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**In the Public Eye:
Analysis of Joe Biden's
Visual Communication
During His First 100
Days of Presidency**

Diplomová práce

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Abstrakt

Tato diplomová práce zkoumá vizuální komunikaci Joe Bidena během prvních 100 dnů jeho prezidentství. První část práce je věnována konceptualizaci vizuální komunikace a historii její výzkumu v marketingu a politice. Dále je tento koncept aplikován ve smíšeném výzkumu se třemi fázemi: kvalitativní, kvantitativní a komparativní. První identifikuje témata použitá v Bidenově komunikaci na sociálních sítích. Druhá popisuje statistiku použití těchto témat, a třetí porovnává výsledky mé studie s podobným výzkumem Stranda a Schilla (2019), věnovaným strategii Donalda Trumpa.

Abstract

This thesis analyzes Joe Biden's visual communication during his first 100 days of presidency. First, I explore the concept of visual communication and its history from marketing to politics. Then, I apply it in a study with a mixed research design that is done in three phases: qualitative, quantitative, and comparative. The first identifies themes used in Joe Biden's social media imagery. The second determines the frequency with which themes were used, and the third juxtaposes the results of my study to the similar research of Donald Trump's strategy by Strand and Schill (2019).

Čestné prohlášení

Prohlašuji, že jsem diplomovou práci na téma **In the Public Eye: Analysis of Joe Biden's Visual Communication During His First 100 Days of Presidency** zpracovala sama. Veškeré prameny a zdroje informací, které jsem použila k sepsání této práce, byly citovány v textu a jsou uvedeny v seznamu použitých pramenů a literatury.

V Praze 6. ledna 2022

.....
Aleksandra Alekseeva

Poděkování

Ráda bych na tomto místě poděkovala Mgr. Ottu Eiblovi, Ph.D., jehož dlouhodobé akademické působení bylo jedním z důležitých zdrojů mé inspirace. Děkuji mu tak za jeho cenné komentáře a nápady, bez nichž by tato práce nejspíše nevznikla.

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1 Introduction

When Joe Biden was inaugurated on January 20, 2021, the first thing he tweeted as @POTUS was exactly on that day. The tweet said: “There is no time to waste when it comes to tackling the crises we face. That's why today, I am heading to the Oval Office to get right to work delivering bold action and immediate relief for American families.” With this short statement Biden aimed to reach a wide range of people and to establish one big goal for his presidency. Firstly, he wanted to reassure people who are devastated by the situation left by Trump. Secondly, the message had to reach citizens who are not pleased with politics as a whole. Another important part of the tweet is Biden’s aim to act immediately and make changes, which can be seen as a motto for the beginning of his presidency. Last, but not least, Biden writes about families - points out his main group of interest and indicates that certain values will be protected during his presidency. This tweet contained only two sentences but had several goals – to start Biden’s presidency correctly, make a right impression and to reach as many people as possible. Small tweets like this one can hold a lot of power and make a big impact on the perception of the establishment in society.

But however strong our words are, there is something that can hold even more power, while being more concise and straightforward than words, and that is imagery. Visual communication is key, if not the most important part of any communication on social media. Sight is a big part of human reasoning - images were there to educate, to tell stories, to make an important message when humanity was not able to use writing for these purposes. Now, when we have all the communicating tools imaginable, imagery didn’t lose its importance, quite the reverse. Social media, television, streaming services, cinema, art - almost everything there is to entertain works with human sight and stays in human cognition. All of these have a common goal - provoke emotions, make people feel certain feelings. If we are talking about politics, images can hold even more power than words as they are easier to notice and to perceive. Well-chosen photos or designs can provoke strong emotions, change minds and call to action. Politicians can frame certain themes and topics using strong imagery, elevating the importance of the selected ones, and downplaying the significance of others. Photos of Muslim immigrants crossing the borders or living in closed polluted communities are often used in

anti-immigration political campaigns as they tend to provoke fear and anger. Images of scrawny hungry animals or big messy factories always accompany promotions of environmental policies to evoke compassion and sometimes even fear of the inevitable disaster. As for the politicians themselves, certain images can be staged for the same purpose – to evoke certain emotions. Visual communication can humanize politicians, present their opinion on any topic, and introduce people to current political events. Moreover, certain patterns can be tracked if the politician is more or less consistent with their activity on social media.

The first association with visual political communication most probably will be political campaigns. There we can see a huge variety of different styles and messages combined with various targeting methods which in result should give a candidate desired victory (that can be operationalized differently for different occasions). Campaigns right before elections might be the time when the political arena dazzles with the high concentration of different marketing visuals and all kinds of politician-voter communication. When the term of the politician starts, that means that success in the elections is achieved, but the campaign doesn't stop there. It may become less “aggressive” and intense. The aim may change but the main point stays the same. To achieve certain goals – maintain people's support, promote a new law, maintain an image, keep up with the citizens – campaign must go on and be consistent. Nowadays, it mostly relates to social media, as personal meetings become less possible and rather irrelevant at this point.

Now, if we go back to 2016, when Trump became president, he also immediately concentrated on visual communication: the visuals were primary, the words were secondary (Strand and Schill 2019). Right on the first day of his presidency, when the media compared the crowds on Obama's inauguration and Trump's inauguration (the crowd on the latter was a lot smaller), Trump demonized the media and falsely blamed them for being dishonest and purposefully wanting to downplay his support. It was very important to him – how he looks and how he is perceived by the public. He was obsessed with his imagery, media attention and himself (Strand and Schill 2019).

Trump's visual identity was very memorable both during the campaign and during his term, the red hat with Trump's slogan “Make America Great Again” alone will likely stay in our minds for a very long time, if not forever. His most important tool was not conventional media, rallies,

or campaign attributes but social media, where he could express himself as he wishes.

Joe Biden became president on January 20, 2021. Joe Biden's campaign was more subtle and less overwhelming than Trump's campaign – we can even go as far as to say that it marked a return to a more balanced Obama-era campaigning, as it was rather typical for a traditional Democratic candidate. His logo is traditional, and Biden stuck with three American colors - blue, red, and white. Despite the traditional colors used for the logo, three stripes that replaced the letter "E" became an inspiration for public creativeness. Furthermore, a lot of the marketing materials that could have been seen on social media were not traditional at all. Weird gradients, stretched fonts, loose brand guidelines - everything was there during the final days of the campaign (Schwarz 2020).

Such a communication style that uses traditional colors and modern, almost psychedelic gradients, that supports both stability and progressive policies all at the same time, raises several difficult questions. On the most basic level - who is Joe Biden? The oldest president with progressive views? However important, I don't strive to answer this particular question in my thesis. The question that interests me here is on a deeper, yet mostly visual, level. What's his visual communication style? How did it reflect the paradoxical nature of Joe Biden? And how does it compare to Donald Trump's style of visual communication?

The study which I am aiming to execute is inspired by Ryan Strand and Dan Schill (2019) who analyzed Trump's visual communication on social media during his first 100 days in the White House. While reading the article I wondered how different Biden's visual communication was and how useful it could be to compare them. By using a similar methodology, I will analyze Biden's visual communication on Facebook and Twitter to see which topics prevail, in a certain manner, did Biden emphasize visual communication itself or was it more about texts?

The main purpose of the diploma thesis is to analyze the visual communication of Joe Biden during the first 100 days of his presidency. And then I have an ambition to compare my results to the Strand's and Schill's study results – to see how different Biden's visual communication is to Trump's visual communication. Are there any common topics as it is the same position? Does visual communication differ drastically? Was there a visible shift?

Now, I would like to address some questions that might interest the reader at this point. First, why the first 100 days in the office? The first

100 days of the presidency are important because the beginning of the visual communication sets the mood for the visual communication of the whole presidency. And at the same time, it can't be considered as just the beginning – 100 days, a bit more than three month, can be enough to understand the main topics, priorities, and the manner of the presidency and especially its first year. Moreover, at the beginning of the presidency people are more invested in the new president and politics itself.

The next question is, why analyze social media? Social media connect huge amounts of people from different backgrounds. They (social media) attract a lot of attention, moreover, they allow an average person to engage with others, with candidates and politicians, if we are talking about politics, and have an illusion of communicating with someone “important”. This is one of the reasons social media have been so popular for quite a long time already. Different social media serve different purposes, but all of them are often perceived as a source of all kinds of news and political information.

And finally, a more fundamental question - why visual communication? The answer is simple and complex at the same time, as it always is in political science. While political visual communication is very important in a broader field of political communication, it is at the same time pretty much understudied. However scarce this field of studies is, research has consistently shown that visual images are easier to perceive, to remember, and to understand (Schill 2012). There are a lot of explanations from different sources to it, which will be discussed closely in this thesis later in the theoretical chapter.

Visual communication is a very strong tool in terms of building an image, broadcasting certain ideas and opinions. It can distract from certain problems and draw attention to the other ones, it can build trust and delude (Perloff 2021; Aiello and Parry 2020; Geise and Baden 2015).

To sum up, visual political communication is very important both during the political campaign and during the time in office. It is crucial to study it to understand the nature of political communication, its context, past, and future. That is why I am aiming to find out if there were any patterns in Biden's visual communication, what were its main topics, and if there was a visible shift from Trump to Biden.

2 Theoretical Framework

To understand the importance of visual communication it is necessary to put it in the context and to go from the broad conception of the visual communication in marketing, narrow it to the visual communication in politics and then to take a brief look at the study of Trump's first 100 days in presidency. But the biggest attention will be put on the theory and history of visual communication - is there any conventional wisdom? Postulates? Significant moments in history? All we will find out in this chapter.

2.1 Visual Communication in Culture, Media, and Marketing

“As consumers, we are exposed to hundreds of explicit advertisements daily on television, in newspapers, magazines, billboards, and online - on the website and social media” (Wedel and Pieters 2007).

And such influence doesn't exist in a vacuum. Visual communication in marketing today in its own way reflects its changing roles, forms, and meanings through history as well as research of it. It is widely recognized that imagery plays a very important role in marketing practice, it ties with basic human ability to interpret the world – visual perception.

When printing became available to humankind, it became one of the dominating communication methods, even though it was text-only for the most part, as mass production of the imagery was impossible due to technical difficulties. Visual presentation of the information became more common when photography was invented and spread around the world - mainly by the proliferation of movie theatres and reproduction in printing (Josephson, Kelly, and Smith 2020). By the end of the twentieth century watching tv programs was one of the favorite pastimes in America. And the era of visual communication in marketing began.

According to Josephson, Kelly, and Smith (2020) the possible origin of studying visual communication lies in the sixth century in China, where Xie Hie used to classify all paintings using “Six Principles”. Due to the lack of mass production, the analysis was rather primitive, without a bigger number of cases. The nineteenth century was the period when

new technological inventions allowed for a mass distribution of images on posters, calendars, books, magazines. And with that more and more scholars became interested in this topic.

The twentieth century was the century when visual communication and imagery rose to its almost full potential - movies in cinemas, accessible printed photos, the beginnings of the television. Rapid proliferation of visual communication and its accessibility to almost everyone in America had, of course, a very big impact on the studying of this phenomenon. At first, as in history of every subject, the methodological designs were simpler, but the complexity evolved with time. And in a couple of years researchers started to look at imagery from different angles. During that period theoretical studies of visual communication changed drastically. It wasn't just about narrow observational studies about paintings and photos, it grew into the subject that became studied in different fields. Scholars had a desire to understand it more, to comprehend the trend of imagery in popular discourse, so the researchers began to appear and evolve. Barnhurst, Vari, and Rodríguez (2004) identified influential thinkers such as literary theorist Roland Barthes who brought the semiotic structures of imagery to widespread public attention, anthropologist Edward Hall who brought forward the study of spatial and nonverbal cues, and historian Daniel Boorstin who in *The Image* identified important trends in language and visual thought, as pioneers in what would become visual communication studies (Josephson, Kelly, and Smith 2020).

As visual communication studies became more sophisticated and common in the academic community - schools, associations, and journals started to form. Professional associations began emerging at the beginning of 1980s. Visual Communication Division, Studies in the Anthropology of Visual Communication journal, annual conference on visual communication under the direction of Herbert Zettl (which still takes place each year) – all of them had pioneered the study of the new phenomena brought by the technology.

2.2 Theoretical Development of Visual Communication

The theoretical development in visual marketing represents an intermixture of different disciplines - cognitive psychology, vision science and social psychology. Vision science is interdisciplinary itself and has its roots

in psychology, neuroscience, computer science, optometry, and even aesthetics (Wedel, Pieters 2007: 2). Vision, as everything in human organisms, is firmly tied with our brain, which means that vision helps us to build the idea of the world - our surroundings. Vision science helps scientists and marketing specialists to understand what exactly consumers notice first, what they perceive as important and when this perception is (un)conscious. Vision science works closely with cognitive psychology. Cognitive psychology helps researchers to understand which stimuli work effectively on consumers and which are ineffective. Throughout the years the methodology designs became more realistic and reflected real life more. As I've already mentioned, visual marketing also overlaps with social psychology, which offers some explanation about the role of motivation and emotion of the consumer. For example, (Balcetis and Dunning 2006) in their research came to the conclusion that people are more likely to notice the objects they want than the objects they don't care about or don't like.

On the other hand, the growing body of research shows that it is impossible to predict consumer choice and perception of the potential product by only knowing what is on their mind - by focusing on interpretive information (Song and Schwarz 2010). What Song and Schwarz (2010) aimed to do in their research was to look at the process of thinking and feeling at the same time - to see them interplay. The research has shown that the context in which a particular product was shown can affect how that product is perceived and evaluated by a potential consumer - subjective experience is more important than the product itself. Less pleasant pictures may negatively influence the assessment of the product. Moreover, the readability of the text that concerns the product/is on the product can also affect consumer's willingness to buy or to use the product (Song and Schwarz 2010). If we are talking about the importance of aesthetics and beauty in visual communication in marketing, Kumar and Garg (2010) contributed to the topic by researching the emotional response of the consumer on a product's aesthetics properties. They suggest that effectively used design can positively affect the emotional response of the consumer. And the biggest response can be received when compared with something unpleasant and imbalanced.

Pieters, Batra Michel Wedel, and Batra (2010) separated two types of visual complexity, where the first one is density of the details and the second one is the complexity of the design. The complexity of the details turned out to be harmful to the brand, which is being advertised, because

it steals the attention from it. The complexity of the design (harmony of the shapes and objects) on the contrary helps to create the impression about the advertisement as a whole and adds comprehensibility to the ad. Which means that the complexity of the features in visual communication doesn't necessarily add value to it, more likely the other way round.

The research of visual communication in marketing is tied with consumer psychology and therefore their emotions. Hasford, Hardesty, and Kidwell (2015) examined whether emotion-provoking images can affect consumer's behavior. The study has shown that if the emotionally charged image was to be placed near the unrelated products, it can lead to more spending if the image provokes positive emotions, and less if negative emotions. Which means that positive or negative emotions evoked by an image can affect consumer's behavior even if that image is completely unrelated to the displayed products. In some cases, visual representation in marketing (data visualization) can lead to biased decisions by focusing consumer's attention on small amounts of alternatives and encouraging irrelevant comparisons. But at the same time, it reduces the effort that it takes to understand the given information (Lurie and Mason 2007).

2.3 Visual Communication in Politics

Now, in the era of technological progress, almost 79 percent of the earth's population has access to television and 51 percent of the population has access to the Internet. Visual communication is as powerful as never before (Lilleker, Veneti, and Jackson 2019). And it is not just about devices themselves, it is also about the growing popularity of different social media (which is, of course, tied to the accessibility of electronic devices). People look, people watch, people comment, repost, send it to friends, relatives. Views, likes, and comments grow with an extreme speed. New Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok algorithms are programmed to show the user what they potentially want to see, what they are interested in, and, in case of some social media, what you are most likely to send someone else (Zhang, Chen, and Xi 2020). That is how certain posts become very successful in terms of popularity and "go viral". Current internet users are overwhelmed with information - whether it is credible infor-

mation or fake news, information about politics or gardening. In this relation images can serve as an alternative to long (or not too long, but either way exhausting) texts. It is hard not to notice that it can be used not just for pure marketing purposes, but for politicians' profit too.

Looks, design, style, posts on social media, public speaking, billboards - all are a part of a politician's image. If we are talking about relevant American politicians on a federal, state, city, and in some cases even county, level, all of the listed are established parts of their campaigns. Today the imagery of the candidate is carefully thought through by the politician's team. All because throughout the years politicians or professionals near them understood that visual communication is one of the key parts of any campaign, if not the most important one. With the changes in the political campaigns that were brought by the progress in technology, changes in the professional team around the politicians occurred too – the professionalization of political communication (Negrine and Lilleker 2016). Designers, consultants, image-managers, creative directors, all of them emerged as a new professional class that helps to design a candidate the desired look to make the right impression. The parties and candidates became more professional and so became their communication in politics. The standards for the visual communication became higher for every campaign throughout the years – it has to be meaningful, it has to look good, it must be consistent and likable for everyone, especially in the case of the American presidential candidates. How did we go all the way from solely textual posters, to studying politicians' tweets and making semantic analysis of their speeches? Where are we now and what does it mean?

A few technological transformations occurred since almost everyone in the developed world got an opportunity to buy a TV for their household. These transformations had an enormous impact on political communication, including visuals. According to Messaris (2019) in recent history the factors that shifted imagery in politics the most are mobile cameras, the creation and manipulation of photo-realistic images, and technologies that enable the avoidance of traditional methods for political campaigning. Access to mobile cameras gave citizens an opportunity to closely follow political candidates, often their personal life that is not really connected to their effectiveness in office. In terms of creation and manipulation of photo-realistic images – this helped media and marketing professionals and non-professional people ability to create strong manipulative political content and fake news that can hardly be divided

from reality. In case of avoidance of traditional methods for political campaigning, it made political campaigns to be more present on entertainment media. This led to some unpleasant consequences such as fall of accountability in case of disinformation and bias (Messaris 2019). Infotainment, politainment, celebritization of politics was a subject of much criticism. Journalists, scholars, and cultural critics pointed out the negative side of these phenomena (Collins and Riegert 2016). On the other hand, it can give the voters the experience of “communicating” with the politician, the feeling of intimacy and knowing the candidates personally. And even if the part of it is staged, it can heighten engagement of the voters in politics. The dissolving barriers between politicians and citizens in that case can benefit the democratic process. Feeling of being represented, trust in establishment and clear intentions of the candidates can form thanks to the blurred lines between voters and politicians (Collins and Riegert 2016).

If we are coming back to the role of visual communication, Schill (2012) introduced ten functions of visuals in politics. The article summarizes the importance of imagery in political marketing and provides the most broad and consistent overview of the visual communication in politics and its research that the field has to offer for now.

1. The first one is *Image as Argument* function. Visuals can make a point and work as an argument to the viewer. Visuals operate in the context and cooperate with the surroundings within the socio-cultural background. For example, if an image showcases a man standing behind the flag, it immediately suggests a connection between the candidate and patriotism (Barry 1997). One way to make a point with imagery is using non-verbal communication - gestures and expressions (Schill 2012). Arguments between politicians or political discussions are often accompanied by non-verbal communication attributes, which in some cases is more powerful than verbal and written communication (Argyle, Alkema, and Gilmour 1971). The other way to make an argument with visuals is to use crowds – proving popularity, having a big support group, having social influence. For example, a government photographer edited a photo of Trump’s inauguration day to make the crowd look less sparse by filling blank spots with people (Swaine 2018).
2. The second function according to Schill (2012) is *Agenda Setting*. The theory claims that the media can determine which topic will be important in society by considering certain subjects' space on the

media platforms. Politicians in democratic countries cannot be in control of what is displayed in the media, but on the other hand they are in control of what pictures are taken from certain events, knowing that the most interesting photos/videos will be demonstrated to the public by the journalists.

3. The third function is *Dramatization Function*, the meaning of this function rests in exaggerating certain issues with imagery to underline their importance. Dramatization of the visuals may change how certain events or problems are perceived by the public (Schill 2009).
4. The meaning of *Emotional Function* rests in its naming - images can evoke emotional response from viewers. Fear, anger, joy, amazement - huge spectrum of emotions can be communicated by visuals (Plutchik 1980). Images can evoke both emotional response and logical thinking, but the human brain starts the process of stirring up emotions faster, and before rational processing (Barry 1997).
5. *Image-Building Function*. Visuals can be a key element in building political image. By creating a strong imagery basis, candidates can be humanized - showing compassion, dressing like ordinary citizens, participating in local events (Grabe and Bucy 2009).
6. The sixth one is an *Identification Function* - voters can dissociate with candidates that look nothing like themselves. So, it is important for the candidate to be relatable for the voters not only in terms of the political agenda, but in terms of the visual similarities too.
7. *Documentation Function*. Here images can work as evidence, documentation, proof of certain events - working in office, helping charities, meeting with supporters, being at war. Everything can play for or against the candidate.
8. Certain iconic and symbolic visuals are often used by politicians to attract attention and make a point, in this case images are performing *Societal Symbol Function*. Cowboy image surrounded by different attributes like rancho, hat and boots, military personnel - photos with troops, military equipment, demonstrating flag, sportsman image - attending sports events, trying to participate - all of the "archetypes" perform only with the attributes which works with visual perception.
9. *Transportation Function*. Photos from certain periods of time or places can in a way "transport" the viewer to the particular event in

history or to a certain event. These are used by politicians to evoke certain emotions - being sad about unfortunate events that took a lot of lives or, for example, being excited about the bright future.

10. *Ambiguity Function* is the last function introduced by Schill (2012). This function gains its importance particularly in terms of the negative campaign. Visual attacks can be made without actually attacking the opponent – not being held accountable, no explicit attack, nothing to be blamed for directly. Images can suggest, but not claim anything at the same time.

2.3.1 Current Research and Methods

Despite the importance of the visual part of political communication, communication researchers often overlook examining visual counterparts in their research, instead they mostly focus on other elements, such as rhetorical strategies, issue framing, and tactical use of linguistic symbols (Schill 2012). Lacking grounding in visual studies, a lot of scholars test whether political images truly reflect what is going on in real life and miss an opportunity to understand visual media on the internet (Barnhurst and Quinn 2012). Nonetheless, study of the visual communication in politics evolves and there are already quite a few methods to choose from if there is a need to analyze imagery. Scholars approach the analysis from very different angles, theoretical and research traditions – impression management, framing, behavioral biology, visual rhetoric, cultivation, faceism, nonverbal communication, cognitive neuroscience, and media studies (Schill 2012).

In the early 2000s the research concentrated on two things - how media or viewing audiences perceive, use, and interpret images (Griffin 2001). This led to conceptualization of representation, interpretation, and attribution, and to understanding of how people perceive imagery as a whole within social and cultural context. During this period of time (and especially before that) political visual communication was not in the center of interest, even where words overlap with imagery in the social context. Studying visual political communication became more popular after 2001 but could be found in the scientific literature already in 1956 (Barnhurst and Quinn 2012). New analysis started with identifying political and visual communication keywords. Visual semantics looks at the imagery as it does at the text – concentrating on the message of the visuals and seeking to expose their ideological foundation.

One of the most widely used methodologies to study visual communication in politics now is content analysis that can be used both as a qualitative and a quantitative method, depending on the goal of the study. The point of the content analysis is to study themes, symbols, characteristics, and message of the text or the image. This method can help us understand if there are certain patterns that can be observed. For example, content analysis can be used to examine if news covers certain candidates more favorably than others or whether female politicians receive different types of news coverage than male politicians, and the themes candidates use in negative ads (Perloff 2021). Using this method, researchers contributed to the knowledge of political communication and mapped the symbolic landscape of a nation's political system. The most common usage of the method occurs when verbal dimensions of media content are words, but the researchers can also analyze audiovisual images – smiles, demonstration of anger and other visible emotions.

Another commonly used method in analyzing visual communication is mixed content analysis. It combines features of both quantitative and qualitative methods and concentrates on analyzing certain features in imagery. It is an empirical, observational method that uses categories that were defined by the researcher either beforehand (deductive logic), or during the analysis process (inductive logic). In this type of content analysis, we can generalize the relative frequencies of visual representation of particular groups – like actions, roles, situations, classes of peoples, certain events and many others (Leeuwen and Jewitt 2004). The researcher can interpret the imagery, define what the “data” (as images) mean and to discuss the significance, whether it is social, political, ideological, or other.

The importance of visual communication in politics is supported by an extensive amount of literature and experts. This concerns not only the analysis of the politician's visual communication itself, but also how imagery can be perceived by the voter and if it is important for them, or in other words – impact of the imagery on voting behavior. Because there is no reason to merely study the messages and intentions that a candidate or a political party had in mind. If it doesn't affect people in any way, the point of visual marketing disappears itself. In relation to that, there is plenty of research that proves the importance of visual communication in politics. One of the most known and relatively early pieces of research on the topic is the study by (Barrett and Barrington 2005). They ap-

proached visual communication in politics by looking at the potential influence of candidate photographs on voter perceptions when partisanship is not available as a heuristic device. The results supported the hypothesis that the influence in fact exists – photographs can actually shape how a politician's personal traits are perceived by a potential voter, their general impression of the candidate and whether they want to vote for a particular candidate.

The study that looks at the topic from both angles was designed by (Lobinger and Brantner 2015). Their aim was to analyze the images first - using content analysis they sorted the most favorable and unfavorable photos of politicians from each other and then asked participants to do the same and compared the results. The study has shown that the results overlap with unfavorable photos, but there is some disagreement in case of favorable depiction. It follows that what is perceived as positive or favorable is highly subjective and further examination on this topic is needed.

Page and Duffy (2016) analyzed politicians' Facebook and Twitter visual storytelling with an aim to find out their rhetorical strategy on these social media. The researchers concentrated on the Republican party during the 2012 presidential elections campaign. Their findings (Page and Duffy used schema of visual attributes to analyze visual communication) suggest that there are certain patterns that can be noticed in politician's visual communication on social media. It is often visible which impression the candidate wants to make and whether his visual rhetoric is strong or rather weak. For example, one of the analyzed candidates was Rick Santorum. The authors claim that themes like "dramatic actor", "heroism", "idealism" were present in his visual communication. Moreover, it reflected his agenda and resonated with his conservative supporters (Page and Duffy 2016)

If we continue to look at the analysis of the visual communication itself, not the reaction of the potential voters', the study of Grusell and Nord (2020) definitely deserves our attention. Marie Grusell and Lars Nord analyzed visual rhetoric of Swedish political party leaders on Instagram during the last three weeks before Election Day using quantitative content analysis. Interestingly, the findings do not suggest that there was a significant rise of the level of personalization in their communication. Everything stayed within a predictable campaign scale. In this context personalization doesn't mean more selfies on the profile but demonstrating certain nonpolitical traits. The study has also shown that there is a

certain pattern among all party leaders - posting photos of positive hard working party leaders who “enjoy their work”.

2.3.2 Political Campaign and Social Media

“Candidates still give speeches, of course—plenty of them—but they are pre-planned to get covered in television and, afterwards, candidates pose for the inevitable selfies, where taller candidates can stretch out their long arms like they are selfie sticks. You may catch a candidate at a rally, and it’s always exciting, but the mainstay of the campaign is the media, the modality by which candidates, journalists, and citizens experience the candidate. Politics is ceaselessly mediated, or Facebooked or Twittered, or whatever social media term you want to place in the past tense”. – Perloff (2021)

Traditional media and social media are two different worlds with different rules and functioning mechanisms. By traditional media I mean television, newspaper, and radio (Kaid and Holtz-Bacha 2008) Where traditional media has a more one-sided role where the information goes one way – from the media to the consumer. Social media then represents alternative media – platforms on the Internet. The political discussion shifted from the workplaces, families, and friends to dialogs and comments on Facebook and other platforms. On-line social networking opened an opportunity to promote their “product” for many people, including politicians. Facebook and Twitter are attractive channels both for campaigning candidates and those who are already in office because they get to broadcast their messages without limiting themselves too much (McNair 2017). Moreover, with social media they have an option to get feedback on their performance in office or posts immediately, to monitor that feedback and overall mood, to engage with their audience and make an influence. If we are talking about social media – politician relations, it is still all about power and winning people’s attention and votes, but the rules and campaigning methods are different on these platforms. As my goal is to analyze visual political communication on Twitter and Facebook, I want to introduce them briefly in this chapter.

The first social media platform I want to discuss here is Twitter. It proved itself to be extremely important and useful on the political arena

during the 2016 elections campaign and during Trump's presidency. Twitter is a blog-like platform, where you can have your own page and express yourself in 140 characters, which makes politicians get to the point faster than it could be with any other social media platform (Parmelee and Bichard 2011). Candidates can use Twitter to make quick points, to post "smart" statements or to inform followers about certain events. Therefore, there is an extensive amount of expert literature about political communication on Twitter, including visual (see Page and Duffy 2016; Cornfield 2017; Paul and Sui 2019; Lee and Shin 2014).

One of the brightest examples of how Twitter can help to build a strong support is, of course, the winning and presidency of Donald Trump. His emotional, aggressive, and seemingly not so much thought through offensive tweets proved themselves to be a source of information for a lot of Americans. The success and popularity of Twitter was accompanied with anti-establishment attitudes of the Republicans, who now refused to believe traditional media. With his statements on Twitter, he attacked the government, traditional media, and other candidates.

Facebook is a fundamentally different platform from Twitter that recently became rather controversial because of many personal data scandals. This platform went through a lot of privacy accusations throughout the years since it was founded in 2004. In 2007, companies could track Facebook purchases and notify their friends about them. Four years later there was a scandal about making private users' information public and accessible for third-party apps. In 2018, it was revealed that Facebook was aware of a big data leak and didn't take any measures to prevent it. And many more privacy and manipulating scandals didn't stop the growing numbers of Facebook users (Newcomb 2018). It is also still commonly used by politicians to promote themselves and to communicate with their supporters. Facebook is a primary source of news for about 30 % of the American population (Shearer and Grieco 2019). As well as it is for sharing thoughts, political views and for consuming political information (Elder and Phillips 2017). To say briefly, Facebook is a social media platform that allows a person to have a personal page, where they can post images, texts – big or small, and communicate directly with other people. As it is the most popular social network in the world, it was and is used both for political communication and for studying political communication. For example, Jensen and Bang (2017) analyzed Trump's and Sanders' political communication during the 2016 elections campaign and checked it for the amount of populist

rhetoric. The analysis has shown that populist elements prevail in Trump's campaign and are limited in Sanders' political communication on Facebook. Also, Facebook can be used for solely marketing purposes - for targeted advertising, because it provides a lot of different options for these purposes. Of course, Facebook is used as a platform for targeted advertisement by politicians too. Elder and Phillips (2017) tested which groups of Hispanic Facebook users were attracted by Clinton's targeted campaign videos and which elements exactly were attractive for them. Videos targeted for the Hispanic group were very successful both in terms of likes and bringing new people to her support base. The most popular were the videos which contained videos of the Hispanic people alone, not paired with videos featuring Hilary Clinton. The other interesting finding that can also be used by politicians and professionals surrounding them is that people on Facebook prefer videos and ads that don't look professional or too edited. The preferred format is displaying people who look like the targeted audience.

2.3.3 Visual Communication and American Presidents

Before discussing the visual communication of Donald Trump, I would like to scale back to the history of the visual communication of other presidents before him. As I've already said, the beginning of the *visual* communication in American politics coincides with the proliferation of television. In the early 1960s, John F. Kennedy became the first candidate who introduced television to the presidential race. And even after the presidential debates, he did not stop there. Kennedy turned the press conference into a political art form, calling on a comedian's talent for using nonverbal expressions to make his point and a showman's ability to deflect a question to his strategic advantage while cleverly eluding reporters' questions (Perloff 2021).

Richard Nixon was not as successful as Kennedy was neither during his first campaign against Kennedy, nor when he successfully got won the election in 1968. At first, he rejected the visual communication as it is, but then recognized its importance of and organized the White House Office of Communications which existed to basically control "what goes out". Although in doing so, Nixon got too far - the Office of Communication started to manufacture supportive opinions and exploited its authority (Perloff 1998).

The presidency of Ronald Reagan meant a certain comeback of the visual communication to American politics, as he mastered the art of being entertaining and natural on television - created an illusion of eye contact with people he was not seeing at the moment of being live on TV (Jamieson 1990). On the other hand, his rhetoric often gave out his biases. Reagan deepened the stereotype about young Black men who live on welfare, and he often used racially loaded visual cues (Covert 2019). His famous political television commercial "Morning in America" featuring American people going to work while being calm and in a good mood, accompanied by sentimental music was showing a certain narrative. Reagan was aiming to make a positive, patriotic, and optimistic impression with a hope for a better tomorrow, under his presidency, of course. While being in office, Reagan had a thought through communication strategy, which was working primarily with the audience's emotions (Perloff 1998)

Skipping to the beginning of the 21st century, George W. Bush, while not being primarily associated with the most unique visual style, definitely used visual communication to his benefit. He identified himself with a cowboy, which was not just an empty distractive image, but more of a form of communication (Hoffman 2011). In a way he suggested a certain way of leadership that he was aiming to put into practice. A cowboy leader is a leader who is strong, and would act quickly and decisively, *"would not negotiate with those perceived as evil, would not spend a great deal of time discussing proposed actions, would always protect the United States, would fight for what was right, would not be swayed by opposition, and would never quit, even when things were going badly"* – Hoffman (2011). It was not difficult and unnatural for him to broadcast this cowboy image – he had a ranch, where the photos of him working were made and where he welcomed a few political leaders, he also often wore cowboy hats and boots. As a memorable image, Bush's cowboy persona was very successful – it was picked up by journals, online and offline newspapers, television, all sorts of media. Even long after his presidency it is still remembered in public culture.

During Obama's presidential election campaign in 2008, visuals were a key element. Posters, stickers, T-shirts designed by independent artists helped generate excitement about the candidate and authenticity of the brand (Seidman 2016). The tone that was set by the independent creators had mainly a positive and inspiring message, portraying Obama

as a “patriotic, moderate, cool, and charismatic, promising change in government (Seidman 2016). When he was in office, Barack Obama was also often portrayed as a cool and charismatic leader, sometimes in informal settings, for example, in casual clothing, playing sports, eating fast food. On the other hand, it was the formal settings that sometimes made him more uncomfortable. According to Gleason and Hansen (2016) Barack Obama sometimes failed to communicate power, as he operated in the traditional frames of American imperialism – was portrayed in neutral spaces and meeting rooms. *“He appears overly rigid in formal situations because that is exterior to his comfort zone”* – Gleason and Hansen (2016).

2.3.4 Visual Presidency of Donald Trump

Finally, in the last subsection of my theoretical part I would like to return to the findings of Strand’s and Schill’s study, as I am going to juxtapose them with my own ones. It is worth noting that their study is in itself a continuation of another piece of research made by (Chun 2018), who compared Obama’s and Trump’s visual communication through the Flickr images. However, I will not discuss it right now, and will return to it only during the discussion. That is not to say that Chun’s research is not relevant for my study, rather that in this subchapter I want to establish a framework which maintains a more direct comparison with Trump’s visual communication through social media done by Strand and Schill. Thus, the first question that interests us here is, what were their findings?

Strand and Schill (2019) found that Trump’s visual communication on social media followed two main goals: build the president’s image and legitimize his presidency.

Trump’s image-building process had a few similarities with former presidents, yet at the same time diverted from them in several key areas. For example, his emphasis on toughness and seriousness was much higher than almost any other president’s before him. He almost never posted any images with his family, pastime, or hobbies, implicitly making it a point that he doesn’t have any spare time for “non-serious” issues. Moreover, he had interrupted a long-running tradition of holding “pres-

idential pets” in the White House, becoming one of the only three presidents, and the first one in modern history, with no pets¹. He also rarely posted any photos from informal settings, contrasting some of his predecessors like Bill Clinton or Barack Obama, both of whom were often photographed during their “everyman” activities from eating out at McDonald’s, Chipotle, or Starbucks, to jogging and playing basketball (Schill 2009). Although seemingly trivial, Strand and Schill (2019) call such imagery “humanizing”, or simply making the character of the president more grounded and understandable.

On the other hand, even though Trump had tried to maintain this “dehumanized” look of a “strong businessman” and “authentic outsider” (Strand and Schill 2019), his other goal was to show that he stands for America, and America stands for him. This brings us to the second overarching theme of Trump’s visual communication on social media: creating a sense of legitimacy of his presidency. This was supported by two types of imagery: first type shows Trump performing his duties as diligently as possible (signing documents, meeting foreign leaders, sitting in the Oval Office surrounded by the politicians), and the second features other people praising Trump for his accomplishments (people clapping and/or smiling, staged meetings with firefighters, business owners, or veterans). Of course, these categories should not be considered as completely separate, as the front stage was always occupied by Donald Trump. Different strategies were employed to maintain that, including seating Trump on a chair that is taller than everybody else’s, setting him as a centerpiece in a *Last Supper*-esque setup, or having him sign documents on a smaller desk with an oversized presidential seal.

Finally, what sets Trump apart from Obama’s visual communication specifically, is his seeming disregard for style and visual professionalism. Obama’s visuals were highly polished and curated, with matching colors and consistent branding, which extended even to the First Lady, Michelle Obama (Shaw 2017; Gleason and Hansen 2016; Paul and Perreault 2018). Trump’s imagery is, on the contrary, inconsistent, and amateurish. I explicitly used the word “seeming” earlier, as this was a deliberate departure from the polished visuals and consistent messaging of Obama’s administration. During his time in office, Trump had written a

¹ The other ones being James K. Polk and Andrew Johnson. Another interesting feature that Trump and Johnson share is that both are among the few impeached presidents.

great deal of viral tweets with poor grammar, over-the-top usage of Caps Lock, and simply incomprehensible words like the infamous “covfefe”. The pictures he and his team used are no exception from this intentional strategy. Strand and Schill (2019) found numerous photos that were out of focus, overexposed, and with strange composition. The non-photo pictures, like text overlaid pictures with Trump’s quotes, or his Twitter posts transformed into pictures, show the same lack of professionalism, feature the same grammar and syntax errors, and poor editing. This phenomenon was noted not only by Strand and Schill (2019), but also by Chun (2018), Linskey (2018) and Shaw (2017), who said that Trump’s pictures “convey a sense of distraction and amateurism”.

What goal does this marriage of toughness and business savviness with seemingly incompatible amateurism and clumsiness pursue? The incompatibility is again an illusory one, as Trump’s communication (both visual and textual) is consistent in at least one thing: he tries to express the message that he doesn’t care and be authentic in it. His “anti-design” (Chun 2018) together with disregard for grammar and good taste is perfect for showing that he doesn’t have time for the things his predecessor did while in office, because he is busy sitting at tables, signing deals, and meeting people, be it firefighters, veterans, or foreign leaders.

3 Research Methodology

In this chapter I will bring forward the methodology of this thesis. As I've already mentioned, I will extensively use the study made by Strand and Schill who studied Donald Trump's visual communication during his first 100 days in office. There are obvious conceptual similarities between their study and my thesis. One can even understand my study as a logical and chronological continuation of Strand and Schill's research. For this reason, I am not going to replicate their study to check the conclusions they made about Trump's visual communication. What I am going to do, however, is that I will replicate their methodology as faithfully as possible to study Joe Biden's visual communication in the same way they did Trump's, in order to compare the two. The first part of the analytical section of my thesis, then, is a grounded, qualitative study, mixed with quantitative analysis (more on that later), while the second part is a comparative analysis. I will try to explain what exactly constitutes these two parts in the next two subsections that are preceded by the subchapter with my research questions.

3.1 Research Questions

Before I dive into more specific descriptions of *how* I am going to perform analysis of Joe Biden's visual communication during his first 100 days in the White House, I would like to establish a wider framework of *why* I am going to do that. I will work with several research questions which I will present in this subchapter. The first question is:

RQ1: What themes are present in Joe Biden's visual communication on Twitter and Facebook during the first 100 days of his presidency?

This question is the narrowest and the most basic one, which will help us to understand the nature of the visuals that Biden tried to project during the beginning of his presidency. On this basic level I will not try to judge and evaluate the valence of these themes, simply their presence or absence. Only after establishing this basic structure of Biden's visual communication, I will go on to the next research question:

RQ2: What impression does Joe Biden try to present to the public through his visual communication during the same period of time?

Here, I am trying to answer a more specific question of the *nature* of said themes, topics, and ideas that prevail in Biden's social media imagery. It concerns the already discussed politician's image, his overall brand, and style of communication. The main reason I included this question is to later embed my findings into the Strand's and Schill's work:

RQ3: How does Biden's visual communication compare with Trump's during his first 100 days?

In this last, comparative part of the analytical section I will match Biden's and Trump's styles of visual communication for any similarities and differences.

3.2 Research Design

Though Strand and Schill call their research a purely grounded qualitative one, it's easy to see why it could be interpreted as partly quantitative. For that reason, I wanted to ensure that my research methodology takes this into account. I chose a mixed research method that combines a main qualitative part with a secondary quantitative analysis. This type of research design is called exploratory design, more specifically, the so-called taxonomy development model (Creswell and Clark 2017). This particular design is used when initial categorization is not known, which is exactly the case in Biden's visual communication. To put it simply, prior to analysis I don't know the categories, or the taxonomy system, with which I want to work. In accordance with Creswell and Clark (2017), and Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998), I am going to perform qualitative analysis on the Biden's social media imagery in order to establish a certain taxonomy of categories, and then "use the quantitative phase to examine the prevalence of these categories" within this sample (Creswell and Clark 2017).

3.2.1 Qualitative Phase

The first phase of my study is the qualitative phase. I approach the categorization of images the same way Strand and Schill did: by analyzing the sample of Twitter and Facebook photos and identifying common themes. This will allow me to create a certain taxonomy of themes, with images attributed to different categories. As the first phase isn't concerned by the *quantity* of the identified themes, the main goal here is a simple inductive thematic saturation, which means that after two rounds of coding no new codes or themes emerge (as suggested by Saunders et al. (2018)). Moreover, considering that I analyze a finite number of images (most likely around 300 images, as it was in the case of Strand's and Schill's study), there is no need to achieve saturation in the number of cases.

The process of coding itself can be categorized as *open coding*, which is "the initial, unrestricted coding of data" (Lindlof and Taylor 2011). This means that no codes (i.e., themes) exist prior to coding, and I am going to categorize a particular chunk of data "on the basis of its coherent meaning – its standing on its own..." (Spiggle 1994). Finally, I will go on to dimensionalize these categories, which involves identifying how the themes interrelate with each other and with a broader construct, in this case Biden's visual communication as a whole (Lindlof and Taylor 2011; Spiggle 1994).

3.2.2 Quantitative Phase

After reaching thematic saturation and establishing a taxonomy of themes, I move on to the second phase of my research, a quantitative one. It features simple descriptive statistics that work with frequency of found themes and organize them into a table with absolute and relative quantities. The frequencies of different themes will be used in order to understand which style of visual communication Joe Biden has chosen, what impression he was trying to make after he was elected, and what framework he wanted to establish for his presidential term. Considering what I've discussed earlier about the importance of the first 100 days, this framework is crucial and contains the distilled message that the president tries to pass on to the public.

Beside comparing the themes and their frequencies, another interesting point for analysis is represented by the dichotomy between Facebook and Twitter. Without going into much detail, in the example of for-

mer president Trump, imagery with the “Make America Great Again” slogan appeared on his Facebook account with a much greater frequency than on his Twitter account (56 vs 3 pictures). Twitter is generally perceived to be more left leaning than Facebook², and it could be the case that Donald Trump had used two slightly different variations of his visual communication to suit different social media platforms and their audiences. Thus, it would be interesting to see whether Joe Biden used a similar approach.

3.2.3 Comparative Phase

It is clear that some of the themes will be directly comparable with one another: we can adequately expect that Biden’s visual communication will also include him signing documents or sitting at the table. In this case we can easily quantitatively compare the two strategies by looking at the numbers. Other themes may be not directly comparable, but easily interpretable: for example, it is quite obvious that Biden had not posted any pictures with Trump’s slogan “Make America Great Again”, however, he could have posted images with his own slogan “Build Back Better” or “Battle for the Soul of the Nation”. Furthermore, there might be new themes that have not been present in Trump’s visual campaign, and therefore need completely new interpretation. All of the above means that there will be several points of comparison. First, I will try to quantitatively compare the frequency of those themes that can be directly contrasted (i.e., signing documents) and those that can be easily interpreted as comparable (i.e., slogans). Second, I will identify those themes that cannot be directly compared and interpret their meaning for Biden’s visual communication separately. Finally, I will qualitatively compare both styles of visual communication and the message they tried to convey.

As a methodological sidenote, I would like to emphasize that I am not going to add any more new conclusions about Trump’s strategy. They are fully adapted from Strand’s and Schill’s study. However, throughout

² See for example the study done by *Pew Research Center* that shows a notable difference between percentages of the Democrats and Republicans who use Twitter (32% Dem vs 17% Rep) and Instagram (49% Dem vs 30% Rep), but not Facebook (72% Dem vs 69% Rep).
<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/04/07/partisan-differences-in-social-media-use-show-up-for-some-platforms-but-not-facebook/>

the analysis and discussion I will provide examples of Trump's imagery that were not explicitly included in the Strand's and Schill's paper. I've downloaded the archive of Trump's Twitter posts and accessed his Facebook photo timeline and limited the search to only his first 100 days, thus looking at the same pictures that Strand and Schill actually analyzed. This means that I can familiarize the reader with concrete examples of Trump's strategy described in Strand's and Schill's paper, while maintaining the methodological integrity of my study.

4 Analysis

In this chapter I will begin gathering data and analyzing them. In order to do this, I will draw from the established theoretic framework and from the research design I described in the previous chapter.

First, I've downloaded all of the images Joe Biden posted on his Facebook and Twitter pages under the @POTUS handle³. The search was limited to the first 100 days that Joe Biden was in office: from January 20 to April 30, 2021. Overall, there were 318 artifacts gathered, 176 of which were downloaded from the Facebook account, while the rest 142 were downloaded from the Twitter account.

Next, I move on to the analysis itself. The first phase is a qualitative analysis with the goal to inductively identify common themes and assign every picture to one or more identified themes.

During this first phase I have identified a total of 14 themes. It appears that Biden's visual communication was more diverse than Trump's, and he based his image (i.e., his brand) on different topics that could be interpreted as less politically obvious. I will elaborate on that point later during the discussion. For now, I am going to limit myself to the simple description of identified themes, so that later it is clear which exact concepts we are dealing with.

The following table provides an overview of Trump's visual themes for reference:

	Facebook		Twitter	
	<i>N</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Desk/table (directly seated)	51	20.07	45	66.17
Text overlaid image	92	36.22	30	44.12
Signing a document	21	8.30	12	17.60
Foreign leader	22	8.60	6	8.82
People clapping	17	6.69	2	2.94
Linear perspective framing	25	9.84	27	39.70
"Make America Great Again"	56	22.05	3	4.41
Trump alone with quote	56	22.05	0	0
Direct Twitter repost	35	13.78	0	0
Military/veterans	15	5.90	3	4.41

Source: Adapted from Strand and Schill (2019)

³ <https://www.facebook.com/POTUS> and <https://twitter.com/POTUS>.

As I suspected, there was a significant overlap between themes in Trump's and Biden's visual communications. Thus, the first set of themes includes some of the same themes Strand and Schill (2019) identified in their analysis:

1. *Signing a document* - includes pictures of Joe Biden signing any document, like an executive order or a bill. Example is in Picture 1.
2. *Text overlaid image* - includes pictures with text on top of any image, be it graphic or photo. Example is in Picture 2.
3. *Desk/table (directly seated)* - includes pictures of Joe Biden seating at a desk or a table. Example is in Picture 3.
4. *Linear perspective framing* - includes pictures with clear linear perspective and a central focal point. Unlike Strand and Schill's classification, in this case this theme may or may not include Joe Biden as a main focal point. Example is in Picture 4.
5. *Military/veterans* - includes pictures featuring either active military personnel, veterans, or military imagery (e.g., military cemetery, military equipment etc.). They may or may not feature Joe Biden himself. Example is in Picture 5.
6. *Foreign leader* - includes pictures featuring foreign leaders. Example is in Picture 6.
7. *Biden alone with quote/text* - includes pictures of Joe Biden superimposed onto text or direct quote. Example is in Picture 7.
8. *Direct Twitter repost* - includes pictures that contain a stylized direct repost from Biden's Twitter account. Example is in Picture 8.

Other Trump's common themes, like *People clapping* or some alternative of *Make America Great Again* with Biden's slogan were not present.



Picture 1: Signing a document



Picture 2: Text overlaid image



Picture 3: Desk/table (directly seated)



Picture 4: Linear perspective framing



Picture 5: Military/veterans



Picture 6: Foreign leaders



Picture 7: Biden alone with quote/text



Picture 8: Direct Twitter repost

Another category includes new themes that were not present in Trump's communication. These themes are:

9. *Political meeting* - includes pictures of Joe Biden meeting his cabinet members, lawmakers, or other political leaders from the US. Example is in Picture 9.
10. *Establishment* - includes pictures of Joe Biden meeting representatives of other institutions (i.e., media, health organizations, NASA etc.) or visiting these institutions. Example is in Picture 10.
11. *White House* - includes pictures of White House from the outside. Example is in Picture 11.
12. *Informal setting* - includes pictures of Joe Biden in informal settings, in casual clothing, or with members of his family. Example is in Picture 12.
13. *Press conference* - includes pictures of Joe Biden participating in press conferences or communicating with media. Example is in Picture 13.
14. *Kamala Harris* - includes pictures where Kamala Harris (current vice president) takes central place either together with Joe Biden, or by herself⁴. Example is in Picture 14.

⁴ It is worth noting that this category does not include *any* picture that simply has Kamala Harris somewhere in frame, only those where she is clearly one of central focal points.



Picture 9: Political meeting



Picture 10: Establishment



Picture 11: White House



Picture 12: Informal setting



Picture 13: Press conference



Picture 14: Kamala Harris

I will go in depth into every category in the next chapter and explain why it was particularly important to make a distinction between them. I will also discuss what they meant to a broader context of Biden's permanent campaign and his presidency, and afterwards compare his visual communication to Trump's more directly. But before I do that, I have to describe the second phase of my analysis, the quantitative one.

After defining the taxonomy of themes, I calculated their overall presence in Biden's visual communication. The findings are presented in the following table (see next page):

ANALYSIS

	Facebook		Twitter	
	<i>N</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Signing a document	9	5.14	10	7.04
Text overlaid image	63	36.00	38	26.76
Desk/table (directly seated)	18	10.29	18	12.68
Political meeting	34	19.43	35	24.65
Linear perspective framing	8	4.57	8	5.63
Establishment	16	9.14	17	11.97
Military/veterans	13	7.43	13	9.15
White House	8	4.57	4	2.82
Informal setting	15	8.57	15	10.56
Press conference	14	8.00	12	8.45
Kamala Harris	15	8.57	11	7.75
Foreign leader	8	4.57	7	4.93
Biden alone with quote/text	5	2.86	1	0.70
Direct Twitter repost	9	5.14	0	0

Source: Author's calculations

The percentages do not add up to 100 percent, because the images can contain more than one theme (although mostly not more than three). Obviously, all pictures of Joe Biden signing a document are also pictures where he sits behind a desk. We can see that the most used theme in Biden's visual communication, similarly with Trump's, is by far the *Text overlaid image* one. It was used in 36 percent of images. The second and third places are occupied by the *Political meeting* and *Desk/table* themes respectively. Interestingly, while there were more themes identified, almost all had roughly the same level of representation in Biden's visual communication, if we are not counting the first two most used themes, already described earlier. As for the least used themes, there is discrepancy between those used on Facebook and those used on Twitter, the most obvious being the absence of the *Direct Twitter repost* on Twitter. The *Biden alone with quote/text* was also scarcely used on both platforms, putting Biden's visual communication into stark contrast with Trump's. I will get back to these distinctions later during the discussion of the comparative part of the analysis.

5 Discussion

The previous chapter went through some of the most apparent findings really briefly. It was done simply to extensively familiarize the reader with the main concepts that arose during the coding process. This chapter, on the contrary, features a more intensive analysis. It follows two main goals. First, I will begin this chapter by going in-depth into every theme, explaining their intrinsic meaning, and their “dimensional” importance for the overall Biden’s visual strategy. Second, I will compare Biden’s visual communication to Trump’s using several key distinctions that I identified during the analysis. Some of them were already discussed in the previous chapter, while others will be described at length later.

5.1 Identified Themes

It is already clear that there was a total of 14 themes identified during coding. All of them bear a significance for a broader permanent campaign of Joe Biden, and his overall visual communication. Thus, I am going to explain their meaning sequentially, beginning with the most (seemingly) obvious one – *Signing a document*.

5.1.1 Signing a document

Signing a document is a very important category of images. On the surface level, it presents the most obvious way to present an image of a hard-working president. Strand and Schill (2019) describe images of this kind, together with images of Trump working late at night, as ones that are “constructed to document *things getting done*” (emphasis added). However, this is not their only goal. They can be a powerful agenda-setting device, as they can show exactly how many executive orders are signed by the president. They can emphasize the president’s political efficiency, showing him not only as a hard-working person, but as a one who actually creates something (e.g., jobs, policies, or border walls). For Trump, it was a particularly important strategy, as prior to the 2016 election he was viewed as an amateur with no political experience (Johnson 2016), and even while his supporters liked precisely that, they were still aware of his amateurism. Thus, when in office, Trump saw a great opportunity

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to show off his political prowess and efficiency, posting many pictures of him “seated at a small desk surrounded by his cabinet...” (Strand and Schill 2019). He posted a total of 21 pictures of him signing a document on Facebook and 12 pictures on Twitter, comprising about 8 percent and 18 percent of total imagery on the respective social media platforms.



Picture 15: Trump showing a signed document



Picture 16: Trump signing a document



Picture 17: Trump signing a document



Picture 18: Trump signing a document

For Biden, amateurism was not a concern. His political career now spans almost five decades, which was seen as both advantageous and adverse for his campaign as a whole⁵, but the experience itself is undoubtable. Hence, he did not need to highlight his ability to “make things done”, which translates to the fact that the images of him signing documents are present in only 5 percent of total imagery on Facebook, and 7 percent on

⁵ Surprisingly, the criticism of Biden’s experience was heard mostly from the left, with publications like *The Los Angeles Times* calling it a “burden” (Hook 2019). For example, Biden opposed several desegregation policies like busing, voted against same-sex marriage, and supported the Iraq war. For a more in-depth analysis see for example Hook (2019) or Saenz (2019).

Twitter. In absolute numbers, he posted 9 and 10 pictures with the *Signing a document* theme on respective platforms.

The difference between Trump's and Biden's usage of this tactic is even more apparent when we consider it in a more dimensional fashion, thinking about it in a context of the first 100 days of these presidencies. Keeping in mind the fact that images with the president signing a document can be a powerful agenda-setting device, Trump can appear to be a more efficient president, a president who, for example, signed more executive orders. This was not the case, however. In fact, during his first 100 days in office, Joe Biden has signed more executive actions than any other president before him, including Donald Trump, totaling at more than 60 of executive actions (Hickey et al. 2021). What does that tell us in combination with the fact that he decided not to show it off on social media? Considering that everything in presidential visual communication is carefully calculated, it's not likely that this was due to Joe Biden's humbleness. I would argue that Biden's strategy here was to not breach his bipartisan appeal. Despite all reports of heavy polarization during 2020 elections, Biden's coalition was actually very broad (Siders 2020; Boak and Fingerhut 2021), as he reclaimed Georgia and Arizona, Rust Belt states like Pennsylvania or Michigan, and shaved off Trump's support especially among college educated whites and white women. Going into office, one of Biden's goals was to maintain the appearance of a "bridge-building" politician who is willing to compromise. The reality of his usage of the executive power, however, was quite opposite. More than a third of the already mentioned 60 executive actions were direct reversals of Trump's policies, such as halting the construction of the border wall, lifting the ban on travel from primarily Muslim countries, or again allowing transgender people to join the military. This could have been easily interpreted as Biden not simply "working hard", but rather overstepping and breaking the trust of the more conservative voters, or voters who switched from voting for Trump in 2016 to vote for Democrats in 2020, which is why he has likely tried to downplay the visual prevalence of this theme, maintaining the appearance of a strictly bipartisan president who is still willing to compromise.

5.1.2 Desk/table (directly seated)

The second theme, which shares some similarities with the previous one, is the *Desk/table*. Quite naturally, it depicts a respective president sitting

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at a desk or a table, while, for example, signing a document, having a conversation with the cabinet members, or having a phone call. Once again, and even more obvious than in the previous theme, we see that there is a drastic difference between Trump's and Biden's imagery. Trump sitting behind a desk or a table comprised a whopping 66 percent of total imagery on Twitter, and around 20 percent on Facebook, 45 and 56 images respectively in absolute numbers. On the other hand, Biden had posted 18 images of him sitting at a desk/table on both platforms, which comprised just about 10 and 12 percent of his imagery on Facebook and Twitter respectively. In the context of the already described *amateur vs. professional* dichotomy this theme easily falls into the same thematic category as the *Signing a document* theme. For Trump, it was essential to establish a narrative of a legitimate and powerful president, who is ready to sign a document anywhere, hence there were tables with a presidential seal set up in various places for him to do exactly that, albeit symbolically. Pictures 19 and 20 show examples of these setups.



Picture 19: Trump signing a document on an improvised table



Picture 20: Trump signing a document on an improvised table

Thus, Trump's main goal with this strategy was to elevate his image as a professional politician, which for Biden was not a concern, for reasons I've described in the previous subsection. This led to Biden posting much less photos of him behind a desk, and in some cases, there was a specific focus on Biden *not* sitting behind a desk, and I will return to this recurring strategy during the discussion of the *Linear perspective framing* theme, but for now I will provide a couple of examples of it in Pictures 21 and 22⁶. Both feature Joe Biden meeting with his cabinet, and both

⁶ Another important note that I wanted to highlight here is that while these pictures look very similar, they are in fact, taken on two completely different occasions, and are separated by several weeks, if not months, however, the photographer chose an almost identical angle. I will also return to this later in the chapter.

feature an empty desk as a central focal point, while Biden sits at the left of the picture.



Picture 20: Biden's cabinet meeting with an empty desk



Picture 21: Biden's cabinet meeting with an empty desk

In those rare cases where Biden *was* sitting behind a desk, the composition of the photos was radically different. None of the pictures featured a crowd behind him, and most were taken from a specific angle in order to show pictures of the president's family behind him, as shown in Pictures 23 and 24.



Picture 23: Biden signing a document with family pictures behind him



Picture 24: Biden having a phone call with family pictures behind him

Now, it's obvious that Biden used the pictures of him sitting behind a desk partially to the same end as Trump did: to establish a narrative of a hard-working president who signs documents and has important phone calls. However, there was a second dimension to this strategy, or rather to its absence (in the sense of it being rarely used): to establish a narrative of a president working *in the field*, and not in the office. It's vital to remember the political context in which Biden's presidency began, which was in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic. This led Biden to choose the strategy of him showing rather how he is meeting with people like vaccine manufacturers, political leaders, or reporters, and not how

he is signing documents behind a desk. That is not to say that this strategy is better or worse than Trump's, but it definitely suited the moment in time in which Biden had become president. Moreover, the essence of the strategy is basically the same: promote the image of a hard-working president, the difference is mostly decorative.

5.1.3 Political meeting

Here, we move on to the next theme, which naturally extends the previous one. I've mentioned that Joe Biden, instead of posting pictures of himself signing documents, had mostly posted pictures of him meeting someone. I've divided this category into two themes which are overlapping, yet contextually quite different. First is the *Political meeting* theme, and it covers Biden's meetings with his cabinet, Congresspersons, or other political and civic leaders like governors or activists. Second is the *Establishment* theme, which features Biden meeting non-political members of the establishment like representatives of the media, scientific organizations, or manufacturing industry. This subsection is dedicated to the *Political meeting* theme.

This theme was the second most prevalent one on both social media platforms, 20 percent of total imagery on Facebook, and 25 percent on Twitter (34 and 35 pictures respectively). Now, the literal meaning of this theme is pretty obvious: as I said it's a natural extension of both *Signing a document* and *Desk/table* themes, meaning that it presents the image of a president who works hard, meets politicians on both sides of the political spectrum, and finds solutions to political problems. And even though there is a very noticeable quantitative difference between Trump's visuals and Biden's in these two themes, qualitatively the *Political meeting* theme is also a part of the same visual communication strategy.

On the other hand, there is a second deeper meaning to this theme: returning faith in the political process. During Trump's presidency public trust in institutions has decreased, with the overall trust plunging by 14 percentage points already in his first year in office, according to *Reuters* (Barkin 2018). And especially during the pandemic, the trust in government and 16 other institutions (like the electoral system, public education system, or local government) has fallen even further, especially

amongst Republicans, as a poll done by *Morning Consult* shows⁷. This drop is corroborated by findings of the *Pew Research Center*, which showed that although “more Republicans than Democrats reported trusting the government, ... that has flipped since Biden’s election”, and the overall trust in the U.S. government is “near historic lows”⁸. Consequently, when going into office, Biden was well aware of his position, as even some Democrats felt deep distrust towards the public institutions, including government, Congress, media, and even science organizations. Biden’s goal in visual communication was then to try to restore that trust.

Some of the examples include Joe Biden meeting soccer players and political activists Megan Rapinoe and Margaret Purce (Picture 25), going into Congress (Picture 26), or meeting the governor of Ohio, Mike DeWine (Picture 27). Picture 28 presents a slightly different approach, as this is an archival photo of then-vice president Joe Biden together with the former president Barack Obama. It was coded as a political meeting, though, as it substantively presents a legitimation of Biden’s presidency, adding to it a layer of trust towards Obama, which is still very high, at least among Democrats (Lizza 2020).

⁷ <https://morningconsult.com/institutional-distrust-deepens-on-the-right-following-election/>

⁸ <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2021/05/17/public-trust-in-government-1958-2021/>

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Picture 25: Joe and Jill Biden meeting with Megan Rapinoe and Margaret Purce



Picture 26: Joe Biden in Congress



Picture 27: Joe Biden meeting with Mike DeWine



Picture 28: Joe Biden together with Barack Obama

Thus, even the simplest photo-op during Biden's visit in Congress produced several visual artifacts for the public perception. This presented a convergence of two strategies: both showing Biden's presidential power and its legitimacy (basically a continuation of previous themes) and supporting trust towards other institutions.

5.1.4 Establishment

Now, the *Establishment* theme is a second portion of the same category as the previous *Political meeting* theme. If we take a look at the context of Biden's first 100 days again, we will understand that the trust towards establishment, and especially towards science experts was perceived to be very low⁹. The restoration of that trust was crucial in order to battle

⁹ It's important to note, though, that the overall trust towards science and scientists actually *has* increased since 2018. On the other hand, it's also clear that "[t]he share of people who fall victim to conspiracy theories and misinformation has

the COVID-19 pandemic, more specifically with the help of the vaccination campaign. As any other campaign then, it had to be accompanied by a visual communication strategy. Joe Biden has chosen the way of regularly posting images of him meeting health experts, vaccine manufacturers, and science organizations. Several pictures include visible branding of these organizations like the CDC, NIH, Pfizer, or even NASA. This branding together with professional composition of the photos and professional-looking people promote the idea of scientific expertise and build trust towards the discussed institutions.

Quantitatively speaking, Biden used this theme in 10 percent of his imagery on Facebook and 12 percent on Twitter, posting pictures of him with some members of (mostly scientific and medical) establishment.



Picture 29: Joe Biden visiting National Institutes of Health



Picture 30: Joe Biden visiting Pfizer

There were two reasons why I chose to divide this theme from the previous one and make them two separate entities. Not only do they follow different visual guidelines, with the *Establishment* theme being more visually serious, collected, and with Joe Biden working “in the field”, and the *Political meeting* theme usually being more casual, always set indoors, and with a stronger emphasis on discussion rather than action. But it’s also a substantively different theme, as it is the first one that doesn’t promote Biden himself or his presidency per se, but rather other institutions that are dependent on his trust. Needless to say, this is not due to Joe Biden’s altruism or good will, but the rationale of increasing

grown” too (Alba 2021). Simply speaking, the partisan divide has increased dramatically, as Republican confidence in science fell by 27 percentage points. For a more complete overview of this phenomenon see reporting done by *The New York Times*: <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/01/science/scientist-trust-poll.html>

vaccination rates and battling misinformation promoted by Donald Trump¹⁰.

5.1.5 Press conference

The distrust towards institutions propelled by Donald Trump quite obviously extends to the media organizations. He has repeatedly discredited “mainstream” media organizations, calling them “fake news”, which led some researchers to call his tactics a “rhetoric of disruption” (Rutledge and Rackaway 2021). Add to it a continuously unreliable narrative provided by the White House on the pandemic, even including matters such as the president’s health status, and it is understandable why even those who do trust the media will have a problem receiving any news coming from the president himself. Thus, Biden’s third goal from this category of visual themes, continuing the substance of the *Political meeting* and the *Establishment* themes, was to elevate public’s trust towards the media and his own narrative.



Picture 31: Biden’s COVID-19 Response press conference



Picture 32: CNN Presidential Town Hall with Joe Biden

Interestingly, while in most other themes Joe Biden was ready to share the spotlight with other politicians, experts, or public figures, in the *Press conference* theme mostly he was the focal point (Picture 31). Visually, this promotes the idea of a single reliable narrative that goes directly

¹⁰ For example, an article in the *Journal of Medical Internet Research* by (Niburski and Niburski 2020) found that Trump’s promotion of unverified COVID-19 treatments like hydroxychloroquine, chloroquine, azithromycin, and remdesivir led to a rapid increase of the drugs’ Amazon sales, Google searches, and to at least one death. And even after Trump leaving office, trust towards these alternative treatments (most recently, ivermectin) is still high (Huang 2021; Reardon 2021).

from the president himself. In several cases, the imagery included branding of the mainstream media, bashed by Donald Trump, like CNN (Picture 32), which again followed the goal of elevating the public trust towards these media organizations. Biden's Facebook imagery contained 14 pictures of some sort of press conference, meeting with the media, or Biden's TV appearance, while Twitter contained a total of 12 pictures of this kind. This comprised around 8 percent of total visuals on both platforms, thus the *Press conference* theme was among the moderately used themes.

5.1.6 White House

The next theme, although rarely used, presents an interesting case of the institutional legitimization already seen in previous themes. Yet again, let's consider the context of what had happened shortly before Biden's inauguration. Just two weeks before it, on January 6, 2021, there was an attack on the United States Capitol, the meeting place of the U.S. Congress. It disrupted the joint session of Congress that meant to count and confirm electoral votes necessary for Joe Biden's inauguration as president. The Capitol was locked down, the lawmakers with the staff were evacuated, a total of 5 people had died (Evelyn 2021), and 4 police officers committed suicide in the following months (Wolfe 2021). As a result, Donald Trump was impeached the second time, and more than 700 people have been charged with federal crimes (Hall et al. 2021). Of course, the blow to U.S. democracy done by insurrectionists was not detrimental, yet it was not completely irrelevant either. The same day, very powerful imagery emerged of the U.S. Capitol being sieged, looted, and vandalized.

Now, obviously, the White House is not the U.S. Capitol. However, it is another important building and a dominant visual symbol of American democracy. And when the image of one institution (namely Capitol) was damaged precisely by visual cues, be it images or videos, including from the insurrectionists themselves, one way to restore the faith in the overall political process was to provide an alternative view of the other institution (White House).

Thus, on the most surface layer this theme is once again a continuation of the legitimization of Joe Biden's presidency: images of Joe Biden walking the grounds of the White House with documents as seen on the Picture 33, basically "doing his job" rightfully.

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Picture 33: Joe Biden walking outside of White House

On the second layer, however, I would argue that the images of the White House, as seen on Pictures 34 and 35, visually evoke a sense of legitimacy and respect not towards Joe Biden as a president, but towards the building itself and as a consequence towards an institution.



Picture 34: The White House as seen from the outside



Picture 35: The White House as seen from the outside

Although Biden didn't use this theme extensively, and only posted 8 pictures with clear reference to the White House as a building on Facebook and 4 pictures on Twitter, comprising just about 5 percent and 3 percent of total imagery on the respective platforms, he did so regularly and with a clear intent of establishing a narrative of trust and respect towards the institute of president. Interestingly, this theme is one among

few where discrepancy between two social media posts is seen most vividly. While all of the previous themes had roughly the same number (or percentage) of pictures posted on both platforms, here Biden posted two times more of White House imagery on Facebook than he did on Twitter. As I discussed earlier, Twitter is often seen as a more liberal platform, while Facebook as a more conservative. We could speculate whether Biden posted more pictures evoking respect towards the presidential post and the White House on Facebook in order to sway more conservative voters, but we cannot definitely prove this claim.

Overall, the previous four themes could be grouped under a broader category of Joe Biden establishing a more reliable narrative directed to restore public trust in institutions and organizations which were undermined by the previous administration. I already described one of the goals of visual communication being an agenda-setting strategy, and it is surely beneficial for any new administration to set an overall tone for the following four years. For Trump, it was disruption and toughness. For Biden, it was respect for the institutions and trust towards the system.

5.1.7 Text overlaid image

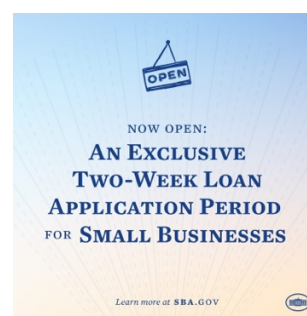
Next, we move on to the next category of themes which includes three different themes, all containing some sort of textual information. The first is the *Text overlaid image* theme, which is comprised mostly of infographics (e.g., Picture 36), slogans (e.g., Picture 37), and short pieces of information about policies (e.g., Picture 38).



Picture 36: American Rescue Plan infographic



Picture 37: Believe in science slogan



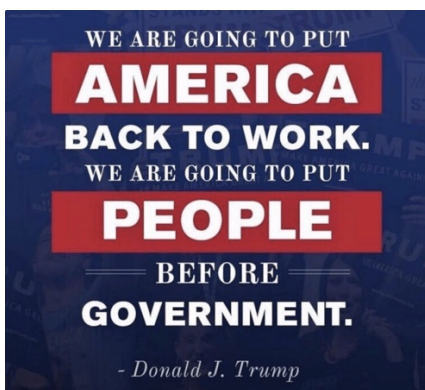
Picture 38: Information about a newly available policy

As a quick disclaimer, I would like to add that the text itself doesn't concern us, as our main goal here is to discern *visual*, not *content*-related patterns in Biden's communication on social media. This means that I am

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not going to fact-check any information from the pictures, nor am I going to judge whether the message is populist, factual, or manipulative, as it simply doesn't matter here.

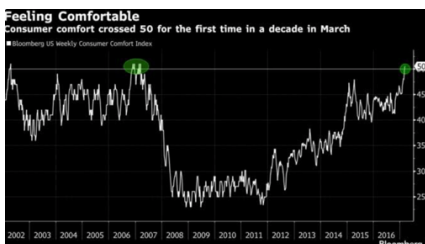
Similarly with Donald Trump, Joe Biden has extensively used this theme, posting 63 pictures overlaid with text on Facebook and 38 pictures on Twitter. In relative numbers, this translates to 36 percent and 27 percent respectively, which is the same as Trump's 36 percent of total imagery on Facebook, but quite different from his 44 percent of total imagery on Twitter. The visual differences, however, are much more visible. Trump's images rarely, if ever, followed any sort of design guidelines. The font ranged from italics to bold with no hierarchy, random ornaments and American flags were added seemingly without any reason, and the infographics were mostly borrowed from other resources, without any stylization to fit with the rest of the imagery.



Picture 39: Trump's quote stylized as an image



Picture 40: Donald and Melania Trump with an imposed birthday wish



Picture 41: Consumer comfort infographic by Bloomberg



Picture 42: Trump commemorating Andrew Jackson

To be fair, there was a certain degree of consistency among the used colors. If we're not counting black and white, they were mostly red or blue, with the red color being almost always the more dominant one. This can be interpreted in two ways: first, red and blue, obviously being colors

of the U.S. flag, might evoke patriotism, while red, being the main color of the Republican Party, and most importantly, Trump's campaign, might stimulate a sense of familiarity and belongingness. Moreover, the absence of clear design guidelines and style patterns, doesn't mean that Trump's visual communication is *bad*. On the contrary, it is completely in line with his rhetoric style and personality. Such visuals during the first 100 days in office were a perfect continuation of his personal way of posting on social media and campaigning.

Biden's visuals, however, are a continuation of Obama's style in visual communication. I've already discussed how Chun (2018) describes Obama-era visuals to be highly polished, professionally made, and consistent. Biden and his team followed the same basic guidelines. The color palette was restricted to just a couple of pastel colors, mainly different shades of blue (e.g., Picture 43), yellow (e.g., Picture 44), and sometimes green (e.g., Picture 45) if we are not counting black and white. The font hierarchy was mainly consistent, with bold text being used to highlight the most important takeaways for the reader (e.g., Picture 46). Moreover, the White House logo can be seen in almost all of the analyzed text overlaid images, which is an interesting overlap with the previous *White House* theme, as consistent branding is key to bridging the gap between the audience and the brand, in this case – the White House and the president. Plus, if an image contained information about a certain policy, for example, American Rescue Plan, it always featured a logo of this policy for higher visibility (e.g., Pictures 44 and 45).



Picture 43: Blue text overlaid image



Picture 44: Yellow text overlaid image



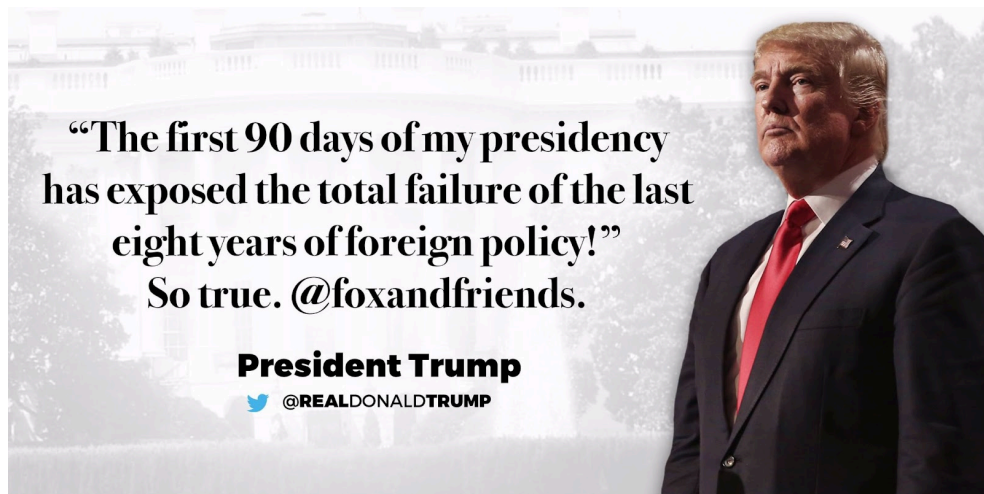
Picture 45: Green text overlaid image



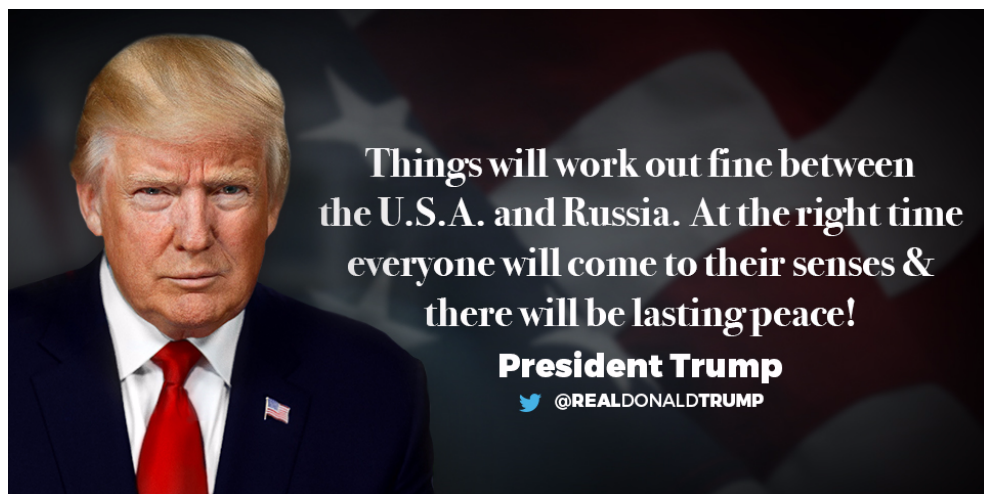
Picture 46: Information about vaccination with a hierarchized font

5.1.8 Biden alone with quote/text

A specific subcategory of the textual images is represented by the *Biden alone with quote/text* theme. Biden has rarely used this theme, with only 5 and 1 pictures posted on Facebook and Twitter, respectively. This poses a striking contrast with Trump's use of this theme, which comprised around 22 percent of his visual communication on Facebook. Thus, it is harder to compare the two strategies directly, as the limited number of cases does not allow us to discern any definitive patterns in Joe Biden's use of it. It's clear, however, that the substantive message of this theme lies mostly on the surface layer and is very similar in both Trump's and Biden's strategies. The goal of this theme is to familiarize the public with the president's views and thoughts that are directly traceable to him, as there is a visual connection between their photos and the used quote. Unlike in the case of the previous theme, there was a more visible conformity in Trump's posts with quotes imposed on his photos. The photos used were mostly the same, and easily recognizable, with Trump's familiar facial expressions. The background was always either white with a picture of the White House (e.g., Picture 47), or dark with a picture of the American flag (e.g., Picture 48), and the font was the same.



Picture 47: Trump's tweet imposed on his photo



Picture 48: Trump's tweet imposed on his photo

Biden's strategy was a bit different, though, as he used mostly naturally taken pictures from press conferences and other events, without changing background, and the text itself wasn't a repost from Twitter, but a direct quote or other text. Moreover, Biden's facial expressions were more relaxed, and the used colors were less contrasting, and more calming than Trump's black-on-white or white-on-black with a dash of red.



Picture 49: Biden's quote imposed on his photo



Picture 50: Biden's quote imposed on his photo

All in all, though, I don't want to overanalyze the theme, for which I don't have enough cases to prove or invalidate any claims. What matters most, is that substantially the use of this theme in both strategies is very similar, even though they have some key quantitative and qualitative differences.

5.1.9 Direct Twitter repost

To conclude the textual category of themes I will describe its final theme, which is the *Direct Twitter repost*. It applies only to Facebook, so it will only be discussed in the context of this platform. This theme comprised around 5 percent of total imagery in Biden's visual communication, and around 14 percent in Trump's, so the difference is almost threefold. For Trump's communication, everything that was said in the previous subchapter also applies here, because he had mostly imposed the Twitter repost on top of his photo as a quote. Biden's approach was more traditional and reposts were done as screenshots as seen in Pictures 51, 52, and 53.



Picture 51: Biden's Twitter repost



Picture 52: Biden's Twitter repost



Picture 53: Biden's Twitter repost

There is a final observation concerning all of the textual themes that I would like to share before moving on to the rest of the themes. Although I said earlier that I am not going to judge the content of the posted pictures, it is appropriate in the context of the chosen color palettes. Trump's strategy didn't differentiate the message it had tried to convey, and even if there were any guidelines in place (as in the *Trump alone with quote* or *Direct Twitter repost* themes), they weren't concerned with the content of the quote or text. *Text overlaid image* themed pictures didn't have any guidelines at all, so the color palettes used there were not consistent neither among themselves, nor in connection with the text that was imposed on chosen images.



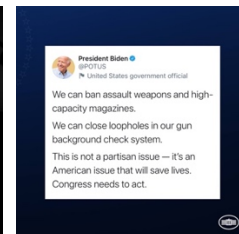
Picture 54: Slogan on a dark background



Picture 55: Biden's Twitter repost on a dark background



Picture 56: Slogan on a dark background



Picture 57: Biden's Twitter repost on a dark background



Picture 58: Policy achievement on a bright background



Picture 59: Twitter repost on a bright background



Picture 60: Slogan on a green background



Picture 61: Policy achievement on a pink background

Meanwhile, Biden's color patterns, especially in the *Text overlaid image* and *Direct Twitter repost* were strictly contextual. For example, darker blue and/or black colors were used for slogans and reposts connected to death, war, or weapons (see pictures 54 through 57). On the contrary, messages that concerned more positive news were using brighter blue and yellow or orange (e.g., Picture 58 or 59). Moreover, in some cases, the used color was thematically the same as the message itself. Picture 60 shows a slogan about achieving the goal of carbon neutrality by 2050, which is quite obviously an environmental message, and it was imposed onto a green background. Another example is shown in Picture 61, which uses transgender flag's colors as a background (light blue and pink) and at the same time contains information about president Biden reversing Donald Trump's ban on transgender people joining the military.

5.1.10 Linear perspective framing

Moving on to the next theme, which is the *Linear perspective framing*, and is a crucial one, I would argue that it presents the most apparent argument for comparison of the two contrasting visual communication styles. It is essential to understand the original meaning of this theme as formulated by Strand and Schill (2019). They defined this theme in order to capture a specific genre of Trump's pictures, where he is posed directly in the center with a crowd of people gathered beside or behind him, a composition evocative of Da Vinci's *The Last Supper*. In such pictures, Trump was always a central figure and a focal point. There were almost no such pictures in the case of Biden's visual communication. However, there were pictures where the composition itself was kept, just without Joe Biden as a focal point. So, I decided to keep this theme to qualitatively and quantitatively compare the two use strategies of it by both presidents. Quantitatively, Biden posted 8 pictures on both Facebook and Twitter, which comprised around 5 and 6 percent of total imagery respectively. This is a major divergence from Trump's communication strategy, which used this theme in around 40 percent of total imagery on Twitter and 10 percent on Facebook.

Qualitatively, these two strategies also couldn't be more different. It might even be assumed that Biden's team has deliberately used the same composition in a contrasting way to pose Joe Biden as a polar opposite of his predecessor. Examples for Trump's use of this theme are provided in

Pictures 62 through 64. Trump was always the center of attention, and a point around which the composition itself was built. He was always seated behind a desk (and most of the time was the only one sitting at all), with a crowd of people standing around him.



Picture 62: Linear perspective framing with Trump as a focal point



Picture 63: Linear perspective framing with Trump as a focal point



Picture 64: Linear perspective framing with Trump as a focal point

Biden, on the other hand, even in those limited cases where the linear perspective composition was used, was never in the center of it. It was either focused on an empty desk (e.g., Picture 65), or had Joe Biden and someone else, most notably Kamala Harris, near the center of the composition (e.g., Picture 66).

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Picture 65: Linear perspective with an empty desk as a focal point



Picture 66: Linear perspective with Joe Biden and Kamala Harris near the center

An interesting case of the *Linear perspective framing* theme is presented in the Picture 67. It features Joe and Jill Biden, the first lady of the United States, visiting a food bank in Texas. The perspective very clearly focuses on Jill Biden, not on the president himself.



Picture 67: Linear perspective with Jill Biden as a focal point

It's not exactly clear why Joe Biden would want to completely forgo the strategy used by his predecessor. Again, in the field of political communication we cannot think that this was due to his humility or humbleness, as we have to understand the calculations the politician and his media team have to do prior to deciding on what to post on social media. However, it is clear that no matter what personality Joe Biden really has, this strategy has tried to create an *appearance* of a humble politician, who is ready to share the spotlight. Firstly, it shows him in more natural settings, communicating with peer politicians on the same level without sitting behind the desk. Secondly, it elevates the importance of the other politicians communicating with him, especially his cabinet and vice president, Kamala Harris, considering the fact that they are presented as his equals, and not necessarily as subordinates. Thirdly, and probably most importantly, it sets Joe Biden further from the idea that the United States are governed fully by a single person, an idea so enjoyed by Donald Trump, yet rejected by most legal scholars and politicians¹¹. Accordingly,

¹¹ Trump had repeatedly implied that as a president he has complete control over anything that goes on in the country. He had said, for example, that "[w]hen somebody's the president of the United States, the authority is total" (Thrush and

in order to reject any authoritarian ideas and inclinations, Joe Biden has rejected the *Linear perspective framing*, symbolically dispersing the governing power across multiple institutions and people.

5.1.11 Military/veterans

One of the most surprising findings of the quantitative part of the research was the fact that Joe Biden had posted more images with the *Military/veterans* theme. Prior to analyzing it was easier to imagine that Donald Trump would have a larger visual military presence, considering his focus on toughness already discussed earlier and thoroughly described by Strand and Schill (2019). On the other hand, Joe Biden made the first impression of a president much less focused on foreign and military policy and concentrated rather on domestic policy. But the quantitative analysis has shown that only about 4 percent of total Trump's imagery on Twitter contained the *Military/veterans* theme, while Biden's Twitter imagery contained more than 9 percent of the same theme. On Facebook the discrepancy between the two presidents was less visible, with Trump posting about 6 percent of the total imagery with *Military/veterans* and Biden – 7 percent.

Does this mean that Biden had a deeper emphasis on the military than Trump, then? This question cannot be answered simply with said percentages. The qualitative substance of the pictures is at least as important, if not more. Trump's use of the *Military/veterans* theme was following the same goal as his overall visual strategy: to confirm his personal status as a legitimate president. The used pictures were pompous and official, with a large number of military personnel, including high-ranking officers, and Trump almost always as a central point of the pictures. Pictures 68 and 69 show Trump in the company of the Central Command leadership and then-National Security Advisor, H. R. McMaster, respectively. Pictures 70 and 71 contain Trump's meetings with veterans and active military personnel, and both show another favorite strategy of Donald Trump's – *Linear perspective framing* with Trump in the middle and surrounded by an enthusiastic crowd.

Haberman 2017). Moreover, a legal analysis by the *American Constitution Society* has concluded that his views are “unconstitutional” (Feingold 2020), while *The Harvard Gazette* has called the former president out on the fact that he “tested the limits of the office, violating traditions, norms, and even laws” (Pazzanese 2020).



Picture 68: Trump's meeting with the Central Command



Picture 69: Trump with H. R. McMaster



Picture 70: Trump surrounded by veterans



Picture 71: Trump surrounded by military personnel

Biden's variation of this theme was, yet again, quite different. The message he was trying to convey was subtler, at the same time being more straightforward. While Trump's goal here was the same as with other themes and strategies – to show his presidential power and establish himself as a legitimate authoritative figure, in this case Commander in Chief, and thus abstract, Biden was aiming for a more concrete application – legitimization of a specific policy. More specifically, the withdrawal of the U.S. troops from Afghanistan. Of course, this claim should be taken with a grain of salt, as it cannot be definitively proven with just several pictures, yet I would like to present several key findings that suggest this idea. While it is clear that, quantitatively speaking, Joe Biden had doubled down on the use of the *Military/veterans* theme, especially on Twitter, the substance of the message was much less obvious. Most pictures with this theme fall under either of two subcategories: they either underline the tragedy of the war or feature a closer and more personal image of the president with military personnel. Pictures 72 and 73 show two examples of the first subcategory, and 74 and 75 of the second one.

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Picture 72: Biden visiting Arlington National Cemetery



Picture 73: Joe and Jill Biden visiting Vietnam War Memorial



Picture 74: Biden meeting with military personnel



Picture 75: Biden meeting with military personnel

Picture 73 shows Joe and Jill Biden visiting the Vietnam War Memorial, and interestingly, this was an unscheduled visit on the National Vietnam Veterans Day, March 29, two weeks before announcing a complete withdrawal of the U.S. troops from Afghanistan by September 11. Though I'm not implying that this visit was a fully staged photo-op, it is clear that it provided a strong parallel with the Vietnam War and its casualties, both visually and substantively, with both wars going on for almost 20 years and both ending without accomplishing any clear goal by a president who didn't start the wars themselves. Other examples, like the one in Picture 81, show Joe Biden meeting veterans and active military personnel if not in casual settings, but using a more personal composition of the pictures, where the president is posed as an equal, and not a superior.

First subcategory, pretty obviously, shows the implications of the war in general, and draws an analogy with another longest U.S. war to create a sense that the withdrawal is necessary in order to prevent a larger tragedy and more casualties. Second subcategory humanizes the people actually fighting the war, showing them on a more personal level

equal with the president. In the end, I would argue that both these sub-categories were used not in order to legitimize Biden's presidency, but his military policies, especially the withdrawal of the troops from Afghanistan.

5.1.12 Foreign leader

The last theme that is common in both Biden's and Trump's visual communication strategies, is the *Foreign leader* theme. There is not much to say about this particular theme, except for the fact that its use by the two presidents was different quantitatively, yet substantively speaking there was not much difference. Trump had posted more pictures with this theme – around 9 percent of the total imagery on both platforms, while Biden's use of the same theme was limited to 5 percent. Moreover, as I said, the difference between the two was really marginal because this was one of the few themes where Trump had posed himself as an equal with another subject of the photo (in this case another foreign leader). He was not seated behind a desk or table and was almost always on the same level as a foreign leader, and the focal point was dispersed between the two. Examples are shown in Pictures 76 and 77.



Picture 76: Trump meeting Justin Trudeau



Picture 77: Trump meeting Abe Shinzō

We could hypothesize, theoretically, that the quantitative difference is again due to Trump's striving for recognition on all levels of politics, and thus he had tried to appear more professional and president-like by meeting more foreign leaders, or at least posting more pictures with them. However, this explanation cannot be fully accepted, as it can also be explained by a third variable, which most likely was the COVID-19 pandemic that restricted the number of foreign visitors and president's visits to other countries. That's why, for example, all of Biden's cases with

the use of this theme feature an on-line meeting between Biden and other foreign leaders (e.g., Picture 78 and Picture 79).



Picture 78: Biden meeting Micheál Martin



Picture 79: Biden attending the Leaders Summit on Climate

The absence of almost any qualitative difference, beside probably the fact that many Trump's photos with foreign leaders were taken non-professionally, also can be attributed to the pandemic. We simply cannot know how Biden's team and photographers would have composed the pictures with foreign leaders, were it not for the pandemic and the meetings being on-line.

5.1.13 Informal setting

I've already mentioned one of the most distinguishable characteristics of Trump's visual communication strategy, described by Strand and Schill (2019), which was Trump's "dehumanized" look. He had no pets in the White House, rarely posted pictures of his family (non-related to their political activity) and was almost never shown in any sort of informal setting, which is surprising, considering how much time he had actually spent playing golf, for example. One article by *The Washington Post* estimates that Trump "probably played 261 rounds of golf as president" and "visited one of his properties ... on 57 percent" of his weekends as president (Bump 2021). Of this, at least 18 rounds were most likely played during his first 100 days, however nothing in his visual communication implies that he had any breaks at all. Such disparity is completely in line with his electoral promises, in which he said that, unlike president Obama, he is not going to have time to go play golf (Bump 2021), when in fact he spent roughly the same amount of time playing golf in half as

much years as president¹². This is another evidence of how careful Trump's visual communication strategy actually was, and only appeared chaotic. Much like Biden had tried to visually downplay the amount of time he spent reversing Trump's policies, thus reducing the use of the *Signing a document* theme, Trump hadn't posted any pictures of his family or leisure time to maintain the image of a hard-working and dehumanized president.

Joe Biden, on the other hand, posted 15 pictures containing some sort of reference to his personal life on both Facebook and Twitter, comprising about 9 percent and 11 percent of total imagery on these platforms respectively. Examples are shown in Pictures 80 through 83. These pictures demonstrate that in that regard Biden's visual communication is a stylistic continuation of Obama's, as shown by Chun (2019). Obama was often depicted playing basketball, wearing casual outfits, and many pictures featured his family, especially Michelle Obama, then-first lady. Although Biden was not shown to be playing basketball, and likely had not played it at all, his imagery often included Jill Biden, and he sometimes also posted pictures in casual clothing. This return to a more humanized look is most likely meant to show as much contrast as possible with Biden's predecessor, Donald Trump. Moreover, as was said numerous times, Biden didn't follow Trump's goal of toughness, but rather another goal of establishing a new consistent narrative. And the use of the *Informal setting* theme seems to provide a sense of familiarity and relatability to this narrative, which is crucial for establishing a connection with the general public.



Picture 80: Joe and Jill Biden during Easter celebration



Picture 81: Biden having a phone call

¹² To be fair, though, this is just an estimate, because, unlike Obama, Trump's team "wouldn't report whether he was playing golf at his properties", and he played almost exclusively on his own properties (Bump 2021).

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Picture 82: Joe and Jill Biden walking the premises of the White House



Picture 83: Biden with his dogs

5.1.14 Kamala Harris

Finally, I move on to the last theme, which had not appeared in Trump's communication¹³, but was used rather generously by Joe Biden. This theme is *Kamala Harris*, and it features, quite logically, Kamala Harris, Biden's vice president. It is important to note, though, that not every picture that featured Kamala Harris in any position was coded as a picture with this theme. Here I was coding only those pictures, where Kamala Harris had a central place in the composition of the photo, either by herself, or together with the president. Biden had posted 15 pictures with this theme on Facebook and 11 on Twitter, which comprised about 9 and 8 percent of total imagery on each platform. Examples are shown in Pictures 84 through 86.



Picture 84: Biden walking together with Kamala Harris



Picture 85: Biden visiting Pentagon together with Kamala Harris

¹³ Obviously, Kamala Harris could not have appeared in Trump's imagery, however Mike Pence would be analogous in this case.



Picture 86: Biden in meeting together with Kamala Harris

The nature of the pictures and of the overall communication suggest that Biden's goal for this theme was twofold. First reason is similar to the one first seen in the *Linear perspective framing*, where I have noticed a repeated symbolic dispersion of power from Biden to other politicians, including, of course, Kamala Harris. By positioning her on the same level both symbolically and spatially, the photos elevate her status and show that she's as important as the president. I will not focus on this particular message as I've already discussed it at length in the *Linear perspective framing* subsection and will move on to the second message.

Second goal is connected to another trend that can be seen in other photos that I haven't yet discussed, and that is Biden's appearance as a feminist. That is not again to say that he necessarily *is* a feminist, but that's not the point here – what matters most is the image he tried to convey. And Biden definitely did concentrate on building his image as someone who supports inclusion of women in politics. I've already discussed that he often included his wife, Jill Biden, in the imagery on both Facebook and Twitter, and not only in informal settings, but also during his political engagements like visits or meetings. In the case of Kamala Harris, it's even more visible, as she can be seen in a lot of images, and even where she's not the central point, she is still easily discernible. Similarly, there were a lot of images that underlined the inclusion of women in politics, for example, in Picture 87 we can see Biden's complete cabinet, and exactly half of it are women. In the already discussed Picture 88 Biden meets soccer players and political activists Megan Rapinoe and Margaret Purce, with Purce sitting in Biden's chair. Picture 89 shows Biden signing a document in the company of Kamala Harris and Isabella Casillas Guzman, the administrator of the Small Business Administration.

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Finally, Picture 90 features Biden and Harris meeting two Combatant Commanders¹⁴ – Gen. Jacqueline Van Ovost and Gen. Laura J. Richardson.



Picture 87: Biden's cabinet



Picture 88: Joe and Jill Biden with Megan Rapinoe and Margaret Purce



Picture 89: Biden in the presence of Kamala Harris and Isabel Guzman



Picture 90: Biden meeting Jacqueline Van Ovost and Laura Richardson

All of the discussed pictures follow the same visual guidelines that elevate the featured women's statuses to the president's level and promote Biden's image as a pro-feminist president.

5.2 Visual Communications Compared

After analyzing all of the themes, I compared Biden's visual communication to Trump's. During the discussion of the themes, I have tried to provide all of the details that have some of the points of comparison already in them. Thus, this chapter will be dedicated to a brief summary of identified differences. Quantitatively, it can be expressed as the following table, where I juxtaposed the directly comparable themes that were present in both Biden's and Trump's imagery (expressed only in percentages):

¹⁴ Nominees at the time of meeting.

	Facebook		Twitter	
	<i>Trump</i>	<i>Biden</i>	<i>Trump</i>	<i>Biden</i>
Signing a document	8.30	5.14	17.60	7.04
Text overlaid image	36.22	36.00	44.12	26.76
Desk/table (directly seated)	20.07	10.29	66.17	12.68
Linear perspective framing	9.84	4.57	39.70	5.63
Military/veterans	5.90	7.43	4.41	9.15
Foreign leader	8.60	4.57	8.82	4.93
President alone with text	22.05	2.86	0	0.70
Direct Twitter repost	13.78	5.14	0	0

We can immediately see a few different patterns. First, both Biden and Trump had used almost the exact same relative amount of the *Text overlaid image* themed pictures on their Facebook accounts. Second, both have not been using the *Direct Twitter repost* and *President alone with quote/text* on their Twitter account, which is again quite understandable and self-explanatory. This is, however, where the similarities end. Apart from these three categories, there is no overlap in two presidents' visual communication styles. While Trump had extensively used the *Linear perspective framing* in his pictures, Biden rarely used it. And even when he did, the difference within this category was not only quantitative, but also qualitative. While Strand and Schill (2019) describe this category of photos where Trump is "prominent and a strong focal point with all visual lines converging to the centered Trump", in the case of Joe Biden, it seems that his PR team has deliberately used a completely opposite strategy: either leaving a central focal point empty or placing both Joe Biden and Kamala Harris at the center of the picture. This comparison is shown in Pictures 91 and 92 respectively.



Picture 91: Linear perspective framing with Trump as a focal point



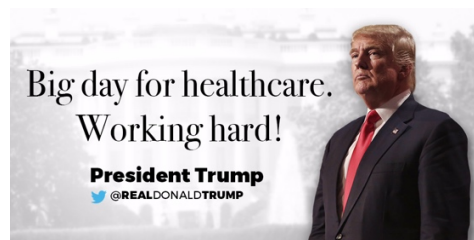
Picture 92: Linear perspective framing with both Biden and Harris as a focal point

Another stark point of contrast was identified in the *Desk/table* category, which was the most used theme in Trump’s visual communication on Twitter, and the second most used on his Facebook page. Biden, on the other hand, used it much less frequently, although, to be fair, not to the point where it could become obsolete. This means that he still used the imagery of him sitting behind a desk or a table, however, much more frequently he tried to pose “in the field”, communicating with other members of political establishment, media, and other organizations, which is exactly why it was important to distinguish between these new categories.

Finally, another obvious difference, which was also both quantitative and qualitative, was the use of the president image imposed onto some kind of text or quote. This was the second most used theme on Trump’s Facebook, while being the least used on Biden’s. As I’ve said, there was also a clear qualitative difference between the two. Both Strand and Schill (2019) and Chun (2018) identify “toughness” as the main feature Trump sought to be identified with. This was noted also by the media, with one article by *The New York Times* noting: “Toughness, more than any other attribute, is what Mr. Trump has sought to project during his short and successful political career” (Thrush and Haberman 2017). This striving has led Trump and his media team to posting pictures where he posed as tough as possible (Pictures 93 and 94). On the other hand, Biden’s usage of this strategy, however scarce, was very different. The colors that he used were calmer, and the photos of Biden himself were taken from more natural settings, like press conferences, while his facial expressions were more relaxed (in comparison to Trump’s). Examples are presented in Pictures 95 and 96.



Picture 93: Trump with quote



Picture 94: Trump with quote



Picture 95: Biden with quote



Picture 96: Biden with quote

But the main difference between the two styles of visual communication is the following. While Trump's imagery was aimed at elevating his *personal* status as president, Biden's goal was to elevate his *institutional* status. To put it simply, Donald Trump strived to legitimize his presidency, as he was perceived as an outsider and an amateur even by his supporters. On the other hand, Joe Biden went into office during a political turmoil that included an armed insurrection and the overall distrust towards political and public institutions. His main goal was to regain the trust of the general public not as an individual, but as an institution. Thus, his chosen style of visual communication follows and accomplishes several goals.

1. Building a new image

The tone of many pictures posted by Joe Biden can be interpreted as a symbolic return to an Obama-era image of a Democratic president. Biden's image was made to resemble Obama's in a few key ways. Biden had posted a moderate number of personal pictures where he was depicted in casual clothing, for example, walking the premises of the White House with a cup of coffee. His wife, Jill Biden, was also a subject of some pictures, same as Michelle Obama was during Obama's term. Furthermore, Biden's facial expressions were often relaxed, he was pictured smiling and reassuring even on the images where he was alone. It was

intended to create a sharp contrast with Donald Trump who was portraying himself as a tough president, and thus had most images of him taken while not smiling but frowning¹⁵.

2. Repairing the damages

Next, Biden's goal was to repair some of the institutional damages made by Donald Trump. I've discussed the overarching motif of Biden's communication that spans multiple different themes and is meant to help a wide range of institutions to regain the public's trust. It is especially seen in the *Linear perspective framing*, *Establishment*, and *Political meeting* themes. Moreover, the same motif is applied to the media through the *Press conference* theme. These themes aim to achieve two goals. First, they are meant to show the legitimacy of the institutions Joe Biden comes in contact with. Second, they are meant to elevate the status of the other people from the government, which is especially seen in the example of the *Kamala Harris* theme, but also in the pictures where Joe Biden meets with his cabinet. This second goal is also connected to the symbolic withdrawal of the political power from one person in order to return to a more traditional approach of checks and balances with different institutions taking on different areas of governing.

3. Choosing the right themes

Not all in Biden's imagery was an opposite of Donald Trump. For example, he also used the same strategy for an agenda setting function of his visual communication. Trump had chosen not to post any pictures from his leisure time, yet as we've already discussed he spent large amounts of time resting at his resorts. It was crucial for him, as he had extensively criticized Obama for not working and playing too much golf. Similarly, Biden had criticized Trump for being a divisive president who relies on the executive orders too much without delegating the legislative power to the lawmakers. Thus, he had tried to visually downplay the amount of time he spent signing executive orders, although he signed them much more frequently than Trump did. He almost did not post any pictures with the *Signing a document* theme to appeal to his wide coalition and maintain an image of a bipartisan president he had built during his campaign.

¹⁵ An exception can be seen in the pictures where Trump was posing beside somebody else, especially with other foreign leaders, or when he was in the center of the *Linear perspective framing* pictures.

One of the secondary questions that interested me was whether Biden's visual communication of Facebook and Twitter. Interestingly, there was not much difference between the two platforms. In case of Donald Trump, for example, he had posted much more pictures of him behind a desk, or with a linear perspective framing composition on Twitter. Biden's communication, on the other hand, was rather homogeneous on both platforms, with an obvious exception of the *Direct Twitter repost* theme. This can most likely be attributed to the fact that Biden hoped that his wide coalition is less likely to be concentrated on either platform, and thus didn't feel the need to correct the strategy in accordance to the social media platform.

6 Limitations of the research

I would like to dedicate the final chapter of my thesis to some of the limitations it has which I think should be accounted for while reading the conclusions.

First and foremost, my thesis is mainly a qualitative study, and as every other piece of qualitative research is dependent on the interpretation of a researcher. Coding images, especially social media posts, is highly subjective, and does not produce large amounts of data, but rather interpretive conclusions about the nature of the images. This leads to the fact that there can be no conclusive verdict, nor hypotheses confirmation, as we cannot fully verify the results, and statistically check for significance or direction of the effect. On the other hand, I've tried to address this drawback by triangulating the results of the qualitative phase by adding a quantitative one, turning this study into more of a mixed research design. I've quantified the identified themes and went through each of them, grounding the interpretation in the political context and dimensionalizing them in relation to each other. Furthermore, the comparative phase helped address some of the potential inconsistencies in the coding, as I had a study by Strand and Schill as a reference and basis.

However, this fact can also be seen as a limitation of sorts. I didn't produce the Trump's study myself, and thus cannot fully guarantee if the results are directly comparable, although I tried to maintain consistency while coding and interpreting, and mainly to keep the original meaning of the identified themes. To be fair though, their work is also a continuation of Chun (2018), and for the parts where Strand and Schill compare Trump's visual communication to Obama's, they adapt Chun's findings the same way I do theirs.

Another limitation is the discrepancy in the analyzed social media accounts. While Strand and Schill analyzed Trump's personal account, @DonaldTrump on Facebook and @RealDonaldTrump on Twitter, I've taken the imagery from @POTUS accounts for Joe Biden. It's fair to say, though, that I didn't have any opportunity to take pictures from Joe Biden's personal account, as he had simply stopped posting on his personal account for the duration of the first 100 days of his presidency. What matters here most, though, is whether the studied account was a primary source of information from a respective president. In Trump's case, his @RealDonaldTrump account was the only account, from where

people could have gotten news related to his presidency coming directly from him, and for Joe Biden, it was the @POTUS account.

Moreover, there is a second limitation that is also connected to the social media platforms, and that is that I didn't analyze *all* of them, most notably missing Instagram and YouTube. There probably is a lot to unpack in the visual communication on Instagram, and another full study should be dedicated to interpreting the audio-visual communication on YouTube. Although, I would argue that Facebook and Twitter remain primary sources for political news among the social media platforms, and thus should be analyzed first.

Next, I analyze only the first 100 days that, while being a good indicator of where is the presidency headed, at least visually, is definitely not enough to grasp the whole communication strategy that can adapt to all sorts of situations arising with the duration of the presidential term. The most obvious example is the pandemic, which started at the end of Trump's term, yet spilled over to the beginning of Biden's, producing radically different political contexts. It would be then interesting to study visual communication during the whole duration of the pandemic, for example, or compare two full presidential terms of different presidents.

All of the above does not mean that this study is incomplete, but rather that further research in this area is much needed. I hope that I have managed to establish some sort of analytical framework for further researchers to try to fill in white areas identified here.

7 Conclusion

In my thesis I tried to tap into the Joe Biden's visual communication style during his first 100 days in office. First, I've described the theoretical framework of the visual communication in media, marketing, and politics. Because of the nature of this thesis and its focus on the visual communication of the president of the United States, I've concentrated more on the political visual communication and the theory that underlies it. Thus, I've described the history of visual communication of different American presidents, and especially – Donald Trump's. I've taken one particular piece of research, the study by Ryan Strand and Dan Schill, where they analyzed Trump's visual communication during his first 100 days in office, and replicated it using the case of Joe Biden, Trump's successor in the White House.

My own analysis has accomplished several goals, and to sum up everything that it has shown, I would like to return to my research questions.

RQ1: What themes are present in Joe Biden's visual communication on Twitter and Facebook during the first 100 days of his presidency?

There was a total of 14 themes identified. They were *Signing a document*, *Text overlaid image*, *Desk/table (directly seated)*, *Linear perspective framing*, *Military/veterans*, *Foreign leader*, *Biden alone with quote/text*, *Direct Twitter repost*, *Political meeting*, *Establishment*, *White House*, *Informal setting*, *Press conference*, and *Kamala Harris*. Of them, the first eight are common with the Trump's and thus allowed us to make a direct comparison between the two visual communication. The most used themes of Biden's communication were *Text overlaid image* and *Political meeting*, with them comprising around 36/27 and 19/25 percent of total imagery on Facebook/Twitter respectively. Other themes' usage mostly ranged from 5 to 12 percent with a couple of minor exceptions like the *Direct Twitter repost* that was obviously not used on Twitter.

RQ2: What impression does Joe Biden try to present to the public through his visual communication during the same period of time?

Three particular goals are clearly seen in Biden's visual communication on social media. First, his own image was relaxed and oftentimes personal, without an emphasis on toughness. Second, he included many other politicians and members of the establishment in his imagery in order to repair trust in media, institutions and to partially withdraw the political power from a single person, something that Donald Trump rejected both substantively and through his visual communication. Third, he had downplayed certain visual themes, especially *Signing a document*, in order to appeal to a more moderate/conservative public and to appear more bipartisan.

RQ3: How does Biden's visual communication compare with Trump's during his first 100 days?

Most of the differences between the two visual strategies stem from the nature of the two presidents. As I've said numerous times, Biden's visual communication is very similar to Obama's, and thus presents a case of a traditional Democratic president, with lots of blue color, pictures of the president with other politicians, and the image of an amicable persona who is often shown in casual and informal settings. This already puts Biden's communication in a completely opposite direction from Donald Trump's. On the other hand, though, there are several less traditional approaches present in Biden's communication that can be interpreted as reactionary to his predecessor's style and rhetoric and also to the political and social situation present during Biden's inauguration as president. For example, he was rarely depicted sitting behind a desk, but rather "in the field", communicating with other politicians, visiting different institutions and organizations. He had put much emphasis on the women in politics, visually underlining their importance. And finally, he had tried to repair the damages done directly by Donald Trump, so his visual communication can be also interpreted as a direct continuation of Trump's presidency, although with a main purpose of dismantling its legacy.

Overall, both strategies are pretty straightforward and similar, albeit follow two polar styles of communication. While Trump's strategy was chaotic and seemingly used as little design as possible, Biden's was highly polished and thought-through. At their core, though, they meant to bring attention of their core audiences to the problems and issues they deemed important and worked with the designs easily digestible by the

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respective audiences. Whether this has worked as planned, and whether the discussed presidents achieved their goals is out of scope of my thesis and would require more quantitatively based research studying Trump's and Biden's supporters and their attitude towards the presidents' visual strategies.

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