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FULL PAPER

Why do politicians use Facebook and Twitter the way they do?
The influence of perceived audience expectations

Warum nutzen Politiker Facebook und Twitter so, wie sie es tun?
Der Einfluss von vermuteten Publikumserwartungen

Ole Kelm

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Abstract: Politicians' social media use affects their relationship with citizens. For example, politicians are better evaluated when they communicate interactively. However, they mostly use social media to broadcast information to their audience. This study asks why politicians use Facebook and Twitter the way they do. The study contends that politicians want to satisfy their audiences' expectations, to get favorable reactions and increase their visibility, and that politicians from different parties have different audiences who have different expectations for how politicians should communicate. Data from two surveys conducted among national (n = 118) and local (n = 859) German politicians show that politicians' Facebook and Twitter communication is strongly oriented to their perceptions of their audiences' expectations. The party size did not influence politicians' Twitter communication, but their Facebook communication: Compared to politicians from major parties, politicians from minor parties communicate in more interactive ways via Facebook. In addition, politicians from minor parties perceive more strongly than their colleagues from major parties that their audience expects them to criticize other politicians or journalists.

Keywords*:* Politicians, social media, audience inclusion, perceptions, expectations.

Zusammenfassung: Die Facebook- und Twitter-Kommunikation von Politikern beeinflusst ihre Beziehung zu Bürgern. Zum Beispiel werden Politiker besser bewertet, wenn sie interaktiv kommunizieren. Dennoch senden Politiker über soziale Medien hauptsächlich unidirektional Informationen an ihr Publikum. Diese Studie fragt, warum Politiker Facebook und Twitter so nutzen, wie sie es tun. Es wird angenommen, dass Politiker die Erwartungen des Publikums mit ihrer Facebook- und Twitter-Kommunikation erfüllen wollen, um positive Reaktionen zu erhalten und ihre Sichtbarkeit zu erhöhen, und dass Politiker von unterschiedlichen Parteien unterschiedliche Publika ansprechen, die unterschiedliche Erwartungen haben, wie Politiker kommunizieren sollten. Um die Annahmen zu überprüfen, wurden zwei standardisierte Umfragen unter Bundestagsabgeordneten (n = 118) und Stadträten (n = 859) in Deutschland durchgeführt. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass sich Politiker bei ihrer Facebook- und Twitter-Kommunikation stark an ihren Vermutungen orientieren, was ihr Publikum von ihnen erwartet. Die Parteigröße beeinflusst zwar nicht, wie Politiker auf Twitter kommunizieren, aber wie sie auf Facebook kommunizieren: Im Gegensatz zu Politikern von großen Parteien kommunizieren Politiker von kleinen Parteien auf eine interaktivere Art und Weise. Darüber hinaus vermuten Politiker von kleinen Par-

teien stärker als ihre Kollegen von großen Parteien, dass ihr Publikum von ihnen erwartet, dass sie andere Politiker und Journalisten kritisieren.

Keywords: Politiker; Soziale Medien; Publikumsbeteiligung; Wahrnehmungen; Erwartungen.

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1. Introduction

Social media are often attributed the potential to strengthen democratic processes by bridging the gap between politicians and citizens (Coleman & Blumler, 2009). The realization of this potential depends not only on the adoption of social media but also on how politicians communicate on social media. Politicians' interactive online communication, for example, positively influences citizens' political involvement (Kruikemeier, van Noort, Vliegenthart, & de Vreese, 2016). However, politicians rarely communicate this way (Boulianne, 2016; Jungherr, 2016), and it is far from clear why politicians use social media the way they do.

Politicians primarily use social media to increase their visibility (Enli & Skogerbø, 2013), and this visibility increases when citizens interact with politicians' messages (Bene, 2017). How many citizens interact with politicians' messages depends on how politicians communicate on social media (Bene, 2017), because citizens have specific expectations for politicians' social media communication (Faus & Hartl, 2018; Lüders, Følstad, & Waldal, 2014). What expectations citizens have are not clearly visible to politicians, because citizens rarely interact with politicians on social media (Hinz, 2017; Kalsnes, Larsson, & Enli, 2017). Thus, the study contends that politicians anticipate what kind of communication their audience expects, and that they adjust their communication accordingly, to get positive reactions, and to increase their visibility.

According to the normalization-equalization debate (e.g., Gibson & McAllister, 2015), politicians' online communication depends on the size of their party. The normalization hypothesis argues that politicians from major parties apply online tools better and faster, but the equalization hypothesis argues that politicians from minor parties with fewer resources and less access to mass media have more incentives to use online tools (Margolis, Resnick, & Wolfe, 1999). However, politicians from different parties have to deal not only with different amounts of resources but also with different audiences, who may expect different kinds of social media communication. Thus, party affiliation might influence politicians' perceived audience expectations, and in turn, politicians' social media communication.

This study offers a new approach to explaining how politicians use social media the way they do: *politicians' perceptions of audience expectations*. Therefore, the heuristic model of audience inclusion in journalism (Loosen & Schmidt,

2012) was transferred to the political system. The consideration of the audiences of politicians' communication enriches the normalization-equalization debate. To analyze why politicians use social media the way they do, two standardized surveys were conducted in 2016 among German national parliamentarians and German city councilors. Thus, this work contributes to the sparse literature on social media communication and perceptions of local politicians (e.g., Bernhard & Dohle, 2015), and on politicians' communication activities at various political levels (e.g., Metag & Marcinkowski, 2012). Such studies are needed, because "the local level is often regarded a key to a flourishing democracy" (Baugut, Fawzi, & Reinemann, 2017, p. 358). Both surveys were not conducted during election campaigns, because the democratic potential of online media can be realized only if politicians offer attractive communication regularly (Coleman, 2005; Tromble, 2018). The surveys focused on politicians' Facebook and Twitter activities and perceptions, to determine differences between two important social media platforms for political communication in Germany (Hinz, 2017; Schmidt, 2017).

2. Politicians' social media communication

Many politicians all over the world use social media platforms (e.g., Dolezal, 2015; Larsson & Kalsnes, 2014; Vaccari & Nielsen, 2013). In Germany, 96 percent of national parliamentarians were on Facebook in 2017, and 65 percent were on Twitter (Schmidt, 2017). Thus, politicians can no longer stand out from their colleagues as being up-to-date by merely having a profile on Facebook or Twitter. Instead, how politicians communicate on social media has become more important.

Simplified, politicians can use social media to broadcast information and to communicate interactively: "Broadcasting is a form of unidirectional communication […]. Interaction consists of behaviors that are based on reciprocity and are typically about engaging others" (Graham, Broersma, Hazelhoff, & van 't Haar, 2013, p. 703). The latter is attributed the potential to strengthen democracy by building closer relationships between politicians and citizens (Coleman, 2005; Coleman & Blumler, 2009; Tromble, 2018). The effects of politicians' interactive social media communication were analyzed in several studies from the Netherlands. These studies showed, for example, that Dutch politicians' interactive social media communication affects citizens' evaluation of politicians (Utz, 2009), citizens' perceived social presences of politicians, and citizens' political involvement (Kruikemeier et al., 2016). In addition, some studies demonstrated that Dutch politicians' interactive communication via Twitter or their website has a positive impact on their votes (Kruikemeier, 2014; van Noort, Vliegenthart, & Kruikemeier, 2016).

However, several studies from different countries indicated that politicians mainly broadcast information via social media, mostly about their political work (and less often about their personal lives), and rarely use social media interactively, for example, to discuss politics with others, to motivate others for political engagement, or to criticize others (Enli & Skogerbø, 2013; Golbeck, Grimes, & Rogers, 2010; Graham et al., 2013; Graham, Jackson, & Broesma, 2016; Jackson

& Lilleker, 2011). Similar communication behaviors were also observed among German parliamentarians (Caton, Hall, & Weinhardt, 2015; Geber & Scherer, 2015; Kelm, Dohle, & Bernhard, 2019; Nuernbergk & Conrad, 2016). While their Facebook and Twitter communication behavior has been remarkably constant over time (Kelm et al., 2019), they use Facebook and Twitter in different ways: For example, German parliamentarians use Facebook more often than Twitter for campaigning activities, and Twitter more often than Facebook to comment on specific events, and to discuss various policies (Stier, Bleier, Lietz, & Strohmaier, 2018).

Thus far, researchers have focused mainly on the explanation for politicians' social media use and nonuse (e.g., Dolezal, 2015; Metag & Marcinkowski, 2012; Quinlan, Gummer, Roßmann, & Wolf, 2018), their general social media activity (e.g., Bernhard & Dohle, 2015; Hoffmann, Suphan, & Meckel, 2016), and meta data, such as the number of retweets, likes, or @-mentions (e.g., Graham et al., 2016; Hinz, 2017; Vergeer & Hermans, 2013). Only a few studies have analyzed which factors influence how politicians use social media (e.g., Bode et al., 2016; Enli & Skogerbø, 2013; Stier et al., 2018; Tromble, 2016, 2018). These studies showed that the national context (the macro-level), the party organization (the meso-level), and individual characteristics (the micro-level) determine how politicians communicate on social media. For example, German national parliamentarians address their supporters less often on Facebook than members of the U.S. Congress (Geber & Scherer, 2015) and German national parliamentarians from major parties more often broadcasted personal messages on Twitter than their colleagues from minor parties (Nuernbergk & Conrad, 2016). Tromble (2018) showed that politicians consider their audiences: Dutch, U.S. American, and British politicians interact more often with others on Twitter, the more frequently these politicians receive positive formulated requests (Tromble, 2018).

Clearly, more studies are needed to identify factors that explain why politicians communicate on social media the way they do, because politicians use different social media platforms for different purposes, and in different ways (Enli & Skogerbø, 2013; Kreiss, Lawrence, & McGregor, 2018; Stier et al., 2018). In this study, micro- (perceived audience expectations), meso- (party size), and macro-level factors (political level) were investigated regarding German politicians' Facebook and Twitter communication.

2.1 The influence of perceived audience expectations

The importance of perceived audience expectations for media producers is theoretically worked out in journalism research. In particular, Loosen and Schmidt (2012) conceptualized a heuristic model of audience inclusion to systematize the relationship between journalists and their audience. The model contains two dimensions that are located on the journalist and audience sides. The *inclusion performance* consists of all the practices and features journalists provide to stimulate their audience to participate, and all participatory practices of the audience. *Inclusion expectations* consist of the attitudes, norms, and motivations of journal-

ists and their audience (e.g., journalists' images of the audience or the audience's motivations for participating).

The model can also be used "to investigate inclusion in other social systems such as politics or economy that are increasingly able to communicate with their audiences directly bypassing journalism" (Loosen & Schmidt, 2012, p. 879). In this study, the model is used to analyze the influence of politicians' perceived audience expectations—located in the inclusion expectations dimension—on politicians' social media communication—located in the inclusion performance dimension.

Politicians' social media audience is defined as all social media users who receive the politicians' messages on social media. In the first place, these users are the politicians' followers, who tend to agree with the opinions of the politicians they follow (Newman, Fletcher, Kalogeropoulos, Levy, & Nielsen, 2017). Politicians' audiences have specific expectations for how politicians should communicate. For example, citizens want politicians to use social media to broadcast information about current political events, and to discuss them interactively with citizens (Faus & Hartl, 2018; Lüders et al., 2014). If politicians provide their audience this expected kind of communication, the audiences might be satisfied, and reward the politicians through likes, shares, or comments, which increase the politicians' visibility. As visibility is a major goal of politicians' social media communication (Enli & Skogerbø, 2013), the assumption is that politicians want to satisfy their audiences' expectations.

However, politicians' audiences rarely engage with the politicians' messages. On average, for example, only 15 percent of politicians' Facebook followers commented on at least one politician's Facebook post during the German federal election in 2013 (Hinz, 2017). Although politicians' staffs can analyze social media data in political campaigns to gain a better understanding of their audiences, these data are not perfect (Kreiss et al., 2018, p. 17). In turn, politicians need to anticipate what kinds of communication are expected from them.

Politicians develop perceptions about others' expectations. For example, in the mass media environment, politicians develop perceptions about journalists' motives, needs, and expectations, and adapt their communication behavior accordingly, to increase favorable media coverage (Kepplinger, 2007). On social media, a different media logic prevails (Klinger & Svensson, 2015). In particular, journalists are less relevant as intermediaries of information on social media than in the mass media. Instead, citizens are more important for distributing information on social media (Klinger & Svensson, 2015, p. 1246). However, in a hybrid media system, older and newer media logics overlap (Chadwick, 2013, p. 4). Politicians can also use social media to provide journalists with information that they can include in their coverage (Paulussen & Harder, 2014). Albeit journalists are perceived as an important target group on social media, national and federal German politicians (Meckel, Hoffmann, Suphan, & Poëll, 2013), federal Swiss politicians (Hoffmann et al., 2016), and local and regional Norwegian politicians (Larsson & Skogerbø, 2018) perceive that citizens or potential voters are a more important target group on social media. As politicians probably try to satisfy citizens' expectations to get positive reactions and increase their visibility, it is hypothesized:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): The more strongly politicians perceive that (a) Facebook users and (b) Twitter users expect a specific kind of Facebook or Twitter communication, the more frequently politicians use Facebook or Twitter for this type of communication.

2.2 The influence of party size

In proportional and mixed-member electoral systems, like Germany, political parties dominate the political process, candidate recruitment, and parliament composition. Parties seem also to affect politicians' social media communication through their ideology and parliamentary status: Literature reviews by Boulianne (2016) and Jungherr (2016) indicated that politicians from left, green, and opposition parties tend to be more active on social media than politicians from conservative, and governing parties. Moreover, politicians' online communication is influenced by the size of their party, although the direction of the effect is unclear. The normalization hypothesis states that "patterns of socioeconomic and political relationships on-line come to resemble those of the real world" (Margolis et al., 1999, p. 26). Accordingly, politicians from major parties with large resources adopt online tools earlier, and use them more professionally than politicians from minor parties. In contrast, the equalization hypothesis argues that political actors' resources are less relevant on the Internet (Coleman & Blumler, 2009; Margolis et al., 1999). Accordingly, politicians from minor parties could overcome the disadvantages they face in the offline world, especially less mass media coverage than their colleagues from major parties (e.g., Jandura, 2007), by using the Internet.

The normalization hypothesis has been largely confirmed for websites by parties and politicians in various national contexts (Gibson & McAllister, 2015; Koc-Michalska, Lilleker, Smith, & Weissmann, 2016; Margolis et al., 1999; Schweitzer, 2011). For the adoption of social media, the picture is less clear: In Germany, Twitter seems to be a stronghold of national politicians from minor parties, whereas national politicians from major parties seem more likely to be on Facebook (e.g., Nuernbergk & Conrad, 2016; Quinlan et al., 2018). These tendencies are not always observed in other countries (e.g., Larsson, 2016; Jackson & Lilleker, 2011). One reason for the different effects of party size could be that the adoption of Facebook is more demanding than the adoption of Twitter (Quinlan et al., 2018). Therefore, the adoption of Facebook may depend more strongly on support from the party than the adoption of Twitter.

However, several studies indicated that (politicians from) minor parties tend to use social media more frequently in interactive and innovative ways than (politicians from) major parties (e.g., Kalsnes, 2016; Magin, Podschuweit, Haßler, & Russmann, 2017; Tromble, 2016). One reason might be that the social media usage is largely independent of the organization and its resources. Thus, the equalization hypothesis may apply to politicians' interactive social media communication:

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Politicians from minor parties use (a) Facebook and (b) Twitter more frequently for interactive communication than politicians from major parties.

Not only major and minor parties' resources differ, but also their electorates. In addition to electorates' political ideology, electorates' media activities differ. For example, compared to major parties' supporters, minor parties' supporters tend to use the Internet more frequently to visit party websites (Norris, 2003). A Finnish study indicated that minor parties' supporters seem to discuss politics more often on social media than major parties' supporters (Koiranen, Koivula, Saarinen, & Keipi, 2017). One reason could be that minor parties' supporters do not get as much mass media coverage of their favorite parties, and therefore, use party websites and social media platforms. Moreover, younger voters in Germany tend to vote more often for minor parties than for major parties (Der Bundeswahlleiter, 2018). As younger citizens tend to be more sophisticated Internet users (Newman et al., 2017), it is likely that supporters of minor parties expect more interactive social media communication from politicians than supporters of major parties. Assuming that politicians develop perceptions of their audiences' expectations, it is hypothesized:

Hypothesis 3 (H3): Politicians from minor parties perceive more strongly than politicians from major parties that (a) Facebook users and (b) Twitter users expect interactive communication.

Combining the previous considerations, perceptions of politicians are a possible mediator between party size and their social media communication:

Hypothesis 4 (H4): The influence of the size of politicians' parties on politicians' interactive (a) Facebook and (b) Twitter communication is mediated by the politicians' perception that Facebook or Twitter users expect interactive communication.

2.3 The influence of the political level

Although numerous studies have analyzed the social media communication of national politicians, only a few studies focused on local politicians' communication (Bernhard & Dohle, 2015; Enli & Skogerbø, 2013; Fawzi, Baugut, & Reinemann, 2018; Larsson & Skogerbø, 2018; Metag & Marcinkowski, 2012). More studies are needed, because there are several differences between the local and national levels. For example, local politicians are less professionalized, have fewer resources, and have closer relationships with their constituencies (Fawzi et al., 2018). Therefore, the results from studies of national politicians cannot simply be transposed to another political level.

Most studies showed that local politicians evaluate the Internet and social media platforms as less important than national politicians (Fawzi et al., 2018; Metag & Marcinkowski, 2012). Thus, local politicians might be less sophisticated social media users. However, national politicians have limited time, due to their numerous obligations, which might decrease their interactive and innovative social media communication.

Taken together, it is unclear in which way the political level influences politicians' Facebook and Twitter communication. Therefore: *To what extent does the*

political level influence (a) politicians' Facebook communication and (b) politicians' Twitter communication?

3. Method

3.1 Data collection and sample

Two standardized surveys were conducted in spring 2016—one among members of the German Bundestag, Germany's national parliament, and one among the councilors of 54 out of 63 of Germany's largest cities.[1] All national members of parliament (MPs) were contacted via postal letter to participate in the survey; all councilors were contacted via email. Two and four weeks after the invitation was sent, reminder emails were sent.

Table 1. Composition of the samples compared to the composition of the Bundestag and all city councils

	Sample national MPs, 2016 (*n* = 118)	Bundestag, 2016 (*n* = 630)	Sample city councilors, 2016 (*n* = 859)	All city councils, 2016 (*n* = 3,503)
Gender				
Female	38.8	36.8	38.8	34.1
Male	61.2	63.2	61.2	65.9
Year of birth				
1950 or earlier	5.5	9.0	13.5	15.9
1951 to 1960	38.2	33.0	28.7	29.1
1961 to 1970	37.3	33.7	27.0	27.0
1971 to 1980	13.6	18.9	16.0	16.9
1981 or later	5.5	5.4	14.8	11.1
Party affiliation				
Major parties	74.4	79.8	52.2	57.4
CDU/CSU	36.3	49.2	23.5	28.3
SPD	38.1	30.6	28.7	29.1
Minor parties	25.6	20.2	47.7	39.8
Left Party	16.8	10.2	9.9	7.6
Alliance 90/The Greens	8.8	10.0	17.9	14.0
Other parties, or no party affiliation			19.9	18.2

Note. Percentages.

A total of 118 national MPs (response rate: 18.6%) and 859 city councilors (response rate: 24.5%) participated. Both samples were barely biased with respect to gender and age, and were biased with respect to party affiliation (Table 1). In particular, national MPs of the CDU/CSU were underrepresented. Of the surveyed national MPs, 94.1 percent used Facebook (*n* = 111), and 52.5 percent used Twitter (*n* = 62;

in 2017, 96% of national MPs used Facebook, and 65% used Twitter; Schmidt, 2017). Of the surveyed city councilors, 51.3 percent used Facebook (n = 441), and 17.7 percent used Twitter (n = 152; no comparative data). As the hypotheses and the research question focused on Facebook and Twitter activities and perceptions, only politicians who used Facebook or Twitter were considered in the following.

3.2 Measures

3.2.1 Politicians' Facebook and Twitter communication

Politicians' broadcasting and interactive Facebook and Twitter communication were considered. To address broadcasting activities, politicians were asked how frequently they use (1) Facebook and (2) Twitter to broadcast information (a) about their political work and (b) about their everyday lives. To address interactive communication, respondents were asked how often they use (1) Facebook and (2) Twitter to (c) discuss political issues with others, (d) motivate others to engage in politics, and (e) criticize other politicians and journalists whose opinions they do not share (all items: 1 = *never* to 5 = *very often*; see Table 2 for means and standard deviations).

Table 2. National MPs' and city councilors' Facebook and Twitter communication and their perceived audience expectations

	National MPs	City councilors	National MPs	City councilors
	Facebook		Twitter	
Politicians' communication				
Broadcast information about political work	4.17 (1.05)	3.57 (1.23)	3.79 (1.09)	2.79 (1.21)
Broadcast information about everyday lives	2.43 (1.23)	2.45 (1.26)	2.87 (1.22)	2.07 (1.12)
Discuss with others	2.87 (1.08)	2.85 (1.17)	3.60 (.98)	2.30 (1.14)
Motivate others	2.96 (1.09)	2.61 (1.22)	2.98 (.97)	1.99 (1.15)
Criticize others	2.21 (1.10)	2.16 (1.11)	3.10 (1.25)	2.08 (1.13)
Politicians' perceived audience expectations				
Broadcast information about political work	4.29 (.77)	3.97 (.96)	3.52 (1.20)	3.72 (1.10)
Broadcast information about everyday lives	3.13 (1.14)	2.79 (1.08)	2.11 (1.18)	2.91 (1.20)
Discuss with others	3.39 (.97)	3.41 (.98)	2.92 (1.18)	3.26 (1.06)
Motivate others	3.02 (.99)	2.95 (1.05)	2.58 (1.26)	2.79 (1.14)
Criticize others	2.68 (1.03)	2.72 (1.10)	2.52 (1.20)	3.17 (1.14)
n	110–111	436–440	62	147–150

Note: Means and standard deviations (in parentheses); politicians' communication: 1 = *never* to 5 = *very often*; politicians' perceived audience expectations: 1 = *do not agree at all* to 5 = *agree very strongly.*

3.2.2 Politicians' perceived audience expectations

Politicians were asked how strongly they perceive that (1) Facebook users and (2) Twitter users expect politicians on Facebook and Twitter to broadcast information (a) about their political work and (b) their everyday lives, (c) discuss political

issues with others, (d) motivate others to engage in politics, and (e) criticize other politicians and journalists whose opinions they do not share (1 = *do not agree at all* to 5 = *agree very strongly*; see Table 2 for means and standard deviations).

3.2.3 The size of the politicians' parties

Politicians were asked to state their party affiliation. The German party system consists of one conservative major party (CDU; and its sister party CSU) and one social democratic major party (SPD) and several minor parties (e.g., Magin et al., 2017). Politicians from CDU/CSU and SPD were separated from politicians from other parties or politicians who had no party affiliation. Dummy variables were created (see Table 1).[2]

3.2.4 Covariates

In addition to gender and age, politicians were asked if they had an academic degree (national MPs: 76.7%; councilors: 68.2%). As the type of mandate could influence politicians' online communication (Nuernbergk & Conrad, 2016), politicians were asked whether they were elected directly (national MPs: 36.2%; councilors: 40.4%) or by party list. In addition, politicians' daily Internet usage in hours was captured (national MPs: $M = 4.15$, $SD = 2.79$; councilors: $M = 3.81$, $SD = 2.53$).

Politicians were also asked why they use (1) Facebook or (2) Twitter (indices "Motivations for Facebook/Twitter use" were based on eight items each, e.g., "for my political work, it is important that I present myself on Facebook/Twitter"), and why they do not use (1) Facebook or (2) Twitter more frequently (indices "Challenges for Facebook/Twitter use" were based on five items in the case of Facebook and on two items in the case of Twitter, e.g., "due to my numerous obligations, I have limited time"; all items: 1 = *do not agree at all* to 5 = *agree very strongly*; see Table 3 for means, standard deviations, and Cronbach's α).

According to the influence of the presumed media influence approach, the perceived political influence of the media could influence politicians' communication (Cohen, Tsfati, & Sheafer, 2008). Therefore, politicians were asked to estimate how strongly (1) Facebook and (2) Twitter influences their voters (1 = *no influence* to 5 = *very strong influence*; see Table 3 for means and standard deviations).

2 An alternative indication of the size of the parties could be the parties' number of seats in parliament. Instead, dummy variables were chosen, because the major German parties CDU/CSU and SPD have more resources than the minor parties, although these minor parties have more seats in some cities than the major parties. In addition, many city councilors refused to answer in which city they are on city councils. Thus, the number of cases would be reduced by alternative measurements.

Table 3. Covariates regarding Facebook or Twitter

	National MPs	City councilors	National MPs	City councilors
	Facebook		Twitter	
Motivations for Facebook/Twitter use	3.68 (.58) α = .75	3.44 (.77) α = .86	3.25 (.84) α = .86	2.71 (.92) α = .90
Challenges for Facebook/Twitter use	2.15 (.72) α = .69	2.39 (.74) α = .62	2.41 (1.19) α = .80	2.82 (1.26) α = .68
Perceived political influence of Facebook/Twitter on voters	3.18 (.89)	3.00 (.89)	2.66 (1.09)	2.33 (.99)
n	106–111	436–441	62	147–152

Note: Means, standard deviations (in parentheses), and Cronbach's α; motivations and challenges: 1 = *do not agree at all* to 5 = *agree very strongly*; perceived political influence: 1 = *no influence* to 5 = *very strong influence*.

4. Results

To test the influence of the political level, the data for the national MPs and city councilors were merged. Hierarchical regression analyses and simple mediation models (Hayes, 2018) were conducted.[3] In the regressions, control variables (block 1), politicians' perceptions of audience expectations (block 2), party size (block 3), political level (block 4), and interaction terms (block 5) were considered. Precisely, interaction terms[4] between (1) political level and party size, (2) political level and perception of audience expectation, and (3) party size and perception of audience expectations were included, because these variables might interact with each other.[5] The politicians' Facebook and Twitter communication served as dependent variables.

In the simple mediation models, party size served as independent variable, Facebook or Twitter communication as dependent variable, and perceived audience expectation as mediator. Control variables were considered.

4.1 Politicians' Facebook communication

The final models for politicians' Facebook communication explained between 31 percent and 49 percent of the total variance (see Table 4). The results largely supported H1 for Facebook. Although politicians' use of Facebook (a) to broadcast information about their political work was not influenced by their perception that their audience expects this kind of communication (ß = .04, *ns*), they used Face-

3 Unfortunately, not all respondents answered all questions. Consequently, the number of cases in the following regressions and simple mediation models are lower than the number of all respondents.

4 The political level, the party size, and the perceived audience expectations were standardized to facilitate the interpretation of the results (Hayes, Glynn, & Huge, 2012).

5 In each regression, only the perception of interest were considered in the interaction terms (e.g., in the regression that explained politicians' Facebook use for broadcasting information about political work, only politicians' perception that Facebook users expect information about politicians' political work was considered in the interaction terms).

book more frequently (b) to broadcast information about their everyday lives (ß = .32, $p < .001$), (c) discuss with others (ß = .27, $p < .001$), (d) motivate others (ß = .35, $p < .001$), and (e) criticize others (ß = .34, $p < .001$), the more strongly they perceived that Facebook users expect these kinds of Facebook communication.

H2 was also supported for Facebook. Politicians from minor parties[6] more often used Facebook for discussing with others (ß = –.11, $p < .05$), motivating others (ß = –.14, $p < .001$), and criticizing others (ß = –.09, $p < .05$) than politicians from major parties.

The political level did not influence politicians' interactive Facebook communication, but their broadcasting activities. National MPs more often broadcasted information about their political work on Facebook than councilors (ß = .18, $p < .001$). Councilors used Facebook more often to broadcast information about their everyday lives than national MPs (ß = –.11, $p < .05$). The interaction terms did not influence politicians' Facebook communication at the statistical level of $p < .05$.

Except for the motivation for Facebook usage, the effects of the control variables differed between the different types of Facebook communication: Male politicians, for example, more often used Facebook to broadcast information about their everyday lives, and to criticize others, than female politicians. In addition, directly elected politicians less often criticized others via Facebook than those elected by party list. The younger the politicians, the more often they broadcasted information about their work and motivated others for political engagement, and the more time they spend online, the more often they discussed politics with others.

The results of the simple mediation models partially confirmed H3 for Facebook (see Figure 1). Politicians from major parties perceived less strongly than their colleagues from minor parties that Facebook users expect politicians to criticize others (B = –.24, $p < .05$). However, party size did not influence politicians' perception that Facebook users expect politicians to discuss with others (B = –.13, *ns*), and to motivate others (.08, *ns*).

6 To determine the effect of politicians' party affiliation, additional analyses were conducted at the national and local levels. Instead of party size, dummy variables for party affiliation were considered (reference: CDU/CSU). At the national level, party affiliation had no influence on politicians' Facebook communication at the statistical level of $p < .05$. At the local level, councilors from the AfD less often broadcasted information about their political work (ß = –.09, $p < .05$) and about their personal lives (ß = –.10, $p < .05$), and they more often discussed politics with others (ß = .10, $p < .05$) than their colleagues from the CDU/CSU. Councilors from The Left (ß = .11, $p < .05$) and from the Pirate Party (ß = .11, $p < .05$) more often motivated others than councilors from the CDU/CSU. In addition, councilors from The Left more often criticized others (ß = .15, $p < .01$) than councilors from the CDU/CSU. However, these results should not be overstated, because the number of respondents who use Facebook was very low for some minor parties.

Table 4. Linear regressions—politicians' Facebook communication

	Broadcasting information		Interactive communication		
	Broadcast information about political work	Broadcast information about everyday lives	Discuss with others	Motivate others	Criticize others
Control variables					
Gender (1 = female)	.01	–.09*	–.03	.00	–.13**
Age (in years)	–.10*	–.02	–.03	–.11*	–.07
University degree	–.01	–.03	–.00	–.06	.00
Mandate type (1 = elected via party list)	.02	–.02	–.03	.05	.12**
Internet usage in hours	.02	.05	.09*	.08#	.05
Motivations for Facebook use	.53***	.32***	.43***	.37***	.27***
Challenges of Facebook use	–.10*	–.06	–.08#	–.11*	–.08#
Perceived political influence of Facebook on voters	.04**	.07	.07	.06	.00
R^2	.46***	.20***	.33***	.31***	.19***
Perceptions of audience expectations					
Broadcast information about political work	.04	–.13*	–.05	–.13**	–.05
Broadcast information about everyday lives	–.01	.32***	–.01	–.02	–.04
Discuss with others	.04	–.03	.27***	–.03	.06
Motivate others	–.04	.06	–.01	.35***	–.03
Criticize others	–.04	–.03	–.02	–.03	.34***
Change R^2	.01	.10***	.06***	.10***	.12***
Party size (1 = major party)	–.06	–.01	–.11*	–.14**	–.09*
Change R^2	.00#	.00	.02**	.02**	.02**
Political level (1 = national level)	.18***	–.11*	–.07	.07	–.02
Change R^2	.02***	.01#	.01*	.00	.00

	Broadcasting information		Interactive communication		
	Broadcast information about political work	Broadcast information about everyday lives	Discuss with others	Motivate others	Criticize others
Interaction terms					
Political level × Party size	–.02	–.01	–.01	.03	.04
Political level × Perceived audience expectations	–.03	.06	.01	–.04	.04
Party size × Perceived audience expectations	–.01	–.04	–.03	–.02	.07#
Change R^2	.00	.00	.00	.01	.01
R^2	.49***	.31***	.41***	.42***	.34***
n	440	439	437	436	440

Note. Standardized beta (β) coefficients; #$p < .10$; *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.

Table 5. Linear regressions—politicians' Twitter communication

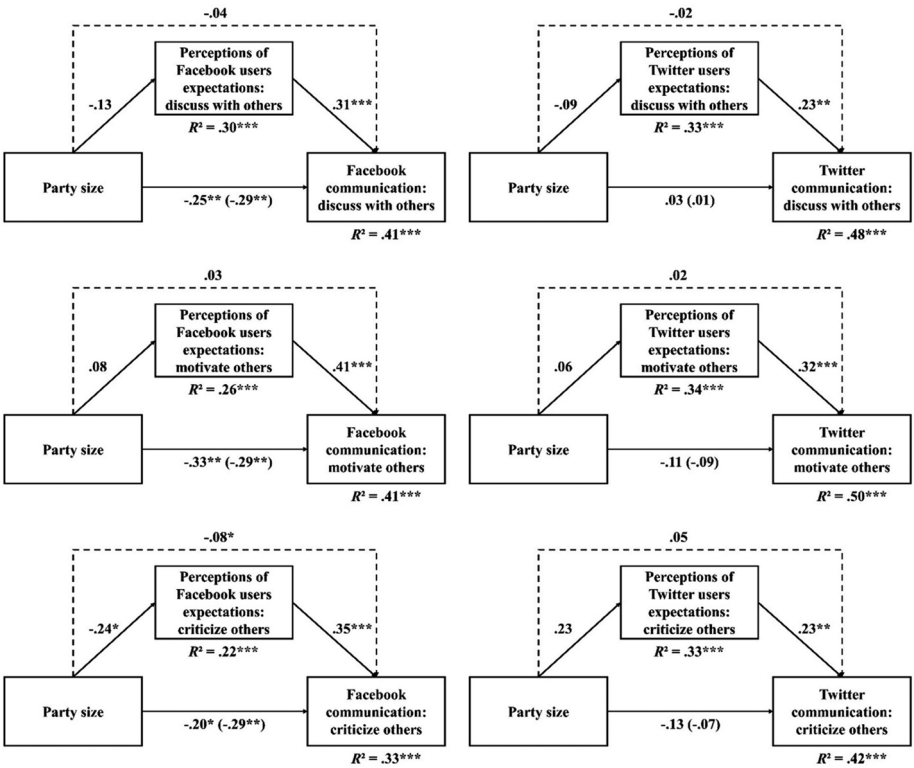
	Broadcasting information		Interactive communication		
	Broadcast information about political work	Broadcast information about everyday lives	Discuss with others	Motivate others	Criticize others
Control variables					
Gender (1 = female)	.00	.01	.05	–.01	–.05
Age (in years)	–.25***	–.09	–.17*	–.09	–.15*
University degree	.04	–.09	–.04	–.17**	–.02
Mandate type (1 = elected via party list)	–.03	.03	–.02	.01	.05
Internet usage in hours	–.08	.12	.03	.03	.07
Motivations for Twitter use	.61***	.58***	.50***	.46***	.48***
Challenges of Twitter use	–.10#	.02	–.04	–.05	–.11
Perceived political influence of Twitter on voters	.08	–.00	.20*	.17*	.02
R^2	.57***	.33***	.42***	.43***	.35***
Perceptions of audience expectations					
Broadcast information about political work	.10	–.07	–.12	–.16*	–.10
Broadcast information about everyday lives	–.09	.15#	–.06	–.02	–.13#
Discuss with others	.06	–.01	.19*	–.09	.09
Motivate others	–.10	–.13	–.11	.27***	–.13
Criticize others	–.11#	.00	.00	–.02	.18*
Change R^2	.03*	.04	.04*	.07**	.07**
Party size (1 = major party)	–.09	.03	.01	–.06	–.05
Change R^2	.01#	.00	.00	.00	.00
Political level (1 = national level)	.13*	–.12	.05	.07	.09
Change R^2	.01*	.01	.01	.00	.01#

	Broadcasting information		Interactive communication		
	Broadcast information about political work	Broadcast information about everyday lives	Discuss with others	Motivate others	Criticize others
Interaction terms					
Political level × Party size	.02	.11	.03	.04	.03
Political level × Perceived audience expectations	.01	.08	–.01	.07	.07
Party size × Perceived audience expectations	–.01	.03	–.05	–.06	–.07
Change R^2	.00	.02	.00	.01	.01
R^2	.62***	.39***	.48***	.51***	.43***
n	163	162	161	163	163

Note. Standardized beta (β) coefficients; #*p* < .10; *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.

H4 was also partially supported for Facebook. Politicians' perception that Facebook users expect politicians to criticize others (indirect effect: B = –.08, $p < .05$), was a statistically significant mediator between party size and this type of communication. The mediating effect of the perception that Facebook users expect politicians to discuss with others (indirect effect: B = –.04, *ns*), and to motivate others (indirect effect: B = .03, *ns*) did not reach statistical significance. However, the perceptions of audience expectations, and the party size directly influenced the frequency of interactive Facebook communication, which again provided support for H1 and H2 for Facebook.

Figure 1. Mediation models—connections between the size of politicians' parties, politicians' perceptions of audience expectations, and politicians' interactive Facebook communication.



Note. Regression coefficients B; total effect of party size in parentheses; the control variables that were included in the regressions were also considered in the mediation models; $n_{Facebook}$ = 437–440, $n_{Twitter}$ = 161–163; $^{*}p < .05$; $^{**}p < .01$; $^{***}p < .001$.

4.2 Politicians' Twitter communication

The final models for politicians' Twitter communication explained between 39 percent and 62 percent of the total variance (see Table 5). The results indicated that broadcasting activities on Twitter were not influenced by perceived audience expectations at the statistical level of $p < .05$ (political work: ß = .10, *ns*; everyday lives: ß = .15, $p < .10$). However, interactive communication on Twitter was influenced by perceived audience expectations (discuss with others: ß = .19, $p < .05$; motivate others: ß = .27, $p < .001$; criticize others: ß = .18, $p < .05$). Thus, H1 was supported for politicians' interactive communication on Twitter, and rejected for politicians' broadcasting activities on Twitter.

H2 was rejected for Twitter. None of politicians' types of Twitter communication were influenced by the size of their party.[7]

The political level influenced only one type of Twitter communication: National MPs more often used Twitter to broadcast information about their political work than city councilors (ß = .13, $p < .05$). The interactions terms did not influence politicians' Twitter communication.

Again, the effects of the control variables differed between the different types of Twitter communication—except for the consistent influence of politicians' motivations for using Twitter. For example, the younger politicians, the more often they used Twitter to broadcast information about their political work, to discuss with others, and to criticize others. In addition, the stronger politicians perceived the political influence of Twitter to be on their voters, the more often these politicians used Twitter to discuss with others and to motivate others.

The simple mediation models indicated that H3 and H4 have to be rejected for Twitter (see Figure 1). Politicians' party size did not influence their perceptions of audience expectations, and politicians' perceptions of audience expectations did not mediate the effect of party size on politicians' Twitter communication. Similar to the regressions, party size did not directly influence Twitter communication. However, the perceptions of audience expectations directly influenced the frequency of interactive Twitter communication, which again provided support for H1 for Twitter.

5. Discussion

Politicians around the world use social media. However, why politicians communicate the way they do is largely unclear. This study analyzed to what extent national and local German politicians' Facebook and Twitter communication is influenced by their perceptions of their audience expectations, the size of their party, and the political level.

7 Again, additional analyses with dummy variables (reference: CDU/CSU) were conducted at the national and local levels to determine the effect of politicians' party affiliation. Party affiliation had no influence at the statistical level of $p < .05$ on national MPs' and city councilors' Twitter communication. Again, these results should not be overstated, because the number of respondents who use Twitter was very low for some minor parties.

This article contends that politicians try to satisfy the expectations of their audiences for how politicians should communicate, to generate positive reactions and to become more visible. As audience expectations are not apparent for politicians, they need to anticipate what expectations their audience might have, and adapt these expectations in their communication. Moreover, it is likely that the audiences of major and minor parties differ. Accordingly, politicians from different parties have to face different audiences that might have different expectations for politicians' communication.

The results of the regression analyses and simple mediation models indicated that national and local politicians strongly align their Facebook and Twitter communication according to their perceptions of what their audience probably expects. The more politicians perceived that Facebook and Twitter users expected politicians to discuss with others, motivate others, or criticize others, the more often the politicians communicated this way. Politicians' perceptions influenced politicians' broadcasting activities about their everyday lives on Facebook, but not on Twitter. Broadcasting information about political work via Facebook or Twitter was not influenced by politicians' perceptions. One reason might be that this form of information is the standard communication practice among politicians (see Table 2). Politicians may have habitualized this kind of communication so heavily that they no longer care about their audiences' expectations.

Overall, the results indicated that politicians care about their audience and its expectations. However, it is still unclear which audience the politicians have in mind. In this study, Facebook or Twitter users in general were the audience focus. According to the hybrid media system (Chadwick, 2013), politicians can use (social) media platforms to address different target groups. Therefore, further studies that consider politicians' perceptions of the expectations of different target groups, for example of citizens, journalists, other politicians, or business representatives, on different (social) media platforms are needed.

The study also showed that the heuristic model of audience inclusion in journalism (Loosen & Schmidt, 2012) can be transferred to the political system. The results showed that politicians' inclusion expectation (their perceived audience expectation) influenced their inclusion performance (their social media activities). However, scholars need to "take more account of what citizens themselves expect" (Tromble, 2018, p. 681). More studies are needed that compare politicians' perceived expectations (inclusion expectation on the politician side) with citizens' actual expectations (inclusion expectations on the audience side) to examine to what extent politicians know what kind of communication citizens actually want (e.g., Kelm, 2019).

The non-negligible influence of politicians' perceptions on their actual communication behavior has practical implications, and raises normative questions. Citizens are encouraged to communicate more frequently what type of communication they expect from politicians. Politicians will probably try to satisfy these expectations. This action may strengthen the relationship between politicians and citizens. However, the results raise the question how politicians communicate, if they perceive that their audiences expect a more private, negative, or even insulting communication. Do the politicians follow their perceptions and communicate

as pure "delegates"? Or do they neglect their perceptions of audience expectations at a certain point? Where do politicians draw the line? Due to the rise of right-wing populism, these questions are becoming increasingly relevant.

The results indicated that the organizational background is important—at least for interactive Facebook communication. Politicians from minor parties used Facebook more frequently for interactive communication than their colleagues from major parties. Interactive Twitter communication was not influenced by party size. Thus, there is an equalization tendency for Facebook, but not for Twitter. Moreover, compared to politicians from major parties, politicians from minor parties tended to perceive more strongly that their Facebook audience expects them to criticize other politicians or journalists. Other perceived audience expectations were not influenced by party size. A reason for this result might be that all minor parties at national level and many minor parties at local level were in the opposition. Thus, politicians from minor parties probably perceived strongly that their supporters expect them to criticize the government.

The effects of the political level showed that the national MPs' and city councilors' Facebook and Twitter broadcasting communication activities differ, but not the politicians' interactive communication practices. Compared to city councilors, national MPs more often broadcasted information about their political work via Facebook and Twitter; city councilors more often broadcasted information about their everyday lives via Facebook than national MPs. A reason for these differences could be that national MPs have more political work on which they can report. City councilors, however, are less professional politicians who may also use Facebook to send their friends information about their everyday lives.

The present study has several limitations. First, the sample of national MPs was small, and biased with respect to party affiliation. Moreover, not all respondents answered all questions. Second, it is unclear whether the respondents correctly assessed their media activities, because the data were based on self-reports. Although many studies use self-reports as a proxy for actual communication (e.g., Bernhard & Dohle, 2015; Hoffmann et al., 2016) and respondents' self-reports, especially their self-reported intensity of broadcasting activities about political work (see Table 2), seem to reflect politicians' actual social media communication (Boulianne, 2016; Jungherr, 2016), future research should combine survey data with content analyses (e.g., Cohen et al., 2008). Third, the causality of the results is unclear, because the results were based on cross-sectional data. It is also reasonable that politicians who communicate in a specific way develop the perception that their users expect this type of communication. However, in line with previous research, the present study results suggested that perceptions determine behavior (Cohen et al., 2008). Finally, the surveys were conducted in 2016 in Germany. Thus, the results are not automatically generalizable to other national contexts. Moreover, one year later, two minor parties, the Free Democratic Party and the Alternative for Germany, were (re-)elected to the German Bundestag. As both parties use social media extensively, the social media communication and perception of politicians from major and minor parties at the national level may now differ.

Despite these limitations, this study has noteworthy implications for the field of political communication. Theoretically, this study has shown that the audience inclusion model can be transferred to other societal systems and that politicians' perceptions of audience expectations are a relevant factor for politicians' social media communication. The study indicated an equalization tendency for politicians' interactive Facebook communication. One reason for this tendency was that politicians from different parties had partly different perceptions of their audiences' expectations. Therefore, the audience should be considered in the normalization-equalization as relevant factor. Moreover, it was shown that complex perceptions are ascertainable in quantitative surveys. Finally, social media users are encouraged to express their expectations for politicians' communication. The politicians will probably listen.

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