, parties are not considered individually, but as part of the subsamples highlighted in the section above. When specific examples are drawn, pages are credited, and links to all Instagram pages studied can be found in the Appendix. No data was collected before approval was given by the London School of Economics Research Ethics Committee.

2.4.2 Reflexivity

Page et al. (2014) highlight some of the ethical complexities of studying communications and social media. The quantitative content analysis approach to online political campaigning is restricted to variables which must account for both the digital architecture of the social media studies, and the effect of the research context on the communication strategies of the campaigns. In this dissertation, content analysis was selected with the aim to pinpoint patterns and identify trends, but not to explain them. In other terms, the research seeks to delineate characteristics of political campaign communications that seem relevant to young people, rather than to elucidate why it is that they might be relevant. The combined use of a-priori, inductive and deductive knowledge in the selection and revisions of the variables used reflects this concern. The codebook and statistical approach were designed to single out some of the characteristics of the content in our sample, but at no point attempted to evaluate why particular discursive choices were made or preferred by different parties.

I am French, 22 years old and voted in both round of the legislative elections - I was aware of my bias towards some parties and the way they address different issues in their campaigns. In selecting, coding, and analysing the content used in this project, it was my intention to remain neutral at all times - especially with regard to the objectives of the different parties. Variables related to social media features as well as visual features were coded as objectively as possible and reflect observable characteristics. Variables relating to the campaign itself were coded as neutrally as possible. In particular, attention was paid to the presence or absence of references to issues

rather than what was said about them. This ensured that posts could be analysed more systematically for their observable features, but also for their message and content.

Table 2. Codebook

	Variable	Coding Scheme	Categories
Social Media Features	Template	The post can be visually identified as part of a series on the page	yes no
	Slide	The post consists of more than one slide (identifiable by white squares at the top right of the first slide)	yes no
	Format	The post (or its first slide) is a picture or video	picture video
	Tag	The post contains tag(s)	yes no
	Hashtag	The description of the post contains hashtag(s)	no hashtag a single hashtag several hashtags
	Campaign Hashtag	The description of the post contains hashtag(s) referring to campaign(s)	no campaign hashtag hashtag referring to a party hashtag referring to a group hashtags referring to both
	Neutral Hashtag	The description of the post contains hashtag(s) neutrally referring to a subject	no neutral hashtag hashtag referring to a topic hashtag referring to an election hashtags referring to both
Visual Features	Picture Composition	If Format is picture, the picture contains which of the visual elements listed	graphic photo text visual & text
	Party Logo	The post (or first slide, or cover if Format is video) contains logo(s) of the party and / or group	no logo party logo group logo both party and group logos
	Type of Photo	If the picture contains photograph(s), the photographs represent which of the elements listed	no photo photo representing an issue photo from a media event photo from a political event portrait
	Visual Importance of Text	If Format is picture, the visual space taken by text in the picture	no text text is an important visual element text is the main visual element
	Information From Text	If Format is picture, complexity level of the information in the text	no text text carries basic information text carries complex information
Campaign Features	References to the Youth	The post (content and / or description) contains references to young people	no reference reference to the youth in the message visual reference to the youth references in both
	References to Issues	The post (content and / or description) contains references to issues	no reference reference to the environment reference to social issues references to both
	References to Behaviour	The post (content and / or description) contains a reference to a behaviour	no reference reference to voting reference to another behaviour (signing a petition, clicking a link, sharing a post...) references to both
	Main Information of the post	The post is mainly about which of the elements listed	a statistic or number an event (past or future) the campaign (events or goals) the election (how to vote or official results) the opposition
	References to the Opposition	The post (content and / or description) contains a reference to the opposition (party or candidate)	no reference general reference reference to specific point(s)
	References to Campaign Goals	The post (content and / or description) contains a reference to the goals of the campaign	no reference general reference reference to specific point(s)

Future research should attempt to combine quantitative content analysis with qualitative analysis. In particular, critical discourse analysis would better explain the use of campaign features, and visual and video analysis would complement the understanding of visual and social media features. Quantitative network analysis could also contribute to a more precise study of metadata features. Both would be highly relevant in understanding the use of

Instagram for political campaigns. Interviews or focus groups with young users of the platform and/or young members of the electorate would be very useful to clarify the relationship between Instagram campaigning, use and voting behaviour. All of these methods are useful areas of research and should be applied to the field of political campaigning on Instagram and youth voting. This research was about identifying patterns between and across campaigns in the hope of finding features that might be relevant to such future efforts. The aim was the start bridging the gaps to facilitate further research.

3. Results

The results of the chi-square tests carried out between the subsamples of youth and traditional parties, and those of the more and less successful parties in the traditional sample, are summarised in the following tables. Table 3 shows the results for the features that differ significantly only between the traditional and youth parties, Table 4 those that differ between the more and the less successful parties, and Table 5 for the features that differ significantly between both.

An asterisk (*) indicates that one of the cells had a value of less than 5 and Fisher's exact test was used instead of a chi-square test. If we could not reject the null hypothesis, the results are not reported.

Table 3. Results of statistical testing for features statistically significant in NH1 only (between traditional and youth parties)

Features	Number of posts	Traditional parties (n=501; 75,5%)	Youth parties (n=163; 24,5%)	P-value
FORMAT				2,99E-04
Picture	Posts	439	123	
	<i>% within type</i>	87,6	75,5	
Video	Posts	62	40	
	<i>% within type</i>	12,4	24,5	
TYPE OF PHOTO				1,539E-6*
No Photo	Posts	186	36	
	<i>% within type</i>	42,4	29,33	
Portrait	Posts	157	33	
	<i>% within type</i>	5,8	26,8	
Media event	Posts	23	3*	
	<i>% within type</i>	5,2	2,4	
Political event	Posts	45	33	
	<i>% within type</i>	10,3	26,8	
Issue	Posts	28	18	
	<i>% within type</i>	6,4	14,6	
VISUAL IMPORTANCE OF TEXT				8,15E-07
No Text	Posts	86	40	
	<i>% within type</i>	19,6	32,8	
Text is one visual element	Posts	178	64	
	<i>% within type</i>	40,5	52,5	
Text is the main visual element	Posts	175	18	
	<i>% within type</i>	39,9	14,8	
REFERENCES TO THE YOUTH				<2,2E-16
No Reference	Posts	430	61	
	<i>% within type</i>	85,5	37,4	
References to the youth in message and visual	Posts	13	38	
	<i>% within type</i>	2,6	2,3	
Reference in the message	Posts	50	38	
	<i>% within type</i>	10	23,3	
Visual reference	Posts	8	26	
	<i>% within type</i>	1,6	16	
MAIN INFORMATION IN THE POSTS				9,93E-11
Campaign	Posts	277	64	
	<i>% within type</i>	55,3	39,3	
Election	Posts	87	10	
	<i>% within type</i>	17,4	6,1	
Event	Posts	88	71	
	<i>% within type</i>	17,6	43,6	
Opposition	Posts	36	11	
	<i>% within type</i>	7,2	6,7	
Statistic	Posts	13	7	
	<i>% within type</i>	2,6	4,3	

Table 4. Results of statistical testing for features statistically different in NH2 only (between more and less successful parties)

Features	Number of posts	Less Successful (n=168; 35,6%)	More Successful (n=304; 64,4%)	P value
SLIDE				4,63E-04
Single slide	Posts	150	192	
	<i>% within type</i>	77,7	62,3	
Several slides	Posts	43	116	
	<i>% within type</i>	22,3	37,7	
TAG				5,92E-13
No Tag	Posts	66	208	
	<i>% within type</i>	34,2	67,5	
Tag(s)	Posts	127	100	
	<i>% within type</i>	65,8	32,5	
HASHTAG				<2,2E-16
No Hashtag	Posts	48	53	
	<i>% within type</i>	24,9	17,2	
Single Hashtag	Posts	106	47	
	<i>% within type</i>	54,9	15,3	
Several Hashtags	Posts	39	208	
	<i>% within type</i>	20,2	67,5	
PICTURE COMPOSITION				1,545E-12*
Graphic only	Posts	56	62	
	<i>% within type</i>	31,6	23,7	
Photo only	Posts	66	66	
	<i>% within type</i>	37,3	25,2	
Text only	Posts	2*	64	
	<i>% within type</i>	1,1	24,4	
Combination of visual and text	Posts	53	70	
	<i>% within type</i>	29,9	26,7	
LOGO				<2,2E-16*
No Logo	Posts	98	106	
	<i>% within type</i>	50,8	34,4	
Group and party logo	Posts	0*	33	
	<i>% within type</i>	0	10,7	
Group logo only	Posts	0*	116	
	<i>% within type</i>	0	37,7	
Party logo only	Posts	95	53	
	<i>% within type</i>	49,2	17,2	
REFERENCES TO ISSUES				2,20E-04
No references	Posts	161	209	
	<i>% within type</i>	83,4	67,9	
References to social and environmental issues	Posts	7	43	
	<i>% within type</i>	3,6	14	
References to environmental issues only	Posts	10	29	
	<i>% within type</i>	5,2	9,4	
References to social issues only	Posts	15	27	
	<i>% within type</i>	7,8	8,8	
REFERENCES TO THE OPPOSITION				7,139E-07*
No references	Posts	179	233	
	<i>% within type</i>	92,7	75,6	
General reference	Posts	9	30	
	<i>% within type</i>	4,7	9,7	
Specific reference	Posts	5*	45	
	<i>% within type</i>	2,6	14,6	
REFERENCES TO CAMPAIGN GOALS				8,84E-07
No references	Posts	153	173	
	<i>% within type</i>	79,3	56,2	
General reference	Posts	26	89	
	<i>% within type</i>	13,5	28,9	
Specific reference	Posts	14	46	
	<i>% within type</i>	7,3	14,9	

Table 5. Results of statistical testing for features significantly different in both NH1 and NH2 (different between traditional and youth parties, and between more and less successful parties)

Features	Number of posts	Traditional parties (n=501; 75,5%)	Youth parties (n=163; 24,5%)	P-value	Number of posts	Less Successful (n=168; 35,6%)	More Successful (n=304; 64,4%)	P-value
TEMPLATES				3,993E-09	4,14E-07			
No Template	Posts	231	119		Posts	61	170	
	%type	46,1	73		%success	31,6	55,2	
Template	Posts	270	44		Posts	132	138	
	%type	53,9	27		%success	68,4	44,8	
CAMPAIGN HASHTAGS				1,19E-09	<2,2E-16*			
No Campaign Hashtag	Posts	145	45		Posts	66	79	
	%type	28,9	27,6		%success	34,2	25,6	
Group and Party Hashtags	Posts	21	8		Posts	0*	21	
	%type	4,2	4,9		%success	0	6,8	
Group Hashtag only	Posts	189	22		Posts	18	171	
	%type	37,7	13,5		%success	9,3	55,5	
Party Hashtag only	Posts	146	88		Posts	109	37	
	%type	29,1	54		%success	56,5	12	
NEUTRAL HASHTAGS				6,03E-16	1,681E-15*			
No Neutral Hashtag	Posts	276	71		Posts	150	126	
	%type	55,1	43,6		%success	77,7	40,9	
Election and Topic Hashtags	Posts	31	19		Posts	2*	29	
	%type	6,2	11,7		%success	1	9,4	
Election Hashtag only	Posts	130	10		Posts	26	104	
	%type	25,9	6,1		%success	13,5	33,8	
Topic Hashtag only	Posts	64	63		Posts	15	49	
	%type	12,8	38,7		%success	7,8	15,9	
REFERENCES TO ACTIONS				1,70E-06	6,308E-08*			
No Reference	Posts	168	79		Posts	66	102	
	%type	33,5	48,5		%success	34,2	33,1	
References to both	Posts	52	6		Posts	5*	47	
	%type	10,4	3,7		%success	2,6	15,3	
References other action	Posts	93	45		Posts	27	66	
	%type	18,6	27,6		%success	14	21,4	
References to voting	Posts	188	33		Posts	95	93	
	%type	7,5	20,2		%success	49,2	30,2	

3.1 Summary Matrix

Using our chi-square tests and our cross-tabulations, we organised the social media, visual and campaign features according to which are more common among youth, traditional, more, and less successful parties. Figure 8 summarises this classification and shows which features are common or specific to the different sub-samples. Importantly, some features appear in different cells when some of their categories show significant differences between some sub-samples and not others. For example, while references to actions were significantly more common in both traditional and less successful parties' posts, references specifically to voting were significantly more frequent only in the posts of less successful parties, but not in those of traditional parties.

	Features used significantly more by traditional parties	Features not significantly different between youth and traditional parties	Features used significantly more by youth parties
Features used significantly more by less successful parties	Features common to Traditional and Less Successful parties More frequent templates More frequent reference to a behaviour	Features specific to Less Successful parties More frequent single hashtag More frequent no hashtag More frequent single slide More frequent party logo More frequent photo only More frequent graphic only More frequent reference to going to vote	Features common to Youth and Less Successful parties More frequent party hashtag
Features not significantly different between more and less successful parties	Features specific to Traditional parties More frequent not to use a photo More frequent the photo is a portrait More frequent text is the main visual element More frequent reference to other behaviour More frequent main information is about the campaign or the election	Features not significantly different Level of information from the text	Features specific to Youth parties More frequent videos More frequent the photo shows an issue More frequent the photo shows a political event More frequent there is no text More frequent text is not the only visual element More frequent main information is about an event More frequent reference to the youth
Features used significantly more by more successful parties	Features common to Traditional and More Successful parties More frequent Election Hashtags More frequent Group Hashtags	Features specific to More Successful parties More frequent several slides More frequent @Tags More frequent several hashtags More frequent group logo More frequent visual and text combination More frequent reference to campaign goals More frequent reference to the opposition More frequent reference to social and environmental issues	Features common to Youth and More Successful parties More frequent Neutral Hashtags More frequent Topic Hashtags

Key

Social Media Features	Visual Features	Campaign Features
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Figure 8. Matrix of Features according to the results of statistical testing and cross-tabulations

We are particularly interested in the features used by youth parties and the parties that are more successful in mobilising young voters. Looking at the matrix above, several trends emerge that could indicate their strategies - they will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. The features that reveal the more complex patterns are described in more detail below - they are the ones that the matrix could not fully capture and visualise.

3.2 Campaign and Neutral Hashtags

While there are significant differences in the proportions of posts using campaign and neutral hashtags between youth and traditional parties as well as between more and less successful parties, youth and more successful parties show different patterns in their choice of hashtags. Youth and less successful parties use party hashtags more often than their counterparts, who conversely use group hashtags more often. It is important to note that the results are

influenced by the fact that the Ensemble parties are among the less successful parties and NUPES parties are among the more successful parties.

As will be explained in more detail in the next chapter, the NUPES parties referred to their group more often by using metadata in the form of tags or hashtags or by following each other. Less successful parties, on the other hand, demonstrate less intragroup referencing. However, the fact that youth parties use party hashtags more often was more surprising, as they are more likely to follow their group members than traditional parties. One possible influencing factor is the frequency of posts by youth parties that were not related to the elections and campaign: Many posts were related to party-specific events, where group hashtags may have been less relevant.

Similarly, youth parties use topic hashtags in a significantly higher proportion of posts than all other sub-samples (38.7%). On the other hand, more successful parties use elections hashtags significantly more often than other sub-samples - in 33.8% of their posts. However, both youth and more successful parties use at least one neutral hashtag in their posts more often than their counterparts - and both do so in the majority of their posts, as only 43.66% and 40.9% of their posts, respectively, do not contain any neutral hashtag.

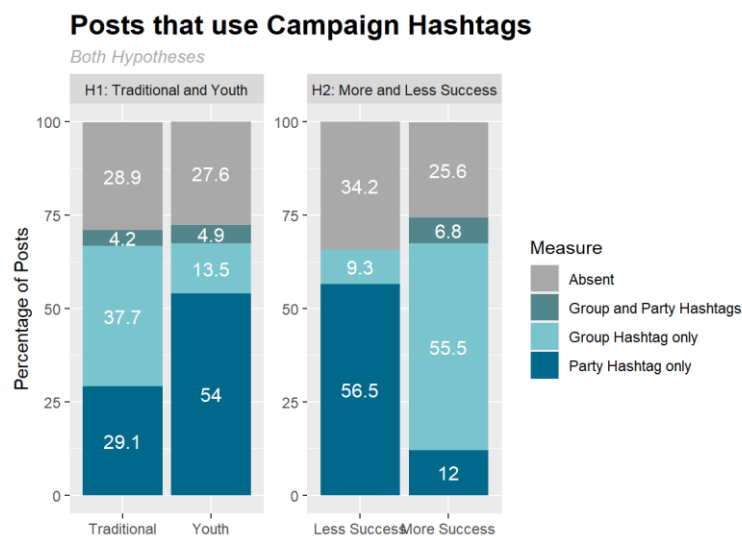


Figure 9. Difference in the use of Campaign Hashtags in all sub-samples

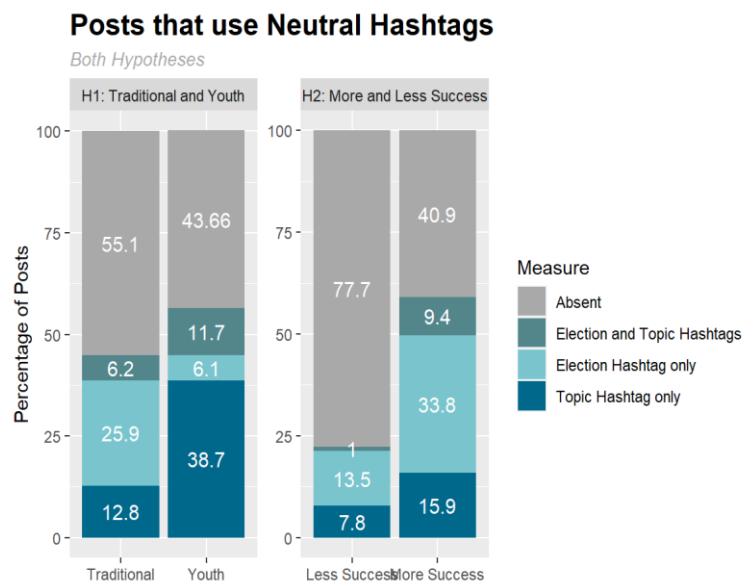


Figure 10. Difference in the use of Neutral Hashtags in all sub-samples

3.3 Visual Composition of the Picture and Visual Importance of Text

Two features, the visual importance of the text in the posts and the visual composition of the picture in the posts, showed significant differences only between youth and traditional parties, or only between more and less successful parties. However, they show interesting patterns: while less successful parties were less likely to use only text in their image, traditional parties generally used text as their main visual element more often than youth parties did. In both cases, this suggests that more successful and youth parties use relatively more diverse combinations of text and visual elements: The former have very similar proportions of each type of composition studied among their posts (four compositions, all between 23.7%-26.7% of posts), and the latter use text alongside other visual elements in the majority (52.5%) of their posts.

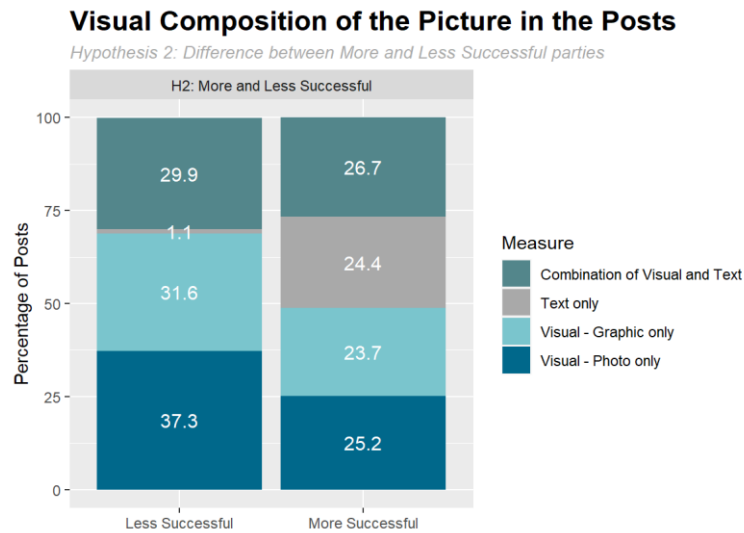


Figure 11. Difference in the Visual Composition of Pictures in the more and less successful parties' sub-samples

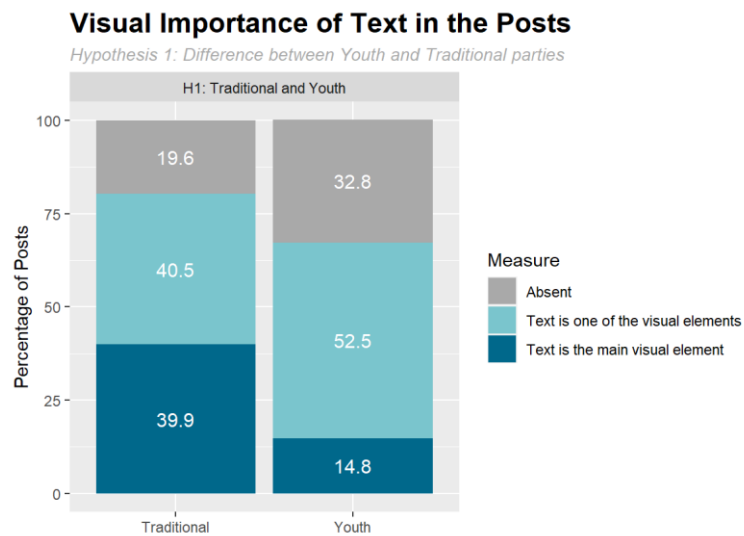


Figure 12. Difference in the Visual Importance of Text in the traditional and youth parties' sub-samples

3.4 Campaign Features

The only campaign feature that shows a significant difference between both youth and traditional parties, and between more and less successful parties, is whether there is a reference to action in the posts. Again, both youth and more successful parties refer to action less often than their counterparts, but there are differences in the references they make. Youth parties are the group that refers to actions the least - 48.5% of posts do not refer to either voting or other actions. More successful parties also have a lower proportion of posts referring to actions than less successful parties, although this proportion is higher than for youth parties. As with the visual composition

of the images, this similar pattern between youth and more successful parties happens in contrast to different trends from their counterparts. Indeed, traditional parties have the highest proportion of posts referring only to other actions (37.5%), while the less successful parties have the highest proportion of posts referring only to voting (49.2%).

There was no significant difference between the more and less successful parties in terms of the most important information in their posts. Youth parties, on the other hand, had a higher proportion of posts that were mainly about an event than traditional parties. In addition, the proportion of posts that were mainly related to their campaign and the elections itself was lower than for traditional parties. For both traditional and youth parties, only a few posts mainly referred to the opposition or to a statistic.

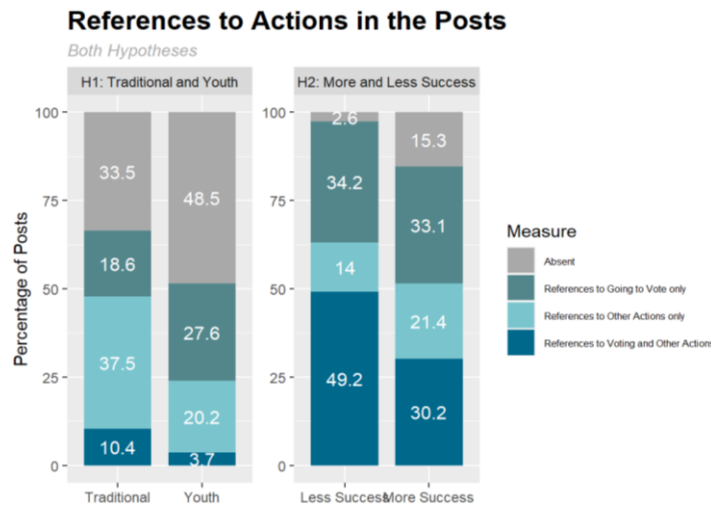


Figure 13. Difference in References to Actions in all sub-samples

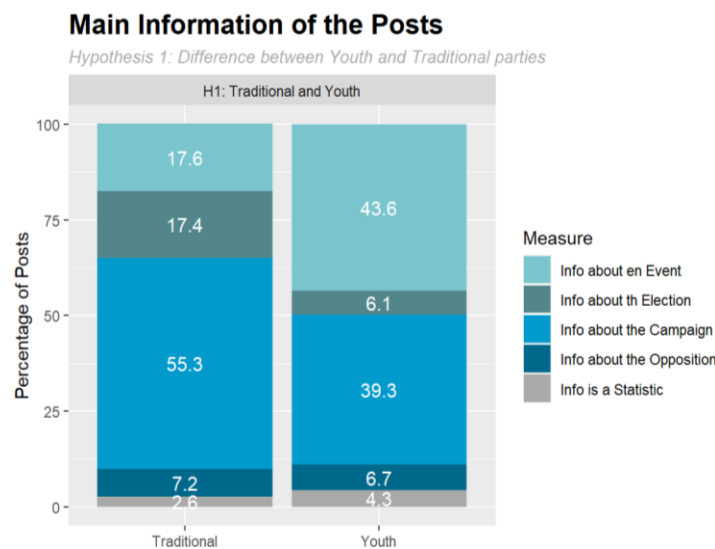


Figure 14. Difference in the Main Information of the Post in the traditional and youth parties' sub-samples

Conversely, although the proportion of contributions relating to either campaign objectives and/or opposition was not significantly different between young and traditional parties, it differed markedly between the more and less successful parties. More successful parties had a higher proportion of posts referring to their own campaign objectives or to their opponents than less successful parties.

While only 7.2% of posts by traditional parties focused on information about the opposition, a much higher 24.3% of posts by successful parties within the same group included a general or specific reference to the opponent. In comparison, only 7.3% of the posts by the less successful parties within this group made some reference to the opposition - a very similar proportion to the 7.2% of posts in the overall traditional subsample. This suggests that the more successful parties either drove the proportion of posts in the sample of traditional parties that focus on the opposition - or that the more successful parties are making general or specific references to the opposition

alongside other information. Again, the proportion of contributions by successful parties that refer generally or specifically to campaign objectives is significantly higher (43.8%) than the proportion of posts by less successful parties (20.8%). This suggests that a reference to a campaign objective in a post is likely to be the main information of that post, as opposed to a reference to the opposition, which is likely to be combined with another, more paramount topic. This is particularly likely in posts by more successful parties, where the proportion of posts referring to the opposition is much higher.

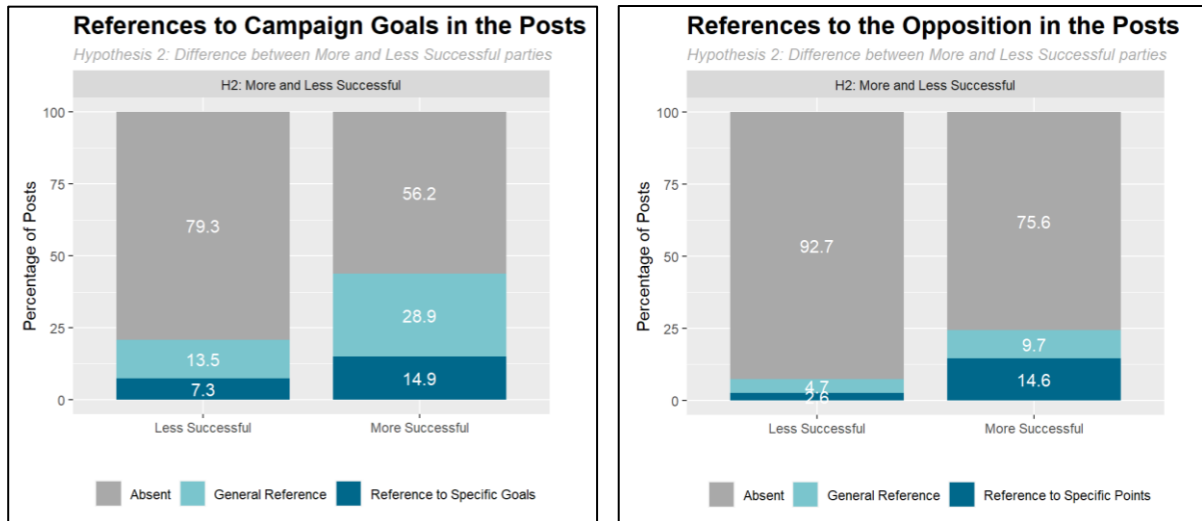


Figure 15. Difference in References to Campaign Goals and the Opposition in the more and less successful parties' sub-samples

Finally, there are two features that differ significantly between youth and traditional and between more and less successful parties: References to the youth and references to issues. Interestingly, these different references show similar trends between the different sub-samples: youth parties refer to the youth in a significantly higher proportion of their posts than traditional parties, and more successful parties refer to social and environmental issues in a significantly higher proportion of their posts than less successful parties. In both cases, this is mainly due to the proportion of posts that have multiple references is significantly higher for the youth and more successful parties than their counterparts. However, it is important to note that this could be related to the higher proportion of youth parties' posts that relate to events - and the higher proportion of posts from the more successful parties that relate to campaign objectives. Indeed, it could be that youth parties address youth more often through events than through their campaign, and that less successful parties refer to social and environmental issues less often because they refer to their campaign objectives less frequently.

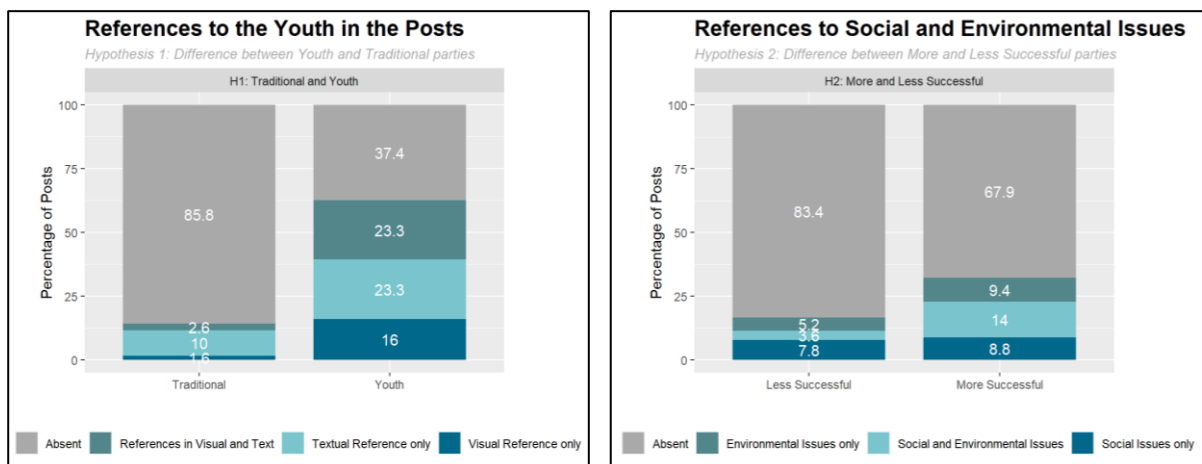


Figure 16. Difference in References to the Youth and Social and Environmental Issues, respectively in the traditional and youth, and in the more and less successful parties' sub-samples

4. Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Visual and Metadata Relations in the NUPES and Ensemble Groups

The NUPES parties were part of our more successful group, as they received the most youth votes in the elections - and the Ensemble parties were part of our less successful group, as they received a much smaller share of votes. One trend that particularly affected the analysis of our more and less successful parties was the differences in group references between the NUPES and Ensemble parties. The parties in the NUPES group used group hashtags and logos more frequently than the parties in the Ensemble group. These different strategies of the two groups are undoubtedly one of the reasons behind differences regarding these features between more and less successful parties.

Since the youth and traditional samples did not distinguish between more and less successful parties, these group differences were not expected to occur between them. However, unlike more successful parties, youth parties used party hashtags more often than group hashtags, unlike traditional parties. This could be partly because there were fewer posts from youth parties during the legislative campaign period, and therefore a higher proportion of posts did not relate to it. This could partly explain why there are fewer references to groups, which were set up specifically for the elections, and why the focus is on parties. Interestingly, this pattern was not significantly reproduced for the Logo variable. This suggests that visual elements such as a logo and metadata elements such as a hashtag can be used differently even when they refer to the same topic - in this case, to party and group identification.

While there was no significant difference in the proportion of posts that used tags between youth and traditional parties, analysis of the patterns of following between youth and traditional parties within NUPES and Ensemble groups found that youth parties and parties belonging to NUPES followed each other more frequently than traditional parties and those belonging to Ensemble. Figure 17 illustrates these patterns. Following a page means not only that its content appears on the user's feed but, more importantly for non-personal accounts, that the pages being followed are legitimate to them. Users of the platform can see which other pages an account is following (unless the account has disabled this feature), and they can click on them to view them.

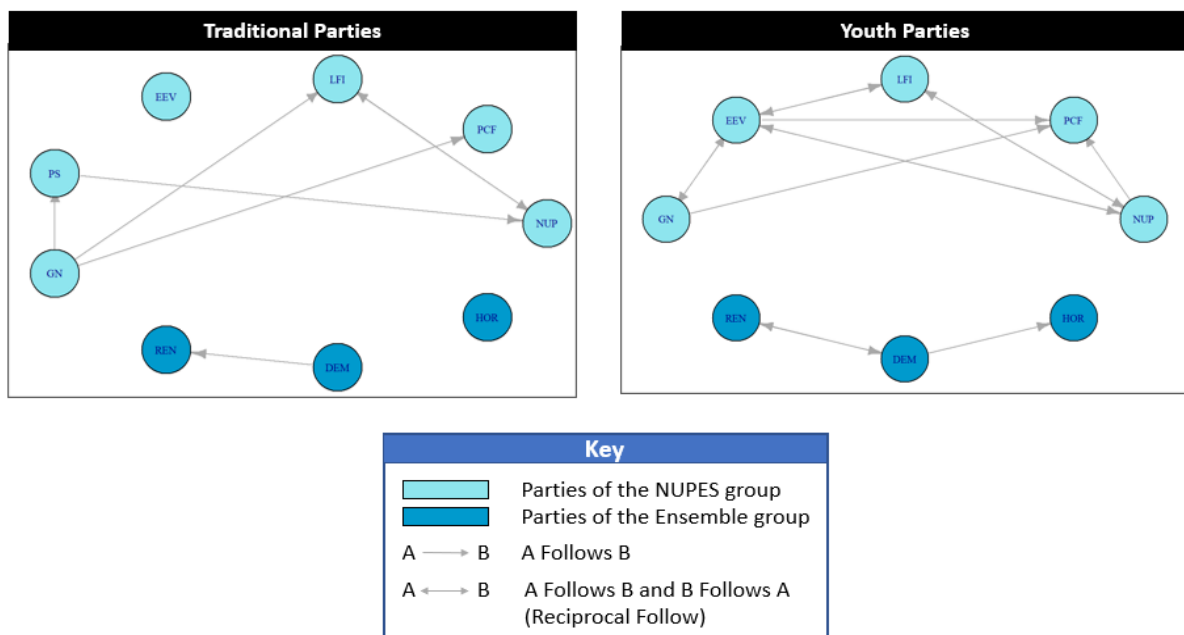


Figure 17. Visualisation of Following patterns among party-group for traditional and youth parties

The fact that NUPES parties follow each other more frequently than Ensemble parties further solidifies the group logo and hashtag patterns between the more and less successful parties: the NUPES group makes more use of Instagram metadata and visual group markers than Ensemble. On the other hand, youth parties follow each other more than their traditional counterparts within the same groups, leading to a more complex proposition. While their choice of logo use is not significantly different from that of traditional parties, and their use of post-specific

metadata suggests that they refer to their group less frequently than to the party, youth parties signal their relationship with other group members on an account-wide level by following each other.

4.1.1 Considerations for our Results

The different Instagram relationships between NUPES and Ensemble group parties should be kept in mind when analysing the differences between the more and less successful parties - as the above features have highlighted their most obvious influences. The NUPES parties' more vocal demeanour towards their group and other group members was evident on Instagram - but also in the group's general campaign. Indeed, NUPES had Instagram accounts (both traditional and youth-run) dedicated to the group itself, as well as an effective website highlighting candidates, propositions and voting guidelines to ensure that their voters had clear instructions on elections days - all elements that Ensemble lacked throughout the campaign and elections period.

The success of parties in mobilising young voters during the legislative elections is undeniably linked to their ongoing campaign activity and programme. Therefore, it is important to reiterate that this study does not claim Instagram campaigning is a predictor of young voter mobilisation. Rather, the aim here is to look for patterns among youth parties and for those parties that actually were more successful in mobilising young people, regardless of their agenda. The aim is to surmise whether such patterns exist and, if so, what features would be productively used to target these young voters when they use Instagram with the intention of learning about traditional political processes such as elections. One of these potential features so far is the use of visual elements and metadata to emphasise group affiliation.

4.3 Visual Approach

Findings about the visual features in our study are summarised in Table 6. It is important to remember here that where posts were made up of several slides, only the top one was analysed as we are interested in the visual strategy of our parties.

Table 6. Table summarising findings about Visual Approach of youth and more successful parties

	Youth parties	Youth and More Successful parties	More Successful parties
Features they use significantly more frequently than their counterpart(s)	Videos content	Combination of visual and textual elements	Several slide posts
Features they use significantly less frequently than their counterpart(s)	Text only content	Template posts	Content with no text at all

4.3.1 Respect of Platform Norms and Expectations

That videos were most frequent among youth parties suggests that the format is both usable by young people and used with the aim to engage young people. Future research should include video analysis that was beyond the scope of this dissertation to further understand how and why videos are particularly employed by young people. In this study, youth parties used videos that were for the most part short, and specifically created for social media – features coherent with those noticed from the @hugodecrypte page. Traditional parties, on the other hand, tended to use videos which were extracts of traditional media events (debates, interviews, official campaign videos). This suggests that as well as using videos less frequently, traditional parties tended to use videos without the digital architecture and norms of Instagram in mind. Indeed, when they were used, videos were often long, and did not include text, subtitles, background music or graphic elements – all of which would be normally present in the videos Instagram users encounter elsewhere on the platform. As such, videos (both in their frequency and content) are representative of the more or less informed and authentic use that can be made of social media: youth parties were more likely to use them, and to edit them in ways that respected the expectations of Instagram users.

4.3.2 Information Structure: Less Professionalized but Still Organised

The different proportions of single and several slide posts between more and less successful parties also follows the expectations mentioned above. Using several slides can help structure post content: the top slide is the first visible, both when the post reaches a user’s feed (if the follow the page or if the platform suggests their content),

and when a user consult's the page. This top slide can therefore identify posts as part of a page, or of a series (template, logo), or summarize or highlight the overall content of the post visually and / or textually. However, templates were more frequently used by traditional and less successful parties than by youth and more successful ones. This nuances our understanding of the uses of single and several slide posts. Indeed, while more successful parties' posts use several slides more frequently, we cannot assume they do so create series of posts, or because they have curated visual identity. Instead, it appears they might use several-slide posts in a manner similar to @youthforclimatefr, to summarize or emphasize the overall content of their posts, possibly to avoid visually overwhelming their top slide visually and / or with too complex information.

Templates can also signal a more 'professionalized' approach to posting on Instagram. Indeed, it is rare for personal Instagram pages to use templates – personal uses of Instagram generally revolve around more or less frequently posting photos, rather than in thoughtfully and structurally curating their page. This might in part explain why youth parties, which tend to be administered on a voluntary basis by young party members, use templates less frequently than traditional parties, which tend to be administered professionally by individuals or groups hired to create, edit and post content on social media. That parties more successful in mobilising young voters, also use templates less frequently than their counterparts could indicate that young audiences might prefer Instagram campaigning content, even from traditional parties, to follow personal, platform-specific norms than professionalized strategies which can remind them of the distance between them and traditional campaigning and politics.

4.3.3 Information Presentation: Combination of Text and Visual

More successful parties and youth parties more frequently used combinations of visual and textual elements than their counterparts. It is interesting however that this was relative to different strategies: less successful parties more often did not use text at all, and traditional parties more often used text as the main visual element. While the higher proportion of combination visuals in the posts of more successful and youth parties happened in contrast to opposed choices from their counterparts, they correspond to our expectations: posts from @hugodécrypte and @youthforclimatefr similarly used mostly visual combinations. However, that traditional parties overall more frequently used text as the main visual element, but the less successful parties among them more frequently did not use text at all is the most complex insight from these features. It might indicate that compared to traditional parties, youth parties tend to illustrate the topic of their posts, and / or not to overcrowd their top slide, preferring instead to provide more complex textual information on the following slides. Similarly, relative to their less successful counterparts, more successful parties seem to more frequently use text than visual only content – as we will see in the following section, this might reflect an Instagram campaigning strategy that revolves around issues, objectives, and information more than around individual candidates.

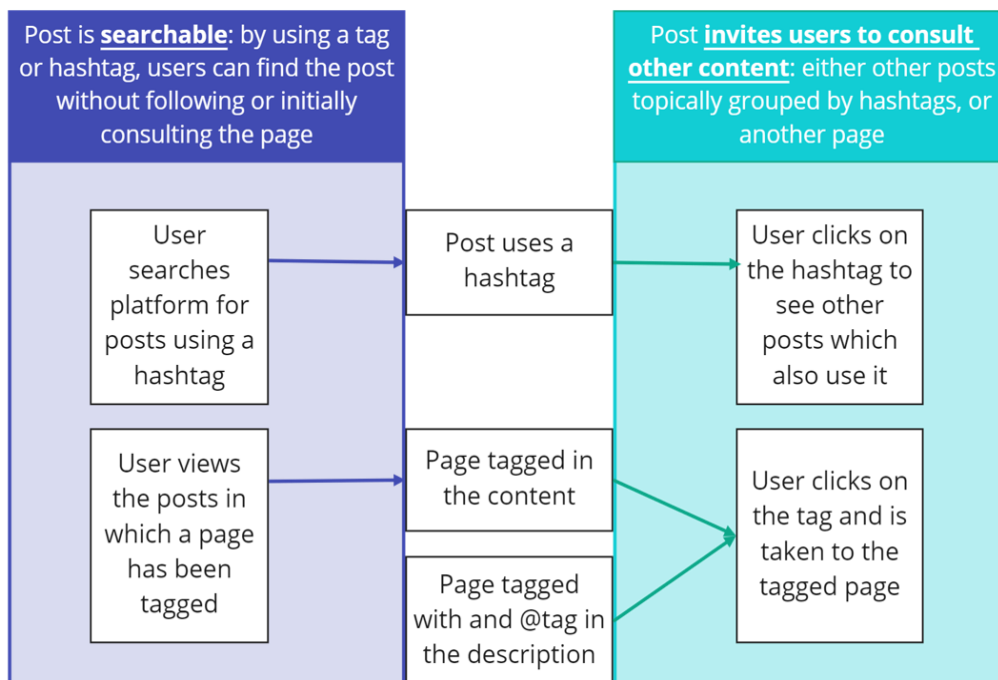


Figure 18. @Tag and Hashtag functioning on Instagram

4.4 Message Approach

Tags and hashtags are affordances specific to social media platforms. While they exist on various platforms (including Twitter and Facebook), on Instagram they work as shown in Figure 18. Their metadata allows posts to be searchable and linked to other posts and pages. The use of tags and hashtags can be an indication of how parties use social media - for example, if they do not use them, would suggest their content is not taking advantage of the specific features of the platform.

It is interesting to note that the frequency and quantity of tags and hashtags used does not differ significantly between youth and traditional parties - but it does between more and less successful parties. The parties that were more successful in mobilising young voters used more tags, indicating an intention to make their posts searchable and link to other pages. This in itself may be indicative of a wider use of Instagram's opportunities as a platform. The most interesting findings about metadata use that emerge from looking at the specific hashtags used also point to different content trends for each of our sub-samples, reinforced by other of our features. The findings are summarised in the Table 7.

Table 7. Table summarising findings about Message Approaches of youth and more successful parties

	Youth parties	Youth and More Successful parties	More Successful parties
Features they use significantly more frequently than their counterpart(s)	Photographs, in particular representing an issue or political event	Neutral Hashtags, in particular topic hashtags	References to campaign goals and to the opposition
	Main information about an event		References to social and environmental issues
	References to young people		
Features they use significantly less frequently than their counterpart(s)	Election hashtags, portrait	References to Actions	References to voting
	Main Information about the campaign and / or election		

4.4.1 Youth Parties Focus on News and Information, Rather than Campaigning and Elections

The first pattern in our analysis, the differences between NUPES and Ensemble, mentioned the different use of campaign hashtags. This is particularly interesting when compared to the use of neutral hashtags. Youth and more successful parties used neutral hashtags (in general) more often than their counterparts, specifically using topic-related neutral hashtags. This suggests that both parties managed by young people and parties that are more successful at mobilising them make use of the thematic grouping of posts on Instagram: Users can find their posts by searching for information on the topic (search by hashtag), and they can find more information on the post's topic(s) by consulting other posts that use that hashtag (click on the hashtag(s) in the post). Neutral hashtags specifically relevant to the elections were also used more frequently by more successful parties, but less frequently by youth parties. This could indicate that traditional parties, and the more successful among them, focus on elections, while youth parties focus on issues and general party information.

This is consolidated by a visual feature that shows significant differences only between youth and traditional parties: the type of photo used in posts. Youth parties use photos more often than traditional parties. In addition, youth parties' photos were more often representative of issues and political events, while traditional parties' photos were more often portraits. This suggests that traditional parties focused visually on individuals - often candidates or important members - while youth parties focused on issues and topics. In this sense, the use of photos, as well as the use of topical hashtags, suggests that youth parties focus on news and general information. This is again consistent with what we observed on the pages of @hugodécrypte and @youthforclimatefr. Future research should further address and question those similarities between Instagram accounts of political parties, and those that provide reportedly neutral news and political information to young people.

The differences in the main information of the posts between youth and traditional parties followed the same pattern: the main information of youth parties' posts was more often related to an event than those of traditional

parties, which more often focused their content on campaign and elections information. Together with the lack of significant differences between the posts of more and less successful traditional parties, this may be an indication of youth preferences in the elections campaigning. The focus on events rather than campaign or elections information suggests that youth parties' interest, or the interest they perceive in their audiences, does not revolve around the campaign itself. These differences between youth parties and traditional parties could be influenced by the number of posts available: Youth parties had fewer posts available, especially during the campaign period, and relatively more posts from the post-campaign period, which may partly explain the focus on events, as many youth parties hold camps and events in the summer. However, it is interesting to note that youth parties were less likely to disseminate information about the elections than traditional parties. This perhaps indicates that youth parties do not believe that young people lack practical (and neutral) information about the elections.

4.4.2 More Successful Parties Focus on Campaigning, but Articulate it Around Young People'S Expectations

Inversely, while a majority of the posts of more successful parties still did not refer to campaign objectives or the opposition, these parties had at least double the proportion of posts generally or specifically referring to either than their less successful counterparts. When considering the previous difference of main information between the posts of youth and traditional parties this is particularly interesting. As discussed in the results section, there are indications that more successful parties make references to the opposition, general or specific, alongside other information, mostly alongside information about their own campaign objectives. These references to campaign objectives are likely to be the main information of the posts. This difference between youth and more successful parties suggests that while youth parties seem to focus on topical information – the parties more successful in mobilising them do not shy away from talking about their campaign and elections information. However, they do so in specific ways, notably by referring to campaign objectives and opposition.

On the other hand, references to political actions, while again reuniting youth and more successful parties, indicate a more nuance campaigning approach. Indeed, youth and more successful parties less frequently refer to political actions than their counterparts. In the posts that do refer to an action, youth parties refer more often to going to vote than to other actions. This might be in part because traditional parties, which are administered professionally, have the potential to refer to more varied actions. Indeed, they might invite their audience to click links in their bio to see content on their other platforms, or might invite them to see TV or radio interviews their candidates might have taken part in. It can still be quite surprising that youth parties have fewer invitations to alternative actions, as youth activists for instance often make use of online petition signing platforms or content on several platforms. This focus on elections in the action references of youth parties suggests that while the main information of youth parties' posts tends to be more distant from traditional campaigning and elections – when they do invite their audience to engage in a political act, it will more frequently be voting, and therefore close that distance from traditional politics. A similar pattern is present in the posts of more successful parties – who also more frequently refer to going to vote than to other action although they overall more frequently refer to all types of actions than youth parties do. For more successful parties, this consolidates the findings: while they also make more frequent use of neutral hashtags and focus on topics, when they do talk about their campaign and elections they do so in precise terms, either by referencing campaign objectives, the opposition, or the specific action of voting.

4.4.3 Different Strategies, Similar Patterns

Two final campaign features can help round out the previous findings: youth parties more often make visual and/or narrative references to the youth than traditional parties, and more successful parties more often refer to social and environmental issues than their less successful counterparts. Again, while the two groups have different strategies for their Instagram campaigns, differences emerge that suggest similar patterns when compared to their counterparts.

It is easy to understand why and how youth parties relate to young people more often than traditional parties - they are led by young party members and target other young people. However, it is particularly interesting that more successful parties refer to social and environmental issues more often than less successful parties. Social and environmental issues were observed in this study because they seem to be of particular importance to young people: many youth activist groups and social movements address these issues, and they often benefit from high levels of interest, participation and response from young people. The fact that more successful parties refer to these issues more frequently on their Instagram pages may indicate that they are trying to engage young people on the platform, if not by explicitly referring to them, by referring to issues that could activate them.

In both cases, the fact that the proportion of posts referring to these issues does not differ significantly between young and traditional parties, and that the proportion of posts referring to youth does not differ significantly between more and less successful traditional parties, suggests that different narrative strategies are indeed being

used to mobilise young people. This is analogous to what we noticed about the combination of text and visual. For these features, although strategies are expressed differently by youth and more successful parties, they follow similar patterns which are apparent only in contrast to those preferred by their respective counterparts. This underlines once more the complexity of similarities and differences in the political communications in connection with young people. These strategies and patterns were only uncovered in the study because the codebook considered inductive and deductive knowledge as well as insights from the literature, and because the sample collected allowed us to study differences between both youth and traditional parties and those more and less successful in mobilising the votes of young people. This dissertation recommends that future research in the field also consider a variety of variables and sub-samples to challenge and elucidate dichotomies of political engagement and age more extensively.

5. Conclusion

This dissertation aimed to contribute to the existing literature on young people's online political communication, the characteristics of social media campaigns and political targeting of young people. It did so by challenging the dichotomies of political engagement and age that are common in these areas of research. In particular, it proposed a combination of a priori, inductive and deductive knowledge in the creation of the codebook used. This was done with the aim of accounting for a youth-oriented social media platform, a traditionally oriented political context, and the political communication of both younger and older generations. The research considered content produced explicitly by and for young people as well as content produced by parties that are more successful in mobilising them. This means that the findings from this project can contribute to the fields of young people's online political communication strategies and the way young people can be addressed in online political communication.

This dissertation investigated whether and which characteristics of political campaigns on Instagram could be associated with younger people, or with parties more successful in mobilising them. These characteristics were divided into the categories of social media, visual and campaign features and summarised in a matrix. Three trends emerged from the features. First, that the parties within the two groups (NUPES and Ensemble) in our sample differed in their visual and narrative references to their group. Second, the visual content of both youth parties and parties that are more successful in mobilising young voters reveal similar patterns in terms of their approach to information structure and presentation. Third, that while youth and more successful parties might follow different strategies in which topics and issues they more frequently address, they follow similar trends identifiable only by considering the strategies employed by their counterparts.

This area of research could benefit from future studies that use and combine other methods. Quantitative analysis was chosen for this project because the aim was to reveal patterns that are not only relevant to the context of the 2022 French legislative elections but could also contribute to future research on social media and youth political communication. Discourse analysis, visual analysis and video analysis are all fruitful avenues in this field, as the focus should now specifically turn to qualitative analysis of political communication on social media. Interviews, focus groups and surveys of younger and older voters, as well as content creators, would enhance our understanding of political campaign strategies on social media, especially those targeted at young people. Contributions from fields such as reception studies, psychology and behavioural research would provide even more comprehensible insights into the political motivation and participation of different age groups and how they might be influenced by different media.

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Appendix A

Instagram Pages Used

Table A1. Instagram pages used in the sample

	Party	Type	Link to the page	Followers*	Verified
Ensemble	Horizons	Traditional	instagram.com/horizonsleparti/	12600	Yes
		Youth	instagram.com/horizonsjeunes/	3091	No
	Mouvement Démocrate	Traditional	instagram.com/mouvementdemocrate/	2573	Yes
		Youth	instagram.com/j_democrates/	920	No
	(formerly La République en Marche)	Traditional	instagram.com/enmarchefr/	84900	Yes
		Youth	instagram.com/jeunesmacron/	11000	Yes
NUPES	Europe	Traditional	instagram.com/eelvfr/	12400	No
	Ecologie Les Verts	Youth	instagram.com/jeunesecologistes/	3269	No

Génération	Traditional	instagram.com/generationslemvt/	7238	Yes
	Youth	instagram.com/lesjeunesg/	1492	No
La France Insoumise	Traditional	instagram.com/franceinsoumise/	38000	Yes
	Youth	instagram.com/lesjeunesinsoumis.es/	7146	No
NUPES (group)	Traditional	instagram.com/nupes_2022/	35000	Yes
	Youth	instagram.com/jeunesnupes/	2408	No
Parti Communiste Français	Traditional	instagram.com/pcfparticomunistefrançais /	12700	Yes
	Youth	instagram.com/_mjcf/	4768	No
Parti Socialiste	Traditional	instagram.com/partisocialiste/	15700	Yes
	Youth	N/A	N/A	N/A
Les Républicains	Traditional	instagram.com/lesrepublicains/	50300	Yes
	Youth	instagram.com/lesjeunesrepublicains/	5045	No
Rassemblement National	Traditional	instagram.com/reconquete_officiel/	35400	Yes
	Youth	instagram.com/jeunesmarine_/	7080	No
Other Reconquête	Traditional	instagram.com/rassemblementnational_fr/	36200	Yes
	Youth	instagram.com/generation_zemmour/	42100	No

* Followers as of August 1st 2022

Appendix B

Instagram Terms and Conditions

Retrieved from <https://help.instagram.com/519522125107875>

The Privacy Policy answers the following questions in the ‘Controlling Your Visibility’ section ([https://help.instagram.com/116024195217477/?helpref=hc_fnav&bc\[0\]=Instagram%20Help&bc\[1\]=Privacy%20and%20Safety%20Center](https://help.instagram.com/116024195217477/?helpref=hc_fnav&bc[0]=Instagram%20Help&bc[1]=Privacy%20and%20Safety%20Center)):

1. Setting Your Photos and Videos to Private
 - How do I set my Instagram account to private so that only approved followers can see what I share?
 - How do I turn off my activity status on Instagram?
2. About Privacy on Instagram
 - Who can see my private Instagram post if I add a hashtag?
 - Who can see when I've liked a photo, or when someone's liked my photo on Instagram?
 - Are my comments and mentions on Instagram hidden?
 - What happens if I share my Instagram post to another social network?
 - How do I remove a follower on Instagram?
 - People are getting suggestions to follow other people after they follow me on Instagram. How do I turn this off?

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