



Revista Moldovenească de Drept Internațional și Relații Internaționale /
Moldavian Journal of International Law and International Relations /
Молдавский журнал международного права и международных отношений

2025, Issue 2, Volume 20, Pages 138-149.

ISSN 1857-1999 EISSN 2345-1963

Submitted: 15.02.2025 | Reviewed 12.03.2025 | Accepted: 20.05.2025 | Published: 01.07.2025

<https://doi.org/10.61753/1857-1999/2345-1963/2025.20-2.12>

TRIBUNA TÎNĂRULUI CERCETĂTOR
THE TRIBUNE OF YOUNG SCIENTISTS
ТРИБУНА МОЛОДЫХ УЧЕНЫХ

**POLITICS AND SELF-PRESENTATION: HOW WOMEN IN POLITICS
USE SOCIAL MEDIA TO BUILD PUBLIC IMAGE**

**ПОЛИТИКА И САМОПРЕЗЕНТАЦИЯ: КАК ЖЕНЩИНЫ-ПОЛИТИКИ
ИСПОЛЬЗУЮТ СОЦИАЛЬНЫЕ СЕТИ ДЛЯ СОЗДАНИЯ
ОБЩЕСТВЕННОГО ИМИДЖА**

**POLITICĂ ȘI AUTOPRESENTARE: CUM FOLOSESC FEMEILE DIN POLITICĂ
REȚELE SOCIALE PENTRU A FORMA IMAGINEA PUBLICĂ**

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ABSTRACT:

**POLITICS AND SELF-PRESENTATION: HOW WOMEN IN POLITICS
USE SOCIAL MEDIA TO BUILD PUBLIC IMAGE**

Social media has become an integral part of political communication, significantly influencing how politicians shape their public image. This article explores how women in politics use digital platforms for self-presentation and the formation of their identity in the public eye. It analyzes the strategies female politicians employ in content creation, voter engagement, and building authenticity in the online space.

Special attention is given to the differences in how women and men are presented in politics, the challenges women face in establishing credibility, and the impact of gender stereotypes on their online presence. The study is based on an analysis of selected case studies and provides insight into how digital self-presentation affects the political success of women.

Keywords: politics, self-presentation, social media, branding, public image

JEL Classification: D83; F50; J38

Universal Decimal Classification: 061.215-055.2; 32:316.37; 242.7; 32:316.65

<https://doi.org/10.61753/1857-1999/2345-1963/2025.20-2.12>

REZUMAT:

**POLITICĂ ȘI AUTOPRESENTARE: CUM FOLOSESC FEMEILE
DIN POLITICĂ REȚELE SOCIALE PENTRU A FORMA IMAGINEA PUBLICĂ**

Rețelele sociale au devenit o parte integrantă a comunicării politice, influențând în mod semnificativ modul în care politicienii își modelează imaginea publică. Acest articol explorează modul în care femeile

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din politică folosesc platformele digitale pentru autoprezentarea și formarea identității lor în ochii publicului. Acesta analizează strategiile pe care politicienii le folosesc în crearea de conținut, implicarea alegătorilor și construirea autenticității în spațiul online.

O atenție specială este acordată diferențelor în modul în care femeile și bărbații sunt prezentați în politică, provocărilor cu care se confruntă femeile în stabilirea credibilității și impactului stereotipurilor de gen asupra prezenței lor online. Studiul se bazează pe o analiză a unor studii de caz selectate și oferă o perspectivă asupra modului în care autoprezentarea digitală afectează succesul politic al femeilor.

Cuvinte cheie: politică, autoprezentare, social media, branding, imagine publică.

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РЕЗЮМЕ:

**ПОЛИТИКА И САМОПРЕЗЕНТАЦИЯ:
КАК ЖЕНЩИНЫ В ПОЛИТИКЕ ИСПОЛЬЗУЮТ СОЦИАЛЬНЫЕ СЕТИ ДЛЯ
СОЗДАНИЯ ОБЩЕСТВЕННОГО ИМИДЖА**

Социальные сети стали неотъемлемой частью политической коммуникации, существенно влияя на то, как политики формируют свой публичный имидж. В этой статье рассматривается, как женщины в политике используют цифровые платформы для самопрезентации и формирования своей идентичности в глазах общественности. Анализируются стратегии, которые женщины-политики используют для создания контента, вовлечения избирателей и создания аутентичности в онлайн-пространстве.

Особое внимание уделяется различиям в том, как женщины и мужчины представлены в политике, проблемам, с которыми женщины сталкиваются при завоевании доверия, и влиянию гендерных стереотипов на их присутствие в сети. Исследование основано на анализе выбранных тематических исследований и дает представление о том, как цифровая самопрезентация влияет на политический успех женщин.

Ключевые слова: политика, самопрезентация, социальные сети, брендинг, публичный имидж.

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INTRODUCTION

Politics is no longer solely about programs, rhetoric, or traditional campaigns – nowadays, personal branding plays a key role in the online space. Social media has become a tool through which politicians reach voters, shape their public image, and build relationships with their audience. While male politicians often derive legitimacy from expertise and authority, women in politics face specific challenges. Besides establishing credibility, they must also contend with gender stereotypes that frequently reduce them to issues of appearance, empathy, or “soft” topics.

This article focuses on how female politicians use social media for self-presentation, what strategies they choose when building their public identity, and what barriers they must overcome. We analyze selected case studies that address this issue and examine the extent to which the digital space allows women in politics to communicate more effectively with voters. At the same time, we reflect on whether the online environment genuinely opens up opportunities for greater visibility and legitimation of their position or, on the contrary, confines them within the frameworks of gender expectations, from which it is difficult to break free.

1 LITERATURE REVIEW

The issue of using social media to build political image and personal brands has been addressed by several authors who contribute to understanding the dynamics between the digital space, political marketing, and women politicians. In our article, we present selected works that are

relevant to understanding this issue and serve as a basis for our research. These works have provided us with various perspectives on how women in politics utilize social media to shape their public image and how this process is influenced by factors such as gender bias and visual communication.

Authors like Aro and Suomi (2024) examine the relationship between positive and negative perceptions of women's personal political brands. They focus on the dynamics between “love” and “hate” towards political figures, identifying how this phenomenon affects their ability to gain public support. The significance of this study lies in its demonstration of the challenges women face when creating and maintaining their political image.

Similarly, Asmariyanaki (2017) examines personalized communication by politicians and its effects on voter decision-making. Her research focuses on political branding and how politicians' communication can influence their ability to persuade voters and shape electoral choices. This work contributes to understanding how politicians – particularly women – use personal stories and communication on social media to build trust and gain voter support.

Another important study that focuses on the use of social media by women in politics is the work of Brands, Kuikemeier, and Trilling (2023), who investigate how female politicians present their personality on Instagram, focusing on visual elements and the use of masculine and feminine themes in politics. This research provides valuable insights into how women balance traditional gender norms with the demands of presenting a strong political image, thereby contributing to the understanding of the challenges faced by women's political branding on social media.

A significant contribution to this topic is also made by Farkas and Bene (2020), who explore visual political communication on social media and its impact on public perception. The authors examine how political communication through visual strategies influences the perception of politicians and their ability to communicate political ideals effectively. This work also addresses how these strategies affect voter decision-making and the visibility of politicians in the digital space.

An essential perspective is offered by Gakahu (2024), who focuses on the self-presentation of women in politics in Kenya, specifically how female political candidates use social media to increase visibility and build their personal image. This research provides insights into how different political and cultural environments shape the way women use social media to enhance their position in politics, contributing to the understanding of global trends in political branding.

Significant attention is also paid to the study by Golovchenko, Stanczak, Adler-Nissen, Wangen, and Augenstein (2023), who investigate gender biases in digital diplomacy, especially on social media. They analyze how women – particularly female diplomats – face online discrimination and reduced reach compared to their male colleagues. This research offers important findings on the challenges faced by the public image of women in the political sphere within the digital environment.

It is important to emphasize that our article is based on a broader range of authorities, and in addition to the mentioned studies, we also consider other important contributions that examine various aspects of political branding, digital diplomacy, and gender biases in the online environment. These studies have provided us with valuable tools to analyze how social media changes political communication and how women in politics navigate the challenges associated with their public image.

2 POLITICAL PERSONALIZATION THROUGH VISUALS: SOCIAL MEDIA AS A COMMUNICATION TOOL

Visual communication plays an increasingly important role in political communication, especially in the context of social media. As pointed out by Farkas and Bene (2020), social media has become a key tool for politicians to express their personal image and share political messages. Politicians are no longer merely representatives of their political parties but are increasingly portrayed as individual personalities. This process leads to the personalization of political communication, where emphasis is placed on the personal identity of politicians, breaking away from the traditional focus on political parties and ideologies. Visuals on social media platforms like Instagram and Facebook have become essential tools to support personalization and present

politicians in a personal light. Farkas and Bene (2020) emphasize that visuals on these platforms not only illustrate political texts but also serve to express personal aspects of politicians. In this way, strong, personal images of politicians are created, supporting the personalization process, which is becoming an increasingly significant element in modern democratic politics. Personalization, as a process of highlighting individual politicians at the expense of political parties, is particularly evident on platforms like Facebook and Instagram. On these social media, politicians can directly communicate with their voters and use visuals to support this interaction. Visuals have become an integral part of politics, not only in professional, formal contexts but also in informal, personal depictions of politicians. Farkas and Bene (2020) also point out differences between individual social platforms and their communication norms. On Facebook, visuals are often supplemented with text that provides context or political messages, allowing politicians to present formal political ideologies. On the other hand, Instagram is a platform where visual aspects of communication dominate, focusing more on personal and informal depictions of politicians, thereby promoting their human and individual image. This difference between platforms shows how visual political communication can adapt to various demographic groups and communication norms. Using visual means on these platforms has a significant impact on shaping the public image of politicians and their relationship with voters, as it allows flexible adaptation to the needs and expectations of different target groups (Farkas - Bene, 2020).

3 SELF-PRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN POLITICS AND ITS IMPACT ON ELECTORAL PREFERENCES

Research findings indicate that female politicians running for legislative positions must pay great attention to their presentation before voters to achieve electoral success. Nowadays, relying solely on professional and political skills is no longer sufficient. Female politicians must actively promote their personalities and build a positive image in the eyes of the general public.

This goal is achieved through various communication tools such as public speeches, debates, or personal meetings, which allow them to establish direct contact with voters and gain their support. An essential factor is gaining support from new voters, who differ from traditional voters not only in their attitudes but also in their critical and independent thinking, leading them to support political change. The self-presentation of women in politics must focus not only on their political expertise but also on creating a credible and personal image that resonates with this dynamic group of voters. For effective communication, it is crucial that female politicians recognize their strengths, especially in the area of political communication. They must be able to convince voters with a high-quality and trustworthy speech that reflects their abilities, ethical values, and moral principles. For new voters, it is not only important what the politician says but also how they present themselves in public. Charisma, authenticity, and the ability to create a personal connection with voters are key factors for success in political campaigns. The self-presentation of women in politics is often shaped by two main motives. The first motive is self-promotion, where female politicians actively present their strengths and positive qualities. This approach is used to create the image of an inspiring and leading personality willing to share their visions and opinions with the public. This motive is particularly important in gaining the support of new voters who perceive female politicians as individuals with the potential for positive change. The second motive is self-verification, where female politicians accept their role as public figures with clear charisma intended to inspire others. This approach allows them to create an authentic and appealing image, even if this image may not always fully correspond to their true personality. This type of self-presentation is important when female politicians strive to build a strong and stable image that distinguishes them from the competition. A significant factor in the success of women in politics is the ability to present themselves as charismatic and inspiring personalities. Charisma and inspiration become decisive factors in shaping electoral decision-making, especially among new voters who make choices based on personal impressions and trust in the candidate. Therefore, it is essential for female politicians not only to communicate their political views but also to create an image that resonates on an emotional level with new voters. This way of self-presentation has a significant impact on the electoral preferences of women and shows how important the right image presented to the public is. In contemporary political campaigns, where communication and image-

building are key elements, the self-presentation of political personalities plays a fundamental role in their success (Mardhiah et al., 2023).

4 VISUAL COMMUNICATION AND SELF-PRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN POLITICS IN THE DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT

In political communication, visual tools have become an increasingly important means for constructing political images and strengthening political identity. This trend has been particularly noticeable in recent years, especially on digital platforms, where political entities use visual elements to effectively convey their messages to the public. An analysis of the use of visual strategies in political campaigns reveals a complex relationship between cultural norms, gender roles, and political intentions. In the case of women politicians, this relationship takes on a specific character, as women face not only political challenges but also strict expectations that are reflected in their public self-presentation.

A study focusing on the visual communication of women politicians in Kenya during the August 2022 campaigns provides a concrete view of how these women engage in the digital environment and use visual signifiers to shape their political image. In this way, they try to utilize digital platforms, such as Facebook, as tools to bypass traditional media, which often stereotype their political roles and diminish their political authority.

4.1 Visual Communication as a Tool for Political Self-Presentation

Political images have become an integral part of modern political campaigns. In this process, visual communication is used as a tool to construct and convey the public image of political leaders, with visual elements being employed to express values, political goals, and personal identity. This process is especially significant in the case of women, who face specific challenges within the political space, where their political abilities are often underestimated, and their public presentation is strongly influenced by established gender norms. The study emphasizes that women politicians, who face media portrayals often shaped by stereotypes and simplified ideas about "female" politics, turn to digital platforms to effectively spread political messages. These platforms offer them an opportunity to construct and control their political image without interference from traditional media, which may overemphasize their appearance or personal lives at the expense of their political intentions (Gakahu, 2024).

4.2 Self-Presentation of Women in the Digital Environment

The use of digital platforms, particularly social media, for self-presentation is a key tool for women politicians to overcome traditional gender limitations and shape their political image in the eyes of the public. Social media provides space for direct interaction with voters and allows female politicians to create and modify their public images according to their own visions. This process requires not only a political strategy but also the ability to perceive and utilize cultural and societal norms that influence the perception of political leaders. For women, this process is particularly challenging, as they must balance the demand to display both authority and approachability while also avoiding simplified ideas about how "female" politics should look. Digital platforms thus allow women as political actors to create their own space for shaping and disseminating their political image without the constraints of traditional media, which often portray female politicians in a negative or oversimplified light. These platforms have become spaces where they can directly communicate with the public and effectively build their political positions (Gakahu, 2024).

4.3 The Use of Visual Strategies and Stereotypes in Self-Presentation

The analysis of visual strategies shows that women politicians in the digital environment often use gender stereotypes, either confirming them or consciously placing themselves in conflict with them. Some women politicians choose to embrace stereotypes that help them gain public support and reduce the risk of marginalization. On the other hand, there are women who consciously break these stereotypes in an attempt to redefine their political image. This process also involves conscious choices in clothing, facial expressions, or posture, which carry political significance. For example, women who choose to present themselves in "masculine" ways (such as wearing strict clothing or adopting an authoritative posture) seek to overcome traditional notions of how a woman in politics should behave (Gakahu, 2024).

This aspect of visual self-presentation proves to be key in political communication, as clothing and facial expressions can significantly influence the public's perception of female politicians. As indicated by Van der Pas and Aaldering (2020), clothing in the political environment is often subject to evaluation, with different clothing choices interpreted as expressions of political beliefs or as symbols of political traits perceived by the public. In this way, women politicians use visual strategies to construct an image that aligns with their political intentions while also responding to cultural and societal expectations (Gakahu, 2024).

5 VISUAL PRESENTATION OF POLITICAL FIGURES AND ITS IMPACT ON ENGAGEMENT ON SOCIAL MEDIA

In the context of social media, it is clear that visual presentation has a fundamental impact on interaction with political posts. The first factor that proved to be crucial is the presence of the politician in the image. When a politician is clearly visible in the photograph, social media users react more positively, resulting in more likes and comments. This factor emphasizes the importance of visual presence in political communication, as posts without a politician do not achieve the same level of engagement. Another significant finding is that posts featuring a politician alone generate more interest than those where the politician is photographed with other people. This suggests that individual presentation, where the politician is clearly identifiable, is more effective in increasing interaction with the audience. Interactions with other people in posts, such as greetings or group photos, do not have the same impact on engagement, and the results suggest that posts containing such interactions received fewer likes. This factor may reflect the preferences of Instagram users, who primarily respond to individual, directly communicated images of politicians. An interesting aspect is also that the way a politician expresses themselves through their facial expression, whether smiling or appearing serious, does not have a significant effect on engagement on Instagram. Nevertheless, it has been shown that photographs in which the politician is clearly visible, regardless of their facial expression, lead to higher interaction rates compared to images where they are not visible (Brands et al., 2023).

5.1 Gender Differences in Engagement

The results of the analysis show that gender differences play a significant role in the evaluation of visual presentation of politicians. Female politicians generally received a higher level of engagement when they were clearly visible in the image. This trend highlights the fact that female politicians may be perceived as "more attractive" or "more interesting" in the context of visual communication, which can increase their visibility and appeal in the eyes of the public. However, it is also important to note that women received more likes when they appeared in full-body photographs or longer shots, compared to men who did not receive the same type of response to these visual formats. Similarly, unlike men, women politicians received more interaction when depicted in photographs where they were distanced from other people. This factor suggests that the visual independence of women may be perceived as positive and attractive, which increases interest in their posts (Brands et al., 2023).

5.2 Political Topics and Their Impact on Engagement

Regarding political topics, it is clear that issues related to rights, family, and children are more frequently associated with posts by female politicians. In contrast, men tend to focus more on masculine topics such as foreign affairs or military defense. These gender differences in topics are also reflected in the level of interaction—posts related to family shared by women generate more comments. On the other hand, topics such as environmental protection or art lead to less engagement from users. An interesting finding is that the consideration of political topics as a whole does not always have a clear impact on increased interaction with posts. Only certain topics, such as rights or the environment, provoke more discussions among users. Topics related to art, as well as some masculine topics, lead to a decrease in likes and comments (Brands et al., 2023).

5.3 Gender Differences in Discussions

In terms of discussions among Instagram users, it was found that female politicians generate more discussions on topics traditionally considered masculine (e.g., foreign affairs or national security). This effect suggests that female politicians may be perceived as more competent or

relevant in these areas, leading to increased discussion compared to male politicians (Brands et al., 2023).

This research provided valuable insights into how the visual presentation of political figures and the choice of political topics influence engagement on social media. The results suggest that for politicians who want to effectively communicate with their audience on platforms such as Instagram, it is important not only what they say but also how they are portrayed and which topics they choose to share. Additionally, gender differences in engagement and discussions indicate that visual communication and political topics may have different effects on men and women, suggesting the need to adapt political strategies on social media platforms (Brands et al., 2023).

6 ANALYSIS OF PERSONAL BRANDING OF WOMEN IN POLITICS: A CASE STUDY OF THREE INDONESIAN FEMALE BUREAUCRATS

In this chapter, we focus on how women in politics, specifically three prominent Indonesian female bureaucrats – Sri Mulyani, Retno Marsudi, and Denni Puspa Purbasari – use personal branding to create and strengthen their public image. This process is analyzed through a feminist perspective, which examines linguistic and discursive practices in the media to reveal how these politicians shape their public image as strong and competent leaders. Feminist analysis shows that these women not only fight against stereotypes associated with women's roles in politics but also actively work to establish themselves as strong and respected figures in society. Through specific linguistic tools, such as metaphors, figurative expressions, and communication styles, these politicians build a public image of competence, humility, and adaptability to various political and social challenges. These self-presentation techniques contribute to shaping their personal branding as leaders who can inspire other women. At the level of words, it is clear that these politicians use language strategically to emphasize their expertise and abilities. The choice of words and phrases serves as a tool to express their competence and credibility in their professional environment. At the level of phrases and sentences, it is evident that these women in politics communicate in a way that not only reflects their professional skills but also their ability to adapt to various political and social challenges. Feminist discourse analysis shows that media representations of these women not only portray them as strong and respected personalities but also highlight their ability to challenge traditional views of women in politics. These women use discursive techniques that emphasize their ability to act independently and autonomously, thus challenging patriarchal norms and stereotypes. The research findings show that the personal branding of these women in politics consists of a strong connection between their professional and personal image, which includes stories about their history, how they perceive themselves in society, how they present their careers (including their aesthetic and moral aspects), and how they use language to express their characters. This means that these women successfully shape their image not only through media representations but also through strategic discursive practices that portray them as inspirational figures in politics (Widawarti - Putra, 2020).

In conclusion, feminist analysis of personal branding in women in politics, as shown by the case of these three Indonesian female bureaucrats, demonstrates how women can use linguistic and discursive tools to strengthen their position in politics and build a positive public image. This process of shaping and strengthening a public image is crucial to understanding the dynamics women in politics face when establishing their position in society.

7 CONFRONTING GENDER STEREOTYPES: HOW WOMEN IN POLITICS SHAPE THEIR PUBLIC IMAGE

When a woman decides to run for a political office, she faces not only the challenges associated with political competition but also the pressure of gender stereotypes, which frequently emerge during political campaigns and influence the perception of the candidate. These stereotypes do not disappear; on the contrary, they are often amplified, thereby increasing their impact on the public image of women in politics. Most voters, during elections, do not seek out details about the candidates but instead rely on shortcuts, such as political affiliation, experience, and the gender of the candidate. Since men and women are associated with different values, stereotypes shape how voters perceive candidates, even though not every individual candidate conforms to these assumptions. Women are often viewed through qualities associated with the "typical woman,"

such as empathy, nurturing, and morality. In contrast, men are perceived as stronger, more decisive, and better equipped to handle crises—qualities that are linked to the ideal leader. This disparity in candidate evaluation means that women are often seen as less competent in areas regarded as "male domains," such as economics, defense, or law, while women's traits are associated with characteristics that are not typically considered leadership qualities. For example, women are often regarded as more moral, which is a positive trait, but in political campaigns, it is less valued than qualities like decisiveness and crisis management ability. These stereotypes also influence how women are perceived during elections. In historical periods, such as after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, when voters favored candidates embodying strong, masculine values like courage and crisis management, the number of women in political positions decreased, as these values were seen as less relevant for women. Conversely, when elections focus on issues such as healthcare or education—issues traditionally associated with "women's concerns"—women may have a better chance of success. However, they still face barriers in areas considered male-dominated. Furthermore, women in political campaigns encounter the issue of double standards. This paradox lies in the expectation that women exhibit feminine traits such as empathy, while at the same time, when they demonstrate masculine qualities such as ambition, independence, or decisiveness, they are criticized. Women who display these masculine traits are often labeled as aggressive, cold, or impersonal, which significantly affects their public image. This double standard frequently leads to women in politics being perceived as rigid and unpopular, which can significantly diminish their chances of success in campaigns. A notable example is Hillary Clinton, who was criticized for her perceived coldness and lack of emotion, negatively affecting her popularity. Gender pressure is also reflected in the specific ways candidates present themselves in campaigns. Male candidates often appear in informal clothing, sometimes with their children, thus appearing more relatable and human to voters. In contrast, women typically present themselves in more formal attire, which leads to them being viewed as more professional. Moreover, women are more likely to emphasize their children in order to reinforce family values, while men may highlight male-dominated activities such as sports or shooting. This difference in presentation illustrates how women in politics must navigate the pressure to balance societal gender expectations with personal authenticity. Women in politics often find themselves in a challenging position, where they must push forward their ambitions and political goals while simultaneously considering societal expectations tied to their gender roles. In other words, they face challenges not only in the political sphere but also regarding the traits and behaviors expected of them based on their gender. Despite being as competent and qualified as their male counterparts, these gender stereotypes can prevent women from achieving the same political successes, which in turn affects how they build and manage their political campaigns (Marckres, 2023).

A study focused on the effectiveness of personalized communication in political campaigns revealed that a high level of personalization can significantly influence voters' attitudes and, in turn, their electoral decisions. The research specifically examined how politicians, by sharing personal information and emotional content, shape public opinion and enhance their credibility. The findings suggest that the more personal the communicated content, the greater the likelihood that voters will develop a positive attitude towards the politician, which subsequently increases their chances of winning the election. An interesting aspect of this study was the gender perspective on personalized communication. The results showed that respondents did not rate female politicians and male politicians differently in terms of credibility, nor did they perceive a significant difference in their perceptions based on gender. This finding is a positive signal, as politics remains a male-dominated sector where women have historically faced gender stereotypes. However, female politicians, such as Hillary Clinton, have had to face specific challenges in building their personal brand and convincing the public of their competence. Hillary Clinton, as the first woman to run for the U.S. presidency, had to navigate societal expectations regarding her ability to exhibit strength while also demonstrating empathy. Unlike male politicians, who are often allowed to be dominant and decisive, women face the pressure to appear both accessible and empathetic. Clinton had to carefully balance these expectations, as excessive emotionality could undermine her image as a competent leader, while aloofness could make her less appealing to

voters. This balance between professionalism and authenticity was crucial in her online self-presentation. Despite these challenges, the study's results showed that gender stereotypes in the perception of politicians are not as strong as previously assumed. Although there are expectations regarding female candidates, particularly their ability to be both strong and accessible, the study found no significant differences in the perceived credibility or evaluation of male politicians and female politicians based on gender. This fact is a positive indicator that society is evolving, and gender stereotypes that women in politics have historically faced are gradually diminishing. Nevertheless, for women in politics, it remains essential to carefully manage their personal brand and balance the sharing of personal information. While personalized communication is a powerful tool for enhancing credibility and influencing public perception, women must avoid excessive disclosure that could diminish their perceived competence. Personalized communication thus provides an opportunity to influence public opinion and electoral preferences, but it requires a sensitive approach that takes into account the specific challenges female politicians face when building their online brands (Asmariyani, 2017).

Female politicians are evaluated on social media not only based on their political positions and actions but also according to their appearance, behavior, and personal lives. Research shows that female politicians face a higher level of negative reactions on social media compared to their male counterparts. These reactions often include sexist remarks, questioning their competence, and even personal attacks. A typical example is when women in politics are referred to in diminishing terms—such as "girls" or "daughters of prominent men"—implicitly suggesting that their presence in politics is more a result of their family background than their own abilities. Social media also creates pressure for women to carefully balance their presentation—they must be sufficiently competent and authoritative but cannot afford to appear "too tough" or "unfeminine." If a female politician tries to present herself as a regular, friendly person, she risks not being taken seriously. On the other hand, if she emphasizes her professionalism and political skills, she may be perceived as "cold" or "unapproachable." These gender biases cause women in politics to be much more strategic in their self-presentation on social media than their male colleagues. Their public image is scrutinized not only by the media but also by the general public, who often judge them through the lens of gender stereotypes. Despite these challenges, social media remains an important tool for female politicians, allowing them to bypass traditional media and directly engage with voters in their own way. A prime example of gender biases in political self-presentation is former Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin. During her tenure, she faced criticism for social media posts depicting her personal life, including informal moments such as her attendance at a private party. While her supporters viewed these images as a sign of authenticity and a modern approach to politics, critics interpreted them as inappropriate behavior for a head of state. This case illustrates the double standard often applied to female politicians—while men in similar situations are not judged so harshly, women are expected to maintain a "dignified" and "serious" image. These gender biases cause women in politics to think much more strategically about their self-presentation on social media than their male counterparts (Aro - Suomi, 2024).

Although the number of women in political positions has been increasing in recent years, they remain significantly underrepresented in high-ranking political offices. This phenomenon, referred to as the "political gender gap," highlights the persistent inequality between men and women in politics, despite the growing perception of gender equality as an ideal. Research has found that while the public increasingly supports gender equality, in reality, it still prefers men over women for leadership roles. This issue is further exacerbated in the online environment, where women face specific biases. Gender biases against female politicians are particularly visible on social media, where their evaluation often focuses on personal traits such as appearance, emotions, or relationships with men, unlike male politicians who are discussed primarily in terms of their political abilities and professional qualities. For example, an analysis of comments on the Reddit platform revealed that women in politics are more often associated with personal aspects of their lives, which reinforces traditional gender stereotypes. In contrast, men are perceived as competent leaders, even when their appearance or family life is not mentioned. An interesting aspect of gender bias is the so-called benevolent sexism, which includes positive yet patronizing stereotypes

about women. This type of sexism does not always manifest directly in politics but can appear in the form of unintentional belittling of women, such as the spread of misinformation about public female figures. Benevolent sexism, therefore, does not create open opposition but instead undermines trust in the competence of female politicians through less overt yet equally harmful language and expressions. In addition to linguistic indicators that show how women and men in politics are perceived differently, studies have also focused on other elements of discourse, such as the length of texts, tone, and form of expression. These factors suggest that public discourse on social media still contains persistent gender biases that limit women's ability to present themselves as competent and authoritative figures. These findings are confirmed in analyses of specific discussions on subreddits, where female politicians faced different types of comments than their male counterparts. In the case of women, the discussion often focused on their appearance, personal life, or family relationships, while the discussion about men was more concentrated on their professional abilities and political views. These differences in the way they are evaluated reflect deep-rooted gender stereotypes still present in political discourse and show that women in politics are still assessed through the lens of gender expectations and norms (Marjanovic et al., 2022).

The research conducted by Golovchenko, Stanczak, Adler-Nissen, Wangen, and Augenstein (2023) focused on analyzing gender biases against female diplomats on social media, specifically on Twitter. The aim of the study was to determine whether female diplomats faced a higher proportion of negativity, whether they were addressed with gendered language, and whether they were less visible compared to their male counterparts. The authors employed advanced analytical methods, such as sentiment analysis, detection of gendered language, and natural language processing (NLP) technology, to reveal how female diplomats are perceived and what biases affect them.

The researchers reached several key findings:

Negativity: Female diplomats did not encounter a higher degree of negativity compared to male diplomats, which was surprising as it was expected that they would more frequently be the target of derogatory or aggressive comments;

Gendered Language: While there was a slight difference in the use of gendered language (e.g., referring to female diplomats as "emotional" or "weaker"), this difference was not as pronounced as might have been expected;

Online Visibility: The main and most significant finding was that female diplomats faced a notable lack of online visibility. They received fewer retweets and had a lower level of public interaction compared to their male colleagues. This lack of visibility represents a serious issue because, on social media platforms like Twitter, visibility is crucial for effective public diplomacy and image building;

The authors of the study pointed out that this type of bias, which is mainly reflected in the insufficient visibility of women on social media, is subtle but equally significant. Visibility on social media is crucial for interactions with the public and influences diplomats' ability to perform their roles in international politics. These findings suggest that gender biases not only affect the public perception of women in diplomacy but can also have practical consequences on their careers and influence on foreign policy. The study also revealed the presence of an "online glass ceiling," indicating that even women in high-ranking diplomatic positions faced additional barriers in achieving high levels of visibility and public interaction. These barriers persist even when women in diplomacy have achieved success. The findings of this research have important implications for addressing gender inequality in digital diplomacy and supporting higher representation of women in this field (Golovchenko et al., 2023).

CONCLUSION

Based on the review of relevant literature and secondary research, we can conclude that women in politics effectively use social media as a tool to build and present their public image, as these platforms allow them to overcome traditional gender barriers in political discourse. Findings from various studies show that social media provides women with a unique opportunity for direct and personal communication with voters, thereby opening up space to create an image that is authentic,

approachable, and dynamic. This aspect is especially important in a context where traditional media still reproduce gender stereotypes, which often disadvantage women in politics. One key aspect is that women in politics must face specific challenges in the form of gender biases, which inevitably also reflect in the online environment. In the current political discourse, women's appearance and personal presentation are more frequently evaluated than their political decisions and performance, creating unequal conditions compared to men, who are primarily assessed based on their political skills. These gender norms are also reflected in the way women use visual communication and interactive tools on social media to build their personal brand. This approach allows women to create stronger relationships with voters, particularly in younger demographic groups, who prefer personal and authentic communication with political leaders.

Based on the findings obtained through the analysis of existing research, we can argue that female politicians are constantly required to balance between maintaining personal authenticity and adapting to the dynamics of the online space, which is strongly influenced by gender expectations. Social media has proven to be a tool that allows women in politics to express their individuality while also balancing the pressure associated with conventional expectations for female political leaders. Despite the persistent challenges posed by gender stereotypes, social media has become an important tool for shaping and maintaining the public image of women in politics, which is not only authentic but also politically effective.

In conclusion, we can state that the success of women in politics on social media depends on their ability to effectively use visual communication and authentic interaction that resonates with voters. This process requires not only adaptation to the digital ecosystem but also the critical handling of gender biases that still persist in political communication. Social media thus represents an ambivalent yet necessary space for women in politics, where they can gain the visibility and support they need while simultaneously building their political identity in line with modern voter expectations. This conclusion is based on secondary research and the analysis of available literature, which has provided valuable insights into how women use social media in political communication.

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