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VISUAL CITIZENSHIP

**COMMUNICATING POLITICAL OPINIONS AND
EMOTIONS ON SOCIAL MEDIA**

Catherine Bouko



Visual Citizenship

This book explores visual political engagement online – how citizens participate in the dynamism of life in society by expressing their opinions and emotions on various issues of democratic life in image-based social media posts, independent of collective actions.

Looking beyond large digital social movements to focus on the everyday, the book provides a well-documented and comprehensive framework of key notions, concrete methods and examples of empirical insights into everyday visual citizenship on social media. It shows how the visual has become ubiquitous in citizens' communication on social media, focusing on how citizens use visual content to express their emotions and opinions on social media platforms when they discuss politics in a large sense.

With this book, every reader interested in political communication, visual communication and/or new media is fully equipped to analyse everyday visual citizenship on social media platforms.

Catherine Bouko is Associate Professor of Communication and French at Ghent University (Belgium). Her main research is on political communication, extremism and citizenship on social media, with a special focus on image-based communication. Her methods of research include (multimodal) discourse analysis, quantitative content analysis, semiotics and ethnography.

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Summaries of the chapters

Introduction

Grounded in the *visual turn*, visual political expression on social media is a form of *everyday citizenship* that is highly *personal*, *creative* and *affective*. Part 1 of the book provides entry points to the key terms and phrases in italics. The discussions and guidelines that I propose in Part 2 are intended to help researchers develop methodological designs for quantitative and qualitative analyses of image-based content. In Part 3, I flesh out the conceptual considerations in Part 1 and the methodological propositions in Part 2 in an empirical case study, namely the Brexit vote, by which the British people decided, on 23 June 2016, to leave the European Union.

Chapter 1

This chapter addresses why everyday political expression on social media can be considered a citizenship practice, whether it is image-based or not. Combining *attention* to societal issues with the *activity* of speaking out, it constitutes a form of civic engagement. However, everyday political expression on social media is to be distinguished from *political participation*, as it does not seek to directly target political, economic or social actors with the aim of influencing actual outcomes. While the societal value of everyday political expression as such should not be overestimated, it should not be neglected either. Its value lies in the potential role it can play as a gateway to political participation, but also in peer-to-peer influence and in *complementarity agency*, by which citizens share their views and, in doing so, help each other improve their collective knowledge and understanding. Furthermore, this chapter also discusses that citizenship is not a static concept; it is reified by each society and is contingent on time and place. Therefore, considering everyday political expression on social media as a citizenship practice requires one to move away from essentialised and idealised approaches to citizenship that are disconnected from reality.

Chapter 2

The development of new technologies in the post-war period of the 20th century has both democratised and enhanced visual practices. This in turn has led to a gradual re-evaluation of visual communication, which has gained added momentum at the start of the 21st century with the co-emergence of smartphones and social media. Sharing pictures online has enabled people to enter into predominantly pictorial dialogues. This chapter takes a brief look at how the visual turn occurring in the second half of the previous century constitutes a re-appreciation of visual communication. This new approach relates to a “new visual literacy” which can be contrasted with the preceding structuralist and modernist “old visual literacy” approach, in which the visual is both subservient to, and fully dependent on, linguistic systems. Flickr, Twitter, Facebook and Instagram were largely created to focus on visual content or adapted at a later stage to accommodate such content to attract higher rates of user engagement. Avoiding a techno-deterministic approach to these platforms, this chapter instead touches upon the contexts in which users interact with platform affordances, leading to specific conventional practices on different social media and to platform-specific vernaculars. Political actors and social movements have long since recognised the power of the visual as a communicative tool, as evident at present in their strong visually based social media presence. While citizens’ expressions in the context of social movements and concrete political events have gained much scholarly attention, the practices of citizens’ civic expression elsewhere remain largely understudied.

Chapter 3

Citizenship has become both *liquid* and *monitorial*, which, embedded into a consumerist context, has transformed the everyday into a legitimate site of political expression, as encapsulated in the notion of *lifestyle politics*. Liquid citizens are connected to all sorts of places and perform a large variety of multi-directional and episodic activities; monitorial citizens voice their concerns and claims on an episodic basis, when their personal centres of interest are at stake (see Chapter 1). This chapter discusses how boundaries between public and private spheres have started to gradually blur under the influence of enhanced mobile technologies and established social media practices. In everyday conversation, the topic of politics often arises from the mundane and, as with most other topics, primarily serves a social, rather than primarily political, function, that is to maintain *good relations* and one’s *social status*. Political self-expression in the everyday as such emanates from the private sphere and is thus highly reliant on personal experiences. Due to blurred boundaries online, these experiences subsequently come to constitute shared common spheres. As an example of how established (visual) practices online may take on a political dimension and how public and private spheres merge, this chapter briefly discusses how citizens’ selfies as a private

expression in political contexts (e.g. during elections) may perform both social and communicative functions and create performative and spectatorial intimacies through a sense of proximity. Finally, we will see how a form of eye-witnessing when shared online in political contexts may become a form of saying, and how bearing witness to political events may become a form of civic participation.

Chapter 4

In this chapter, we will see how image-based play and creativity fulfil an important role in contemporary participatory culture. First, it discusses how the idea of *media citizenship* incorporates the importance of *popular culture* and *entertainment* in creating *cultural public spheres*. In these spheres, reflexive citizens, through their emotional engagement, enter into *performative actions*, such as discussion, critique and imagination; actions which may impact on identity, social values and political orientation. *DIY citizenship* further emphasises the importance of creativity and play, as in a digital world citizens become content creators. Visual content online, such as political memes, is often heavily intertextual and plays with both conventional and creative metaphors, in which especially humour plays an important role as a social lubricant. A world full of stimuli, in which complex political ideas create a distance between citizens and political spheres, relies on heuristic devices to facilitate understanding, but which also carry the risk of oversimplification and trigger cognitive biases leading to cultural stereotyping.

Chapter 5

Citizens' expressions on social media often revolve around affective and emotional engagements. This chapter discusses how the affective turn and affective citizenship shape contemporary citizens' engagements, which in online environments may lead to particularised emotional practices and alignments. It shows how affect as an unactualised potential can be thought of as a precursor to more concrete, embodied emotional and cognitive processes. Both the rational and emotional are mutually intertwined dimensions within our information processing systems. Affective citizenship thus highlights how any engagement (political or not) entails a degree of affective investment, which through its expression can foster a collective dimension and aid a sense of belonging. Emotion can be seen as a social expression and thus as a social practice. In this respect, emotional repertoires are built collectively. As with any social structure, this entails a degree of normativity and power dynamics. On social media, affective proximity and emotional expressivity become means to overcome physical distance, boosting the importance of these affective dimensions. In practical terms, we will see how emotion is a vital part of visual processing and how *seeing as doing* images stimulate an emotional response based on internalised norms and values. This chapter also

addresses how iconicity, achieved through familiarity, plays a role in emotional exchanges, highlighting the social dimension of affective communities.

Chapter 6

This chapter highlights the particular qualities and limitations of content analysis and discourse analysis, especially when applied to image-based datasets. For content analysis, this chapter focuses on the importance to establish and distinguish the right type of variables, while simultaneously showing, through practical examples, the challenges in doing so successfully. For discourse analysis, it discusses the importance of recognising structures and patterns both in text and images, as well as the social circumstances of the production, distribution and reception of such artefacts. In the practical context of social media, this chapter finally addresses the particular difficulty of the “context collapse” that occurs online; multiple audiences congregate in virtual places, and social media users and researchers alike are left to imagine the contexts of production, distribution and reception.

Chapter 7

Halliday’s systemic functional linguistics (SFL) was designed to analyse the relationships between texts and aspects of social life. The model acknowledges the functionality of language both for its communicative purpose to communicate ideas as well as its social and compositional aspects. SFL has found a broader applicability beyond linguistic systems and has become predominant in semiotics. This chapter discusses two SFL-based models that can be applied to the analysis of visual content. O’Toole’s functional framework for painting (1990) adapts Halliday’s representational, interpersonal and textual functions to relate to visual art. Kress and van Leeuwen’s (2006) model similarly assumes three functions, but it rather focuses on the meaning-making potential as expressed through subdivisions within functional patterns and processes. While the model establishes some more-or-less conventionalised patterns of meaning, it also, at least in theory, stresses the importance of a contextualised approach. This chapter pays extra attention to some of the challenges that the analysis of visual content poses. There is, for example, reason to doubt if the conventions of Kress and van Leeuwen or O’Toole’s visual markers would be applied similarly by different interpreters. For visual content, much more so than for linguistic systems, it is a valid question how we process images, as a whole or through their component parts.

Chapter 8

Chapters 8 and 9 focus on the research designs of 26 corpus-based studies on visual citizenship. Together, they offer a comprehensive view of the scientific publications in the field. This chapter discusses the studies that rely

on quantitative methods, as it aims to provide the most concrete schemes possible with an eye on replicability, systematicity and reliability. When studying social media content, it is first important to acknowledge that the potential population or the number of memes, tweets and posts to study is practically unlimited, continuously changing and unknowable. It thus becomes central to explicitly define the parameters in which the data collection and selection takes place. This chapter touches upon different methods that try to address the optimal corpus size and discusses the issue of coding reliability by looking at some statistical measures that are used to calculate reliability and at recommended sizes for the samples on which reliability is tested.

Chapter 9

This chapter discusses and suggests additions to typologies and taxonomies that were designed for the quantitative categorisation and coding of concepts related to the representational, interpersonal and compositional functions of image-based content. For the representational function, I distinguish preliminary, standard, contextualised and latent variables. In doing so, I pay attention to (1) the direct relation of the data to the research aims and subject in terms of *noise*, (2) the relative levels of generality and specificity that research contexts require in relation to the categorisation of variables and (3) the distinction between manifest and latent content. In discussing concepts such as visual genres, themes, topics and frames, this chapter stresses the importance of identifying what one is coding for, that is, what the visual content consists of, what content is represented in images, what the content is about, and which perspectives can be inferred from social media posts. In relation to interpersonal variables, this chapter discusses key concepts such as affiliation and relationality, and introduces the variable of *play*. We will see how *incongruity* and *exaggeration* constitute *play*, and how they can be related to common strategies on social media, such as delegitimation. Lastly, this chapter looks at how socio-cultural regularities in the use of compositional patterns can lead to the emergence of visual and multimodal *genres*.

Chapter 10

In this chapter, the focus is on *appraisal* in text–image content, and more specifically on attitude, which is subdivided into affect, judgement and appreciation in Martin and White’s framework (2005). Affect and judgement in discourse (roughly emotions and opinions, respectively) are often tightly interwoven and their expression relies on a broad range of devices, cues and related discourse patterns and strategies that are not always easy to distinguish. The discussion is structured around three broad modes of the *semiotisation* of attitude in discourse: (1) *thematized*, (2) *signal-like* and

(3) *supported* attitude. First, in discussing thematised attitude, we will see how *emotions* and *opinions* become the object of discourse either through direct denotative processes or through more figurative and more – or less conventionalised, connotative expressions. For visual content, rather than trying to identify basic emotions from facial and bodily expressions, I follow a more cautious approach according to which minimal patterns of thematised emotions, namely valence and arousal, can be identified in facial and bodily expressions. However, higher-level divisions between specific emotions are very challenging through visual analysis alone. Second, for *signal-like* attitude, specific patterns signal the presence of emotions and/or opinions in discourse, especially when they are combined with each other (e.g. exclamation marks can signal emotions and/or opinions). Unlike thematised attitude, which concerns discourse *about* emotions and opinions, signal-like attitude refers to discourse *as* emotion or opinion.

Lastly, supported attitude is informed by cognitive schematisations rather than by specific linguistic patterns, as in the case of thematised and signal-like attitude. I am concerned here with the clues of what causes certain attitudes rather than their consequences in discourse (i.e. signal-like attitude). Analytically, I rely on a set of eight appraisal criteria that help me to infer emotions and opinions from manifest content, like the proximity in time and space between a situation that is schematised in discourse and its writer/speaker. In addition, I will discuss how visual arguments can reveal attitude and how they can be constructed and analysed.

Chapter 11

This chapter explores visual citizenship through the textual and visual analysis of Brexit-related Flickr and Twitter posts published in the month that followed the momentous vote. It does so by focusing on the posts of ordinary citizens and by quantitatively examining how topics, visual genres, social relations and stances are incorporated in these posts. However, even when Brexit (hash)tags were included in these posts, this did not automatically guarantee a direct discernible link to the referendum. As Flickr in particular allows for a high number of tags per post, and users additionally use hashtags very broadly, only three out of four posts in the Flickr corpus were directly Brexit-related. Largely the same topics were discussed on Twitter and Flickr, although compared to findings from other research, immigration, sovereignty and the NHS only play a minor role in the corpus. Brexit itself is more prominent, as a high number of posts tend to share general attitudes without addressing more specific topics. While both Twitter and Flickr posts mostly perform an additional function of self-expression, Twitter posts with only one social function are predominantly used for information sharing, while single-function Flickr posts more often contain a form of eye-witnessing. Lastly, the posts that articulated a stance mostly came out against Brexit. However, a remarkably large proportion of posts did not take a stance either

way, as the information-sharing on Twitter and the eye-witnessing on Flickr often occurred without it.

Chapter 12

The previous chapter presented the results of the quantitative analyses of Flickr and Twitter posts. Specifically, almost half of the Flickr posts include self-expression, making it the dominant social function, ahead of eye-witnessing. The proportion of visual content that is not photography (more than a quarter) is also relatively surprising for a social media platform that caters to photo lovers. These two results show the richness and diversity of that social media platform. Chapter 12 will explore further the issue of self-expression by focusing on posts that include a photograph, related or unrelated to Brexit, and self-expression. In doing so, I do not consider posts based on cartoons, memes, etc., which have already been the focus of a large body of research. Photographs and self-expression are included in 468 posts, accounting for 29% of the Flickr corpus. In other words, a third of the Brexit-related Flickr posts comprise a picture *and* markers of self-expression. In Section 12.1, I code the presence of thematised, signal-like and supported attitude in image and text and outline patterns of text–image relations used when citizens voice their emotions and/or opinions. In the second section, I address the issue of subjectivity in self-expression when I outline five types of appraisers in discourse. I provide a typology of eight types of verbal attitude in Section 12.3 and discuss visual patterns in Section 12.4. While these frameworks are suited for quantitative findings, they also allow for the writer’s attitudinal engagement to be analysed in fine-grained detail. In this respect, I briefly introduce Martin and White’s (2005) system of engagement in Section 12.5 and illustrate it with examples from the Flickr corpus.

Chapter 13

This chapter addresses how the rich diversity of often commonly shared elements in Western cultures form resources for metaphorically expressing judgements of major events such as Brexit. Inscribed emotions are relatively rare in my corpus. Nevertheless, the few emotion-related metaphors that can be identified demonstrate key classification principles in metaphor theory. This chapter also discusses how identifying types of judgement-related metaphors and their source and target domains allows us to analyse different scenarios that are represented in the posts. Such scenarios can indicate the moral foundations on which events such as Brexit are evaluated. Different moral foundations markers function in relation to common metaphor source domains, such as journeys, containment and nature, especially as products of the socio-cognitive processes that lead to ingroup favouritism and outgroup derogation. This chapter also presents a methodological design to analyse

metaphoric creativity in multimodal content. By discussing examples from the Flickr corpus, I propose a cline of creativity to help with the analytically challenging task of determining the degree to which metaphors are creative or conventional. Lastly, the corpus exemplifies the way in which mundane experiences and the objects that we as citizens encounter can form a source of almost endless creativity that allows us to recontextualise, comprehend and communicate even major events such as Brexit.



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Introduction

Visual citizenship: communicating political opinions and emotions on social media

The internet is replete with lists and rankings, like the top ten books of all time, the most iconic 1990s songs or even the best ten dinosaurs. Some lists rank the moments that shaped social media history (e.g. Peters 2017; Russo 2021): Obama’s US presidential election victory (2008), the Haiti earthquake (2010), the Ice Bucket Challenge (2014), the Paris attacks (2015), the resurgent Black Lives Matter movement after the killing of George Floyd (2020), etc. In such lists, nearly all of the selected events illustrate how citizens join forces on social media in movements, protests and/or in solidarity. Since the Arab Spring in 2011, scientific research has focused on these three types of situations and has emphasised how citizens mobilise and/or carry out concrete actions online, which have often made the difference in fighting for better rights. Authors have also largely explored the popularity of more discreet civic actions on social media that require less investment in time and energy, and which transform individuals into “citizen marketers” of the cause they support, for example, in adding the campaign logo of their favourite election candidate to their picture profile (e.g. Penney 2017). These are “connective actions,” an oft-cited concept which Bennett and Segerberg (2012) define as engaging in sharing easily personalised political content online, which, *ideally*, can translate into collective actions, both online and offline.

A large body of research has already been published on connective actions. My book is not about them; there is no collective, or even connective, dimension in the online citizenship I analyse. In this respect, I do not address how “ambient affiliations” emerge when citizens bond around values, align with themselves and express affinity through keywords and hashtags like #NotMyPresident, #vegan or #MondayMotivation (Zappavigna 2012). In the citizenship that I focus on, putative communities do not always arise; people might align or disalign with other citizens, or not even show any interest in each other’s posts on the same topic. Affinity is only one option among others, including polarisation.

What I do address is political expression on social media, when individuals voice their political views without any form of connective or collective engagement. Many citizens participate in the dynamism of life in society by expressing their opinions and emotions online on various issues of democratic

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life. In doing so, they perform *everyday* citizenship, whereby they (1) communicate around political issues that matter to them, in exceptional contexts, such as elections, and also on a regular basis, and (2) share their views in types of social media posts that are the same as the ones they use in everyday apolitical communication online (see e.g. Highfield 2016). These practices are less visible; they do not generate trending topics on social media; they may not attract a lot of media attention. They are, however, at the core of life on social media platforms. With the notable exception of memes, they also remain an under-researched field of inquiry in academia, compared to connective and collective actions online. The lines between the two are often blurred, however. After all, determining where merely voicing opinions ends and activism starts is challenging, especially when citizens are “liquid,” that is, not grounded in specific practices, and – simultaneously or not – perform a large variety of multi-directional and episodic activities, engaging in connective and/or collective actions online and/or in mere political expressions (Papacharissi 2010, see Chapter 1). While they differ in terms of engagement and collective dimension, connective actions and political expression share at least three common features: most are reactions to news events; they concern politics in the *narrow* sense and they are often expressed and shared through image-based content.

News and social media have become intimately intertwined, and much of the social media content is related to news events. As surveys have consistently shown, social media are now among the most used news sources worldwide, outpacing other channels: in 2020, over 50% of adults in 24 out of 40 countries used social media as a news source (Watson 2022). In that context, commenting on political events and voicing one’s political views are particularly prevalent. According to a survey by the Pew Research Center in July 2016, over 48% of the US Facebook users’ posts were related to politics in at least some way (Duggan and Smith 2016).

The news that individuals get and react to on social media generally concern current political events, that is, politics in the *narrow* sense: the management and decision-making by the state apparatus and political parties, in terms of national and international laws and reforms, allocation of resources, etc., in a day-to-day fashion or during specific political contexts, such as elections (see e.g. Edkins 1999). What is managed and decided is not given; it is the result of ideological expressions and struggles in terms of how to organise the social order. Put simply, what counts as politics in the narrow sense is part of politics in the broad sense. For example, news that covers getting vaccinated against COVID-19, the possible shutdown of an aging nuclear power plant, the possible extension of parental leave, etc. all primarily concern politics in the narrow sense. Nevertheless, these specific political events rely on politics in the broad sense, in terms of individual freedom versus collective protection from disease, the room given to more sustainable energies, and the definitions of the parents’ roles, respectively. As in the news, citizens’ main focus in their social media posts is politics in the narrow sense, but

with an eye on politics in the broad sense. For example, many citizens who commented on Brexit-related news events also expressed their values, which can be linked to moral foundations and ideologies, like in “unity is strength” posts (see Chapter 13).

Most moments that shaped social media history partly made the difference thanks to the memorable images published, commented on and liked online. For example, Barack Obama’s “hope” poster quickly became iconic and went viral, resulting in hundreds of people making their own visuals, for serious or parodic purposes (Seiffert-Brockmann, Diehl, and Dobusch 2018). We can probably all still visualise it: his calm face, slightly tilted head and forward gaze exude great serenity, coupled with the message of hope in capital letters. More tragically, George Floyd’s face crushed by the foot of police officer Derek Chauvin while repeating that he could not breathe over and over again had a powerful emotional impact on many citizens, who produced large amounts of visual content paying tribute to the victim and calling for justice, whether on the streets or on social media platforms, as part of the Black Lives Matter Movement. Professional political communication and activism, as the Obama and Floyd’s examples illustrate, are predominant in the research field of visual political communication. Yet the visual has become ubiquitous in political expressions, too. This is part of a general trend: in 2020, Facebook recorded more than 500 million daily viewers on Stories. The same year, posts with images accounted for 55% of the posts created by Facebook pages, video posts accounted for 22.2% and link posts made up 18.5% (Gotter 2020).

Human culture has always been visual; social media communication updates aspects of visual communication that have been used for centuries but only recently highlighted by research. Indeed, the popularity of images can be explained by at least four main characteristics they have. First, they capture the attention differently compared to words (e.g. Sutton et Lutz 2019). Object recognition and meaning-making in images can occur rapidly, within the time of a single fixation, that is, within 200 milliseconds (Wyble, Folk, and Potter 2013). Features such as colour and frames in particular capture the attention (Dahmen 2012), but so does conceptual information, especially when it is motivationally relevant for the viewer: for example, food images appeal more to the imagination of hungry people, and smokers pay more attention to smoking-related images than non-smokers (Ilse et al. 2020; Harris et al. 2018). Second, images are also powerful communication tools, because they facilitate information recall: humans remember visual information better than verbal information. However, although this picture’s superiority effect has been widely claimed in research, it needs to be nuanced, especially since it sometimes depends on the memory processes specific to age groups (Defeyter, Russo, and McPartlin 2009). Third, images are powerful triggers of emotions, in two ways. On the one hand, emotional images, like threatening natural scenes, capture the attention automatically and more rapidly than non-threatening ones (Furtak et al. 2020). On the other hand,

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images trigger stronger emotional reactions than text, and thereby might have a higher mobilising effect for online protest. For example, among the Twitter images related to the Black Lives Matter Movement, those evoking sadness would rather be demobilising, whereas images evoking anger, fear or enthusiasm are said to enhance citizens' mobilisation (Casas and Williams 2019). On the dark side of social media platforms, complaints from content moderators about their working conditions are a stark reminder of how watching disturbing visual content can trigger often intense emotion, posing high risks of post-traumatic stress disorder (Messenger and Simmons 2021). Lastly, the socio-political power of visual imagery in triggering emotions and thereby potentially manipulating people is facilitated by the inaccurate, yet still popular, adage that "a picture never lies": the fact that images can be strategically constructed still often goes unnoticed by viewers (Lilleker, Veneti, and Jackson 2019).

In the previous sections, I have argued that connective actions and everyday political expression on social media have several features in common. Therefore, many insights related to the former are highly valuable resources to analyse the latter and have, therefore, been included in the book. Nevertheless, insights from research into connective actions are rather fragmented, comprising different research questions, methods and empirical outcomes, and having been published largely in articles or book chapters. More importantly, to my knowledge, there is so far no comprehensive book that provides conceptual frameworks and methods to analyse image-based political expression that is not related to connective actions or to professional political communication. Consequently, this book sprang from a desire to provide a multidisciplinary response to this gap in the literature. I hope that it will help readers find the concepts, methods and/or empirical insights they are looking for.

0.1 Concepts

Grounded in the *visual turn*, visual political expression on social media is a form of *everyday citizenship* that is highly *personal*, *creative* and *affective*. Part 1 of the book provides entry points to these key terms, which I define as macro-level considerations.

In Chapter 1, I define everyday political expression, whether it is image-based or not, as the combination of *attention* to societal issues (e.g. in reading news) with the activity of *speaking out*, which constitutes a form of *civic engagement*. It is distinct from political *participation*, as it does not seek to directly target political, economic or social actors with the aim of asking for change, unlike connective actions. In this chapter, I also address how ideal models of citizenship do not meet empirical realities. In this respect, the societal value of everyday political expression should be neither overestimated nor neglected. Its value lies not only in the role it can play as a gateway to political

participation but also in peer-to-peer influence and in complementarity agency, by which citizens share their views and, in doing so, potentially help each other improve their collective knowledge and understanding of political topics.

With the co-emergence of smartphones and social media at the start of the 21st century, everyday political expression has become increasingly visual. Chapter 2 provides a brief introduction to the visual turn, whereby visual content is no longer only the *object* but also the *means* of interaction. This translates into a culture in which individuals tell stories *with* images and no longer exclusively *about* them (Prieur et al. 2008). Commuters by train will be familiar with passengers taking pictures of notice boards announcing delays: sharing one's experiences of train delays online, and more generally about the quality of public transportation, is more telling with a visual, to the extent that staff of a British railway company sometimes advise passengers on over-crowded trains to send pictures of the chaos to the company's Twitter account, since that is likely to have more impact than verbal internal feedback (Belam 2018). Besides, technology is so pervasive in our everyday lives that it often goes unnoticed. In Chapter 2, I also briefly outline how Flickr, Twitter, Facebook and Instagram were largely created to focus on visuals or adapted at a later stage to accommodate such content to attract higher rates of user engagement.

Boundaries between public and private spheres have started to gradually blur as a result of enhanced mobile technologies. This is the subject of Chapter 3. In everyday conversation, the topic of politics, as with most other topics, primarily serves a social, rather than a political, function, that is to maintain good relations and one's social status. Political self-expression in everyday life emanates from the private sphere and is, as such, highly reliant on personal experiences, like pictures of dogs at polling stations, which has been an election-day tradition in Great Britain since 2015 and has also become popular in other countries. By photographing their pooch waiting quietly in front of the polling station, voters share online how they transform this civic duty into a personal moment. The dog owners' creativity is impressive, both in the visuals (e.g. dogs disguised as a Christmas tree or Father Christmas for the special occasion) and in the political narratives in which the pets are given centre stage. In Chapter 4, I address how creativity and fun play an important role in everyday political expression and how they challenge the ideal model of the citizen as a "rational-critical actor," which fails to consider

the multitude of ways in which people exchange, process and engage political material in their day-to-day lives, ways that just as easily can be crude, limited, dismissive, trivial, playful, and emotional as they can be thoughtful, wide-ranging, generous, complex, rational, serious, and high-minded.

(Jones 2005, 18)

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As posts featuring dogs at polling stations emphasise, the ideal of rationality in political expression collides with empirical realities, in which citizens can just as easily address political issues rationally or emotionally. In Chapter 5, I discuss how the current affective turn in social sciences and humanities, whereby scholars explore the emotional dynamics of societal existence, represents an invitation to abandon the traditional opposition between reason and emotion for a more nuanced approach to the processes that are at play when citizens express their political opinions. This is especially true, since social media technologies have rendered the emotional dimensions of communication dominant in the pursuit of increasingly high levels of engagement that can be monetised (i.e. likes, shares, comments).

0.2 Methods

Any person interested in analysing visual content will most probably come across the old adage that “a picture is worth a thousand words.” Interestingly, this claim has been interpreted in two opposite views. On the one hand, Leonardo Da Vinci argued in the Renaissance that paintings were “the only imitator of all visible works of nature”:

And if you, O poet, tell a story with your pen, the painter with his brush can tell it more easily, with simpler completeness and less tedious to be understood. . . . Undoubtedly painting being by a long way the more intelligible and beautiful will please most.

(quoted in Richter et Pedretti 1883, 327–328)

In this view, visual representation is more accurate, easier to understand and more complete than a verbal depiction. On the other hand, the adage is also used to emphasise how the visual can be highly polysemous, particularly in portraying what is left unsaid. In this respect, the computer scientist Edsger W. Dijkstra (1996) once claimed that “a picture may be worth a thousand words, [but] a formula is worth a thousand pictures.”

Visual polysemy is one of the methodological challenges in visual studies, which I address in Part 2 of the book. The discussions and guidelines that I propose in this part are intended to help researchers develop methodological designs for quantitative and qualitative analyses of image-based content. In Chapter 6, I therefore begin by discussing the validity standards of quantitative and qualitative methods. With those validity standards in mind, I move on to discuss concrete research methods. The methodological design I propose is largely based on systemic-functional linguistics (SFL). I will limit myself to an introductory and operational approach to this theory, which requires no prior knowledge of linguistics. The key idea behind SFL is that language, be it verbal or visual, is *functional* in nature:

it is used to achieve communication purposes and serve social functions. According to SFL, the three main functions of language are the following: (1) the *representational* function concerns the way any aspect of social life is represented. Language is an instrument to conceptualise the world to ourselves and others, that is to construct experience, to indicate the salient participants of the experience, its circumstances, etc. The representational function of language can be conceptual or narrative. To give but one example, facial portraits in identity cards do not represent experiences the same way as a portrait picture does in the meme here; their representational functions differ in that IDs are *conceptual* representations that render the facial traits as accurately as possible, while memes like the one here are *narrative* representations that focus on the character's mental process for which the embedded text serves the same function as thought balloons in comic strips.

(2) The *interpersonal* function concerns not only the social relations between the participants inside the image but also how they interact, or not, with viewers. For example, in *demand*s like in the famous "I want you for the US army" poster that has inspired numerous memes (see Figure 0.1), the participant in the image is looking at the viewers (i.e. potential recruits), which is not the case in *offer* images like the one in Figure 0.2. Demand gazes allow to create an imaginary relation between the participant and the viewer, whereas offer gazes present information to the viewer.

(3) The *compositional* function underlines how language can serve to organise the various elements of a text with coherence, continuity and flow. Left-right, top-bottom (like in the meme given earlier) and centre-margin organisations are compositional issues.

The great advantage of the representational, interpersonal and compositional patterns is that they can be analysed quantitatively or qualitatively, depending on the degree of granularity and contextualisation researchers want to achieve. I discuss these patterns with politics-related social media examples in Chapter 7, which is mainly based on Kress and van Leeuwen's seminal theory for reading images (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006). I provide general guidelines on the issues of replicability, systematicity and reliability of coding image-based content in Chapter 8. In Chapter 9, I propose coding variables which are divided into representational, interpersonal and compositional patterns.

The focus of Chapter 10 is on how citizens voice their political *attitude* in image-based content, following Martin and White's appraisal theory (2005). *Affect* and *judgement* in discourse are often deeply interwoven and expressed via a broad range of discourse features. The research design I propose is structured around three modes of attitude in discourse: (1) thematised, (2) signal-like and (3) supported attitude, which I explain in that last methodological chapter.



Figure 0.1 Demand gaze in “I want you for the US army” poster

Courtesy: Library of Congress (USA)



Figure 0.2 “Oh, I disagree with your politics?” meme featuring Gene Wilder

0.3 Empirical insights

The macro-level considerations in Part 1 and the methodological propositions in Part 2 are helpful when analysing image-based social media posts published in a wide variety of contexts. The aim of Part 3 is to flesh them out in empirical case studies from the context of the Brexit vote on 23 June 2016, by which a majority of the British people decided to leave the European Union. (The withdrawal came into effect in January 2020.) The outcome of this EU referendum in favour of Brexit was a surprise, for politicians, media professionals, pollsters and millions of citizens alike, both in and beyond the UK. This major political event caused a tsunami of reactions on social media: more than four million posts including the hashtag #Brexit were posted worldwide on Twitter within a matter of hours. And three years later, Brexit was still so ubiquitous in conversations that customers in some pubs were asked to buy a general round of drinks each time they used the term (Charteris-Black 2019, 1).

One can legitimately consider that analysing visual citizenship in the Brexit context helps reinforce the already disproportionate scientific focus on specific political events and therefore does not account for everyday political expression, such as in lifestyle communities around hobbies (Wright, Graham, and Jackson 2015). Indeed, my book does not explore how politics is brought into conversations which are apolitical in the first place. That said, the Brexit vote differs from traditional political events in that it is not an election but a referendum. Voters were not asked to choose between political parties but between two options that would affect British citizens and EU citizens living in Britain in a wide variety of areas: immigration and mobility, economy, health, the future of the UK as a nation, etc. The Brexit vote led to divisions in British society which are not only related to EU membership, but it also became the catalyst for broader political, cultural and identity-based issues which question the very nature of British identity and democracy, as demonstrated by the variety of EU referendum-related topics discussed in the news and on social media before and after the vote (see e.g. Moore and Ramsay 2017; Brändle, Galpin, and Trenz 2022).

I analysed posts published in the month following the vote, so as to include a wide variety of reactions and not only the manifestations of shock, surprise, sadness or joy in the hours or days following the vote, or only reactions to specific Brexit-related news events, like the many political resignations and appointments or the announcements by multinationals to relocate their offices outside the UK.

My datasets comprise Brexit-related Flickr and Twitter image-based posts. Admittedly, with its 60 million monthly active users, Flickr is a drop in the ocean compared to Facebook, Instagram or Twitter and their 2.96 billion, 1.44 billion and 486 million in 2022 monthly active users, respectively (Broz 2022; We are social and Hootsuite 2022). David Garcia, who collected the data, and I decided to select these two social media platforms for three reasons: (1) Automated data collection on Flickr and Twitter is both technically easy and permitted, whereas it has no longer been authorised on Facebook and Instagram since 2018, for example. Manual data collection remains a realistic alternative for small datasets only. Our data comprise over 5,000 Flickr and 10,000 image-based Twitter posts. (2) A second advantage of selecting Flickr is that David Garcia could collect an exhaustive dataset of *all* the Brexit-related Flickr posts. (3) Easy access to tweets mainly explains the prevalence of Twitter datasets in social media studies. This limitation raises issues in terms of representativeness, Twitter users being younger, more educated and more often male users compared to the whole population (Blank 2017; Sloan 2017). Unfortunately, demographics are not available for Flickr, but it can be assumed, with all due caution, that the Twitter and Flickr profiles do not converge, at least not fully, since these two social media platforms differ in terms of usage (see Chapter 2). Although it is commonly perceived as a mere repository for pictures, Flickr is a social media platform in its own right; social communication is among the most popular reasons why Flickr members use the platform (see e.g. Stuart 2019). In the same vein, the quantitative results discussed in Chapter 11 reveal that self-expression is the main social function of Brexit-related Flickr posts.

Furthermore, it is also surprising that photographs make up – only – 73% of the visual genres: in this virtual temple of photography, the very fact that one visual item out of four is not a photograph already reveals that its members use the platform in ways other than a mere repository.

In Chapter 12, I apply the framework presented in Chapter 10 to identify how frequently and by means of which patterns citizens express opinions and emotions in their Brexit-related posts. I also explore how thematised, signal-like and supported attitude are voiced in visual content, in combination with verbal elements.

Lastly, in Chapter 13, I address how the rich diversity of often shared elements, such as sunsets, gates or flowers, form a pool of potentials for the metaphoric expression of judgements on major political events such as Brexit. I also discuss how judgement-related metaphors can be indicative of moral foundations on which events such as Brexit are evaluated, such as care versus harm, fairness versus cheating, or loyalty versus betrayal. I also present and apply a methodological design to analyse metaphoric creativity in text–image content. Lastly, I address the way in which often overlooked mundane experiences and objects of the everyday can form a source of almost endless creativity that allow us to recontextualise, comprehend and communicate even major events such as Brexit. One example is the achenes of dandelions that are scattered by the wind, metaphorically representing the 27 EU countries that might leave the European Union as a consequence of the Brexit vote.

The empirical findings in Part 3 of the book give rise to what is, to my knowledge, the first discussion of how citizens voice their political opinions and emotions by means of a large variety of text–image patterns of attitude in social media posts, contextualised by quantitative insights regarding topics, frames, visual genres and social relations.

Analysing visual citizenship on social media relies on knowledge about citizenship, the visual, social media and appraisal theory. Most scholars have more expertise in one domain than in the other three and focus their research accordingly. In addition, analysing text–image social media posts requires a certain level of familiarity with quantitative and/or qualitative methods for both the linguistic and the visual, which is also rather unusual. In this context, my book has been designed for scholars and students who want to address visual citizenship in a comprehensive and multidisciplinary way. Lastly, although my scope is the under-theorised everyday visual citizenship, many of my insights will also prove valuable for analysing other types of online political engagement and image-based social media posts.

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Part I

Concepts



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1 Everyday political expression as a citizenship practice

Much like books, newspapers or television before them, social media are the new means of connection, communication and mobilisation. As such, they act as catalysts for broader societal evolutions and changes that upset the established *modus operandi*. In doing so, they question our approach to citizenship and democracy, triggering fears and hopes. Following the rhetoric of the democratising power of the internet, utopian narratives about social media carry ideals of citizenship in which emancipation and freedom are central. By contrast, dystopian narratives point out how social media can be a threat to citizenship and democracy, for example, when “a lazy generation” (Morozov 2009) confuses symbolic actions with social activism and with so-called “real commitment” (Sinek 2014). For many, clicktivism (also called slacktivism) seems to become more prevalent, with utopian narratives as a sign of an early enthusiasm that has now superseded by reality. In the debates around such polarised views, citizenship is often treated as a static, essentialised concept; the two seminal and oft-cited models of citizenship – Marshall’s and Schudson’s theories – are both diachronic and context-based approaches, but this contextual dimension is often omitted in the literature. For Marshall (1950), citizenship evolved in three successive stages of gaining rights in the class-based England of industrialisation and capitalism: from civic rights (freedom of expression, personal liberty, access to justice, and property rights) to political rights (rights for elective representation) and, ultimately, to social rights, provided by the welfare system through education and social services. Schudson’s (1998) framework comprises four stages, and each encapsulates one type of citizens in the USA, from (1) the deferential citizens in the 18th century, whose role was to reaffirm the established order, to (2) the partisan citizens in the 19th century, who showed loyalty to their political party, to (3) the informed citizens, who gain some current and historical understanding in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and, ultimately, to (4) the monitorial citizens from the middle of the 20th century, who voice their concerns and claims on an episodic basis, when their personal centres of interest are at stake. Both models are designed as successive layers, with subsequent stages being added to the previous ones.

Instead of being a static, universal ideal then, citizenship is always contingent and reified. It is context-dependent, dynamic and as such continuously re-imagined, re-formulated and re-implemented. In order to understand how it has been reified, and whether it has been potentially in decline or been partially transformed into easy but insignificant actions since the rise of social media, researchers first need to agree on what they are talking about. Five misconceptions or misunderstandings explain why a dystopian approach to citizenship on social media may be overstated. These are discussed in the five sections of this chapter.

1.1 Broad definitions of citizenship, civic engagement and political participation

1.1.1 *Dutiful versus self-actualising citizenship*

The notion of citizenship is contingent not only on time and place but also on the scientific discipline any researcher is affiliated to (Hartley 2010). For political scientists, citizenship typically concerns how rights and obligations are constructed and involve both the citizen and the state.

This approach to citizenship as *dutiful* contrasts with the *self-actualising* approach (Bennett 2012) based on identity, consumption and culture (Hartley 2010). Bennett (2007) outlines four main differences between dutiful and self-actualising citizenship regarding the value of government obligation, the significance of voting, trust in politicians and media as well as types of civic sociality, which he summarises as shown in Table 1.1 (see page 19).

As Table 1.1 outlines, self-actualising citizenship is a broad paradigm that encompasses a wide range of activities, from consumerism to more activism-related actions. Dutiful citizenship is broad too, for example when it encompasses expressions of interest and membership in civil society organisations. The same is true for the closely related notions of civic engagement and political participation, which are often broadly conceived and used interchangeably.

1.1.2 *Civic engagement*

For Berger (2009, 235), “civic engagement is ready for the dustbin” insofar as many scholars use this notion to qualify a multitude of activities related to charity, membership in associations, community service, artistic expression and political participation. For example, in his oft-cited thesis that civic engagement was on the decline in the USA, Putnam remained relatively unclear about what civic engagement was and, therefore, what was actually declining. In Putnam’s study, civic engagement refers to a broad idea of “life in communities” (2000, 25) and encompasses civic and political, but also religious, participation, as well as informal sociality and altruism. Both the dutiful and the self-actualising approaches to citizenship are present in Putnam’s

Table 1.1 The changing citizenry: the emerging youth ideal of self-actualising citizenship (AC) versus the traditional civic education ideal of the dutiful citizenship (DC)

<i>Actualising citizen (AC)</i>	<i>Dutiful citizen (DC)</i>
Diminished sense of government obligation – higher sense of individual purpose	Obligation to participate in government centred activities
Voting is less meaningful than other, more personally defined acts such as consumerism, community volunteering or transnational activism.	Voting is the core democratic act.
Mistrust of media and politicians is reinforced by negative mass media environment.	Becomes informed about issues and government by following mass media
Favours loose networks of community action – often established or sustained through friendships and peer relations and thin social ties maintained by interactive information technologies.	Joins civil society organisations and/or expresses interests through parties that typically employ one-way conventional communication to mobilise supporters

Source: Bennett (2007, 14)

framework. This all-encompassing approach to life in communities under an umbrella definition of civic engagement ultimately refers to involvement of any kind (Berger 2009). Furthermore, both the words “civic” and “engagement” require some clarification. Being civic should not be conflated with being helpful or sociable (Berger 2009, 336). That said, the line between civic and service activities is often thin and difficult to distinguish, since it potentially relies on non-observable concepts such as intentionality. Furthermore, civic and service activities are not mutually exclusive. For example, helping deliver meals and gifts to patients at a local hospital can be experienced as community service when one is focusing on fulfilling these persons’ needs, but it can also be motivated by one’s will to change society into a more cohesive one. In that second case, one participates in solving a societal issue and experiences civic engagement. Berger’s definition of the term “engagement” is similar: he highlights how the polysemy of the word “engagement” creates conceptual confusion: one can “engage *in*,” “be engaged *by*” or “engage *with*” something. The first two phrasal verbs imply attention but no activity, while “engage *with*” refers to both attention and activity. For Berger (2009), civic engagement should be restricted to the combination of attention and activity.

1.1.3 Political participation

The notion of political participation is defined in both broad and more specific ways as well. Following the definition of dutiful citizenship, political participation was typically originally thought of as actions directed against

political actors. More recent definitions have added the notion of grievances addressed to societal or economic actors (Ekman and Amnå 2012). Teorell et al.'s definition emphasises how claims can be voiced through concrete actions that relate to both the dutiful and the self-actualising dimensions of citizenship:

Through participation, citizens voice their grievances and make their demands heard to the larger public; they also make governments accountable and politicians responsive. The venues open for such activities are multiple. Citizens may vote on election day, write letters to their public representatives or campaign for a political party. They may sign a petition, put a bumper sticker on their car, or join a protest march. Sometimes the expression of their will is more subtle, such as when they donate money to non-profit organisations or even boycott certain products in the supermarket.

(Teorell, Torcal, and Montero 2007, 334)

In Teorell et al.'s definition, political participation goes further than attention and activity in relation to civic engagement; it concerns concrete activities that directly target political, economic or social actors with the aim of influencing actual outcomes (Ekman and Amnå 2012). While one may wonder whether putting a bumper sticker on one's car really targets such elites, at least this definition is wide enough to encompass activities other than traditional participation through voting. This is in line with Carpentier's approach (2011), for which access to and interaction with the media or community are merely the basic requirements; they do *not equate* with participation as they do not capture the power and decision-making dynamics inherent in participation.

By contrast, some approaches to political participation widen the notion to a broad range of activities. For example, Macnamara (2012) considers reading heritage media a traditional form of political participation and regards watching videos, peer-to-peer interaction in social networks and online likes or comments as new forms of political participation. For Dennis (2018, 81), political engagement online is so diffuse that it becomes impossible to determine whether activities fall within civic or political engagement (terms that he uses interchangeably with political participation). Instead of defining activities, it is up to each citizen to distinguish between their own activities: "participants determine the parameters of what constitutes political or civic involvement." In line with Berger's criticisms, such broad approaches particularly trigger issues when they refer to engagement, involvement or participation interchangeably, and as such become examples of *conceptual stretching* (Berger 2009; Sartori 1970). Therefore, in my framework, political participation is used in a strict sense, following Berger, Teorell et al. and Carpentier. Political expression is not considered political participation in this strict sense. This does not change the fact, however, that it is vital for democracy.

1.2 Idealising political participation over (online) civic engagement

The emergence of every new medium influences the nature of discourse in a society. In 1985, Postman argued that television had replaced exposition with entertainment as the natural format for representing all experience. Exposition was a mode of thought and a means of expression that favoured conceptual, deductive and sequential reasoning. Print media was its realm, especially before the development of the telegraph that brought a “world of broken time and broken attention” (Postman 1985, 69). With television, entertainment became the norm, spawning a new ideological paradigm and a “dangerous and absurdist” epistemology (Postman 1985, 27). The fact that television is entertaining was not the problem for Postman; what he was concerned about was the epistemological dominance of entertainment, which spread to other media and influenced modes of thinking and experiencing. Postman’s claim anticipates many current stances on online practices of citizenship. Indeed, the emergence of social media precipitated a crisis in how activism is defined (Penney 2017, 2), leading to fears of equating low-cost symbolic actions with the “real sacrifice” demanded by on-the-ground activities (Gladwell 2010). While the most pessimistic voices will warn against a new paradigm based on weak substitutes favoured by a lazy generation (e.g. Morozov 2009; Sinek 2014), the optimists will point out the value of symbolic actions and other forms of civic engagement as potential *gateways* towards “higher” political participation.

1.2.1 Civic engagement as latent participation

For Ekman and Amnå (2012, 288), most typologies focus on manifest political participation and therefore fail to take into account the many common but less visible practices of “non-political or semi-political” civic engagement performed by many citizens. For the authors, these neglected activities can relate either to involvement (e.g. *attention* to politics as important, interest in societal issues) or to civic engagement (*attention and activity*), for example when citizens read about, or watch, political issues in the media, when they discuss politics or societal issues online or offline, or when they give money to charity. However, for them the value of such activities lies in the “reservoir of participation” which could emerge from it (Ekman and Amnå 2012, 297). Ekman and Amnå argue that involvement and civic engagement need to be considered as *latent* political participation. The citizens involved in latent participation are on “standby” (Ekman and Amnå 2012, 297; Amnå and Ekman 2014): they might not engage in political participation for the moment but they might get triggered to make a difference on specific occasions.

1.2.2 Three criticisms of the gateway model

First, there is no consensus on the value of latent participation as a gateway. According to Karpf (2010), who analysed email action alerts by 70

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advocacy groups back in 2010, most organisations believe in the effectiveness of high-volume online practices as gateways to transform their target groups' attention into powerful action that will make a difference. By contrast, other organisations have advocated against displays of support on social media, such as adding a ribbon to one's profile picture. For example, UNICEF Sweden launched a campaign in 2013 to claim that "Likes don't save lives. Money does." Research also offers conflicting views on the value of low-cost civic engagement as a gateway to more significant political participation (e.g. Choi and Kwon 2019; Kristofferson, White, and Peloza 2014). For this reason, Amnå and Ekman frame them as *potential* gateways.

Second, identifying practices as gateways to political participation is particularly difficult now that online settings have allowed people to become "liquid citizens" (Papacharissi 2010, 108), who are connected to all sorts of places and who are no longer grounded in specific practices. Liquid citizens perform a large variety of multi-directional and episodic activities. In this context, isolating one specific variable or type of activity as a gateway to political participation is particularly challenging and would run the risk of being reductive, especially if presented as the only cause.

Third, everyday political expression, like other forms of civic engagement, should rather be framed as valuable civic engagement in itself, *as well as* a potential lubricant for other forms of engagement (Wright, Graham, and Jackson 2015). For Penney, both the pessimistic substitution thesis and the more optimistic gateway thesis frame involvement and civic engagement as relatively superficial and powerless and, therefore, neglect the very core of powerful communication on social media: peer-to-peer influence and persuasion, not as gateways to a potential future, but in the here and now. However, two surveys conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2020 dampen this optimism, revealing that content on social networks changes citizens' views in a relatively limited way and that differences of opinion are experienced as rather negative. According to the first survey (Perrin 2020), 23% of users of social media in the USA say that social media led them to change views on an issue. Black Lives Matter is the most recurring instance the respondents cited (12%). That said, this survey does not allow to distinguish the types of content that may have an impact (news, peers' content, propaganda, etc.). The second survey (Anderson and Auxier 2020) highlights that 70% of the respondents experience political talks with people holding different views as stressful. Also, 72% generally reach the conclusion that such exchanges reveal that they have less in common politically than they thought. Only 22% consider that they have more in common than expected.

That said, I agree with Penney (2017, 164) when he argues that frameworks based on ladders of engagement, from gateways to "deeper" activities, should be dismissed: "The fundamental problem with the ongoing debate between up-the-ladder optimists and down-the-ladder pessimists is that they both evaluate the efficacy of symbolic political action quite narrowly in terms of how it impacts other forms of political participation." In his book, Penney

focuses on the “citizen marketer,” who is involved in persuasive media dissemination activities in the desire to help make a difference to societal issues. Showing banners or using rallying slogans on social media relies on persuasive strategies, whereas political expression does not, or at least not systematically. Be that as it may, the line between voicing one’s political points of views as a non-instrumental way of political socialisation and strategically voicing them as an instrumental means to shape our peers’ opinion may be particularly blurred. Furthermore, whereas most citizens are not likely to seek to persuade others every time they engage in political expression, they nevertheless value the agency they gain in sharing content that is useful or meaningful for others. Content shared on social media is sometimes framed as narcissistic or based on self-interests, but research reveals that this is not the whole story (Hermida 2014). When social media users select content to share, what appeals to others, whether as entertainment or information, may be even more important than the users’ self-interests. Sharing relevant content with others increases one’s social value. Therefore, in the context of political expression, sharing useful or meaningful content may be experienced as particularly rewarding. This is in line with McAfee’s (2000) notion of “complementarity agency,” by which citizens share their views and, in doing so, ideally help each other improve their collective knowledge and understanding. It is important to note that both the more optimistic community-minded motivations and the more pessimistic self-serving view are not mutually exclusive. Users can post content which serves to communicate collectively useful information, while simultaneously, and self-interestedly, boosting their own social status. Without falling into the “cult of the conversation” (Simpson 1997) that frames all types of conversation as “the soul to democracy” (see e.g. Schudson 1997), the focus on this type of activity emphasises the value of involvement and civic engagement, and not only as potential gateways to political participation.

1.3 Listening as an underestimated activity

In the celebratory context of “having your say,” pejorative terms emerged to qualify the listeners who do not speak up. Their passivity and their absence of *contributions* to collective discussions are called to account when they are designated as “free-riders” who benefit from the efforts made by others (Kollock and Smith 1996). People who view messages but who do not post anything are commonly labelled as “lurkers”: Sharf (1999) used this term to qualify her absence of contribution in a forum on breast cancer where she read the threads. For Lacey, part of why listening is underestimated is the lack of distinction between a passive audience who “listen in” and a “listening public” who is engaged in active “listening out.” In the first case, one listens without real attention. For example, when people are engaged in other activities, such as preparing meals, driving or working, listening is often more about “wallpapering” the day (Barnes 2018, 48), without much focus. In

the second case, by contrast, one anticipates and listens out for something (Lacey 2011, 2013). As Lacey reminds us, some practices of listening are more active and engaged than others. Besides, voicing is not the only type of agency in everyday political expression; dissemination of selected existing content entails some “curatorial agency” that should not be underestimated (Penney 2017, 31). Indeed, such selection is another way of voicing: “In the curatorial metaphor, authorial voice comes not from creating (symbolic) content, but from assembling it and (re)presenting it to an audience” (Penney 2017, 31). When they disseminate curated content, social media users do not merely free ride on the effort of others.

Listeners are crucial to everyday political expression for at least two reasons. First, they are indispensable to elicit disclosure of ideas. As a matter of fact, talkers do not post for an audience of none; there is no motivation to post without an awareness that someone is listening (Crawford 2011). For this reason, it is not possible to fully understand how citizens express themselves in everyday political talk without taking into account the vital role of listeners in this process (Barnes 2018). Put simply, “listening is participation, and participation requires listeners” (Ananny 2014, 365).

Second, *listening as action* indirectly emphasises the power of peer-to-peer influence. In the context of free circulation of speech in a democracy, citizens must be in a position to listen to ideas that have not originated from their self-interests and their filter bubbles, in order to thoughtfully adopt, adapt and reject new ideas. Speakers play a key role in this process in that they potentially influence listeners. Undoubtedly, social networks do not always offer an environment that is conducive to pluralistic interactions. The question is, however, whether the interactions between citizens before the advent of online communication were really more conducive to pluralism. As we will see in the next section, there is legitimate reason to doubt this.

1.4 Idealising rational deliberation and consensus

1.4.1 *The anachronistic bourgeois public sphere*

When Habermas published his analysis of the emergence of a bourgeois public sphere in Germany, France and the UK in the late 18th and 19th centuries, he probably had no idea that his essay *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (first published in German in 1962) would become a cornerstone for understanding political discussions at large in the 20th and 21st centuries. Indeed, Habermas’ approach to the public sphere was strictly contextualised. He argued how, during the Enlightenment, the centralisation of power in the national state made effective power remote and increased the separation of political authority from everyday life. These social conditions facilitated a situation in which middle-class men engaged in rational public debates, which formed zones of mediation between the state and the

individual. The emergence of these new public spaces was contingent on time and place: it could only take place against the background of the privatisation of self, subjectivity and the home (now separated from the workplace) as well as the philosophical consciousness of “publics” and their importance in the society of the 18th century (Crossley and Roberts 2004). These new experiences of individuality and privacy were among the social conditions which gave rise to this type of bourgeois public sphere. At the same time, several societal changes compromised the public sphere, among them the blurred delineation between public state and society, illustrated by the intervention of the welfare state in private concerns and interests, with local variations between the three studied countries. As we can see, Habermas’ approach to the rise and fall of the public sphere was contextualised. Nevertheless, researchers who analyse political communication on social media almost always refer to Habermas’ approach when they examine the notion of the public sphere without always taking its temporal and geographical contingency into account. His framework is sometimes reduced to rational deliberation in search of consensus. Even the notion of rationality can be absent. In such cases, the public sphere is defined as, for example, “the public space where people come to discuss issues relevant to society at large” (Bouvier and Rosenbaum 2020, 6). Such broad definitions equate public spheres with public spaces, and deliberation with discussion. As a matter of fact, Habermas’ bourgeois public sphere is a public space, but the reverse is not automatically true. The same applies to discussion, which does not always take the form of deliberation. This terminological distinction is key given that “online digital technologies create a public space, but do not inevitably enable a public sphere” (Papacharissi 2010, 124), given that public spaces are not necessarily based on rational deliberation in search of consensus.

Some researchers insist on precisely those contemporary societal and communication changes which make the bourgeois public sphere anachronistic. For example, Papacharissi confronts an essentialised, normative and idealised approach to Habermas’ public sphere with a more contextualised and descriptive alternative:

Are we not misapplying the potential of online technologies, if we try to retrofit them into civic habits that no longer interest us? If the public sphere model proposes that the optimal way of practicing democracy is via organized, rational, and agreement-driven discussion taking place in commercial-free public spaces, then contemporary and digitally enabled civic habits must not represent democracy at its optimum. Or, alternatively, the public sphere model no longer works. This would require that we shift emphasis away from models of rational deliberation within representative democracy, and examine alternative formats of information and opinion exchange that develop in late modern democracies.

(Papacharissi 2010, 20)

1.4.2 *Ideal rational versus fragmented and messy citizenship practices*

Being distant from any formal setting, everyday political expression in particular leads us to seek models that do not exclusively focus on rationality. Indeed, rationality fails to capture the very nature of everyday political expression, “which tends to be fragmented, anecdotal, messy, incomplete, and less formally deliberative” (Wright, Graham, and Jackson 2015, 6) and in which emotions are key (see Chapter 5). Furthermore, in the context of participatory culture where people co-create and share user-generated content (Jenkins 2006), creativity and play are key to forms of citizenship that emphasise actualising processes rather than dutiful ones. They highlight how citizenship can be “as much dramatic and performative as it is deliberative” (Hartley 2010, 241), as I will briefly discuss in Chapter 2. In this vein, Hartley (2010) coined the expression “Do-it-Yourself citizenship,” in reference to McKay’s (1998) “DiY culture” in which the right to *protest* is combined with the right to *dance*.

Actually, and even though he established a hierarchy between them, Habermas himself (1996, 374) recognised less formalised public spheres; he differentiated between *episodic*, *occasional* and *abstract* publics in the public sphere according to the

density of communication, organisational complexity and range of publics – from the *episodic* publics found in taverns, coffee houses, or on the streets; through the *occasional* or “arranged” publics of particular presentations and events, such as theatre performances, rock concerts, party assemblies, or church congresses; up to the *abstract* public sphere of isolated readers, listeners, and viewers scattered across large geographic areas, or even around the globe, and brought together only through the mass media.

In contrast to formalised practices based on rationality, many scholars have drawn attention to more informal, culturally situated, and sometimes even “silly” forms of civic engagement (Hartley 2010), in which the lines between opinion sharing, entertainment and peer socialising can be particularly blurred (see Chapters 3–5).

Furthermore, within informal everyday contexts that are prone to collapsing into one another, everyday political expression can be messy as well as unpredictable:

It is via meandering and unpredictable talk that the political can be generated, that the links between the personal and the political can be established. The looseness, open-endedness of everyday talk, its creativity, potential for empathy and affective elements are indispensable for the vitality of democratic politics.

(Dahlgren 2006, 279)

An excessive focus on rationality dismisses the value of spontaneity and creativity.

1.4.3 Deliberation versus agonism, and the conflictual nature of modern pluralism

Rationality is one issue; deliberation is another one. As a matter of fact, deliberation does not equal mere discussion, since it entails decision-making and consensus-building. When citizens deliberate, they seek to achieve a collective decision; voicing one's opinion is only a preliminary step in trying to reach consensus. Strictly speaking, everyday political talk does not fall within deliberation. However, for Mansbridge (1999, 212), formal and informal deliberations differ in *degree* rather than in *kind*. The author stresses how "everyday talk produces collective results collectively, but not in concert." She claims that the fact that formal types of deliberation, for example public assemblies, aim at producing a decision that is binding on the participants, while more informal settings do not, is not enough to exclude everyday talk from the deliberative system. Both formal and informal discussions produce results; the difference lies in the manner and in the time these results require. Everyday talk helps to prepare for formal decisions in the long term.

Instead of broadening the concept of deliberation like Mansbridge, some scholars (e.g. Papacharissi 2010; Penney 2017; Wright, Graham, and Jackson 2015) rather claim that other forms of social interaction prevail over deliberation, especially on social media. Agonism in particular (from the Greek *agon* meaning "struggle") is a philosophical outlook that emphasises the importance of conflict within politics. In her oft-cited work on agonism in politics, Mouffe (1999) points out how antagonism is constitutive of the political. She argues how deliberation-based models, in pleading for consensus, negate the conflictual nature of modern pluralism. According to her, deliberation implies the exclusion of unselected possibilities. Yet contestation is vital for democracy. It follows that pluralism can only be agonistic. One may wonder to what extent pluralism and agonism are that easy to combine on social media: divergent beliefs exist on these platforms, but do citizens still even encounter them? Besides, agonism on social networks sometimes takes on a silent form, through polarisation: when like-minded people flock together, they can simply *ignore* alternative viewpoints they disagree with. The two surveys conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2020 (see Section 1.2.2) revealed that content on social networks changes citizens' views in a relatively limited way and that differences of opinion are experienced as rather negative. Besides, and as I have already noticed in Section 1.2, isolating social media as a variable of change among liquid citizens, who are not grounded in specific practices and who perform a large variety of multi-directional and episodic activities (Papacharissi 2010), is particularly challenging. According to these two surveys, political talk on social media does not seem to lead to consensus through deliberation. Not even close.

1.5 Idealising a certain kind of citizen

1.5.1 *Nostalgia for sophisticated literacy in the olden days*

On 16 October 1854, in Illinois (USA), Abraham Lincoln, who became the 16th US president in 1860, met Democrat Stephen A. Douglas for one of their seven political debates. The debate was organised in two phases: first, Douglas delivered a three-hour speech. At 5 pm, when it was Lincoln's turn to take the floor, they suggested having a break, so that the audience could have dinner at home, before coming back for . . . four more hours of talk (Postman 1985; Sparks 1908). Seven-hour debates were not uncommon at that time. The debates were not exclusively moments of concentration, though; they were experienced as social events, with some music during breaks, etc. Yet the speeches were based on the model of the printed word, aimed at *reflective* readers: long sentences, sequential argumentation and appeal to deductive rationality. It is no coincidence that the Age of Reason developed at the same time as print culture, as it entailed conceptual reasoning through detachment and objectivity. For scholars like Postman, who value the debates in which television had not yet replaced exposition with entertainment, the two US presidential election debates in 2020, each lasting only one and a half hour – the average duration of a movie – pale in comparison.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, “participation in public life required the capacity to negotiate the printed world. . . . Mature citizenship was not conceivable without sophisticated literacy” (Postman 1985, 62). Like Postman's value of exposition, Habermas' deliberation model is structured around the communicative forms of an elite. They are both sets of *ideal* conditions. The cultural mindset as influenced by the qualities of the written word is framed as the dominant way of thinking. However, as we have seen in the previous sections of this chapter, citizens do not live for, or dream of, societal and political issues. However, while the grass is often seen as greener back in the old days (i.e. a rosy retrospection bias), enthusiasm for civic life was probably higher in times when entertainment and leisure options were more limited than they are now. As Schudson claimed with his approach to the *monitorial* citizen, many people tend to be rather disconnected from political life. They *scan* rather than read political content and only *react*, quite episodically, when issues are very important to them (Schudson 1998). A survey by the Pew Research Center in 2015 revealed that only 35% of millennials talk about politics a few times a week (Mitchell, Gottfried, and Matsa 2015). The percentage is higher for baby boomers (49%) but the findings nevertheless confirm that everyday political expression is not among citizens' favourite social pastime. Likewise, another survey conducted two months before the 2020 US presidential election outlined how the majority of social media users (55%) were “worn out” by how much political content they encountered on social platforms during this particularly intense political period. This is an 18% increase compared to the 2016 US elections (Anderson and Auxier 2020).

1.5.2 Undermining power relations and inequalities among citizens

These approaches to the public sphere were originally restricted to the practices of a limited segment of the population, that is, the emerging bourgeoisie. When they are used in contemporary contexts, they fail to take into account how exposition or deliberation is still the privilege of well-educated people, who enjoy quite “sophisticated literacy” (Postman 1985, 62). In doing so, they ignore the realities of power relations that determine who can participate in public spheres and who is excluded, whose voice is recognised and heard, and whose is not. Furthermore, consensus-building requires agreed-upon definitions of the concerns that deserve deliberation. In a setting that ignores the inequalities between citizens, the concerns and experiences of non-dominant groups are likely to be silenced. Other approaches to citizenship, particularly the ones that combine actualising creativity and political agency, are more likely to be inclusive and offer more opportunities for civic expression than deliberation-based public spheres (see Chapter 4). They might also attract segments of the population that are less involved in civic life, such as young people. For example, in putting together one’s identity from the available cultural opportunities (rather than based on dutiful activities), Do-it-Yourself citizenship offers a “new direction in self-determined citizenship [to] previously unfranchised, silenced subject[s]” (Hartley 1999, 178). Yet DIY citizenship can also be charged with overlooking the power relations and inequalities by idealising *liberalism*, whereby any individual choice would supersede social and power inequalities: “despite the best rhetoric of liberal democracy – individuals do not start with equal handicaps” (Ratto and Boler 2014, 11). DIY citizenship might be particularly self-determined but that does not prevent it from being affected by social hierarchies and divides. For this reason, Habermas-inspired, *as well as* DIY forms of citizenship require critical approaches that seek to unveil naturalised power relations and discriminations (Ratto and Boler 2014).

This book is about how citizens express their civic voice in everyday political talks on social media. It is not a book about the citizens who do not use social media, because they do not wish to or, more worryingly, because the digital divide does not allow them to. According to the global digital report published by We Are Social and Hootsuite (2022), the global number of people with online access keeps growing and reached 5.03 billion people around the world in July 2022, accounting for around 63% of the world’s total population. Yet this also reminds us that over 40% of the world’s total population remains unconnected to the internet: approximately 3.2 billion people, a third of whom live in Africa and another third in Southern Asia. And the lack of communication infrastructure is only the tip of the iceberg of the digital divide; less visible forms of digital inequalities are experienced by many citizens on a daily basis, in relation to, for example, their age, gender, literacy and/or disability. These digital divides matter greatly, especially at times when democratic and civic life are more and more performed

online, by political elites, social actors and citizens. Unfortunately, these divides are beyond the scope of this book. In the next chapter, I will discuss how communication has become highly visual on social media in the context of the visual turn and how this has consequences for everyday citizenship.

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2 Citizenship, social media and visual cultures

2.1 The visual turn and a new semiotic order

Human culture has always been visual. As far back as the Middle Stone Age (80,000–75,000 BC), homo sapiens was already creating, mixing and using colour pigments and carving ochre blocks (discovered during archaeological excavations), millennia before the first figurative rock art drawings were made. So far, 45 million paintings and engravings have been discovered at 70,000 sites across 160 countries, with the oldest discovered painting dating back to 40,000 BC (Anati 2003). Palaeolithic artists went to great lengths to add a visual touch to their lives: they never stopped perfecting animal and plant colours, and archaeological research around the Lascaux cave in France revealed that they could travel more than 40 kilometres to exploit deposits of earthy iron oxide, which did not fade as quickly as other pigments (Leroi-Gourhan 1965). These ancestral practices remind us that the printed word is, culturally, a relatively recent phenomenon, emerging only around 3300 BC. Yet it has profoundly influenced our visual literacy, namely in how our vision is socio-culturally constructed and scientifically conceived. In the 20th century, based on Ferdinand de Saussure's linguistic works, structuralists approached images as visual systems based on linguistic language. For Barthes, for example:

[I]t is true that objects, images and patterns of behaviour can signify, and do so on a large scale, but never autonomously; every semiotic system has its linguistic admixture. Where there is a visual substance, for example, the meaning is confirmed by being duplicated in a linguistic message. . . . We are, much more than in former times, and despite the spread of pictorial illustration, a civilization of the written word.

(Barthes 1967, 10)

According to this structuralist framework, image was related to verbal text for millennia. Until approximately the 17th century, the image mainly served to *illustrate* the text: it allowed viewers to *visualise* the linguistic content (oral or written) they were familiar with, mostly sacred texts. Until approximately

1600, texts were the predominant source of authority. This gradually changed, as the visual representations of our natural and tangible surroundings became windows on the world and, as such, supplanted the authority of texts (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006). Modern forms of understanding the world equated knowing with *seeing*: for instance, between 1600 and 1800, tourism became increasingly framed as an eye-witnessing experience rather than as an opportunity for discourse (Adler 1989). Likewise, the dissemination of medical findings became increasingly image-based during the Enlightenment (Stafford 1991). Nevertheless, primarily textual or primarily pictorial practices exemplify “the old visual literacy” (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006, 23): within this modernist paradigm, images are framed as literal replicates of reality and visual communication as subservient to language.

The “visual turn” (Jay 2002) or “pictorial turn” (Mitchell 1995), which started in the second half of the 20th century, profoundly questioned this modernist approach to visual communication. The visual turn addresses the place of visuality in relation to language and emphasises the development of visual paradigms that question the previous dominance of language over visuality. Visual communication is *rediscovered*: the visual turn is

a postlinguistic, postsemiotic rediscovery of the picture as a complex interplay between visuality, apparatus, institutions, discourse, bodies, and figurality. It is the realization that spectatorship (the look, the gaze, the glance, the practices of observation, surveillance, and visual pleasure) may be as deep a problem as various forms of reading (decipherment, decoding, interpretation, etc.) and that visual experience or “visual literacy” might not be fully explicable on the model of textuality. Most important, it is the realization that while the problem of pictorial representation has always been with us, it presses inescapably now, and with unprecedented force, on every level of culture, from the most refined philosophical speculations to the most vulgar productions of the mass media. Traditional strategies of containment no longer seem adequate, and the need for a global critique of visual culture seems inescapable.

(Mitchell 1995, 36)

This visual turn also saw a “new visual literacy” emerging (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006, 23), in which visual representation is based on systems that do not merely duplicate their linguistic counterparts. The visual turn has changed the way visual culture is conceived in research, notably shifting from a structuralist to a postmodern paradigm. In this “new semiotic order” (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006, 34), linguistic and visual codes are equal and no longer organised in a hierarchy.

The academic emphasis on the increasing importance of the visual echoes how visual culture is produced and consumed. One of the reasons why the visual turn developed in the second half of the 20th century is the

technological progress at the time, which allowed new levels of realism and illusion, and democratised amateur practices. However, these advances also intensified fears over the manipulative power of images. These fears were not new; for example, the first film screenings in the late 19th century sometimes caused public panics. But for the first time, the fantasy of a society dominated by images appeared as a real technical possibility (Mitchell 1995). Television in particular amplified the power of images: elections and wars (especially the Gulf War in 1991) became heavily televised experiences. More recently, images from the ground in Ukraine that were shared on social media emphasised how images can affect the responses to the war with Russia (see e.g. Suciú 2022).

Images are not only seen as manipulative, but they are also frequently framed as mind-numbing entertainment. “I find television very educating. Every time somebody turns on the set, I go into the other room and read a book”: this famous quote by the American comedian Groucho Marx (1890–1977) is a humorous take on concerns about the dominance of entertainment over education due to the increasing pervasiveness of television. For dystopians, television transformed entertainment into the natural format for the representation of all experience. And entertainment is based on *seeing*: “Thinking does not play well on television, a fact that television directors discovered long ago. There is not much to *see* in it” (Postman 1985, 90, original emphasis). Forty years after the publication of Postman’s book, which some consider prophetic, and at a time when younger generations increasingly turn away from television, social media have become the epicentre of rapidly developing visual practices. As we will discover in the next section, the recent technological advances go some way towards explaining the emergence of a heavily visual culture on social media.

2.2 Technical advances and visual platform vernaculars

In 2005, only 2% of the US population had a smartphone. This rate reached 65% eight years later, in 2013 (Comscore 2016). In 2020, the penetration rate of smartphones reached 81.6% in the USA, 78.9% in the UK and 63.4% in China (O’Dea 2021). While the penetration rate of the mobile phones (and later smartphones) in the USA trailed behind several European countries in the years 2000, it nevertheless showed one of the fastest growth rates for any communication technology introduced in the United States. By contrast, wired telephones entered US households four times more slowly (Carey and Elton 2010).

Of course, the proliferation of smartphones could not play a key role in the emergence of a heavily visual digital culture without the social platforms that made it possible to share photographs. The cameras in their pockets do not only allow people to archive all the ordinary and extraordinary moments of their lives; but through sharing pictures online, individuals can also enter into “pictorial dialogues” (Villi 2007, 57). These dialogues can take place

between close friends and family and/or between acquaintances (i.e. weak ties) inside one's own online community. The visual turn means that the visual content is no longer only the *object* but also the *means* of the interaction. This translates into a shift from a "Kodak culture" (Chalfen 1987, 2), after the name of the well-known company in the photography industry, in which individuals share stories around amateur photographs (family gatherings, etc.) to a "Snaprs" culture in reference to snapshots, in which individuals also tell stories *with* images and no longer exclusively *about* images (Prieur et al. 2008).

Most social media platforms were either created to engage with visual content or quickly adapted their functions to do so. Founded in 2004, Flickr has, from its inception, centred its strategy on the sharing of photographs and claims on its website that it had more than 100 million "registered photographers" in 2021 (Flickr n.d.). Flickr's favoured types of images and modes of interaction have been subject to several strategic changes over time. Initially conceived as a chat room where users could share pictures synchronously, Flickr first developed its function as an image repository. While this function is still prevalent on Flickr, the platform has evolved into a fully-fledged social network, enhancing interactions between its members. "Share your photos. Watch the world," Flickr's slogan for several years, showed how Flickr built on a collective experience constructed through sharing visual records. Around 2005, Flickr was the ultimate platform to share images of catastrophes, such as the bombings in London or the floods in Australia (Liu et al. 2008; Vis et al. 2014). Then Twitter encountered its own visual turn. While Twitter was originally designed as an SMS-based platform, the content shared on this micro-blogging platform has also become increasingly visual and it overtook Flickr as the ideal platform for sharing images of events in real-time (Burgess 2011). In reaction, Flickr has developed other uses for image. Flickr's current slogan illustrates this shift: "Find your inspiration. Join the Flickr community, home to tens of billions of photos and 2 million groups." This slogan focuses on the passion for photography shared by Flickr members.

Visual content has also been key on Facebook since its beginnings. Started in 2003 as a Harvard University visual rating site, it launched its very popular photo feature and the ability to tag friends in photos two years later, followed by its news feed in 2006. In 2020, Facebook recorded more than 500 million daily viewers of its Stories feature, out of a total of 1.82 billion daily active users. In the same year, posts with images accounted for 55% of all posts created by Facebook accounts, and video posts accounted for 22.2% (Gotter 2020).

Most social networks are now image-oriented. Visual content generates (much) higher engagement rates on social media, which simultaneously confirms and reinforces the prevalence of the visual dimension. In this context, it is not surprising that the photo-sharing platform, Instagram, exceeded one million users just two months after its launch in 2010 (Desreumaux 2014). Ten years later, in the third quarter of 2020, the photo-sharing platform

surpassed 1.58 billion users and 500 million daily users of its stories function (Kemp 2020). It is the social media platform which has been generating the highest engagement rates (i.e. the sum of the likes and comments that an Instagram profile receives per post divided by the number of its followers) for several years (Feehan 2021). Other image-oriented platforms do exist, like the microblogging website and social media Tumblr, founded in 2007. In July 2022, Tumblr hosted over 500 million blogs (Tumblr n.d.).

A large range of visual cultures on social media illustrate this general tendency for image-based interaction, which is in turn dependent on the features and affordances that are specific to each platform. In an approach that seeks to avoid any techno-deterministic understanding of media practices, social media affordances are not seen as stable and intrinsic technical properties; rather, they are *potentialities* for various usages. Although the affordances are not imposed, they still set limits on what is *possible* on a given social media platform. Within these limits, possible actions vary (Hutchby 2001, 453). Among the various enabling and constraining potentialities, some of the users' enactments of technical affordances (especially display, interaction, circulation affordances) become "platform vernaculars" (Gibbs et al. 2015). These consist of shared conventional practices that, while not static, are typical of a particular social media platform. Following Gibbs et al. (2015), Pearce et al. (2018) coined the expression "visual vernaculars" to account for such image-based conventions of usage. There are now established trends in visual vernaculars: "Twitter is for news and links exchange, Facebook is for social communication, and Flickr is for image archiving, Instagram is for *aesthetic visual communication*" (Manovich 2016, 11, original emphasis). However, these broad differentiations only reveal the tip of the iceberg. The most specific and well-known practices that are associated with these social media are not always the most *common* ones that people use. For example, according to Manovich's large-scale analysis, 80% of the photos shared on Instagram are *casual* photos most of which do not follow aesthetic codes and can be considered poor quality from a technical point of view.

Only a few studies that seek to identify visual vernaculars are based on cross-platform comparisons. Through a quantitative analysis of over 400,000 images related to climate change that were posted on five social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Reddit, Tumblr and Twitter), Pearce et al. (2018) emphasised how reposting and liking images may appear common and similar on all platforms but are actually impacted by the different platforms' affordances, that is, different reposting and liking interfaces. These differences partly explain why images circulate more readily on Twitter than on Instagram, and therefore why the same images appear more often on Twitter than on Instagram. Conversely, the more intimate nature of the photos shared on Instagram means that they are intended to be seen by family and friends rather than by ambient connections. Pearce et al.'s analysis of the ten most engaged with images on each of the five social media platforms revealed distinct visual patterns, namely experience-based aesthetic travel

pictures on Instagram, controversy and contestation image macros on Twitter, memes and infographics with embedded text on Facebook. Nevertheless, the authors also emphasise how aesthetic visual communication is not specific to Instagram and could be observed across the social platforms.

The affordances that are specific to each social medium shape visual practices on the platforms. For example, Instagram filters are a well-known affordance that is used in many contexts: “The possibilities, and resulting filtered aesthetic, became so prominent though that actively resisting it became a badge of honour: the #nofilter hashtag” (Leaver, Highfield, and Abidin 2020, 55). Others are situation-based, such as the Facebook memorials, which both enable and confine social media mourning and mourners using images of their loss (Giaxoglou 2020). The unique combination of affordances on the video-based social media TikTok also shapes how it is used for political communication, especially by the younger generations (see e.g. Guinaudeau, Munger, and Votta 2022). Videos of people lip-syncing speeches by political leaders like Trump or Obama (both earnestly and sarcastically) are an example of symbolic actions that facilitate the connections between like-minded TikTok users.

While differences between platforms undoubtedly exist, the distinctiveness of their visual vernaculars should be put into perspective. After all, platforms share many affordances (Gibbs et al. 2015), which allows smooth cross-platform circulation of (visual) content. In the same vein, the success with digital marketers of social media management platforms like Hootsuite, Sprout Social or Agora pulse, which allow the cross-posting of (visual) content, illustrates how the distinctiveness of (visual) content according to the platform is often limited to slight modifications of an original social media post. Indeed, these cross-posting platforms are very useful for adapting content according to the specific technical affordances (e.g. caption length, image formatting) without substantially changing it. Social media innovation has even been proclaimed to be “dead” (Otieno 2021): while they were originally based on their own unique approach and aimed at different groups of people, social media do not want to be left behind on any affordance that attracts most users. Platforms therefore tend to copy each other. For example, the success of Instagram stories, themselves inspired by Snapchat stories, led other social platforms to create similar affordances. Besides, the use of stories as an affordance is itself influenced by other affordances and technical features: visible metrics of engagement (views, likes, shares and comments) and invisible algorithmic measurements play a key role in shaping the stories we create and engage with (Georgakopoulou, Iversen, and Stage 2020).

2.3 Citizens’ political expression in visual social media posts

Images have always been particularly powerful tools for political communication. The Bayeux Tapestry, crafted between 1067 and 1079 (Figure 2.1), is often regarded as one of the earliest examples of visual propaganda in the



Figure 2.1 Detail of the Bayeux tapestry (11th century)

Courtesy: City of Bayeux (France)

Western world. Measuring 68 metres by 50 centimetres, it offers a detailed description of the Norman Conquest and the events that led up to it. As it was intended to reinforce William, the Conqueror's claim to the English throne, the designers of the tapestry strategically selected the events to be embroidered.

Almost 1,000 years later, many political actors owe their professional successes not least to their skilfully orchestrated image in the media, initially particularly on television. Former US president Ronald Reagan (1981–1989) was emblematic in that respect: according to NBC News correspondent Chris Wallace (quoted in Clendinen 1984), Reagan's staff managed the visual settings of his physical appearances on television in great detail and prepared his bodily movements second by second in campaigns "that even Hollywood would envy." Today, social media have become an essential communication tool for professionals in politics, both in electoral or day-to-day governance contexts. The most famous case study is the avid former Twitter user Donald Trump, who increasingly tweeted or retweeted during his turn as president: on more than 12,000 occasions in 2020, compared to approximately 3,500 times in 2018 (Statista 2021). Many of his tweets were image-based. The differences between Trump's Twitter and Instagram accounts also illustrate how the specific affordances of both social media lead to different communication strategies: Trump's Instagram posts were more positive than his tweets; they also contained less attacks on minorities and less personal attacks on Hillary Clinton (Dobkiewicz 2019).

Likewise, social movements and protests carefully cultivate their visual presence on social media, in order to emphasise the power of their visual performance and their iconic potential (see e.g. Andén-Papadopoulos 2014). Visual imagery of political movements can also underline the visual power of the everyday in upheavals, revealing a sense of civic unity despite cultural differences as well as a common voice against governmental oppression (see e.g. McGarry et al. 2019).

Research on the visual communication of political actors and social movements on social media abounds around the world, while citizens' civic expression practices outside any movement remain understudied. Most research in this area is directly related to an election context. Other contexts, like the 2018–2019 US government shutdown (Agur and Gan 2021), remain exceptions. Several quantitative studies highlight the diversity of the citizens' shared visual content. For example, Marchal and colleagues' research (2021) about the visual tweets that were posted two weeks before the 2019 European elections revealed how photographs were the most frequent visual format (38.7%), ahead of posters (21.9%) and screen captures (12.9%). The same study highlighted the dominance of official campaign material, with 18.18%, ahead of campaign events (13.8%) and polls (10.6%). Citizens' political activities, which encompass political opinions and activism in the study, accounted for only 6.7% of the tweets. However, the method used for this content analysis does not allow distinctions between the types of Twitter accounts that posted the content, and, therefore, between amateur and professional visual activities on the platform.

Twitter is by far the most studied platform, partly for practical reasons, namely easier access to data. Nevertheless, some researchers provide insights regarding other platforms. For example, Mahoney and colleagues distinguished between nine types of visual civic content that was shared on Instagram in the context of the 2014 Scottish Independence referendum and the 2015 UK general election. These types focus on how citizens express their political opinions, how they use symbols, how they focus on the self and how they document the voting process (Mahoney et al. 2016, see Chapter 9). Other analyses provide more specific insights on the personal, the creative and the emotional dimensions of civic visual expression on social media. These three approaches are the object of the next three chapters of this book.

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3 Personalised citizenship

3.1 The blurring of private and public spheres

I was so affected by the thought that while Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin were on the moon, Michael Collins was all alone in the command module in the dark and the silence. I thought of him on the dark side and, having been nervous about changing schools, made up my mind that if he was brave enough to do that, I would be fine taking the bus by myself.

This is how Debbie Brook shared her memories of the Apollo 11 moon landing in 2019, 50 years after she watched it on television in July 1969, in an article for which *The Guardian* invited its readers to share their memories of a life-changing shared experience (quoted in Holmes 2019). In 1969, from the comfort of their homes, people collectively witnessed humanity reach the moon. Media, and especially television, have always been windows to the world that allow us to learn about, or emotionally experience, events from the locus of one's private sphere. Still uncommon in 1969, although the moon landing was an incentive for many people to buy their first TV, the television set rapidly became an essential domestic object. After that of television, the spread of privately owned computers and smartphones and the rise of always-on connectivity has culminated in a broad set of changes to our notions of proximity, distance and mobility, especially as experienced in increasingly blurred private and public settings. The reach of the outside world into the private sphere, through traditional media, has been coupled with the projection of virtual private spheres into public spaces, through social media. When individuals attend offline events, they experience this moment in both private and public physical spheres. Additionally, when they share their photos or videos of the event on social networks, they also create or maintain virtual private spheres, which may ultimately spill into virtual public spheres. In doing so, some attendees maintain "telecocoon," a term coined to describe how people create streams of conversation that keep them in touch when they are apart (Habuchi 2005, 167). These spaces of insular intimacy that are not restrained by geography and time allow continuous virtual interactions

within private spheres that already exist offline. But the pervasiveness of mobile technologies has also blurred the boundaries between private and public spheres:

What used to be informal social activities in the private sphere – friends hanging out together and exchanging ideas on what they like – have become algorithmically mediated interactions. . . . In less than eight years, the meaning of “sharing”, once understood as user-to-user information exchange, has subtly been replaced by a meaning that naturalises the sharing of personal data with anyone on the planet.

(Van Dijck 2013, 65)

Pictures of very intimate moments that go viral illustrate that tendency, the picture of Jessica Whelan being a case in point. She is a four-year-old little girl, whose father decided to share her agonising battle with cancer on social media in 2016 (Hardy 2016).

3.2 Privatised civic engagement on ubiquitous social media

The dividing line between the private and the public spheres was clear for the emerging citizenry of the 18th century: in London, public debates were held in separate locations from the home, especially in coffee houses. In France, the bourgeois house comprised the *living room*, for private purposes, and the *salon*, which served society (Habermas 1989). Under the same roof, the private and public spheres were separate. By contrast, building on Bauman’s concept of liquid modernity (2005), contemporary citizens are defined as “liquid citizens” (Papacharissi 2010, 108) who are connected to all sorts of places in a “floating world” (Gergen 2003) and who are not grounded in specific practices (see Chapter 1). They perform a large variety of multi-directional and episodic activities in which the line between private and public spheres is blurred. In the same vein, multi-tasking and slight but continuous focus characterise the monitorial citizen, who “is not an absentee citizen but watchful, even while he or she is doing something else. . . . Citizenship now is a year-round and day-long activity, as it was only rarely in the past” (Schudson 1998, 311). Citizenship is now liquid, multi-tasked, potentially less committed but continuous, navigating between the private and public spheres, offline and online, through pervasive (social) media. Furthermore, in contemporary consumer culture, individuals’ everyday routines, practices and choices are seen as legitimate sites of political expression. Such “lifestyle politics” contests the division between what is personal and political and further blurs the lines between the private and the public spheres (Portwood-Stacer 2013).

Specific locations for public exchanges, whether inside or outside the house, are no longer meaningful for digitally equipped citizens. For Papacharissi, “all civic actions in contemporary democracies emanate from the locus of a private sphere” (2010, 20). Activities to get informed (e.g. reading news

articles), which remain private, as well as publicly oriented activities in which one's opinion is voiced (through sharing it, supporting causes, etc.) both emerge in private spaces. Digital equipment only partly explains the privatisation of civic engagement. In a context of limited direct communication with political leaders (despite the scope offered by online communication) and cynicism and fatalism about politics, citizens might feel more powerful – or at least less powerless – in engaging in society issues from the locus of their private sphere. As I will discuss in the next section, another explanation for the privatisation of civic engagement may lie in the fact that politics (in the broad sense) is only a topic among others in citizens' daily lives. Consequently, political expression is often embedded in the flow of communication about more personal interests.

3.3 Political self-expression embedded in personal experiences

Contrary to what is suggested by those who hold more dystopian views (see Chapter 1), political knowledge and self-expression might not be declining after all. Based on surveys conducted in the 1940s and 1990s, Delli Carpini and Keeter (1997) claim that American citizens appeared no more or less informed at the end of the 20th century than half a century earlier, and they equally tended to be more informed than commonly assumed. In their study, the median of political knowledge is 49%, with significant differences among socioeconomic groups. Furthermore, their study highlights how most American citizens, past and present, were *generalists*; they were equally informed about various areas of political knowledge. The inverse is also true: those who are uninformed about one specific area are usually uninformed about other areas, too. Political conversations do not seem to be on the decline either. In 1979, 16% of American adults reported that they “often” discuss politics and 37% “sometimes” (Barnes et al. 1979 quoted in Jacobs, Lomax Cook, and Delli Carpini 2009). In 2015, a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center revealed that 35% of the millennials and 49% of the baby boomers talk about politics a few times a week (Mitchell, Gottfried, and Matsa 2015). Another Pew survey in 2016 indicated that 9% of social media users say that they often discuss, comment or post about politics or government on social networks, while 23% claim that they sometimes do so (Duggan and Smith 2016). Of course, the insights gained from these surveys cannot be strictly compared due to methodological differences (e.g. different questionnaires and different definitions of politics). Nevertheless, they seem to suggest that politics has always been one topic among many in everyday conversations, no more or less special than any other. Most people are not “political junkies” (Coleman 2006) who are highly interested in, and informed about, politics. As generalists, most people do not hold specialised discussions in ordinary settings. Politics, in the broad sense, arise in the midst of informal talk, as “a by-product of casual interaction” (Cramer Walsh 2003, 2). Embedded in the everyday, general political

discussions are not demarcated events. For this reason, they are likely to be underrepresented in surveys about political conversations, in favour of more memorable and/or conspicuous discussions (Podschuweit and Jakobs 2017). Therefore, surveys that ask respondents how often they talk about politics might only indicate the most visible political conversations. Political discussions on social media often arise from seemingly banal and everyday topics (Highfield 2016) and are not always experienced as political moments in the strict sense. Politics often comes up incidentally, in non-political contexts: a survey conducted in the USA highlighted that political topics were encountered in forums and chatrooms related to all kinds of topics, and especially in hobby-based online environments (Wojcieszak and Mutz 2009). When they discuss their interests and hobbies, 53% of the respondents come across political discussions. That said, another survey revealed that 44.6% of the respondents feel annoyed when people talk about politics on social media (Bischoff 2019). My analysis of Brexit-related posts revealed that 9% of Flickr posts and 5% of Twitter posts refer to personal moments in image and/or in text (see Chapter 11), like in the example featuring the picture of a tree being cut down and the text

Treexit. A sad story. Another sad day. A tree that we had brought all the way from Italy when we moved into the house in 2000 has died and had to be cut down. It seems even more poignant after the disaster of the “Brexit” referendum.

While ordinary people, as distinguished from activists and professionals, may still be more invested in some political topics than others, due to personal circumstances, interests and involvements, in a more general sense, they talk about politics on social media for the same reasons they talk about other topics, that is, to maintain their social status and good relations with others. Which is not always a success, though: 70% of the respondents to a Pew survey experience political talks with people holding different views as stressful (Anderson and Auxier 2020, see Chapter 1). Miller et al. (2016) also emphasise the role of humour in political talk on social media as a lubricant for good social relations and popularity (see Chapter 4). The personalisation of politics, by narrating politics from the locus of personal experiences, can definitely be added to the list of lubricants.

On social media, the public sphere is not only often constituted by the *private* sphere, but it is also often coupled with a highly *personal* perspective. A study on 350 Twitter users (quoted in Hermida 2014, 40) revealed that 80% of them were “meformers” who talked about themselves or their views. Humans have always had an urge to forge their social bonds by sharing how they experience private or public events, like Debbie Brook, who connected the moon landing in 1969 to her personal apprehension as a little girl who had to change schools. Through their pervasiveness, social media have only reinforced practices that have always existed offline and that have

particularly increased online in the broader context of the “demotic turn” (Turner 2010) in which ordinary people are given visibility across the media landscape (e.g. in reality TV programmes and more recently on social media).

Lastly, online settings that are dedicated to everyday topics increase the personal nature of political talk. The comparison of political forums hosted by the British newspaper *The Guardian* and forums dedicated to reality TV highlighted that the participants of political discussions on *The Guardian*’s website tended to seek to convince and “win the debate,” while the incidental political discussions on the reality TV forums fostered mutual learning and particularly drew on more personal experiences (Graham 2009). Politics on social media, too, is often personalised, as it relies on people’s own perspectives and experiences (Highfield 2016). In the next section, I will discuss two main ways that personalise politics by means of image-based content.

3.4 Image-based content that personalises political self-expression

People are “made to be social” (Hermida 2014, 29), and in the context of everyday conversations, politics as a topic among others serves to ensure and maintain one’s social status and good relations with others (Miller et al. 2016). The common practice of talking about politics in the flow of the everyday follows this logic of social bonding and enhanced visibility (of the self) as well. I will now discuss two types of image-based content which afford visibility to the ordinary self and to eye-witnessed events in political contexts.

3.4.1 *Political selfies by ordinary people*

“Selfie’. The singular mention of that word elicits an opinion from anyone and everyone” (Eler 2017, 1). Opinions on selfies are as ubiquitous as they are divided: utopian or dystopian narratives commonly consider them as tools for either empowerment or narcissism, which both need to be nuanced (Senft and Baym 2015). Selfies can be normative or subversive; they can follow the conventions of self-depiction or subvert them in struggles over online commodification of the image of the self. The approaches can also be combined, leading to blurred lines between everyday selfies and selfie activism.

Selfies in election contexts highlight how the personal and the political spheres, as well as the individual and the collective, can be highly interlinked. “I voted” selfies are a representational ritual at the crossroads of dutiful and self-actualising citizenship (Butkowski 2022). For Butkowski, especially those selfies which are anonymised by hiding the face allow an embodied connection between the voter and imagined audiences, in which the individual and the collective converge, as the audience can fully project themselves onto the image and hence into the experience.

This type of selfie in particular serves social bonding, in that elections are a topic among others that is framed from a personal perspective. But selfies during elections, and especially ballot selfies which show the photographer’s

completed ballot, can simultaneously serve communicative purposes other than mere depictions of daily life, for example, encouraging others to vote or to vote in a particular way. The combination of various purposes often blurs the line not only between the political and the personal but also between the private and the public spheres. The vaccine selfies that spread during the COVID-19 epidemic in 2021 also served various purposes across the private and the public spheres: in addition to sharing a (positive) moment and acting on a self-promotion impulse, such selfies were shared to show that vaccination is safe, to encourage others to get vaccinated and/or to help dispel vaccine scepticism and disinformation (Murphy Kelly 2021). In such cases, the highly individual experiences of voting or getting vaccinated merge with the collective and can create a feeling of “networked reflective solidarity” that links people with other citizens who share similar civic or political views (Senft 2008).

Political selfies usually contain more than a face. Nunes (2017) points out how the placemaking function of the selfie in a specific offline location can trigger a feeling of agency for ordinary people when the selfie is distributed online. In locating the photographer within a specific physical and social context, the selfie allows to encode engagement with an event and to share it to virtual public spaces. When tourists report their personal experience of protest movements in selfies, the personal, the private and the individual are given multiple chances to conflate with the public and the collective, depending on how far ordinary people blur the lines between everyday citizenship and activism:

To take the tourist shot in the middle of political upheaval is not to degrade or debase the struggle and rights claims of activists, but rather to acknowledge the interpenetrating spaces that operate as a context for citizenship in the digital age.

(Nunes 2017, 116)

3.4.2 Pictures of eye-witnessed events

Selfies are part of the broader common practice of eye-witnessing, whereby information about events is shared between the witness and the (online) community. Social media platforms, especially Twitter, have particularly encouraged sharing fast-breaking information in the context of crises (e.g. natural disasters or political upheavals). When they take and share pictures of such events, internet users often – but not always – practise a form of citizen journalism defined by Mortensen (2011) as a desire to share one’s personal experience of witnessed events without feelings of responsibility or moral duty. Now any individual can witness events with their smartphone; many people are used to recording the world that surrounds them by merely taking pictures of events. Being more than purely factual footage, these witnessing pictures blur the lines between ordinary practices, citizen journalism and

activism, in private and public spheres. Peters (2001) distinguishes between passive and active witnessing: passive witnessing consists in seeing the events of the world, while active seeing refers to producing knowledge about these events. These two dimensions of witnessing – seeing and saying – conflate in selfies (Koliska and Roberts 2015) as well as in witnessed pictures more broadly:

The event is already experienced in a mediated form as it plays out, both figuratively and literally speaking, since the scene is taken in with attention split between the mobile phone screen's reproduction of the event and the event in real life.

(Mortensen 2011, 11)

However, what bearing witness means is rarely explained and this conflation might further increase the confusion between seeing and bearing witness (Tait 2011). In this respect, the distinction between witnessing and bearing witness (or between seeing and saying) is still important in political contexts, insofar as bearing witness entails civic responsibility for contemporary events. It entails a form of engagement, while the mere act of seeing and recording does not. Following this line of thought, Andén-Papadopoulos (2014) insists on the distinction between *mere eye-witnessing* and *citizen camera-witnessing*, which she defines as “the embodied risk of filming as resistance to brutal repression.” Citizen camera-witnessing entails a form of participation in the event and not only mere spectatorship. Through citizen camera-witnessing, people take risks to provide critical visual testimonies of unjust situations. Of course, the boundary between the ordinary and activism is not always clear-cut. The text and/or hashtags that accompany the picture (be it a selfie or an eye-witness image) play a key role in giving additional context to the depicted event and in highlighting to what extent it is experienced as a private and personal event, as a political and public one, or as a mix of both.

Ordinary people play a role in sharing visual testimonies of events when they act as bystanders on site. In addition, they can also be witnesses of mediated and spatially removed events: the abundance of screenshots of TV news shared on social media in every crisis highlights such mediated experience of witnessing from the private sphere (Vis et al. 2014). When the screenshots stage the domestic setting too, the private sphere conflates with the personal. Posting pictures of television or computer screens that feature on-street mobilisation can also be a way to join the community (Adi, Gerodimos, and Lilleker 2018).

Lastly, eye-witnessing can also be creative and humorous. Pictures of social media users' pets particularly rely on techniques that conflate the personal and the political spheres. Pets are a source of joy for their owners, who often consider them as fully fledged members of the family. Among other benefits, gaze-mediated bondings with dogs increase oxytocin levels, a key hormone in relationships (Nagasawa et al. 2015). Unsurprisingly, pets, especially cats and dogs, are very popular on social media: a 2016 survey of

2,000 American pet owners that use social media revealed that 65% of them post about their pets on social media, twice a week on average. Also, 33% of the respondents declared that they post about their pets as much and as often as they do about their family; 16% even more (Petcare Mars 2016). Pets can even have their own social media platforms, like Petzbe. Caple (2019) observed how Instagram posts at election day in which dogs are the main characters that directly address the audience (their owners remaining in the background) illustrate a large variety of practices. Some are anchored in everyday life and only indirectly refer to the political sphere (e.g. #I am only there for the sausage sizzle), while others reveal how dogs are transformed into dog marketeers, sometimes wearing political t-shirts, who hold voting preferences and/or promote candidates. By channelling their vote preferences through their dogs, these Instagram users create some humorous distance between themselves and their political ideas.

In the next chapter, I will discuss how the personal dimension of visual citizenship online is often coupled with visual creativity.

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4 Visual creativity and civic engagement

The previous three chapters on citizenship and the importance of visual and personal dimensions of communication on social media have highlighted the extent to which citizens' practices tend to shift from *dutiful* citizenship to what Bennett (2007) calls "actualising citizenship." In both dutiful and actualising citizenships, citizens unite around collective actions. Actualising citizenship leaves more room for individual and creative expressions, but this remains at the service of a collective effort, even if that effort is often loosely defined. Therefore, I adopt the notion of actualising citizenship in a broad sense (i.e. not systematically in relation to connective actions) when applying it to everyday political expression. As we will see, (visual) popular culture often plays a central role in the expression of this creative citizenship.

4.1 Popular culture, creativity and citizenship

As we have seen in Chapter 1, Marshall's (1950) seminal approach to citizenship comprises three successive stages of rights: *civic* rights (freedom of expression, personal liberty, access to justice, property rights), *political* rights (rights for elective representation) and, ultimately, *social* rights, provided by the welfare system through education and social services. Since it was developed in the context of industrialisation, Marshall's typology does not account for the development of 20th-century consumer and participatory cultures. For some citizens, consumption has become a mode of citizenship, sometimes called "consumer politics." This can be expressed both at the collective level (e.g. boycotting campaigns) or, more simply, through individual, everyday consumption choices in supermarkets and shops. In view of both consumer and participatory cultures, Hartley (1999, 2010) proposes to update Marshall's typology by adding two more phases of citizenship, namely *media citizenship* and *DIY (do-it-yourself) citizenship*. As in Marshall's framework, the successive phases are added to the previous ones.

Theories of media citizenship gained prominence in the early 2000s. They focused on media consumption, especially television entertainment, as a resource for citizenship, in response to modernist approaches that emphasised the television malaise (e.g. Postman 1985, see Chapter 1). The defenders

of media citizenship argue that, while modernist authors' fear of how television impacts democracy is not entirely unfounded, they have contributed to widening the gap between the political elite and ordinary citizens by disregarding the importance of popular culture, entertainment and pleasure for citizenship. Shared values and meaning circulate through elements of popular culture, and these elements can be the basis of identities, which can, in turn, fuel political opinions and actions. Popular culture is everywhere, including in politics: "popular culture neither manipulates us nor mirrors us; instead we live through it and with it . . . our lives are bound up with it" (Street 1997, 4). In Jenkins and colleagues' words (2002, 3), "we engage with popular culture as the culture that 'sticks to the skin,' that becomes so much a part of us that it becomes difficult to examine it from a distance."

Van Zoonen (2005) emphasises how citizens, in *discussing*, *criticising* and *imagining* politics based on popular television shows, engage in fan-like activities. For both citizens and fans, commentary, community and emotional investment are paramount:

Both fans and citizens emerge as a result of performance, of popular-cultural and political actors, respectively; both fans and citizens seek information about their objects, talk and discuss, try to convince others of their preferences, and propose alternatives; both fans and citizens have a necessary emotional investment in their objects that keeps their commitment going.

(van Zoonen 2005, 145)

The performances of citizens and fans here are performances of *passionate discussion*, in response to modernist theories which rather advocate deliberation as the privileged means of exchange between citizens (see Chapter 1). Popular culture appears as a resource for *reflection*. This reflexive role of popular culture is also key in McGuigan's definition of the *cultural public sphere*, which he illustrates with the activity of watching fiction and identifying with the characters and their problems. These fictional situations that emotionally engage the viewers-citizens allow for discussions about life in society, beyond the fictional world. For McGuigan, the cultural public sphere

includes the various channels and circuits of mass-popular culture and entertainment, the routinely mediated aesthetic and emotional *reflections* on how we live and imagine the good life. . . . The cultural public sphere provides vehicles for thought and feeling, for imagination and disputatious argument, which are not necessarily of inherent merit but may be of some consequence.

(McGuigan 2005, 435, emphasis added)

In his definition, McGuigan insists on the relative impact of media citizenship. In the same vein, van Zoonen (2005) argues that such discussions on fictional

politics are not likely to concern concrete and detailed political instances but will rather stimulate people in sharpening and expressing general political views. In Nærland's (2020) terms, fictions can *introduce*, *extend* or *solidify* the citizen's overall orientation towards politics. For example, the Norwegian online series *Skam* sparked numerous online discussions among teenagers around the world regarding the values that govern societies, especially about social identities and gender relations (Lindtner and Dahl 2019).

Referring to fiction when expressing political ideas is not, of course, a citizen activity that will change the world. As Street and his colleagues (2013) argue, one might rightly claim that such interest and discussions about politics in the broad sense remain distant from formal politics, for example, elections and governments, which still matter. However, media citizenship does highlight the extent to which pleasure and emotional investment are levers of civic engagement that should not be neglected. As Dahlgren (2009, 85) sums it up, "no passion, no participation." If the enthusiasm generated by popular culture can be transferred to civic issues, even if only partially and superficially, this is already a small victory against some citizens' disinterest in politics, even if it should not be overestimated.

The concept of *DIY citizenship* strongly emphasises citizens' own production and creativity.

DIY citizenship is a product of participatory culture. In this type of actualising citizenship, citizens not only discuss politics through popular culture, but they also create user-generated content, which is often based on popular culture. Using the metaphor of the "*stage* for citizenship," Hartley (2010, 241, original emphasis) insists on how the metaphoric expression of DIY citizenship is dramatic and performative. In this framework, performance is strongly coupled with creativity: DIY citizenship is linked to "the right to protest and the right to dance" (McKay 1998, 37). The notions of *remediation* and *bricolage* encapsulate this creative tendency: on the one hand, when citizens engage in remediation, they "adopt, but at the same time modify, manipulate, and thus reform consensual ways of understanding reality" (Deuze 2006, 8). On the other hand, citizen-bricoleurs assemble their versions of reality in a highly personalised fashion (Deuze 2006). Remediation and bricolage are particularly evident in creative practices that make use of intertextuality, that is, link content by means of various types of reference to other content. Intertextual user-generated content is based on existing artefacts, which can be elements of popular culture that citizens quote or subvert. Intertextuality combines the individual (bricolage) and the collective (remediation), so that citizens express their personal creativity while including collective codes and cultural references that are shared by the community.

The popularity of references to existing elements of (pop) culture, which often go viral, also emphasises the importance of *play*. For example, intertextuality is an essential element of parody (Hutcheon 2000). In media citizenship, entertainment is valued as a resource for civic reflection. Within the DIY framework, purposeful play is constitutive of citizenship. Creativity can

be humorous and silly, for example by playing with vernacular codes and repertoires in memes. For the defenders of silly citizenship, the idea that playful attitudes are limited to childhood and youth is simply absurd (Hartley 2010). And given its bonding affordances, humour can play a significant role in citizenship.

In the following sections of this chapter, I will discuss how citizens make particular use of visual creativity to express their political opinions by means of *creative heuristic devices*.

4.2 Heuristic devices in citizens' political social media posts

Citizens have limited cognitive abilities. As humans, we have neither the inclination nor the ability to perceive all available information and alternatives, to consider all results and then make rational decisions based on them. Human brains have to make choices when processing information. It can be processed using broadly two different routes: a central and a peripheral route (see e.g. Petty and Cacioppo 1986). Via the central route, arguments are carefully evaluated and weighed up against each other. Since elaborating on information requires a major cognitive effort, the resulting attitudes are typically stable and long term. By contrast, if motivation is minimal or if external factors make it impossible to assign cognitive resources to the information provided (e.g. when information is missing or when an immediate decision is necessary), it will most likely be processed via a peripheral route. For example, in order to deal with the flood of information shared on social media and save on processing capacities, people are likely to process incoming information through unconscious cognitive mechanisms. Via this route, clearly structured and elaborate arguments are neglected in favour of mental shortcuts, and heuristic devices facilitate, and often oversimplify, the analysis of information. Several scholars applied this information-processing model from cognitive psychology to political contexts, which resulted in political cognition theory. According to this framework, the political world is too complex, abstract and distant from citizens' direct experiences.

As I mentioned in Chapter 3, people have always been *generalists* who collect information about the various areas of political knowledge in equal but average ways (i.e. their knowledge is average but covers varied political topics). Politics is one of many topics in everyday conversations, no more or less special than any other. From that perspective, responses to the modernist approach to the uninformed voter paradigm emphasise that highly informed political conversations are an elitist utopia that is disconnected from the realities of politics and that ignores the distance between most citizens and their political representatives. As McGuigan (2005, 435) argues, "why should people be expected to treat official politics, where they have so little power to influence what happens, with the same passion that they devote to their own personal lives and lived or imagined relationships to others?" In that context, citizens need heuristic devices to process political information: "When people

do not have enough time and energy fully to survey the political horizon, they may rationally employ some cognitive heuristic to make the task more manageable” (Neuman 1992, 15). When media and public discourses reconfigure the political world by means of heuristic devices (e.g. metaphors), they do not determine it top-down but rather make it possible to *connect* political frames, schemes and maps with citizens’ diverse “habits, tastes, capacities, comforts and hopes” (Lippmann 2004 [1922], 52; Neuman 1992). In doing so, media and public discourses help reduce the distance between the citizen and the political sphere, between what is familiar and unfamiliar.

In the era of participatory culture, this reconfiguration of the world into familiar heuristic devices that have the potential of connecting citizens is no longer the preserve of media and public discourses; citizens, too, have become major producers of that kind of content. The cartoons that were created and shared online as a reaction to the Charlie Hebdo attacks in 2015 exemplify this. These images were based on widely shared social representations in the Western world and revealed how a traumatic event that went global converged in a rather limited set of metaphors, in easily recognisable narratives that circulate in contemporary society: the pen fighting the sword, the journalist as a hero, analogies with 9/11, etc. (Bouko, Calabrese, and De Clercq 2017).

4.2.1 *Semiotic familiarity: the power of conventional metaphors*

Metaphors are not only demonstrations of poetic talent to express ideas in a figurative, rather than a literal, way. Instead of merely using language to substitute one expression for another, speakers employ metaphors as cognitive instruments and processes of thought that are materialised in linguistic utterances only secondarily: “Most of our ordinary conceptual system is metaphorical in nature. . . . *The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another.* . . . Human thought processes are largely metaphorical” (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 4–6, original emphasis). For example, the two scholars illustrate how metaphors structure our daily mental processes and activities with the “argument is war” metaphor. This metaphor is visible in many everyday expressions, such as “he *attacked every weak point* in my argument” (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 4, original emphasis). People not only talk about arguments in terms of war, but they also mentally conceptualise the argument and their opponents through the war frame. As a result, people’s performances in arguments are (partially) structured by the war metaphor, like in the many COVID-19-related memes that circulated during the pandemic, such as Figure 4.1.

The linguistic metaphor that is uttered is only the tip of the iceberg of an invisible mental process. As Lakoff and Johnson’s book title suggests, we *live by* metaphors. That said, in focusing on the highly conventional, pervasive and therefore often unconscious metaphoric dimension of conceptual metaphors, the two authors were not primarily concerned with the metaphoric



Figure 4.1 “US survival rate” meme

realisations in language and the uniqueness and specificity of individual occurrences, depending on variables such as register or media genre. Their findings were mostly based on decontextualised lists of metaphorical expressions that were not collected in authentic discourse. Therefore, complementary to Conceptual Metaphor Theory, studies in a more discourse-oriented approach to metaphor address both the universal *and* individual dimensions of the uses of metaphors. In doing so, they can reveal how metaphorical realisations can be the result of a “rhetorical compromise” between conventionality that guarantees that metaphors are widely and easily comprehensible, and creativity that add vividness to the speaker’s statements, for example (Semino 2008, 8; Demjén and Semino 2017).

The metaphorical nature of our system of thought has not escaped the political world: “Politics without metaphors is like a fish without water” (Thompson 1996). Political discourses are full of metaphors, circulated by political protagonists, the media and citizens alike. Both politicians *and*

citizens conceptualise and act in political situations through metaphoric reasoning (Hanne 2015). At least three reasons can explain why metaphor seems uniquely designed for discussing politics. They relate to three rhetorical strategies, which are also typical of political cartoons: condensation, domestication and opposition (Morris 1993). First, *condensation* is linked to the complex nature of politics and the need to provide an accessible version of it to citizens, notably through heuristic devices. In condensing data and encapsulating the essence of a complex idea, metaphors allow to convey a large number of elements and a high level of complexity in a concise and understandable manner. In other words, in helping citizens understand complex issues, “metaphor creates a feeling of enlightenment” (Mio 1997, 122). Second, *domestication* concerns the power of familiarity, which many heuristic devices – metaphors included – rely on. Through domestication, issues and topics, especially unfamiliar or complex ones, are associated with familiar concepts. In the most common metaphors, the figurative element is often a body part (e.g. the *head* of a company) and numerous conventional metaphors are based on mundane, familiar human experiences (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). Many of the metaphors that are used to frame complex (political) issues illustrate this tendency towards the familiar. One case in point is Brexit metaphors:

Brexit has inspired far more metaphors than it has solutions. Every politician, pundit, and pub bore has come up with their own way to describe the British vote to leave the European Union. Brexit is apparently like leaving a golf club, escaping from prison, eating a chocolate orange, flying to the moon, playing football, ordering at a restaurant, taking an egg out of an omelette, or paying a bar bill.

(Tapper 2019)

The third strategy is *opposition*. It establishes a contrast that emphasises differences, like in the metaphor of the sinking *Titanic* versus the lifeboat that escapes, which has been widely used in the Brexit context. In dividing elements into clear categories and glossing over differences and similarities, opposition metaphors can play a central role in the formation of identities. Self–other metaphors in particular help organise communities and enhance cooperation and support inside the ingroup, as well as division and conflict with the outgroup (Beer and De Landtsheer 2004).

Studies of linguistic metaphors almost always focus on those used by political elites and the media (Perrez and Reuchamps 2014). The same holds true for visual metaphors: political metaphors and their rhetorical visual strategies are almost exclusively examined in newspapers cartoons (see e.g. El Refaie 2003; Schilperoord and Maes 2009; Forceville and van de Laar 2019). Of course, the emergence of participatory culture has not made all citizens confident with a pencil; drawing political cartoons remains primarily a professional practice. That said, citizens do use creative means to express their political views in

symbolic and metaphorical ways and share them online. Cartoons are one of these creative means, such as photographs or image macros. In the context of the COVID-19 crisis, for example, citizens have shared visual metaphors that are mainly autobiographical but are also used to address various political issues, such as insufficient or marketised healthcare (Saji, Venkatesan, and Callender 2021). Apart from media and public discourses, online extremism is another field of research where visual metaphors have attracted scholarly attention. Extreme-right amateurs and professionals alike have become experts in using visual propaganda that resonates with cultural knowledge through visual metaphors (Bogerts and Fielitz 2019).

The virtues of metaphors, whether linguistic, visual or multimodal, are also their weaknesses: while they make it possible to understand complex political topics and to express one's opinions on them, there is only a fine line between simplification and oversimplification. As heuristic devices, metaphors often stimulate the peripheral route of thought processes and might, therefore, trigger cognitive biases. Furthermore, "much of the power of the metaphor lies in its capacity to evoke an analogical narrative, without making that narrative so explicit that its aptness can easily be challenged" (Hanne 2015, 1).

Finally, the power of familiarity also raises concerns. Metaphors that are based on familiarity are particularly effective, since they resonate with latent shared symbols. In being repeated continuously, conventional metaphors can potentially be transformed into uncritical clichés that maintain citizens' comfort zone: "Chronic repetition of clichés and stale phrases that serve simply to evoke a conditioned uncritical response is a time-honored habit among politicians and a mentally restful one for their audiences" (Edelman 1967[1964], 124). In oversimplifying and making complex issues familiar, frequently used metaphors tend to appear as self-evident and incontestable. They naturalise frames and viewpoints (Shore 1997), to the extent that ideas expressed through metaphors seem more transparent, but also more logical and better developed, than their literal counterparts (Read et al. 1990). The potential of metaphors to manipulate people undoubtedly explains their success in populist and extremist discourses.

As Australian aboriginal lawyer Noel Pearson argued in 2007:

[W]e often become prisoners of our own metaphors. Humans need metaphors to communicate and when metaphors work to capture complexity, they are wonderful. When they are inadequate they are worse than useless: they hold our collective imagination captive and constrained.

(quoted in Hanne 2015, 40)

As I will discuss in the next section, unlike conventional metaphors, creative metaphors are created and shared to shake up our routines and take a fresh look at (political) issues.

4.2.2 Semiotic innovation: the power of play and creative metaphors

As the title of Huizinga's (1955 [1938]) seminal book suggests, the human is a "homo ludens": Western cultures and civilisations have been built around the paradigm of play and many forms of social life have been designed in playful terms:

The spirit of playful competition is, as a social impulse, older than culture itself and pervades all life like a veritable ferment. Ritual grew up in sacred play; poetry was born in play and nourished on play; music and dancing were pure play. Wisdom and philosophy found expression in words and forms derived from religious contests. The rules of warfare, the conventions of noble living were built up on play-patterns. . . . Civilization is, in its earliest phases, played. It does not come *from* play like a babe detaching itself from the womb: it arises *in* and *as* play, and never leaves it.

(Huizinga 1955 [1938], 173)

As Huizinga emphasises, creativity is based on play. Art is based on play (poetry, music, dancing, etc.), so are creative ways to express one's political opinions on social media. Following Eberle (2014), play can be defined as the combination of six elements: anticipation, surprise, understanding, strength, pleasure and poise. All these elements are rewarding processes, which partly explains why play has been such a key activity in cultures. *Anticipation* refers to the state of readiness for play. As in Huizinga's framework, play is distinct from ordinary life, and anticipation makes way for play. The second element, *surprise*, consists in the reaction to a central pattern in play: incongruity, through which the association of elements lacks accordance and diverges from conventional expectations. Creative metaphors are incongruous patterns *par excellence*, since one element is substituted by another in a creative, unconventional way. Humour is triggered when incongruity is solved by adding further information to the initial incongruity. Jokes in question–answer patterns exemplify the incongruity-resolution model. Here is one: "Question: What do you call a lazy baby kangaroo? Answer: A pouch potato."

While incongruity triggers surprise, it does not systematically trigger humour. Therefore, some creative metaphors are created to offer fresh ways of looking at reality, without providing a humorous dimension. Creative metaphors can open the mind. Of course, art history is full of examples of creative metaphors with that function. For example, Picasso's *Guernica* (painted in 1937) comprises a rich variety of visual metaphors around the general "war as bullfight" metaphor, which the painter left open for individual interpretation (Wischnitzer 1985).

According to Eberle's framework, playing with others enhances mutual *understanding* (through increasing empathy, etc.) and *strength* of mind and body (i.e. physical and intellectual skills). *Pleasure* and fun are the fifth

element of play. While anticipation, surprise, understanding and strength trigger physical, intellectual, emotional and social pleasures, “much of the pleasure we derive from play is social in nature” (Eberle 2014, 226). Fun and humour, while distinct (non-humorous play can be fun), are both very powerful social lubricants. Finally, players enhance their *poise* when they experience increasing dignity, grace or fulfilment. For Eberle, only activities that entail the six elements can be fully qualified as play. In participatory culture on social media, the elements of surprise, understanding, cognitive strength and fun/pleasure are prominent; anticipation and poise are less relevant, though. Let us see in the following how these elements of play can materialise in creative, political, user-generated content.

4.2.2.1 Creative parodies of conventional metaphors

As explained earlier, metaphors are very common in political discourse. Unsurprisingly, parodying political communication based on metaphors (e.g. election campaigns) is, therefore, a common practice. In focusing on some elements and hiding others, metaphors can be powerful evaluative tools. For example, some user-generated content parodies the Greek Socialist Party’s 2015 election campaign, which exploited the metaphor “running a country is like piloting a plane” and its related positive scenarios and entailments (Piata 2016). In the parody, the positive evaluation provided by the “plane as a country” metaphor is subverted with another scenario in which the plane runs out of fuel. The captain’s expected self-control and professionalism are subverted in an incongruous entailment: throwing out some luggage, and maybe even some passengers.

4.2.2.2 Creative metaphors

Can you recall the kangaroo joke (in Section 4.2.2)? You probably can, even if you read that section of the book some days ago. The humour bias might explain why you still remember the pouch potato. It is one of the biases which enhance memory and is based on the assumption that humorous stimuli are more easily remembered than non-humorous content (Schmidt 2002). The difference can be explained by the distinctiveness of humour, the increased cognitive processing required to understand a joke, or the emotional arousal it triggers. Although there are several studies that have supported the existence of a humorous recall and/or recognition advantage, there is no consensus on why this phenomenon occurs; it is not yet clear whether humour is a specific case of other, more commonly researched memory phenomena, such as the better recall of stimuli which are highly distinct or bizarre. According to the context-dependent hypothesis, semantic processing depends on how common the presented material is, irrespective of whether it is humorous or not. Uncommon humorous material requires greater activation of stored semantic knowledge than common non-humorous material does (Worthen

and Deschamps 2008). According to the incongruity resolution hypothesis, resolving semantic incongruities also creates a memory advantage for humorous materials. Stimuli with an initial incongruity require a semantic search and it is because of this that, if a resolution of incongruity is generated, the material will be recalled at higher rates.

The playful element of surprise through incongruity is particularly exploited in creative metaphors. As distinctive outputs that go off the beaten track, they benefit from the previously mentioned cognitive potentials that arouse interest or even trigger laughter. This has not escaped marketers, who create abundant creative metaphors in advertising. For example, in ads, cars become dolphins, muscles, sharks, etc. (Bateman 2014, 181). Creative metaphors are used for commercial purposes, as eye catchers, sources of fun and/or mind openers. In participatory online culture, humour is often realised through creating creative metaphors.

Political memes are emblematic of creative citizenship. In a corpus of over seven million visual memes, 30% of those that contained identifiable themes were considered political (Du, Masood, and Joseph 2020). In memes, creativity is commonly based on incongruous humorous associations between political items and various elements of popular culture. For example, Bernie Sanders, candidate in the 2016 American presidential election, substitutes the eccentric scientist Doc Brown in a parody of the movie *Back to the future* in the meme given here (see Figure 4.2).

As this meme illustrates, intertextuality is a constitutive element of memes. Memes are defined in relation to each other: a meme is “(a) a *group of digital items sharing common characteristics* of content, form and/or stance; (b) that were created *with awareness of each other*; and (c) were circulated, imitated, and/or transformed *via the Internet by many users*” (Shifman 2014, 7–8, original emphasis). Shifman’s characteristic (a) is not a sufficient condition for visual outputs to be considered memes; all three features are necessary.

Intertextuality is based on imitation *and* transformation. At the level of content, meme creators keep some elements from existing content but suppress or transform others. At the level of form, they base their creativity on conventions, such as embedding capital letters in some visual content. In doing so, they engage creatively at an individual level, while at the same time relying on collective and affiliative patterns that other Internet users can recognise (Milner 2012). Practices of imitation and transformation are particularly rich and varied: Milner identified 13 types, divided into two main categories. On the one hand, *remixed* images are transformed images; the accompanying text may be modified or not. On the other hand, *stable* images are images that retain their original shape and in which transformation occurs exclusively at the level of language.

Of course, as Milner’s typology also suggests, intertextuality is not always based on creative metaphors and does not systematically entail incongruity. For example, the Obama Hope poster that represented Obama’s 2008 election campaign inspired both “organised discourses” that were in line with

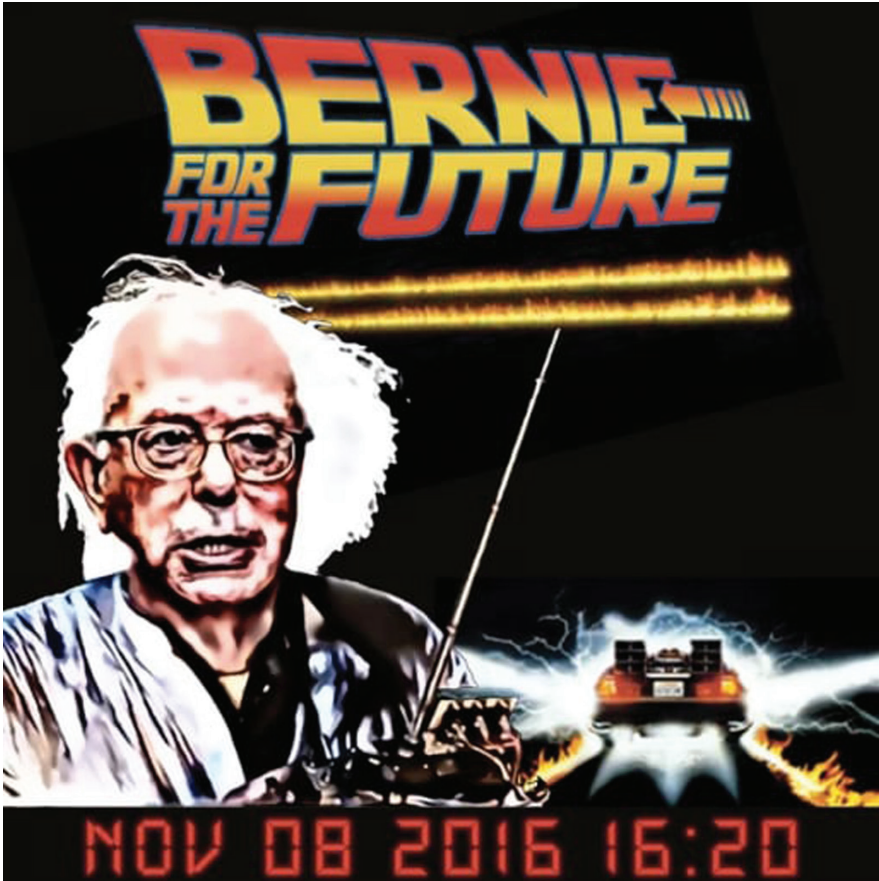


Figure 4.2 Bernie Sanders in a meme interweaving politics and popular culture

the initial political message of the Democratic party and “alternative discourses” which subverted it, for example, in replacing Obama with Hitler, among others (Seiffert-Brockmann, Diehl, and Dobusch 2018).

4.2.3 *The power of play and the danger of cognitive biases*

Several political memes that have caused famous controversies illustrate how memes can be based on absurd ideas but nevertheless have worrisome political consequences. Take the Zodiac killer meme: in 2013, Ted Cruz, the Republican US presidential candidate, was accused of being the Zodiac killer in a tweet that was created as a joke. Yet this mock conspiracy theory circulated for several years. In reality, the Zodiac killer is an unidentified serial killer who perpetrated murders in California in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when Ted Cruz had not even been born. But in 2016, a poll revealed

that 38% voters in Florida believed that Ted Cruz might be the Zodiac killer – 10% believed it; 28% were not sure (Jensen 2016).

This example illustrates how memes, as built on heuristic devices, can trigger automatic thinking and, therefore, some powerful cognitive biases. Beyond automatic thinking, the sleeper effect might partly explain why such an irrational statement can gain some credit over time. The sleeper effect is a long-term bias that occurs when the impact of a message from an unreliable source grows over time (see e.g. Kumkale and Albarracín 2004). As humans, our changes in attitude typically do not occur directly after we receive a message, but over a period of time. Likewise, the attitudes we had upon receiving the information are gradually forgotten. Hence, while the main message sticks, we are likely to forget the associations we initially made with the source of the message: we forget whether we associated the message with a trustworthy source or not. And as we have seen with the humour bias, messages that are out of the ordinary or straight out ridiculous have higher chances of sticking with us. Unreliable sources and fake news sources are likely to produce such messages, while the information of reliable sources might not be as exciting. This means that the efficacy of the message transported by a trustworthy source can diminish over time, whereas the efficacy of an untrustworthy source might increase. Therefore, the negative effects of lack of credibility of a source decrease over time, whereas the positive effects of persuasive and attractive information increase. In the case of the Zodiac killer meme, the playful but untrustworthy source might be forgotten, yet we might be likely to keep the striking message in mind, especially if automatic thinking is not replaced by deliberate thinking.

For some observers, it is the virality of this meme that should be put into question, rather than its existence and its content as such, which was nothing more than a joke: telling people to rationally look at the facts is one thing “but the meme works on a higher level. It satirises the fact that political discourse in America has sunk so low that this kind of spurious accusation can actually get traction” (Dean 2016). Such memes are a boon to opponents of memetic forms of creative citizenship, who point out, not wrongly, “how memes perfectly capture what’s wrong with our political engagement” (Powers 2016).

Beyond heated debates regarding memes in politics, young Americans who took part in focus groups on memes in political contexts offered a more nuanced approach (Penney 2020). On the one hand, memes can be facilitators of expression. Thanks to the humour that memes convey, these young citizens more easily dare to express their ideas. Therefore, memes can help break the spiral of silence, through which citizens might be wary of expressing their political views for fear of social consequences (see Chapter 3). The young respondents also appreciated the social role of memes in bringing like-minded people together, who can then easily express their political affinities and provide mutual support. Lastly, humour in memes is also seen as a coping strategy for the most upsetting aspects of politics. Figure 4.3, which is

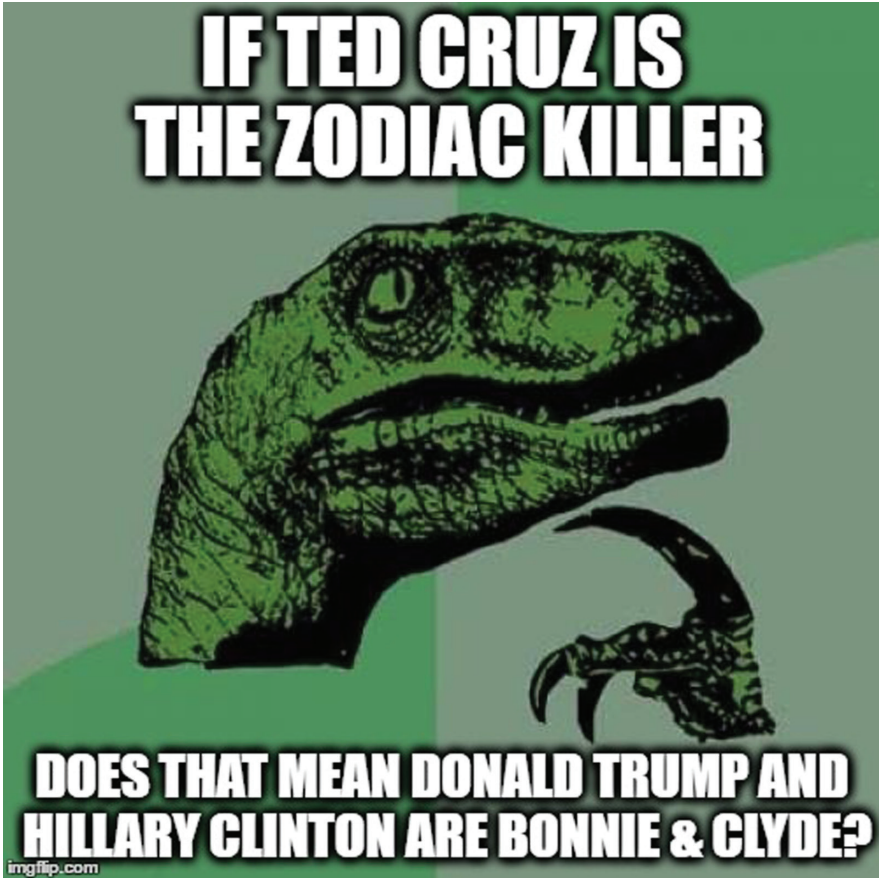


Figure 4.3 “If Ted Cruz . . .” meme

a response to the Zodiac killer meme, exemplifies how humour sometimes helps to offset negative feelings towards absurd, irrational or disappointing political situations.

On the other hand, they were also aware of the risks of trivialising political debates with memes and of shifting citizens’ attention away from deeper civic engagement. Memes can easily delegitimise political actors and be superficial, hostile and extremely polarised (see e.g. Hristova 2014; Ross and Rivers 2017), and these young respondents are fully aware of these drawbacks. The only downside is that the young adults who participated in the focus groups were all university students. There is a legitimate concern that less privileged socio-cultural youth may not share the same nuanced view on memes and creativity in everyday politics. And they might be even more sensitive to the power of visual heuristics.

As we have just seen, visual citizenship is often creative. In the next chapter, I will discuss how it is commonly emotional, too.

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5 Affective citizenship

As I have briefly discussed in Chapter 4, pop culture can very much contribute to politics through the *emotional* investments it entails. Popular culture works primarily through emotions, and its main relevance to politics is based on this very dimension. Recognising the emotional potential of popular culture in politics should be seen in the broader context of considering the role of emotions in political expression, especially on social media. This affective turn is the subject of this chapter.

5.1 The affective turn in political expression

The advent of social media technologies has made the affective and emotional dimensions of communication and social life become dominant. This shift has been at the centre of worldwide debates that have profoundly changed our views on mass persuasion. The Facebook-Cambridge Analytica scandal, which erupted in 2018 and through which personal data belonging to millions of Facebook users was collected without their consent for political advertising, is only the tip of an iceberg of techniques that have been capitalising on the power of emotions for psychological targeting. This scandal stands out more for its scale and the political contexts in which the data were used (i.e. the 2016 US presidential elections and the Brexit referendum) than for the nature of the techniques in use. With or without scandals, emotions remain at the core of persuasive communication campaigns, whether they are exploited to induce consumers to buy a product or vote for a political candidate. In the same vein, populist political parties and extremist movements around the world have become masters in the art of emotion-based communication that triggers automatic thinking and cognitive biases on social media (e.g. Bouko et al. 2021; PISOIU and LANG 2015). An extensive literature has already pointed out how people are more likely to share content when it has an emotional dimension. For example, Brady et al. (2017) analysed over 500,000 tweets written in relation to three polarising moral topics in the USA, namely gun control, same-sex marriage and climate change. They found that moral-emotional words (e.g. hate) were correlated with a 20% increase in sharing the tweets. Consequently, emotion appears as key in the transmission of moral ideas.

Social media users are also more likely to share emotional news content (see e.g. Hasell 2020). Another study shows how different emotional states (enthusiasm, anger or anxiety) can elicit political opinions on social media in different ways: anxiety increases the motivation for people with little political knowledge to share political opinions but decreases it for people with a high level of political knowledge (Heiss 2020). Enthusiasm and anger stimulate sharing political opinions, but only among people who are motivated to use social media for political purposes in the first place.

The current societal focus on the power of emotions in social media communication resonates with an affective turn in social and behavioural sciences and the humanities. Numerous researchers now seek to illuminate the affective dynamics of societal existence:

Affect and emotion are so intricately and essentially human that they form the fundamental basis of being and sociality. . . . Affect and emotions are indispensable driving forces in the constitution of practices, forms of life, institutions, groups, and social collectives.

(Slaby and von Scheve 2019, 1–4)

This affective turn is also addressed in studies on citizenship, in which affect and emotions are framed as two different types of situational entanglement.

5.1.1 *Emotion and affect: two different types of situational entanglement*

The terms “emotion” and “affect” are used in different and sometimes diverging paradigms, and their frequent interchangeable use for stylistic purposes leads to further confusion. Let us briefly clarify how emotion and affect converge and diverge. On the one hand, there seems to be a broad consensus in social psychology regarding the situatedness of affect and emotion. Neither affect nor emotion are inner states of being; rather, both are social and relational phenomena. Of course, any binary distinction between inner and outer world would be overly reductive; while an inner emotional structure might entail personality *dispositions* towards specific affective or emotional behaviours, these are nevertheless always situated in externally originating, concrete experiences (Mühlhoff 2019). On the other hand, affect and emotion differ in the relational dynamics with the world that they entail: “roughly, whereas ‘affect’ stands for pre-categorical relational dynamics . . ., ‘emotion’ signifies consolidated and categorically circumscribed sequences of affective world-relatedness” (von Scheve and Slaby 2019, 43). “Pre-categorical” here refers to the preconscious, pre-discursive dynamics of intensity between bodies. Affect is defined as pure potential intensity (Massumi 1995). Likewise, Williams (1977) insists on the sensitive and energetic immediacy of affect that cannot be reduced to fixed forms. In this respect, emotions, cognitions and actions are all effects of affect (Papacharissi 2015). While the notion of

affect focuses on the embodied experience, emotions and emotion repertoires emphasise the collective, shared aspects of emotion and reflect how emotional experiences can be categorised into prototypical situational entanglements which evolve over space and time. Categorising and labelling emotions play a key role in this respect. In the search for discrete and universal emotions, researchers have been studying “basic emotions,” which are assumed to occur in all cultures and to be experienced by all humans. The six common basic emotions are joy, surprise, sadness, anger, fear and disgust. However, while this hypothesis is still very popular inside and outside academia, the very existence of basic emotions has been questioned for decades (see e.g. Ortony 2022 and Chapter 10).

5.1.2 *Emotion and reason*

As situational entanglements, emotions are relational categories that combine cognitive and affective processes. Directed at people, objects or events of the world, emotional reactions entail evaluative world views and orientations. Like any engagement, political engagement encompasses affective dimensions and investments that are not limited to cognitive attention. Political participation is likely to quickly fade without positive evaluation and/or emotion.

The affective turn represents an invitation to abandon the traditional oppositions between reason and emotion for a more nuanced approach to the processes that are at play when citizens express their political opinions online. For Weber and Kalberg (2002), in the 19th century, increasing rationalisation during the industrial era and the ensuing alienation of people turned society into metaphorical “iron cages.” The notion of *affective community* makes it possible to go beyond this prevalent rationalist vision of society and to insist on the affective social connections which also play a role in social constructs. This approach insists on how citizens can experience “a net of pulsating spheres of sociability” (Zink 2019, 287). As such, the role of affect in social constructs goes far beyond demarcated affective episodes (i.e. emotional moments). Affective vitality enables “re-enchanting, imagined affective communities that form and deform, and that temporarily congeal and dissolve again” (Zink 2019, 298).

Affect-driven expressions have been stimulated by the nature of social networks as both ephemeral and pervasive. Discourses are no longer the exclusive domain of rationality but are now open to the intensity of affect as well. By opening up public spaces to less rational means of communication, affect encourages citizens to engage in different but equally legitimate discourses. In this sense, affect is empowering and democratising. As a result, citizens typically share social media posts that mix emotion, news and opinion (Papacharissi 2015).

Marcus, Neuman, and MacKuen (2000) refer to neuroscience to emphasise the importance of emotions and their combination with cognition in the context of political expression. The title of their book, *Affective Intelligence*, was chosen to highlight the perceived incompatibility of cognition and

emotion. Just as our brains use both right and left hemispheres, our information processing is both cognitive and emotional. Reason and emotion are also coupled in key definitions of emotions. In Scherer's (2005) definition, for example, evaluating internal or external stimuli through cognition is a main activity during the emotional process. Emotion appears as a combination of five interrelated and synchronised components: the appraisal of the event consists in the *cognitive* component. Based on this appraisal, *neurophysiological* changes may happen, such as increased heart rate. *Motivational* components are performed when actions are prepared. Fourth, the *subjective feeling* component enters into action when one interprets one's own emotional experience. And lastly, the *motor expression* component concerns the concrete and situated communication of one's emotions. That last component entails that voicing emotions is a cultural practice, in specific situations of communication.

5.1.3 *The cultural practice of emotion*

Researchers interested in digital affective cultures focus on what people *do* instead on what they *have* (Döveling, Harju, and Sommer 2018). In this approach, affect is a situational entanglement, a "practical engagement with the world" (Scheer 2012, 193). In creating affective resonance, emotional repertoires are the "glue" that connects individuals" (von Poser et al. 2019, 241). Virality is partly based on emotional repertoires, on "emotional hooks, key signifiers that touch upon a shared set of affective investments and affiliations" (Balance 2012, 143). Connecting individuals through emotional repertoires mostly happens through comparing their emotional reactions to the most prevalent and accepted ones. In this way, these repertoires strengthen implicit norms behind social constructs. They influence appraisal mechanisms and favour certain types of emotional contagion and alignment: some types benefit from high visibility while others are relegated to the margin. As such, emotional scenarios are infused with relations of power. Online commemorations exemplify the normative convergence of practices. For instance, in paying tribute to the journalists of the French satirical newspaper Charlie Hebdo in 2015, citizens expressed their appraisal in a limited number of symbolic images, such as the pen versus the sword (Bouko, Calabrese, and De Clercq 2017).

As social products, emotions expressed in public spaces play a prominent social role. Through affect, we can tune into events that are physically removed from us and experience affective proximity. Affect can give them a sense of presence, albeit evanescent, and a sense of being part of a collective. Affect can trigger "feelings of community" (Papacharissi 2015, 9) or even "communities of practice" that together engage in the pursuit of a common goal and a shared endeavour (Döveling, Harju, and Sommer 2018). Again, events that shake the foundations of our humanity, such as terrorist attacks or natural disasters, are particularly conducive to the development

of collective emotional practices through which social belonging is recreated and solidarity is expressed.

At a time when social, economic and cultural structures have undergone drastic changes, the feeling of being counted is now often experienced at the level of individual affect. Finding one's own unique place in the world is driven by affective experiences. Some will see it as a democratising alternative to the prevailing hyper-individualism: citizens can now use more popular, less elitist and less intimidating means of communication (Papacharissi 2015). Others will see it as a sign of the defeat of social struggles, in which the collective frames of reference that help us to rationally analyse the world and its inequalities are replaced by affect, which no longer pushes citizens to act but to passively feel (Robert 2018). In the latter view, affect tends to "anaesthetise" citizens and mask governmental powerlessness in the fight against inequality. It depoliticises by emphasising emotions rather than critical analysis. In this perspective, emotion should not be the social glue that connects individuals.

5.1.4 *The social glue in a political context*

You probably know this story: imagine a pot filled with cold water, in which a frog is swimming quietly. Then a fire is lit under the pot. The water heats up slowly. Soon it is warm. The frog finds it rather pleasant and continues to swim. The temperature starts to rise. The water is warm. It's a bit more than the frog likes; it makes it a bit tired, but it does not panic. The water is now really warm. The frog is beginning to find it unpleasant, but it is also weakened, so it puts up with it and does nothing. The temperature of the water will rise until the frog will simply cook and die, without ever having got out of the pot. However, plunged into a pot at 50°C, the frog would immediately kick its legs and find itself outside. It is with this little tale (which is only metaphoric; the premise is false) that Robert begins her book on emotions and the media (*La stratégie de l'émotion*, in French). Robert does not condemn emotion, as she and other defenders of rationality are sometimes wrongly accused, but she warns against the social control exerted through emotion (Robert 2018). In an empire of emotion, emotional outpourings would slowly but surely replace critical distance. For Robert, it goes without saying that emotion and reason must coexist; the ascendancy of emotion is essentially an *institutional* issue: while expressing citizens' political opinions emotionally has several advantages, including greater inclusion and feelings of belonging, there is still cause for concern about the increasing emotional imbalance in key democratic institutions: the judiciary and the media need critical distance to politics but seem to be increasingly influenced by emotion.

Researchers, like Robert, argue against emotion as a social glue. In their view, emotion is a false way of binding people together; only civic dialogue can do so. Papacharissi makes a similar point when she puts the impact of affect into perspective: "affect explains the intensity with which something is

experienced. It refers to just that: intensity. Feeling with great intensity does not necessarily lead to deep understanding or engagement with an issue” (Papacharissi 2015, 135). However, other research emphasises the “vibrant online community with shared communal and emotional bonds” that emerged from events such as the #BlackLivesMatter movement and that continues even after the first intense moments (Schuschke and Tynes 2016, 25).

Still, emotional “anaesthesia” (Robert 2018, 158, translation) may replace rational engagement. By abandoning the ideal of social equality, which is reinforced by superficial emotional reactions that are favoured over critical reflections, a pessimistic and resigned vision of life in society is allowed to develop. In this context, Laurence Parisot, the president of the French business network (MEDEF), pronounced in 2011: “Life, health and love are precarious. Why shouldn’t labour be?” (quoted in Robert 2018, 110, translation). If labour, which (historically) entails collective regulations, social progress and struggles, is compared to emotions, such as love, it is in danger of becoming individualised and subjectivised, and as such lose its potency as an object of collective concern and protest.

According to Robert, reason does not eradicate sensibility and only reason could bring everyone into agreement, whereas emotions are more individual and subjective by nature: “emotions are proper to each person while reason is proper to all, even if it is not used in the same way by everyone. Whereas one can discuss a thought, sensitivities close the discussion” (Robert 2018, 148, translation). For Robert, only reason brings people together after the intensity of an emotional experience. While emotion is a powerful glue during ephemeral collective moments in hyper-individualistic lives, its predominance has become a danger to social life and democracy.

Shared sensitivities, especially when related to emotional repertoires as creating social bonds, may equally lead to emphatic reasoned arguments, in which emotions open up discussion and foster collective experience. It is exactly this mutual influence, and inseparability of reason and emotion, that constitutes a balance between individuality and collectivity. Political exchanges may become more humane thanks to the emotional dimension, while reason and critical hindsight complement and advance citizens’ efforts to overcome their differences and come together to fight social inequalities. It is not so much emotion and reason that are in opposition but rather the ideologies of hyper-individualism and the fight against social inequality.

5.2 Affective economies on social media

Even before the age of social media, research already revealed how computer-mediated communication (CMC) seemed to encourage the expression of emotions. Interlocutors tend to express emotions more explicitly in CMC than in face-to-face interactions, because they are less wary about face-threatening acts (i.e. acts that challenge the interlocutors’ self-image or freedom to act), especially in anonymous or pseudonymous environments (Derks, Fischer,

and Bos 2008). People manage to cope with the restrictions that are part of CMC by, for example, using emoticons, emojis and gifs, or by verbalising emotions more explicitly (Derks, Fischer, and Bos 2008; Dresner and Herring 2010). People also succeed in interpreting interlocutors' emotions, whether or not these are expressed through emotion-based lexis (e.g. sad and happy) or only through more implicit linguistic and paralinguistic cues (Harris and Paradise 2007). Besides, emotionally loaded messages seem to attract both more attention (Kissler et al. 2007; Smith and Petty 1996) and more arousal (Berger 2011; Berger and Milkman 2012). Back in 2008, Derks et al. drew attention to the reduced spontaneity that characterises most types of CMC, which they attribute to its asynchronous nature. This time lag means that users have more opportunities to control the expression of emotions. Consequently, emotions might be regulated more easily, and CMC users might have fewer emotional outbursts online than in face-to-face relationships.

Since the early 2000s, there has been a notable increase in emotional expressions in CMC. This is arguably based on the dynamics of “digital affective capitalism,” which underpins social media platforms and takes advantage of the online optimisation of emotional expressions (e.g. Karppi et al. 2016). In 2002, Massumi (2002, 45) defined “affective capitalism” as “the ability of affect to produce an economic effect more swiftly and surely than economics itself mean[ing] that affect is itself a real condition, an intrinsic variable of the late-capitalist system, as infrastructural as a factory.” Nash uses the metaphor of “emotional slavery,” in which social media users are kept “anxiously producing and consuming without self-consciously, or collectively, identifying their position as one of slave,” to emphasise how social media platforms and their affective economies manipulate their users under the utopian guise of freedom and open access to the internet (e.g. Nash 2016, 19).

As I discussed in Section 5.1.3, the social practice of expressing emotions can trigger emotional alignment. The nature of alignments can be explained not only by contextual parameters (e.g. the nature of the event) but also by the affective economies of social media in general and of each platform in particular. A survey among 1,201 young social media users pointed out that the expression of positive emotions is perceived as more appropriate than negative emotions across social media platforms (Waterloo et al. 2018). This corroborates the large body of research that points out how the injunction to be socially desirable on social networks encourages social media users to present a positive self-image and how happiness is a key driver for sharing content (see e.g. Hermida 2014 and Goffman 1974 for a more general theory on the social presentation of the self). The types of emojis used illustrate this positivity bias: a lexicon of the 751 most used emojis shows that most of them, and especially the most popular ones, express positive emotions (Novak et al. 2015). This positive orientation can result in a snowball effect of emotional contagion and alignment, since people are likely to share more positive content when they are exposed to more positive content (Kramer, Guillory, and Hancock 2014). However, in an experiment on their participants' Facebook

newsfeed, Kramer et al. observed that expressing negative emotions also triggered emotional alignment. This survey among Dutch social media users also revealed some differences in perception between the platforms: positive emotions are perceived as most appropriate on WhatsApp, followed by Instagram, Facebook and finally Twitter. Negative emotions are also considered most appropriate on WhatsApp, followed by Facebook, then Instagram and finally Twitter. These differences between the platforms can be explained by the perceived specificities of each affective economy: WhatsApp is a private platform which is mostly used for communication with strong ties. In these relationships, lower social distance decreases issues regarding impression management and risk of face threats. By contrast, Twitter is perceived a rather public platform that particularly enables sharing information and comments with weaker ties, where expressing emotions might be perceived as less appropriate. Facebook ranks second for both positive and negative emotions and is perceived as a platform for both weak and strong ties. Lastly, positive emotions are perceived as more appropriate than negative ones on Instagram. This can be explained by its visual and aesthetic affect economy, in which positive emotions are more conventional.

Papacharissi (2015) points out how social media enhance emotions by amplifying the storytelling tradition. On these platforms, people are invited to affectively tune into events they are not experiencing directly, by imagining what these events might feel like for the people who *are* experiencing them. Affective experiences can consist of emotional and rational reactions to stories of events; the key point lies in us being prompted to react by investing our emotions in these stories, by feeling like the people involved in the event, even though most of us are unable to think like them, because we live in different realities. Emotional discourse is salient in such narrative performative contexts (Page 2012).

The prevalence of emotions on social media can also be explained by the performance of sociality. For example, emotion-laden tweets are spread more often and more quickly across the Twitter community through retweets (Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan 2013). Indeed, spreading information or comments on social media can be considered “symbolic declarations of the self” (Hermida 2014, 39), which signal to other participants how one would like to be perceived.

Today, the business of online emotion detection is thriving, with the global sentiment analysis market being valued at 5.8 billion US dollars in 2016 and 18.13 billion US dollars in 2018. It is expected to reach 61.36 billion US dollars by 2025 with a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 23.32% over the forecast period (Jadhav 2017; BMRC 2021). Marketers and other business specialists have well understood the quote according to which “people will forget what you said. People will forget what you did. But people will never forget how you made them feel” (ascribed to Buehner, see QI 2014). Emotion detection is used in numerous fields and for varied purposes, such as outlining the various uses of social networks, determining how public sentiment is shaped, analysing corporate reputation management

and brand loyalty or pinpointing public reactions to large-scale events. Sentiment analysis is also used for political purposes, such as anticipating voting intentions, analysing how political actors exploit emotion and identifying dominant emotions in political or social contexts. In the Brexit context, for example, the large majority of EU referendum polls failed to predict the voting intentions in 2016, whereas some sentiment analyses based on natural language-processing techniques managed to predict the result with high accuracy (e.g. Celli et al. 2016).

Whereas research on emotion on social networks based on natural language processing has become extensive, studies on emotions and citizenship including the visual dimension of social media posts are still relatively limited. And yet, it has long been established that images are powerful vectors of emotions.

5.3 Visual content and emotions

5.3.1 *Cognitive approaches to images and emotions*

Cognitive research sheds light on the primacy of emotions when processing visual information. The left and right hemispheres of the brain are in many ways mirror images of each other and are constantly interacting, but they also have some specialised functions in information-processing that can partly explain the importance of emotion-based responses to visual stimuli. The left hemisphere is commonly characterised as analytical, abstract and logical, whereas the right hemisphere is referred to as more holistic and emotional. This distinction makes sense for the analysis of images, since some types of visual content are designed to stimulate a detailed, analytical reception, while others will rather trigger a rapid, holistic, overall interpretation: “Recognizing faces, finding your way around in space, discerning shapes in camouflage, and seeing patterns at a glance are right-brain activities; breaking down complex patterns into component parts, focusing on detail, and intense analysis are left-brain activities” (Barry 2005, 54). For example, visualisations of scientific research or, more simply, games that stimulate the search for specific elements in an image appeal to the left hemisphere (like the famous “Where is Charlie?” game that many parents and children are familiar with). By contrast, advertisements are typically designed for the right side of the brain: “Much advertising is designed to exploit the gap between the impressionable right brain and the critical left” (Carter 1998, 60). Much of visual content in social media posts adopts the same strategy, since they are designed to capture attention and to be read quickly in a context of information overload (see visual heuristics in Chapter 4). In this sense, they particularly appeal to the right hemisphere.

Images and particularly of photography have specific cognitive power. In the 1980s, the French semiotician Roland Barthes famously argued that “whatever it grants to vision and whatever its manner, a photograph is always

invisible; it is not it that we see” (Barthes 1982 [1980], 6). The camera is conceptualised as invisible in its techniques to reflect reality, which makes photographs particularly powerful. Since then, a large body of research has pointed out how a belief in photographs as transparent unmediated reproductions of reality ignores the modes of symbolic representation that photography also constructs, and that is before Photoshop and deep fakes. But even if we know that images are constructed artefacts, “we tend to be verbally skeptical and visually gullible” (Joo et al. 2014, 2). In addition, some types of image might particularly trigger affect resonance, that is, a type of emotional response that is based on the viewer’s internalised norms and values (Lilleker 2019). For example, the emotions of pleasure and disgust are likely to be connected to contrasting norms or values.

Seeing as doing images might particularly stimulate affect resonance (Goossens 2003). These images visually represent concrete actions in that they enable the viewers to imagine and feel what it would be like to be part of the action. Even if they can contain symbolic modes of representation, *seeing as doing* images rely on some level of transparency that facilitates the viewers’ identification with the action and, consequently, affect resonance. This partly explains why it is considered preferable to illustrate a press article with a dynamic image of actors in action (e.g. a market gardener harvesting leeks), rather than images of static people, standing motionless while the photograph is taken (e.g. the same market gardener standing next to their harvest).

5.3.2 *Iconic images and the circulation of emotions*

Transparency in *seeing as doing* images might trigger emotions, as does iconicity. Hariman and Lucaites’ essay *No Caption Needed* (2007) has become a seminal reference for the study of iconic images. Their book only deals with photojournalistic icons, taken by professionals and disseminated in the media. Their approach is nevertheless interesting for the study of visual citizenship on social networks given that these iconic images are very frequently reproduced or appropriated (Blaagaard 2019). Countless professionals or amateurs share their personal appropriations or reproductions on social networks, for the sake of humour or art, but also to visually express their political opinions. For example, Ed Freeman’s photograph features four male models planting a gay pride flag similar to how the six soldiers planted the flag at Iwo Jima in Joe Rosenthal’s Pulitzer-Prize-winning picture in 1945 (see Figure 5.1). Freeman took it in the early 2000s without political intent and shared it on social media in 2015 to celebrate the US Supreme Court’s landmark decision to allow same-sex marriage nationwide. This appropriation went viral and spawned fury among some social media users, who considered that such an analogy between the WWII soldiers and gay men was inappropriate or degrading for the former (Lamothe 2015).

Images, whether photojournalistic or other, are made iconic by the *strong association* between five features of icons. Hariman and Lucaites (2007, 29)



Figure 5.1 *Raising the flag on Iwo Jima* by Joe Rosenthal (1945)

define the iconic photograph as “1) an aesthetically familiar form of 2) civic performance 3) coordinating an array of semiotic transcriptions that 4) project an emotional scenario to 5) manage a basic contradiction or recurrent crisis” (numbers added). Frequently reproduced in the media, iconic images are widely recognised, remembered and adapted across a large range of topics and genres.

Emotional scenarios consist of “evocations of emotional experience.” Their notion of emotional scenarios focuses on the emotional connection with the viewers. Hariman and Lucaites insist that iconic images feature people in social spaces that concentrate and direct emotions towards the viewers. In other words, photojournalistic icons are an emotional type of *seeing as doing* images, as illustrated by the Iwo Jima photographs. In evoking the emotional experience of the characters featured in the photographs, icons activate structures of feeling and emotional relationships with the viewers. Importantly, icons feature emotions that are experienced in a context of “basic contradiction” or “recurrent crisis” (i.e. fifth characteristic of Hariman and Lucaites’ definition). For example, the Pulitzer-Prize-winning photograph titled *The Terror of War* (by Nick Ut in 1972) features a naked little girl, crying, and other children fleeing a Napalm attack during the Vietnam war. This picture that features the children’s overt outrage, shock and fear is among the photographs that

changed the history of warfare. Besides, this picture is currently also known for its key role in the debates around content moderation by social platforms, since it was initially banned from Facebook in 2016 for nudity and then reinstated after public criticism (see e.g. Gillespie 2018; Ibrahim 2017).

5.3.3 *Emotions and citizens' visual imagery on social media*

Research on emotion and visual political communication is still relatively limited. The same is true for citizens' everyday political expression on social media, since most research is related to political campaigns or protests. For example, much attention has been given to the 2011 protests in Egypt and the Arab Spring more widely. These protesters are mostly considered activists (and therefore beyond the scope of this book), but ordinary citizens were also involved in the social media communication during these political upheavals. In their analysis of 571 Twitter images shared during the 2011 Egyptian revolution, Kharroub and Bas (2016) draw the distinction between efficacy-eliciting and emotion-arousing pictures. The first type is related to a belief that social change is possible while the second one concerns violent content drawing from ingroup anger. They found that efficacy-eliciting pictures prevailed over emotion-arousing ones. In their study, violence depicted in the visual content was the coding variable that determined whether a post was emotion-arousing or not. Emotion was therefore only examined in relation to manifest violence. In their analysis of the news storytelling on Twitter via the #egypt hashtag, Papacharissi and Oliveira (2012, 2) point out how "emotive tweets" blend humour, news sharing, opinion and emotion. However, they do not explain how these four patterns can be identified, instead stating that "discerning one from the other is difficult and doing so misses the point."

In their study of 174 Romanian citizens' Instagram posts published during the 2014 presidential elections, Adi, Gerodimos, and Lilleker (2018) point out that the emotions of happiness and joy and the feeling of pride were prevalent in their corpus. Only 17 posts contained negative emotion, mostly frustration directed against the prime minister and candidate Victor Ponta. Citizens celebrated the election outcome with their family, friends and even pets, and shared these joyful moments through selfies.

Casas and Williams (2019) analysed 9,500 images that were shared on Twitter in the context of a Black Lives Matter event in 2015. According to their five annotators' manual labelling, 30% of the images did not evoke any emotion, while about 50% triggered more than one. Only about 19% of the images evoked one single emotion (Williams, Casas, and Wilkerson 2020). They coded the images based on five discrete emotions, namely sadness, anger, disgust, fear and enthusiasm and pointed out how often two emotions or more are elicited by the same image, like sadness coupled with anger and disgust.

The death of Alan Kurdi in 2015 has also received much scholarly attention. For some researchers, the media coverage of this tragic event was generally overwhelmed by emotion, which led to a simplification of migration issues (e.g.

Robert 2018). According to them, the drowning of the little Syrian boy exemplifies how emotion is sometimes used, consciously or not, to avoid analysing the causes of an issue and, for political actors, shouldering their responsibility. What is more, the iconic photograph of Alan Kurdi has sometimes been instrumentalised to prevent refugees from attempting to enter the European Union (Adler-Nissen, Andersen, and Hansen 2020). That said, some research has highlighted how many citizens combined image and text to express emotion but also to critically consider this tragedy. Giaxoglou (2019) conducted a multimodal analysis of 230 #JeSuisAylan Instagram posts and drew attention to the prevalence of the subjunctive mode (“as if”), through which people contrast this drama with possible alternatives for the three-year-old child if he were still alive. Such reactions are considered typical patterns in expressing sadness and compassion and were visible in both the comments and images of the Instagram posts. Adler-Nissen, Andersen, and Hansen (2020) further pointed out the speed and the range of the creative remediations of Alan Kurdi’s iconic image. They identified four types of remediation: artistic appropriations that focus on Alan Kurdi’s innocence, displacement of Alan Kurdi’s body to other settings or, conversely, maintenance of the bodily posture and the setting but substitution of Alan Kurdi for businessmen. In addition, pictures of street art featuring Alan Kurdi were also widely shared on social media and used as a means to express emotion and critical stances.

Lastly, Caple (2019) examined the multimodal patterns that citizens use when they express their voting preferences and visually feature their dogs at the same time, in an analysis of 92 Instagram posts that were shared around the hashtag #dogsatpollingstations in the context of the 2016 Australian federal elections. Only one post of her dataset was coded as emotional. This post denotes the dog’s emotions (#billygraves wasn’t too happy). Here again, personal and political experiences converge in social media posts (see Chapter 3).

While the volume of research to date is still limited, it nonetheless displays the richness of the practices used by citizens to express their emotions and couple them with their political views, from the tragic to the humorous. This brief overview also highlights how analysing emotions in text–image artefacts entails a diversity of methods, approaches and methodological limitations, ranging from very specific designs (e.g. based on violence), to rather intuitive and non-replicable methods, and from including annotators’ manual analysis of their perception of evoked emotions to studying denoted emotion in the verbal text of multimodal posts. As I will outline in the next part of the book, any researcher interested in analysing text–image content will encounter more than one methodological challenge on their way.

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Part II

Methods



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6 Challenges to the validity of visual studies

“For a scientific mind, all knowledge is an answer to a question. If there has been no question, there can be no scientific knowledge. Nothing is self-evident. Nothing is given. Everything is constructed” (Bachelard 2002 [1938], 25). Bearing in mind that social constructivism, what is the best way to design research to analyse an image-based dataset of political expression? I will discuss two main methods for answering that question, namely quantitative content analysis and qualitative discourse analysis. It is important to note that, in my book, I only address *manual* techniques to conduct content and discourse analyses. Computer-based methods provide vital research designs for analysing textual corpora, but they are still limited when analysing text–image artefacts, especially when the research questions go beyond face, colour or object detection (see e.g. Manovich 2016; Williams, Casas, and Wilkerson 2020).

Before looking, in Chapters 8 and 9, at how these two sets of methods can be applied to an image-based corpus, this first chapter on methodology will address central challenges relating to the validity of quantitative and qualitative methods more generally. But before getting to the heart of the matter, let us end this short introduction with two quotes that sum up two empowering ideas. In the first quote, de Bonville argues that “in the researcher’s day-to-day reality, for one gram of genius, more than one kilo of technical know-how is needed” (de Bonville 2006, 395, translation). The author here reminds us of the importance of methodologies and, implicitly, that quite a lot of time is needed to carefully set them up before analysing any data. In the second quote, Rose (2016, xxiii) points out how methodologies for visual studies are meant “to discipline your passion, not to deaden it.” I would add that methodologies not only discipline the researcher’s passion but also, in fact, inspire it and bring out potential, exciting avenues of research that the researcher had not yet imagined. This is to some extent the objective of the methodological part of my book. Let us give it a go.

6.1 Challenges in content analysis

6.1.1 *Quantitative and qualitative content analyses*

Everything is constructed, and often not consciously so. To overcome this limitation to objectivity, content analysis was initially conceived as a method to avoid any intuition and interpretation. Indeed, it was limited to *manifest* content that can be objectively coded on the basis of standardised procedures. For those researchers, content analysis is exclusively quantitative. Likewise, in my book, the expression “content analysis” as a method refers exclusively to quantitative content analysis based on systematic, standardised and reliable coding procedures. In fact, by defining it this way, I merely follow most methodological guides for quantitative content analysis (e.g. Berelson 1952; Krippendorff 2013; Neuendorf 2017). They generally frame content analysis exclusively as quantitative, to the extent that most of them do not use the expression “*quantitative* content analysis,” but simply “content analysis.” However, the notion of content analysis can also be defined in broader terms. For some researchers, content analysis is a *set of analytical techniques*, but not a specific methodology as such. In that case, a content analysis can be qualitative: discourse analysis, grounded theory, semiotics, etc. can be considered as methods of qualitative content analysis. This is the position that several researchers adopt when they encompass these specific qualitative methods in their overall handbooks on qualitative content analysis. In this case, they use this concept as an umbrella term rather than as a concrete methodology (see e.g. Marying 2021).

Problems arise when studies are labelled as “qualitative” content analyses instead of quantitative, even though they provide quantitative results. This is a regular occurrence, I noticed, especially in visual content analyses. Let us examine a case study on visual female empowerment that illustrates this methodological issue, in my view. In this research, Aiello and Parry (2020) analysed 60 images of women among those which *Getty Images*, a US photo agency and image bank, has stocked in collaboration with the American feminist organisation *Lean In* since 2014. The *Lean In* collection on getty.org contains over 10,000 images of women’s leadership in contemporary work and private environments. The two authors (2020, 224) explain that the images were coded through categories of “manifest content, such as activity, setting, pose and gaze.” They provide quantitative insights, in percentages or in approximate quantities (e.g. 50%, almost half, over a third). It is legitimate for the reader to wonder why they present their analysis without the methodological constraints of quantitative content analysis, such as explicit and detailed coding categories and inter-coder reliability checks and precise numerical results (instead of approximations). Quantitative insights like those they provide, without a rigorous quantitative research design, are quite problematic, especially since they present their analysis as an example of what a content analysis can be in their handbook on visual communication. Surprisingly, the authors refer to

this research as a “qualitative content analysis” (2020, 224). But why label a content analysis that provides quantitative results as qualitative? In many cases I observed, quantitative content analyses without a quantitative methodological design are labelled as qualitative. This, in my opinion, is an inappropriate approach to the notion of qualitative research.

Besides, in many studies on visual content, the adjective *qualitative* seems to refer to the small size of the dataset, which is – again – an inappropriate distinction between quantitative and qualitative characteristics. Researchers and scientific journals that adopt a quantitative approach to content analysis would generally consider small-sized datasets as invalid because they are too small to draw any kind of stable results from (see Chapter 8). However, their diminutive sizes do not automatically render them qualitative.

Other studies illustrate slightly different, but related, issues when they are labelled as qualitative analyses even though they rely on a coding methodology. For example, in the context of the 2014 Scottish independence referendum and the 2015 UK general election, Mahoney et al. (2016) coded 881 Instagram posts by means of a codebook including 51 content codes. They oppose their method to machine-learning techniques and define it as a “human-centred thematic qualitative analysis for simple categorisation of Instagram images” (2016, 3343). In doing so, they seem to contrast automated coding procedures with manual ones, and illustrate what I consider a common methodological bias of equating *qualitative* with “human-centred,” *manual* analyses. In my view, a “simple categorisation” of images is a manual, yet quantitative, analysis, and not a qualitative one. In this respect, it is worth distinguishing between the main characteristics of quantitative and qualitative results, namely counting the occurrence of variables that can be coded versus identifying patterns that are too complex to be coded. The main validity standards of these two methodologies also differ, in that one is a replicable analysis, while the other is a finely grained and contextualised analysis, as I will discuss in this chapter.

6.1.2 *Manifest and latent content*

For researchers who only work on manifest content, content is like a “liquid” that a chemist analyses. All the chemical components are in the liquid; the chemist’s task is limited to analysing the liquid by categorising its chemical components (Mucchielli 2006, 21, translation). There is nothing other than the observable chemical elements. The exclusive focus on manifest content and standardising coding categories are not self-evident, however, and have been the subject of much discussion. When content analysis was elaborated back in the 1950s, Berelson only advocated the *observation of manifest* content while Osgood insisted on the importance of *inferring latent* content (Berelson 1952; Osgood 1959). Berelson defended *descriptive* content analysis, Osgood made the case for *inferential* content analysis. Descriptive content analyses are particularly well suited to computer-based studies of large-scale

visual corpora. For example, Pearce et al. (2018) analysed manifest visual vernaculars in over 400,000 images related to climate change that were shared on five social media platforms (see Chapter 2).

There are two ways of going beyond descriptive content analysis. The first procedure consists of analysing latent content through manifest variables. From this perspective, descriptive content analysis is not sufficient in itself; interpretation is its logical outcome. This is a major asset of content analysis: its atheoretical nature makes it particularly relevant and useful, since it can be used to study and apply many different research questions and theories, respectively (de Bonville 2006). An example of this combination of coding manifest content and inferring latent content is the inference of patriotic love through detecting and counting national flags in Instagram posts (Adi, Gerodimos, and Lilleker 2018, see Chapter 5). Aiello and Parry (2020)'s study on Getty images (see Section 6.1.1) also illustrates inference, namely how female empowerment is inferred from manifest categories of women's activity, setting, pose and gaze.

In the second procedure, the researcher codes latent content through latent variables. In that case, inference is not performed *after* the content analysis as such; the coding itself is determined by inference, which makes it more challenging in terms of objectivity and might entail lower reliability of the coding (see examples in Neuendorf 2017; Casas and Williams 2019; Williams, Casas, and Wilkerson 2020).

However, differentiating between the two procedures is not always straightforward. For this reason, it may be better not to rely on a dichotomy between manifest and latent but to consider a *continuum* between highly manifest and highly latent content (Neuendorf 2017). The challenge is then to establish coding variables that are sufficiently reliable to code latent content. Vague indicators are problematic in this respect. In her handbook *Content Analysis*, Neuendorf (2017) provides an example of categories that allow to code latent content through latent variables. More specifically, she suggests three indicators for coding informational or emotional appeal in advertisements:

- 1) More informational than emotional: there is more factual information of products or services than appeals to feelings in [the] advertisement;
- 2) More emotional than informational: there is more content appealing to emotions than factual information in [the] advertisement;
- 3) Unable to determine.

(Neuendorf 2017, 132)

In this example, choosing between 1 and 2 is very approximate and subjective, without precise and clear indicators. The explanation of the indicator does not help, since it simply rephrases it, rather than making it explicit, and does not show how one can determine whether the content is "more" or "less" informational than emotional, and "more or less" sounds vaguely quantitative. Ultimately, approximate indicators of latent content are hardly compatible with reliable content analyses.

These issues are even more challenging when the content analysis does not consist of the observation of manifest content or the inference of latent content, but when the researchers try to infer the *effect* that the image may have on the coder. This is the method that was applied to analyse to what extent 9,500 Twitter images taken in the context of a Black Lives Matter protest incite specific emotions in the viewers (Casas and Williams 2019, see Chapter 5). The two researchers opted to overcome the subjectivity of emotions by coding the top 1,000 images using five different coders. Their coding scheme consisted in answering the question “how much [of that emotion] does the image incite in you?” through a 0–10 Likert scale. The coders were invited to answer this question five times, for anger, fear, disgust, sadness and enthusiasm, respectively. Rather than asking five coders to code the corpus, it might be more appropriate to base the study on content that is present in the image, whether manifest or latent, rather than on the emotional reaction of the coder (see Chapter 9). Here, in the absence of observable or inferred indicators in the image, the coder gives free rein to their subjectivity and might not code the corpus with sufficient stability. One way to partly address that might be to have them code the corpus repeatedly on different days, but that makes the research design even more cumbersome. In fact, their research design might seem to illustrate *predictive* content analysis, which is a third type of content analysis, following descriptive and inferential methods. As the name suggests, predictive techniques allow to predict some outcome or effect of the content on receivers. However, like the other two methods, predictive content analysis is designed to measure *characteristics of the content*; it is only when it is coupled with other methods, like surveys, that it can permit some prediction (Neuendorf 2017). Basically, Casas and Williams’ research design is closer to survey techniques and does not comply with the methodological constraints of content analysis. It is worth noting that they do not label their research “content analysis.”

My last point regarding the validity of content analysis is that overlaps between categories are frequent, as Rose (2016) illustrates with a content analysis of nearly 600 pictures published in the magazine *National Geographic*, conducted by Lutz and Collins (1993). In conclusion, the validity of a content analysis largely depends on the quality of its categories, and it is often challenging to establish measurable and valid ones.

6.2 Challenges in discourse analysis

Everything is constructed: one’s ways of interpreting images but even one’s ways of *seeing* images. Content analysis comes up against this paradigm, since it assumes that the same image can be observed and coded in the same way by several people. As I pointed out in Section 6.1, content analysis deals with this issue in two ways. It either limits itself to manifest content, which is as unambiguous as possible, or to manifest variables that allow to infer latent content *after* the coding procedure, even though there is a greater risk of lower reliability.

Discourse analysis offers complementary methods to address the issue of the constructed ways of seeing. In this respect, it can be combined particularly well with content analysis, provided that it is applied in a way that complies with the key methodological constraints of both sets of methods. In this section, I will briefly revisit the importance of defining discourse (analysis) as (the analysis of) a set of structures and patterns. I will also address the qualitative nature of discourse analysis and the two major potential pitfalls of qualitative research, namely superficiality and over-generalisation (Page et al. 2014).

6.2.1 *The analysis of discourse structures and patterns*

So far in this book, most of the concepts I made use of do not have a widely agreed definition, and discourse is no exception to this rule. On the one hand, “discourse” is a fashionable term that has been defined broadly and vaguely, to the point of being almost meaningless and used indiscriminately (Jorgensen and Phillips 2002). On the other hand, different authors and traditions have defined it in specific ways that do not always coincide. They nevertheless agree on the importance of the notion of *structure*:

In many cases, underlying the word “discourse” is the general idea that language is structured according to different patterns that people’s utterances follow when they take part in different domains of social life, familiar examples being “medical discourse” and “political discourse.”
(Jorgensen and Phillips 2002, 1)

The notion of discourse can refer to typical structures of specific discourses, such as those mentioned by Jorgensen and Phillips. Gee draws the distinction between *discourses with a little d* and *Discourses with a big D*. A discourse with a little d refers to language when it is in use and, therefore, situated. By contrast, discourses with a big D can be defined as cultural models in practice. For example, Gee (1999, 61) illustrates discourses with a big D with the “success model” in the USA: “This cultural model (theory, storyline) runs something like this: ‘Anyone can make it in American if they work hard enough’ and helps make sense of things like ‘success’ and ‘failure’ to many people.” Therefore, discourses with a little d are concrete occurrences and realisations of Discourses with a big D.

In a similar vein, Koller addresses how to analyse collective identity in discourse and discusses collective identities as “conceptual structures comprising beliefs and knowledge, norms and values, attitudes and expectations as well as emotions [i.e. discourses with a big D], and as being reinforced and negotiated in discourse [i.e. discourses with a little d]” (Koller 2012).

Language patterns and meanings are situated in such a way that they can be *recognised* by people who are relatively familiar with the same cultural models:

The key to Discourse is “recognition.” If you put language, action, interaction, values, beliefs, symbols, objects, tools, and places together in such a way that others *recognize* you as a particular type of who

(identity) engaged in a particular type of what (activity) here and now, then you have pulled off a Discourse. Whatever you have done must be similar enough to other performances to be recognizable.

(Gee 1999, 18)

Recognition entails recognisable structures and patterns. Discourse analysis is concerned with the role of language in this recognition process. My emphasis on discourse structures may seem basic and self-evident, but it raises concerns in many scholarly contributions which, according to their authors, come under the heading of discourse analysis. In this respect, the editorial policy of the seminal journal *Discourse & Society* is particularly significant. In a text titled *What do we mean by "Discourse Analysis"?* that scholars are invited to read before submitting their work, the editor of the journals points out that most submitted papers are rejected, because they do not actually conduct a discourse analysis in the strict sense:

Typical of discourse analysis is an explicit, systematic account of structures, strategies or processes of text or talk in terms of theoretical notions developed in any branch of the field. . . . This also means that merely summarizing, paraphrasing or repeating (fragments of) talk or text, something any reader may also do, is NOT a form of discourse analysis for this journal. The same is true for merely commenting ABOUT (the contents of) a fragment of discourse without any regard for structural or dynamic properties, even when such comments may well be relevant in a social perspective. The majority of papers submitted to this journal are rejected for this reason: They do not go beyond repeating, paraphrasing, summarizing or (merely) commenting upon a fragment of text or talk.

(Discourse and Society n.d., original emphasis)

Antaki et al. (2003) share this view in their paper with the self-explanatory title *Discourse analysis means doing analysis*. As I did for content analysis, I only consider discourse analysis in the strict sense, that is, entailing the theory-based analysis of discourse structures and patterns. However, as we will see in Section 6.2.2, theories and methodologies extending beyond the field of discourse analysis are invaluable for conducting a *qualitative* discourse analysis.

6.2.2 *Qualitative discourse analysis*

In Table 6.1 (on page 98), Baxter (2020, 392–393) sums up the strengths of quantitative and qualitative research on a continuum, examining their characteristics in relation to each other, that is, as “more” or “less” compared to the respective other set of methods. Combining the two approaches enables us to take advantage of both types of strengths.

Table 6.1 The strengths of quantitative and qualitative research

<i>Strengths</i>	<i>Quantitative</i>	<i>Qualitative</i>
Reliable	More	Less
Transparent	More	Less
Generalisable	More	Less
Nonreactive/unobtrusive	More	Less
Inexpensive	More	Less
Wide spatial and temporal coverage	More	Less
Valid	Less	More
Methodologically flexible/adaptable to research situation	Less	More
Findings relevant to resolving a specific problem	Less	More
Connection to/engagement with those studied	Less	More
Conditions of document creation are clarified	Less	More
Useful for answering “why” questions	Less	More
Takes advantage of researcher-as-instrument	Less	More

Source: Baxter (2020, 392–393)

It is somewhat surprising that Baxter considers quantitative research to be less expensive than qualitative research, as this very much depends on the research design. Quantitative analysis requires at least a second coder, who is not always easy to recruit, especially when there is no research budget to draw on. To address the issue of single-coding reliability, some researchers code their corpora twice themselves, with an interval of several weeks between the coding sessions (e.g. Kouper 2010). However, this coding method is not unanimously accepted in the field. Furthermore, content analysis is transparent and rigorous, setting up expectations of increased validity. However, its validity is neither lower nor higher than that of any qualitative analysis; their respective validity relies on different parameters.

Besides these two aspects, Baxter’s table shows how qualitative research is more adaptable to different research situations and specific issues and better suited to answering “why” research questions. He also points out how the researcher is more engaged when elaborating a research design that is less based on standardised procedures. Actually, the term “discourse analysis” stems etymologically from the Greek verb *ana-lyein* (“deconstruct”) and the Latin verb *discurrere*, which means “running back and forth” (Wodak 2006). This metaphor of back-and-forth movement nicely evokes how discourse analysts move between data and theory as well as between language and society (Page et al. 2014).

Qualitative analysis is not limited to the study of artefacts alone; the conditions of their creation and circulation are key elements of inquiry as well. As such, researchers conducting qualitative analysis ideally not only focus on one isolated aspect (i.e. the visual content itself) but also seek to consider the artefact in context. In his seminal model, Lasswell (1948, 37) observed how communication scholars tend to focus on only one aspect of the communicative act, depending on the question they wish to answer: *who* communicates,

Table 6.2 Sites and modalities for interpreting visual materials

	Site of image itself	Site of production	Site of audiencing	Site of circulation
Technological modality	Visual effects	How made?	How displayed? Where?	How circulated?
Compositional modality	Composition	Genre	Viewing positions offered? Relation to other texts?	How changed?
Social modality	Visual meanings	Who? When? Who for? Why?	How interpreted? By whom? Why?	Organised by whom or what? Why?

Source: Rose (2016, 25)

says *what, through which channel, to whom* and with *what effects*. In a similar vein, Rose (2016) proposes a model that comprises four sites on which the meanings of images can be studied: the site of image itself, its circulation, the site of audiencing (i.e. how it is seen by its various audiences) and its production. Each site is related to technological, compositional and social modalities, as shown in Table 6.2.

Whereas the research generally focuses on one of the four sites, every analysis should be grounded in empirical research that includes the social modalities in which images are produced, viewed and circulated (Rose 2016). The good news is that qualitative discourse analysis meets this requirement.

For Gee, the validity of discourse analysis largely depends on how it contextualises the *discourses with a little d* inside the *Discourses with a big D* by giving some consideration to the whole picture, at least as contextual background.

Discourse analysis is particularly appropriate for analysing how meanings, structures and patterns are situated and conventionalised. This holds for textual as well as visual signs. The more finely selected the theoretical and methodological frameworks are in relation to contextualised research questions, the more qualitative the discourse analysis will be.

6.2.3 Interviews and reverse image searches as complementary methods

To complement the analysis of any image-based social media post with concrete insights concerning its production, audiencing and circulation, other types of data and research methods are necessary. The social modality of production, audiencing and circulation raises most issues, due to the “context collapse” on social media (Marwick and boyd 2011): since social media collapse multiple audiences into single contexts, individuals tend to write for imagined audiences in virtual public spaces, while offline, they present themselves according to the context of their interactions. Therefore, social media

users can only *imagine* the context of reception of their posts. The opposite is also true: the receivers can only imagine the context of production of the posts they read.

Interestingly, not all social networks share the same view of authenticity (i.e. how online identity meets actual offline identity), actual audiences and context collapse. Regarding identity, Facebook community standards insist that “Facebook is a community where people use their authentic identities. It is against the Facebook Community Standards to maintain more than one personal account. . . . Authenticity is the cornerstone of our community” (Facebook 2021). In this respect, Facebook users were initially requested to connect on Facebook using their first and last names; they are now allowed to use “the name they go by in everyday life.” By contrast, Instagram allows users to hold five accounts under a single email address to share different sides of one’s self with others, even though Instagram is now owned by Meta, the same parent company as Facebook (Abidin 2017; Leaver, Highfield, and Abidin 2020).

Context collapse is no less a factor for researchers who seek to analyse the context and the concrete experiences of production, circulation and reception of social media data. The best way to deal with this context collapse would be to complement the analysis of the posts with interviews with users (i.e. with producers for the site of production and with receivers for the site of audiencing). For example, 30 multilingual Flickr users explained, in interviews, how they considered Flickr a suitable platform for exchanging pictures among photographers, whereas Facebook is rather used for sharing pictures that are quickly consumed and the quality of which is less important (Barton 2015). Another research based on the same interviews pointed out how the Flickr tagging function, which was created to facilitate the search of images, was also used for various other purposes (Barton 2018). Likewise, the content and discourse analyses of female empowerment in the *Lean In* collection of Getty images were complemented by interviews with 40 photographers (Aiello and Parry 2020, see Section 6.1.1). Interviews are the best option to achieve insights about the social modality of the site of production: the questions *Who? When? Who for? Why?* will only receive hypothetical answers as long as the producers of the social media posts do not confirm that the information and content they share reflect the reality of who they are, when they produced it, who for, and why. The same is true for the site of audiencing and the related questions *How interpreted? By whom? Why?* as well as for the site of circulation and its questions *Organised by whom or what? Why?* Of course, interviews are only feasible for a rather limited corpus of social media profiles. In addition to interviews, and with the aim of getting insights regarding the site of circulation, Aiello and Parry suggest using reverse image search engines, like Google Images, in order to identify how a specific image circulates on the internet and thereby explore technological and compositional modalities of the site of circulation. However, this technique is not exhaustive in identifying circulation and does not actually provide insights into circulation on social media. Therefore, it is more suited

for their corpus of Getty images and their overall circulation than for insights about how these images are shared on social networks.

In the next chapter, I will outline how systemic-functional approaches to visual content, based on Halliday's seminal theory of systemic functional linguistics, is an appropriate framework for analysing images themselves, both in quantitative and in qualitative research designs.

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7 Systemic functional approaches to visual content

7.1 The three functions of language

Halliday's model of systemic functional linguistics (SFL) is particularly well suited for analysing image-based social media posts. First, this model was designed to analyse the relationships between texts and aspects of social life. Indeed, systemic functional linguistics focuses on how language both acts upon and is confined by social contexts. Second, it can be adapted to any semiotic system, including visual content. Third, in the broad sense, it can inspire and structure categories for content analyses (see Chapter 9).

SFL is relatively complex and may be daunting for the readers who are unfamiliar with linguistic theories. In this book, I will therefore limit myself to an introductory, yet operational, approach to this model, which does not require any prior knowledge of linguistics.

In the 1970s, Michael Halliday devised a theory for interpreting the *functions* of language in discourse. The underlying assumption of his theory is that language is *functional* in nature: it is used to achieve communication purposes and serve social functions. The study of language is grounded in social experiences:

Grammar goes beyond formal rules of correctness. It is a means of representing patterns of experience. . . . It enables human beings to build a mental picture of reality, to make sense of their experience of what goes on around them and inside them.

(Halliday 1985, 101)

Based on this general social approach to discourse, Halliday's theory comprises the following three (meta)functions of language:

While construing, language is always also enacting: enacting our personal and social relationships with the other people around us. The clause of the grammar is not only a figure, representing some process – some doing or happening, saying or sensing, being or having – with its various participants and circumstances [i.e. the ideational function]; it is

also a proposition, or a proposal, whereby we inform or question, give an order or make an offer, and express our appraisal of and attitude towards whoever we are addressing and what we are talking about. This kind of meaning is more active . . . this is “language as action”. We call it the interpersonal metafunction, to suggest that it is both interactive and personal. . . . But the grammar also shows up a third component, another mode of meaning which relates to the construction of text. In a sense, this can be regarded as an enabling or facilitating function, since both of the others – construing experience and enacting interpersonal relations – depend on being able to build up sequences of discourse, organising the discursive flow and creating cohesion and continuity as it moves along. . . . We call it the textual metafunction.

(Halliday and Matthiessen 2004, 29–30)

The ideational/representational function concerns the function of *representation* through language, that is, how any aspect of social life is represented in discourse. In this function, language is an instrument to conceptualise the world to ourselves and others; language is the resource for constructing experience, for indicating the salient participants of the experience, the processes that relate to them and the circumstances of the experience. Different designations and configurations of actors, processes and circumstances result in differences, sometimes very subtle ones, in meaning at the representational level, like in the three sentences here:

- I don’t understand what you are saying
- Your meaning is incomprehensible to me
- No idea what you’re on about

The interpersonal function serves to express not only the social relations between the participants inside the interaction but also how readers are addressed. The three sentences given in the list also illustrate how the interpersonal relations are framed in different ways.

Lastly, in the textual function, the clause is a *message*. This function underlines how language can serve to organise the various elements of text and talk with coherence, continuity and flow. This function concerns the internal organisation of the signs (e.g. words or visual elements) and how the whole is relevant to the message and its context. For example, textual continuatives (e.g. yes, no, well, oh, now) and textual conjunctions (e.g. and, but, before, because) are linguistic devices that ensure the continuity through signalling a move in the discourse or through linking two clauses together, respectively (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004, 81).

These representational, interpersonal and textual functions are simultaneously fulfilled in every clause; they are complementary and, therefore, need to be jointly analysed. They are “three lines of meanings” in the same clause (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004, 58).

With his theory of systemic functional linguistics, Halliday made a significant contribution to interpreting the connections between language and

social life. His framework inspired a large body of discourse models, including Martin and White's appraisal theory (2005), which I cover in Chapter 10. Research on social media also benefits from the insights provided by SFL. For example, scholars rely on this framework to examine how online affiliation is generated on Twitter or Instagram by means of the interpersonal function of language (e.g. Zappavigna 2012; Inwood and Zappavigna 2023).

Halliday's approach to language is a model for thinking about social and semiotic processes in general; it is not limited to linguistic signs but can be applied to visual signs as well. Like linguistic semiotic systems, visual semiotic systems serve to communicate interpretations of experience and enable forms of social interaction, which systemic functional grammar aims to analyse. SFL-based models have become predominant in visual studies. I will present two key models of SFL as applied to visual data: O'Toole's model for paintings as well as Kress and van Leeuwen's grammar of visual design.

7.2 O'Toole's functional framework for paintings

In 1990, O'Toole applied Halliday's theory to visual art; Table 7.1 presents a slightly simplified version.

Table 7.1 SFL model for paintings adapted from O'Toole

	<i>Representational</i>	<i>Interpersonal</i>	<i>Compositional</i>
School/ Genre	Typical themes	Orientation to reality	For example, baroque and expressionism
Picture	Actions, events, agents, patients, goals, scenes, settings, features, portrayals, sitters	Focus: perspective, clarity, light, colour, scale, volume Gaze: "eyework," "paths," intermediaries Frame: "weight," omission and intertextuality Modality: fantasy, irony, authenticity	Overall structure: proportion, line, rhythm, geometric forms, colour cohesion Framing: horizontals, verticals and diagonals
Episode	Groups and sub-actions, scenes, side-sequences, interplay of actions	Scale and centrality to whole, relative prominence, interplay of modalities	Relative position in the overall structure and to each other, alignment, coherence, interplay of forms
Figure	Character, act, stance, object, position, gesture	Characterisation (attributes), relation to viewer, contrasts and conflicts, modalities	Relative position in overall structure, in episode and to each other Subframing
Member	Parts of the body or the object, natural forms, components	Stylisation, attenuation, modalities, synecdoche (part-as-a-whole)	Cohesion or contrast

Source: O'Toole 1990, 190–191, original quotation marks

O'Toole distinguishes between five units of analysis, from the most general to the most detailed ones: the first unit is the school or genre that the painting is affiliated to. The other four units are the picture as a whole, subdivided into the episode (i.e. scenes, actions, sequences), the figure (human or non-human actors) and the member (i.e. the components of the figure). While the first unit of analysis is strictly artistic, most of the features related to the other units are not specific to art and can be applied to any visual element. Many of his categories, especially the representational ones, can be a source of inspiration or can be adapted to a large body of study cases, inside and outside art.

At the level of the *picture*, the representational function concerns the actions, actors and settings that can be recognised. The representational function is divided into four aspects: 1) how the painting focuses on specific elements; 2) how interaction between the actors in the painting as well as with the viewer is designed, especially through gaze; 3) how framing gives more or less weight to the components of the picture; and 4) how modalities express the orientation of the picture to reality (e.g. through authenticity or irony). Importantly, gaze is an umbrella term that is not limited to “eyework,” that is, engagements through the gaze itself (O'Toole 1990, 193). Gaze can also be constructed through “paths” and intermediaries. Actual paths and roads as well as paths of light or colour guide the viewer's attention towards specific elements of the painting. Intermediaries are secondary actors in the painting, displayed in the foreground, who draw the viewer's attention to the main characters. Like these three gaze devices, the focus devices of perspective, clarity, light, colour, scale and volume direct the viewer beyond the plane surface of the foreground. Frame is the third type of the interpersonal features at the level of the picture. It concerns what is excluded or included in the painting, both inside (the actors) and outside (the viewer). For example, an image can be constructed in such a way that the viewer observes represented action through a window, which offers them only a limited point of view on the action, preventing them from seeing the elements outside the window frame. Lastly, the interpersonal systemic choices indicate the orientation to reality (e.g. literal, figurative, ironic).

The compositional function concerns the overall structure of the painting (its “gestalt”), through proportion, geometry, colour cohesion, etc. The horizontals, verticals and diagonals inside the rectangular frame of the painting also play a role in the compositional function.

Most of these various features can also be applied at a micro-level, namely the episode, the figure and the member.

The last unit of analysis concerns the components of the figure, like body parts. Synecdoche is a feature that is specific to the level of the member. It is a figure of speech in which a part of something is used to refer to its whole: a physical structure and its parts (e.g. we need more hands), etc. In doing so, O'Toole also integrates figures of speech in his model. This is particularly welcome, since it has been long established that figures of speech and other symbolic strategies are frequent visual devices in advertising, cartoons and user-generated content on social media (e.g. Bateman 2014; Bouko, Calabrese, and De Clercq 2017).

7.3 Kress and van Leeuwen's three functions of visual communication

In 1996, six years after O'Toole, Kress and van Leeuwen published their SFL "grammar" for *Reading Images*. Released in 2006, the second edition of their book is still one of the most widespread references for analysing visual content. Unlike O'Toole's, Kress and van Leeuwen's framework follows a tree structure. In O'Toole's table, the increasing level of detail was based on the unit of analysis (picture, episode, figure and member), whereas in Kress and van Leeuwen's model, it relies on the meaning-making process. Their approach is summarised and slightly adapted in Table 7.2 on page 108. I will limit myself to introducing the three functions of visual content that are theorised at length in *Reading Images* and illustrate and discuss them with political memes and image macros that were spread on social media.

7.3.1 The representational function

At the first level of the representational function, Kress and van Leeuwen distinguish between representations that design *social constructs*, namely conceptual structures, and representations that design *social action*, that is, narrative structures. For example, any ID photograph is conceptual and serves to depict the ID owner's facial traits. Its function is purely conceptual; the ID owner is not involved in any kind of process. By contrast, processes are key in narrative structures.

7.3.1.1 Narrative structures

The patterns of narrative structures are organised as follows (see Table 7.2):

- Processes
 - Agentive
 - Non-projective (actions or reactions)
 - Projective (mental and verbal processes)
 - Non-agentive (conversion)
- Circumstances (settings, means and accompaniment)

Kress and van Leeuwen's first level of division of narrative structures concern *processes* and *circumstances*. Circumstances provide additional, complementary information about the represented process(es). Although they provide valuable information, circumstances can easily be left out without compromising the basic narrative organisation.

Vectors are key in processes. The participants (human or non-human) in narrative images are not presented conceptually as in ID photographs; the process they are involved in is represented by at least one vector: "The hallmark of a narrative visual "proposition" is the presence of a vector, which indicates the

Table 7.2 Summary of Kress and van Leeuwen's SFL-based framework for reading images, with slight adaptations from the original

	<i>Division 1</i>	<i>Division 2</i>	<i>Division 3</i>
Representational function			
Narrative structures	Processes	Agentive Non-agentive	Non-projective Projective
	Circumstances (settings, means, accompaniment)		
Conceptual structures	Classificational processes	Structured	Spatial Temporal
	Analytical processes	Unstructured	
	Symbolic processes	Attributive Suggestive	
Interpersonal function			
Interactivity	Contact	Demand Offer	Involvement or detachment Viewer power (through high angle), equality (through eye-level angle) or represented participant power (through low angle)
	Social distance	Intimate Social Impersonal	
	Attitude	Subjectivity	
Modality	Colour saturation, differentiation and modulation, contextualisation, representation, depth, illumination, brightness	Objectivity	Action or knowledge orientation
		Technological Sensory Abstract Naturalistic	
Compositional function			
Information value	Left, right Top, bottom Centre, margin		
Saliency	Maximum Minimum		
Framing	Maximum disconnection Minimum disconnection		

Source: Kress and van Leeuwen (2006)

directionality of the process: narrative structures always have one, conceptual structures never do” (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006, 59). In diagrams, arrows are common literal vectors. Pictures generally contain more implicit horizontal, vertical or obliques lines. Let us take an example here, featuring former US president Bill Clinton, his wife Hillary Clinton and their dog. This meme (not in the best taste, admittedly) refers to Clinton’s extramarital affair with Monica Lewinsky that was disclosed in 1998. It contains four main vectors: one constructed by the dog’s movement towards Bill Clinton’s nether regions, another one by Bill Clinton’s gaze downwards at the dog and a third one by Hillary’s gaze towards her husband. Hillary’s hand on the dog forms the fourth vector.

The subsequent divisions refine the vectors’ patterns gradually.

Kress and van Leeuwen distinguish between agentive and non-agentive processes. In agentive structures, the vector indicates how the process is oriented from a point A to a point B, while in non-agentive structures, the dynamic of the process takes the form of a *cycle*. The “Monica” meme (Figure 7.1) comprises an agentive structure: one event (the dog’s move, point A) leads to three reactions (the two gazes and the gesture on the dog, points B).



Figure 7.1 “Let’s call her Monica” meme featuring the Clintons and their dog

By contrast, visualisations of the water *cycle* (precipitation, evaporation, etc.), which every pupil has once studied in geography class, are typical examples of non-agentive structures. In such cases, the vectors are generally represented by real arrows.

At the third level of division, agentive processes are separated into non-projective versus projective patterns. Non-projective processes comprise visible actions and reactions while projective processes are mental and verbal ones. The meme here illustrates projective structures. This meme is a screenshot of actor Gene Wilder in the 1971 musical *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory*. First shared on social media in 2010 according to the Internet meme database knowyourmeme.com, it is often used to express sarcastic and patronising stances in a multitude of (political) situations, as in Figure 7.2.



Figure 7.2 “Oh, I disagree with your politics?” meme featuring Gene Wilder

Wilder is reacting to something the viewer cannot see; it is kept outside the frame of this image. Wilder is the only represented participant. This entails a focus on the participant's mental process, for which the embedded text serves the same function as thought balloons in comic strips.

Like mental processes and their related thought balloons, verbal processes connect the participant and an utterance via a speech bubble or any other device that indicates that the participant is speaking. Such distinctions can be applied relatively easily in comic strips, for example, where thinking and verbal bubbles are clearly differentiated from each other. By contrast, embedded text, for example, in memes, with no use of bubbles or balloons, makes this distinction more challenging. In Figure 7.2, it is Wilder's smile that allows to consider that the text reflects his thinking, since, obviously, he was not speaking but smiling when this image was shot. The key characteristic of projective verbal processes is that the represented participant does not speak to any other represented participant, which also allows a focus on the verbal process as such. By contrast, when the participant speaks to another represented participant (visible through a vector between them), the verbal act is considered a verbal non-projective *action*.

For Kress and van Leeuwen, in mental and verbal processes, a vector is formed between the actor and the thought/speech bubble. This type of vector can be coupled with other ones: in the meme featuring Wilder, a second vector can also be observed, this time between Wilder, through his gaze, and the viewer, that is, a participant outside the meme. Whether the concept of vector is the most appropriate one to describe the connection between the participant and his words or thoughts is questionable, though; I will further discuss this issue regarding Figures 7.5 and 7.6.

The "Monica" meme illustrates non-projective structures: the dog's move to Bill Clinton is a non-projective action on the lawn. In addition, this meme shows how there is not always a clear-cut difference between projective verbal processes and non-projective verbal actions. Indeed, the embedded text "Let's call her Monica" can be interpreted as a projective mental process if either Bill or Hillary Clinton thinks about calling the dog Monica, but it can equally be considered a pattern of non-projective verbal action if one of them suggests this name verbally to the other participant. The visual layout of the text does not make it possible to identify one or the other.

Kress and van Leeuwen subdivide non-projective patterns into transactional and non-transactional actions. A transactional action is composed of a vector that connects two or more represented participants of an action. In the "Monica" meme, the four vectors provide the three participants with four connections: (1) from the dog to Bill Clinton (through the dog's move), (2) from Bill Clinton to the dog (through Bill Clinton's gaze), (3) from Hillary Clinton to Bill Clinton (through Hillary Clinton's gaze), and (4) from Hillary Clinton to the dog (through Hillary Clinton touching the dog). In a non-transactional action, a vector emanates from a participant but does not point at any other represented participant. Figure 7.3, featuring Leonardo Di Caprio, is of that kind: the participant is raising his glass to the viewers, who are



Figure 7.3 “To those of you . . .” meme featuring Leonardo Di Caprio

outside the image. Both Di Caprio’s look and arm gesture create horizontal vectors towards them.

In Figures 7.2 and 7.3, the represented participant’s eyeline vector does not point to any represented participant and they therefore both illustrate non-transactional patterns. Furthermore, both participants were not speaking but thinking when these photographs were shot. However, there is no vector-based *action* in Figure 7.2 (only a non-transactional and mental reaction), unlike Figure 7.3, in which Di Caprio’s eyeline is reinforced by the vector created with his raised arm. Additionally, the text in Figure 7.3 concerns both the participant’s mental process and his bodily action (raising his glass to specific people). In other words, the meme featuring Di Caprio comprises projective (mental) as well as non-projective (action) structures, and both of them are non-transactional.

As Table 7.2 indicates, non-projective transactional actions or reactions can be unidirectional or bidirectional. Unidirectional actions entail that there is only one vector, which projects the action into one direction. By contrast, bidirectional actions comprise a second vector that creates reciprocity. In the “Monica” meme, there is one bidirectional action, between Bill Clinton and the dog. The connections between Hillary and the dog as well as with her husband are unidirectional ones, since neither her husband nor the dog acts on her.

In Figure 7.4, featuring former British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and the late Queen Elizabeth II, the action is bidirectional. In such cases, an imagined double-headed arrow connects the two participants. In this example,



Figure 7.4 “Tell me again . . .” meme featuring former British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and Queen Elizabeth II

their handshake creates a horizontal double-headed arrow between them: they are interacting. Besides, this example underscores how the participants are not required to look at each other to generate bidirectional actions. As we can see, the two vectors constructed by their respective gazes diverge.

Let us examine one last meme that exemplifies an issue concerning vectors as the criterion to identify either narrative or conceptual representations. The meme in Figure 7.5 was taken from an issue of the webcomic series *Gunshow*, released in 2013. It features a dog trying to assure himself that everything is fine, despite sitting in a room that is engulfed in flames. It has gone viral on social media to express citizens’ views about politicians’ lethargy, self-denial or lack of courage. Some versions of this meme include the original speech bubble “this is fine.” In that case, this meme would exemplify a projective structure (i.e. a verbal process). The version without the speech bubble in Figure 7.5 is more challenging to analyse. In Kress and van Leeuwen’s theory, the presence of at least one vector reveals whether some visual content relies on narrative or rather on conceptual representations. Yet, in this meme, there is no vector of any kind: no mental or verbal process is depicted through a vector towards a speech or thought bubble, and the dog is not performing any action whose directionality would be indicated by a vector. Yet it is impossible not to do anything, and considering it as a conceptual representation is not appropriate either.

The vector approach thus appears to be less suited for motionless actions or mental/verbal processes without embedded text. The same reasoning can be adopted for the example of the emperor penguin parent and its young between its legs on the ice floe, depicted as Figure 7.6 and regarded by Kress and van Leeuwen as a conceptual analytical representation which emphasises the participants’ characteristics, like facial traits in ID photographs. However, this

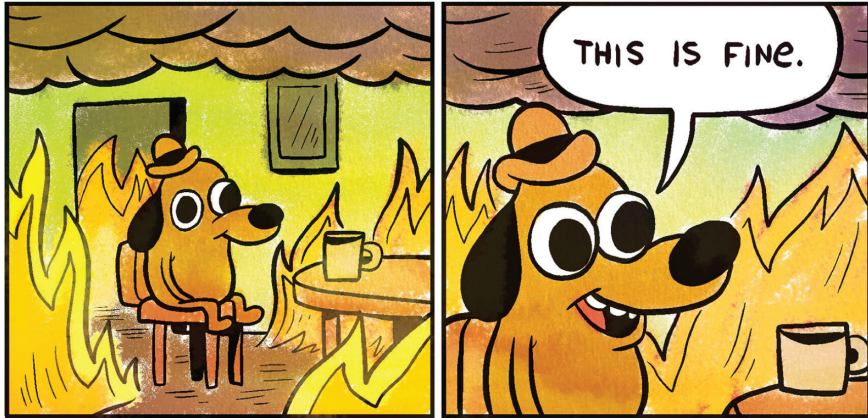


Figure 7.5 “This is fine” dog meme taken from KC Green’s webcomic series *Gunshow*
 Courtesy: KC Green

type of image can just as easily be interpreted as a narrative representation of the penguin parent warming its young and protecting them from freezing temperatures. These parent–child penguin photos are often interpreted as symbols of parental care and therefore narrative representations. The text “Big penguin helps small penguin” below this photo found on a memes site further reinforces its narrative aspect, unlike a potential analytical text like “Big penguin and small penguin on the ice floe.” Such cases exemplify how considering visual content as either narrative or conceptual can be particularly challenging.

Hence, the absence of visible actions through vectors does not automatically mean that an image is a conceptual one. Ultimately, this meme and this picture highlight how some images can be constructed through narrative structures although they are not designed as vector-based systems.

7.3.1.2 *Conceptual structures*

Apart from narrative representations, the representational function of visual communication can also rely on conceptual representations. In this second type of representation, the connection between the participants in an image is established via classificational, analytical or symbolic processes. They organise the connection between the prominent element, namely the Superordinate and at least one set of subordinates in the case of classification, and between “one Carrier (the whole) and any number of possessive attributes (the parts)” for analytical processes. Lastly, symbolic processes comprise relationships between the Carrier and symbolic attributes or suggestions that denote what the Carrier is or means (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006, 79, 87, 105).

Let us first distinguish classificational and analytical processes. Classifications refer taxonomies of kinds, while analytical ones are related to “part of”



Big penguin helps small penguin .

Figure 7.6 “Big penguin helps small penguin” picture

Table 7.3 Snapshot of the conceptual structures (see Table 7.2)

	<i>Division 1</i>	<i>Division 2</i>	<i>Division 3</i>
Conceptual structures	Classificational processes Analytical processes	Structured	Spatial Temporal
	Symbolic processes	Unstructured Attributive Suggestive	

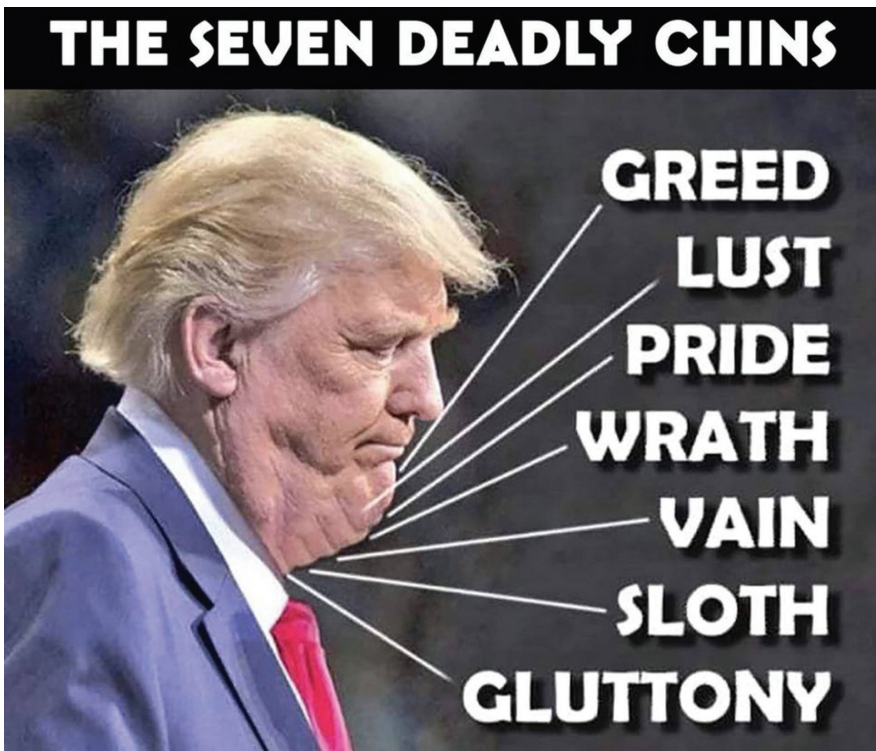


Figure 7.7 “The seven deadly chins” image macro

processes. Figure 7.7, featuring former US president Donald Trump is classificational, based on a *taxonomy* of the deadly “chins.” Each chin represents a subordinate structure.

Kress and van Leeuwen distinguish between structured and unstructured analytical processes. Unstructured ones show the possessive attributes (the parts) but not the Carrier itself. In such cases, the visual content does not show how the parts fit together to make up a whole. For example, the picture of some bones of a skeleton that do not feature the whole skeleton contains the possessive attributes but not the carrier and is thus unstructured.

ID pictures, in which all the facial elements are present, are also structured images.

Structured processes are divided into temporal and spatial ones. The meme here was shared on social media by US Republicans during the 2020 US presidential elections (see Figure 7.8). Its timeline exemplifies a temporal process.



Figure 7.8 “2017: Russian election meddling” meme



Figure 7.9 “I am European . . .” meme

The map of the European Union in Figure 7.9 is an example of a spatial process.

Now that I have introduced classificational and analytical processes, let us move on to the third and last type of conceptual representations, namely symbolic processes. The process can be “symbolic attributive” (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006, 105), which means that the Carriers’ symbolism is derived from their attributes. For example, the creator of the meme here plays with beards and their symbolic meanings of masculinity, virility, status, power and sovereignty.

Historically, beards also symbolised male wisdom: for example, in the Graeco-Roman world, the philosophers’ beard was an unavoidable attribute, and the various beard trimmings indicated some of their philosophical views and affiliations. The following anecdote reported by John Sellars in his essay *The Art of Living* exemplifies this:

In AD 176 the Roman Emperor and Stoic philosopher Marcus Aurelius created four chairs of philosophy in Athens, one for each of the major schools. When, a few years later, the holder of the Peripatetic Chair died, two equally well qualified candidates applied for the post. One of the candidates, Diocles, was already very old so it seemed that his rival, Bagoas, would be sure to get the job. However, one of the selection committee objected to Bagoas on the grounds that he did not have [a] beard saying that, above all else, a philosopher should always have a long beard in order to inspire confidence in his students. Bagoas responded by saying that if philosophers are to be judged only by the length of their beards then perhaps the chair of Peripatetic philosophy should be given to a billy-goat. The matter was considered to be of such grave importance that it was referred to the highest authorities in Rome, presumably to the Emperor himself.

(Sellars 2003, 15)



Figure 7.10 "They'd all be so much more electable" meme



Figure 7.11 “Canada r attacking” meme

When there is no other participant than the Carrier in the image, its symbolic dimension does not rely on attributes. Coined as “symbolic suggestive” (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006, 105), this second type of symbolic processes is derived from – or suggested by – the Carrier’s own characteristics. In Figure 7.11, which was shared on social media in 2016 to comment on Canada’s military operations abroad, the caribou symbolises Canada. In this meme, the caribou as such, without attributes, is the only element that symbolises the country and its alleged lack of military power.

Of course, symbolic attributive and suggestive processes rely on conventional symbols that are specific to their spatial, temporal and socio-cultural contexts.

7.3.2 *The interpersonal function*

The interpersonal function relates to the visual features encoding the interaction between the represented participants and between the participants and the viewers. It also concerns how modality cues reveal to what extent the visual messages are reliable in their representation of reality.

7.3.2.1 *Interactivity*

7.3.2.1.1 CONTACT, SOCIAL DISTANCE AND ATTITUDE

Kress and van Leeuwen distinguish between three patterns of interactivity in images: contact, social distance and attitude. Contact is further divided into *demands* and *offers*. In demand images, the participant in the image is looking

Table 7.4 Snapshot of interactivity in conceptual structures (see Table 7.2)

<i>Interpersonal function</i>		
Contact	Demand Offer	
Social distance	Intimate Social Impersonal	
Attitude	Subjectivity	Involvement or detachment Viewer power, equality or representation power
	Objectivity	Action or knowledge orientation

at the viewer, while that is not the case in offers. For example, Figures 7.1 and 7.2 illustrate an offer, while Figure 7.3 exemplifies a demand through Leonardo DiCaprio's gaze. Gazes in demands allow to create an imaginary relation between the participant and the viewer, whereas offer images "offer" information to the viewer.

Interactivity between the participant and the viewer can also be enacted based on either social proximity or distance, realised through the distance of shots: close, medium and long shots can indicate various levels of proximity and social distance. Figures 7.2, 7.3, 7.7, 7.8 and 7.9 are close shots, since the viewer can only see the participants' face and shoulders, front or side. Figure 7.4 is a medium shot, showing the participants from the top of their head to roughly their waist. Lastly, Figures 7.1 and 7.5 are long shots, in which all participants are captured from head to toe. These three types of shots can roughly reflect three degrees of proximity, namely intimate/personal, social or impersonal relationships. That said, the use of these conventional patterns of distance is also influenced by parameters other than proximity or distance. For example, the fact that visual content on social media is often watched on the small screen of a smartphone means that the components of long shots are inevitably more difficult to distinguish, perhaps making users prefer images with medium or close shots. Interactivity matters, but so does readability.

7.3.2.1.2 ATTITUDE IN SUBJECTIVE VISUAL CONTENT: PERSPECTIVE, SHOTS AND ANGLE

The third and last level of interactivity relates to attitude and to the difference between *subjective* and *objective* visual content. Subjective images comprise a point of view that encodes an imaginary relationship with the viewer. Perspective through selected angles allows to construct points of view: in subjective images, the viewer sees the content from one participant's perspective. By means of perspective, subjectivity becomes literal:

The point of view is imposed not only on the represented participants, but also on the viewer, and the viewer's "subjectivity" is, therefore,

subjective in the original sense of the word, the sense of “being subjected to something or someone.”

(Kress and van Leeuwen 2006, 131, original quotation marks)

On social media, selfies are probably the most obvious instances in which the photographer’s subjectivity is inscribed in the image (Zappavigna 2016).

By contrast, objective visual content is deprived of such perspective and of “in-built” point of view (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006, 130). For example, Figure 7.11 is constructed as objective; it captures its elements like they are positioned in the natural world. Such images do not relate to the viewer. Figures 7.1 and 7.4 are designed with *slight* high-angle shots. Combined with long or medium shots, respectively, these angles construct the viewer’s point of view, who is kept at a *far* distance to the Clintons and at a *social* distance to Johnson and the Queen. With their very subtle angles, Figures 7.1 and 7.4 highlight how the distinction between perspectival and non-perspectival visual content is in fact a continuum: some angles are so subtle that they are close to objective cues. These two examples also emphasise how angles must be combined with other elements, such as contact and social distance, to determine potential relations with the viewer.

Frontal and oblique angles have conventional meanings that are likely to entail involvement and detachment, respectively. Kress and van Leeuwen argue that frontal angles tend to involve the viewer, who is considered as a part of the represented world. By contrast, oblique angles rather keep the viewer detached from the representation. However, the conventional character of this difference BETWEEN frontal and oblique angles is particularly questionable and might be the result of choices that are independent of any inclusion–exclusion issue. A very simple reason can sometimes be that an oblique angle allows more people to be photographed or, where people are in rows, allows the faces of everyone to be captured, whereas frontal angles mainly show only the first row. The same reasoning can be applied to Figure 7.12: the picture of the Upper House of the Parliament of the UK is constructed with long and high-angle shots, oblique angles and characters that look away from the viewer. All these visual patterns converge to effect distance and detachment between the represented participants and the viewer. Furthermore, the creator of this meme textually constructs the British House of Lords as a negatively appraised outgroup.

However, most pictures of the House of Lords chamber that circulate on the Internet contain oblique angles, but because of the spatial configuration of the Chamber. There is no reason to believe that they were taken this way to systematically represent the viewer’s detachment and exclusion. Put simply, it is the combination of the visual and the textual elements that allow to argue that oblique angles serve or reinforce detachment in this specific case, while they might not serve this meaning in other contexts. Again, conventional patterns always have to be interpreted in view of other elements and of the context in



Figure 7.12 “House of . . .” meme



Figure 7.13 “I’m tired of . . .” meme

which they appear. Likewise, both the frontal angle and the embedded text are necessary to argue that Figure 7.13 entails the viewer’s involvement.

There is a risk of slipping from the observation of conventional patterns to subjective interpretation without evidence. The more multi-layered the

analysis is, the more valid its findings. The two examples given earlier also underline the need for constant back and forth between the visual and the textual elements of the content under scrutiny (see Section 7.4).

Angles can be frontal and oblique; they can also be high, eye-level or low, indicating three types of perspectival relationships with the viewer. When the angle is high, like in Figures 7.12 and 7.13, the visual content gives some power to the viewer, who is invited to observe the situation from a high and hence powerful point of view. By contrast, eye-level angles depict equal connections, like in the relationships of the viewer with Gene Wilder and Di Caprio in Figures 7.2 and 7.3. Finally, low angles give power to the represented participants. Figure 7.14 is an example of the many memes that feature

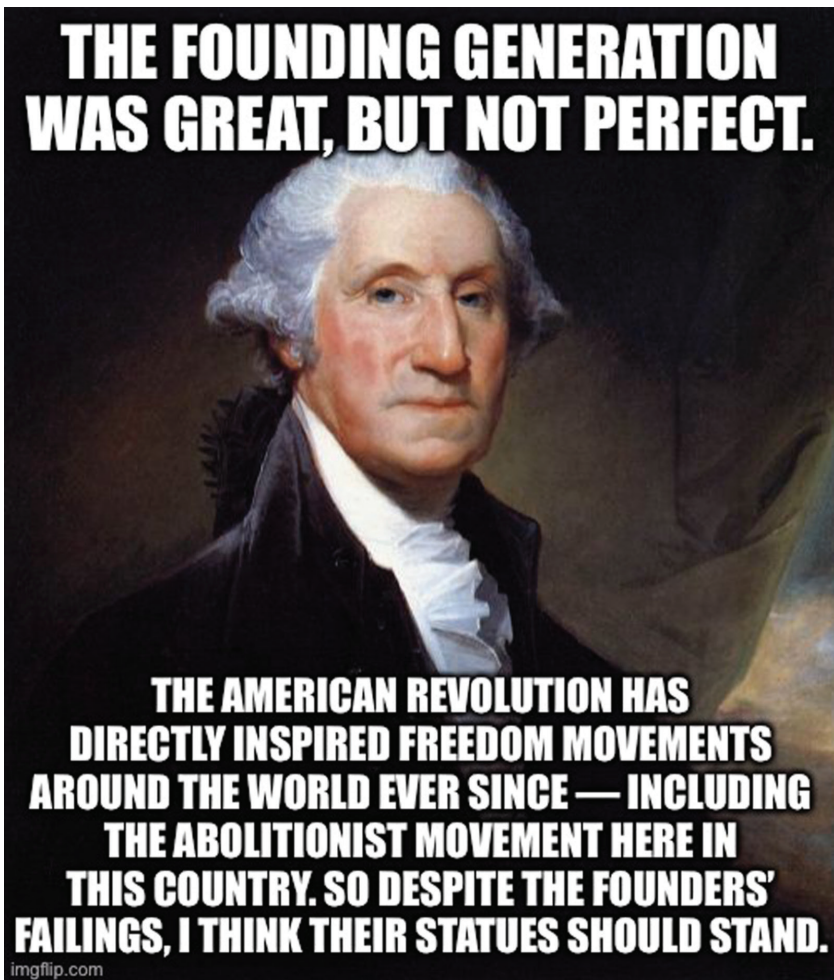


Figure 7.14 “The founding generation . . .” meme

the Founding Fathers of the USA, often with low angles, to reinforce – or, depending on the text, subvert – their status.

7.3.2.1.3 ATTITUDE IN OBJECTIVE VISUAL CONTENT: ACTION OR KNOWLEDGE ORIENTATION

Objective attitude is *oriented* towards either *action* or *knowledge*. This distinction is similar to the involvement-detachment division that Kress and van Leeuwen draw for subjective visual content. The action-knowledge division also relies on the types of angles: frontal angles would be oriented towards action, while top-down angles would rather visualise the represented world from a knowledge orientation, disconnected from the action itself. Frontal angles entail eye-level shots that involve the viewer. By contrast, top-down angles will rather orient the represented action towards the knowledge it provides the viewer: disconnected from the action by the high angle, the viewer gains knowledge about an action they are not involved in. Of course, front angles are not always connected to an orientation towards action. Figure 7.7 featuring Trump and his “deadly chins” illustrates this: this meme is not action-based; it is related to psychological features and exemplifies how conceptual images can be oriented towards knowledge with a frontal angle.

7.3.2.2 *Modality: colour, perspective, background, representation, depth, illumination and brightness*

Through interactivity patterns, the creators of visual content can design relationships between the represented participants and the viewer. By means of modality cues, they can focus on the connection with “reality,” indicating to what extent and how the content is *constructed* as reliable: reality is not naturalistically observable; it is socially constructed. Accordingly, Kress and van Leeuwen emphasise how modality is interpersonal rather than representational and how the creators of visual content make use of modality cues to align the viewers with, or to distance them from, conventional representations of reality. In Western cultures, photorealism is generally constructed through the combination of several conventional visual patterns:

Pictures which have the perspective, the degree of detail, the kind of colour rendition, etc. of the standard technology of colour photography have the highest modality, and are seen as “naturalistic”. As detail, sharpness, colour, etc. are reduced or amplified, as the perspective flattens or deepens, so modality decreases.

(Kress and van Leeuwen 2006, 159)

The two scholars distinguish eight modality markers. Their modality configuration is composed of:

- 1) Colour saturation, from black and white to maximum colour saturation
- 2) Colour differentiation, from monochrome to a maximally diversified range of colours
- 3) Colour modulation, from unmodulated colours to a maximum use of different shades of colour
- 4) Contextualisation, from the absence of background to the most detailed background
- 5) Representation, from abstraction to the most detailed representation
- 6) Depth, from the absence of depth to maximum deep perspective
- 7) Illumination, from the absence of light and shade to their fullest representation
- 8) Brightness, from only two degrees of brightness (e.g. dark grey and lighter grey) to a large variety of degrees of brightness

Each modality marker is designed as a scale, in which the two extremes (i.e. from black and white to maximum colour saturation) have lower modality than naturalistic levels, which are situated at intermediate stages. Kress and van Leeuwen emphasise how types of visual content, which are not meant to be photorealistic, articulate the eight scales of modality. In food magazines, for example, the pictures are meant to create an illusion of touch, taste and smell; the sensory illusion is more important than some naturalistic reality and, therefore, has higher modality in this type of visual content. The values of colour also illustrate variations of modality. In food magazines, colours are often used to trigger pleasure, arousal or other emotions, while they are selected to facilitate the reading of diagrams in scientific-technological contexts and copied from reality in naturalistic images.

Modality highlights how colours can fulfil various interpersonal functions through their different values. In the Western world, people have sought to associate colours with meanings (i.e. the *representational* function) and emotional effects (i.e. the *interpersonal* function) since at least ancient Greek times (see e.g. Gage 1999). Since the advent of digital marketing, the Internet is full of guidelines on how to use colours for social media communication, and a large body of studies in marketing psychology focus on the potential of colours to increase engagement on social networks. For example, the analysis of 785 images collected from 35 of the most popular brand groups on Facebook revealed that black, brown, grey and navy blue were the most popular ones, leading to more engagement (Zailskaitė-Jakštė et al. 2017). The popularity of some of these colours can be partly attributed to their cultural meaning (e.g. trustworthiness for blue, wealth and elegance for grey and black) and their effects (e.g. the calming power of blue). But both the meanings and the effects of colours are contingent social constructs, at least partially, and as such depend on the context in which they are produced, experienced and interpreted. Accordingly, the popularity of blue in ads is

probably reinforced by the strategic choice of a colour that is widely popular, many people across the world considering it their favourite colour, generally before green or red (Jordan 2015). Besides, some other scholars stress the importance of individuality when they establish correlations between the use of colours (i.e. colourfulness, colour diversity and colour harmony) and (Korean) Instagrammers' gender and personality traits (Kim and Kim 2019). Put simply, the values of colours vary and evolve over time and space. This would explain why, over the centuries, people have always failed to address colour meanings in anything more than fragmented understandings (Gage 1999). The evolution of the meaning of blue, pink and white and its impact on baby clothes from Greek antiquity to the 18th century in Europe, when pink has become the standard colour for girls' clothing (after blue and white, see e.g. Koller 2008), are also a significant example in this respect (Vandel 2013). Nevertheless, despite individual and collective contingency, some colour patterns can be considered as carrying relatively stable conventional meanings or effects in the context of contemporary Western culture.

The meanings of colours are drawn from a process of double associations. First, people associate colours with elements they observe: blue is associated with the sea and the sky, green with nature, red with blood, etc. As Williamson (1984 [1978]), 103 puts it, "nature is the primary referent of a culture." Second, associations arise between the symbolism of these observed elements and their colours: blue might evoke science and objectivity, because the sky is not confined and allows us to think clearly and unimpededly, like in the phrase "blue skies thinking" (Ledin and Machin 2018); blue was a blessed colour for the Ancient Greeks, since the sky was the residence of the gods. Blue can also evoke purity, based on the purity of water. Likewise, the association between red and energy or vitality is drawn from the red of bodily phenomena, the warmth of orange from the colour of the sun, etc. The cultural meanings are then coupled with effects of colours. In this respect, blue is considered calming, red and orange as energising, etc.

Besides hues, colour saturation, modulation and differentiation also play a role in the interpersonal function of colours, as Kress and van Leeuwen suggest (2006, 160). Likewise, researchers in social psychology insist on the importance of analysing two or three dimensions of colours, namely hue, saturation and brightness. From this perspective, saturated blues and purples are found to be the most pleasant colours; saturated reds and yellows are the most arousing ones, while pale blues and purples were the most calming ones (Simmons 2006). This research also highlights the strong level of agreement among the participants in this experiment, which underscores how colour-emotion associations are stereotyped within a given culture.

According to Kress and van Leeuwen, four coding orientations encapsulate four modality configurations of the eight modality markers listed earlier (colour saturation, etc.): *technological*, *sensory*, *abstract* and *naturalistic*. Each of them is related to types of social groups that use the content (e.g. academics vs. artists), as well as associated institutional contexts (e.g. a conference vs. an exhibition). These clusters of visual codes thus create proximity with the viewers

who are familiar with them, and distance to the ones who are unfamiliar or less familiar with the visual conventions. Viewers are addressed as members of the same (sub)culture, who share the same conventions, or as outsiders. The filters with which Instagram users can curate the modality of their photographs help create a sensory configuration that is specific to that social network. Zappavigna (2016) highlights how the Instagram filters that lend photos to their vintage look have the potential to increase the images' emotional impact and make present moments more poignant. In such cases, the nostalgia is not related to a past event but to a present one that is curated with a vintage filter. Consequently, the emotional power of nostalgia does not concern the content as such but the technical style (i.e. modality) of the photograph. Besides these nostalgic emotions which these specific filters stir up, the general aesthetic typical of Instagram aims to be inspirational. This refers to positive emotions related to dreams and escape that such idealised curated images can elicit. However, the interpersonal function also concerns the way in which the relationships between the represented participants and the viewers are constructed and the way in which the latter can be included or excluded. In this respect, the typical Instagram aesthetics, coupled with ideal represented content, can also arouse feelings of envy, frustration or jealousy by highlighting the distance between an idealised image and its viewers. Most of these viewers are probably familiar with these aesthetic codes but they might not have the inspirational and attractive photographs to use them in turn.

7.3.3 *The compositional function*

The compositional function concerns the way the representational and interpersonal components are related to each other to construct a meaningful whole. They are interrelated through three types of compositional patterns (see Table 7.2):

- *information value* (the location of elements in the various zones of the image), left, right, top, bottom, centre, margin
- *saliency* (patterns to attract the viewer's attention)
- *framing* (connection or disconnection of some elements to or from the whole)

7.3.3.1 *Information value: left-right, top-bottom and centre-margin*

The information value addresses the meanings entailed by three oppositions: left versus right, top versus bottom and centre versus margin. These oppositions can be particularly significant for social media posts and especially for memes, in so far as one of their main features is the anomalous juxtaposition of two contents in side-by-side visual arrangements (see e.g. Knobel and Lankshear 2007; Howley 2016). The participants in such incongruous juxtapositions are often depicted out of context, which facilitates the

appropriation and recontextualisation of the same split-screen arrangement by other social media users (Shifman 2014). For example, you have probably encountered multiple variants of the “disaster girl” meme, like the three examples in Figures 7.15, 7.16 and 7.17.



Figures 7.15, 7.16 and 7.17 Variations of the “disaster girl” meme, in political and private contexts



Figures 7.15, 7.16 and 7.17 (Continued)

The organisation of the left and right zones of visual content is very much influenced by the sequential nature of written language. For example, Western languages are written from left to right, and the compositional configuration of Facebook content illustrates the influence of that direction. As we can see from the two contrasting screenshots (Figures 7.18 and 7.19), the layout is reversed for Arabic, compared to the English version.

The buttons, the order of the headings, as well as the location of the images versus the text are reversed. The same is true for the Instagram app and for Twitter, whereas Flickr is not available in right-to-left languages.

The left-to-right cultural pattern gives rise to visual meanings of left and right zones: the left is the zone of the “Given” and the right is the zone of the “New” (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006). The left side is likely to provide information that the viewer already knows or is already familiar with, while the right side tends to offer new information. Following these cultural patterns, the inverse would be true for right-to-left language communities, for whom the right zone represents the “Given” and the left concerns the “New,” although no studies with participants allows to corroborate or refute this idea, to my knowledge.

Some question–answer patterns in particular illustrate this dichotomy, like in the meme in Figure 7.20. Here, the question at the top left is explicitly framed as a given (i.e. the question is *why*, not *whether* Trump’s supporters are reluctant to wear COVID-19 masks) and the answer at the bottom right is framed as new information (i.e. analogy with Ku Klux Klan’s hoods).

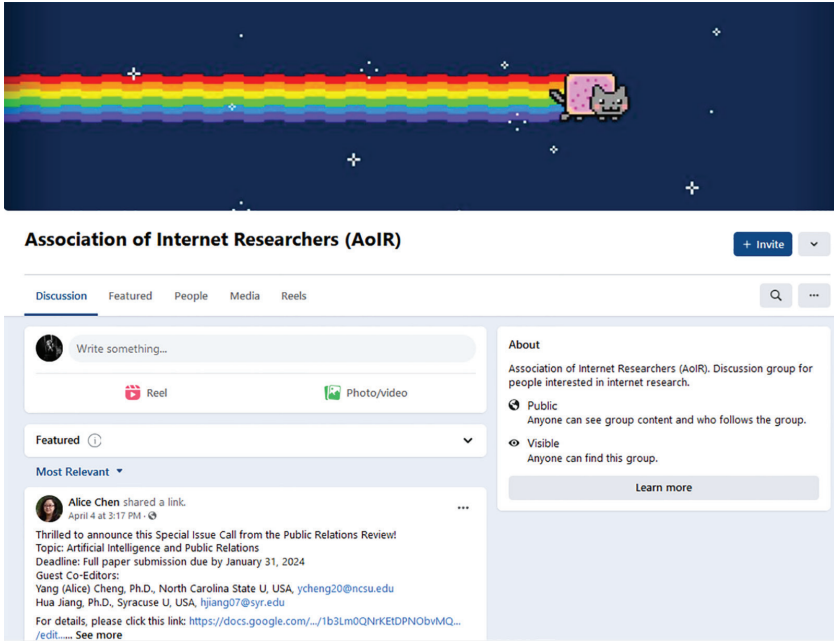


Figure 7.18 Screenshot of the AOIR Facebook page, English version



Figure 7.19 Screenshot of the AOIR Facebook page, Arabic version



Figure 7.20 “Why are Trump . . .” meme

Furthermore, the left-right dichotomy is reinforced by the oblique angle formed by the four rows of KKK members, which divides the picture into two triangular parts.

In this meme, the opposition between the left and the right is made visible by the spatial arrangement of the two sentences. In the same vein, the character’s gaze to the right (at the representational level), which is common on election campaign posters, also illustrates this dichotomy between the past on the left and the future on the right. That said, Figure 7.21, in which US president Biden’s gaze to the left, is a reminder that all these visual conventions are cultural tendencies that are never applied systematically.

Figure 7.21 remediates a picture taken for a *Washington Post* article written in 2019 about Biden’s probable victory. Although it mentions that it has been approved by Biden, this image macro is a fake ad that even managed to confuse Twitter, which took it down for violating the platform’s election rules after it had already been widely shared on the platform during the US presidential campaign (Kelly 2020).

Kress and van Leeuwen illustrate Given–New compositional patterns with horizontal examples of double-pages in magazines, visual art, ads, textbook visuals and diagrams, etc. However, the relevance of the Given–New opposition raises at least two issues, especially when it is applied to social media. The first limitation lies at the level of the image of the post. As Kress and van Leeuwen argue, the left-right division is particularly well suited for horizontal



Figure 7.21 “His brain? . . .” fake ad

artefacts. But social media content is increasingly vertical. Initially, when social networks were emerging, vertical videos were criticised and referred to as the “vertical video syndrome” (Ryan 2018). However, some years later, the design of smartphones and the advent of some of their affordances, such as the Stories, encouraged the sharing of vertical videos. Social media are mainly consumed via smartphones, to the extent that 48% of 18-to-29-year-old Americans reported to be almost constantly online in 2021 (Perrin and Atske 2021). Social media posts are increasingly designed for vertical viewing on smartphones, at least on Facebook and Instagram, where it is considered best practice, and sometimes even as default, such as for Stories. Following this trend towards the vertical, Instagram developed vertical swiping in 2021, inspired by TikTok features. In line with these developments, content that is created for being viewed on smartphones is not likely to include a significant left-right division and is more likely to play with top-bottom differences, at least on some social media platforms: the vertical format is not available on Twitter, and Flickr is suited to vertical, square or horizontal images, even panoramic ones.

The second issue concerns the combination of the visual content (with or without embedded text) and the text that surrounds it. Most social media posts are multimodal. They not only contain an image, but their authors

Table 7.5 Image–text configurations in social media posts on Facebook, Flickr, Instagram and Twitter, for newsfeed and when users click on specific posts (January 2022)

	<i>Newsfeed on computer</i>	<i>Newsfeed on smartphone</i>	<i>Post on computer</i>	<i>Post on smartphone</i>
Facebook	Text above, image below	Text above, image below	Image on the left, text on the right	Image above, text below
Flickr	Image above, text below	Image above, text below	Image above, text below	Image above, text below
Instagram	Location above, image in the middle, text below	Location above, image in the middle, text below	Location and text on the right, image on the left	Location above, image in the middle, text below
Twitter	Text above, image below	Text above, image below	Text above, image below	Text above, image below

also add some text in a separate “what’s on your mind” section or other text zones that are situated above, below or next to the visual content. These zones can also contain hashtags, emojis, handles of other social media profiles, and links.

Kress and van Leeuwen (2006, 183) claim that “more generally, if the left contains a picture and the right is verbal text, the picture is presented as Given, as a well-established point of departure for the text, and the text contains the New.” In essence, such generalisations are questionable, and even more so for social networks. Watching social media content on smartphones has consequences for the format of the visual content itself (at least on Facebook and Instagram), but also on the spatial organisation of the visual content and the text. The configuration differs depending on whether one scrolls the newsfeed or clicks on a specific social media post (see Table 7.5).

In the two left-right patterns (i.e. third column in Table 7.5), the visual content is on the left and the verbal text on the right in the case of left-to-right languages and reversed for right-to-left languages. However, there is no reason to apply Kress and van Leeuwen’s symbolic interpretation of the image as a Given and well-established point of departure for the text, which would contain the “New” element of the message. This left/visual-right/textual organisation is probably more related to salience, hierarchy and eye movement patterns (see Section 7.4).

Besides the left and the right, the top and bottom zones can also structure visual composition and sometimes do so in combination with the horizontal zones. While the left and the right might evoke a Given–New division, top and bottom can evoke ideal versus real information, according to Kress and van Leeuwen. For example, ads that favour an idealised representation of the product will be more likely to visualise it in the upper section of the ad, while ads that focus on a more down-to-earth presentation of the product will rather position it in the lower section. “The upper section tends to make

some kind of emotive appeal and to show us ‘what might be’; the lower section tends to be more informative and practical, showing us ‘what is’” (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006, 186). In an ad, placing a product on a table will give it a down-to-earth dimension, for example, as Barthes demonstrated with his famous analysis of the 1960s Panzani ad featuring a grocery net filled with Italian products. Tables are likely to be placed in the lower part of the image to align with the viewer’s common perspective and high angle on furniture. In addition, its flat surface divides the image into two parts. Again, symbolic, stylistic and practical considerations coalesce to determine the visual choices.

For Kress and van Leeuwen, most visual composition in Western societies is still predominantly organised by dual right-left and/or top-bottom oppositions, sometimes with a sharp line dividing the two sections. Figure 7.22 exemplifies this sharp distinction between the meme creator’s perception of



Figure 7.22 “Remember when . . .” meme

ideal politicians versus actual ones. However, most social media posts comprise a vertical organisation that does not draw on this symbolic distinction but simply on the affordance of the top-down reading experience.

Lastly, visual composition can also be structured with centre and margin patterns, which are related to visual hierarchy: “For something to be presented as Centre means that it is presented as the nucleus of the information to which all the other elements are in some sense subservient. The Margins are these ancillary, dependent elements” (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006, 196). Centre-margin divisions can be combined with left-right as well as top-bottom ones.

7.3.3.2 *Salience*

The three oppositions I have discussed in Section 7.3.3.1 spell out how various visual elements can be related to each other in composite artefacts. These oppositions can sometimes serve symbolic meanings, but they can also draw on more practical parameters of visual hierarchy. With their newsfeed in the Centre and the other elements left in the Margins, combined with the salient size of the visual content of the posts, Facebook and Twitter turn the viewer’s attention towards the visual components of the central zone, as has been confirmed by eye-tracking research (see e.g. Wang and Hung 2019). Priority is given to the visual content of the post. On Instagram and Flickr, the salience of the visual content compared to the textual elements is even bigger proportionally.

Salience is a matter of contrast, namely how and to what extent one visual element will contrast and stand out more than other ones. The modality strategies inside the image play a key compositional role in this respect (see Section 7.3.2.2): choices regarding colour saturation, colour modulation, contextualisation, depth, illumination and brightness make some elements more salient than others. Furthermore, cultural patterns also impact on salience, such as including human figures or cultural symbols, which commonly attract attention. Let us illustrate it with Figure 7.23, which represents Britannia, the national personification of Britain. The composition of this meme, which was widely shared in the context of Brexit, combines several techniques that make it stand out in its original colour version: the focus is sharpened; the colours are saturated and contrast with each other; the yellow oblique lines direct the viewer’s attention to the centre and create what we might call visual rhythm; the meme only contains only foreground elements, which are more salient thanks to the absence of background. Cultural symbols, like in Figure 7.23, also play a role in the salience, through either familiarity or incongruity. Lastly, the textual elements in the meme are written in white with a black band around it. This high tonal contrast has become a norm in memes and makes them stand out even more.

In the context of high competition to attract the viewer’s attention on social media, visual content with a complex composition is avoided in favour of salience.



Figure 7.23 “Runs out of . . .” meme

7.3.3.3 Framing

Framing is Kress and van Leeuwen’s third and last compositional device. It addresses how the elements in the visual composition are connected to, or isolated from, each other, on a scale that ranges from the absence of framing (which highlights group identity and global cohesion) to maximum framing (which stresses the separations between the elements, pointing out their individuality).

Contrast can reinforce the differentiations and discontinuities while lack of contrast can reinforce the internal visual harmony. Other visual devices can also play this role, such as vectors that create some rhythm and visual flow between the elements, which helps connect them. For example, in Figure 7.23, the yellow lines are oblique vectors that direct the viewer's attention to the goddess figure. This creates some connection and cohesion in the composition.

I have now completed the overview of the features that can reinforce the representational, interpersonal and compositional functions of images. As I have already briefly mentioned, the applicability of these cues is sometimes challenging, and we can question how this approach can be defined as a “grammar of visual design,” as their authors coined it. This first methodological challenge will be discussed in the next section, as will the choice of the unit of analysis for SFL-based visual studies.

7.4 Two challenges in analysing visual resources

7.4.1 *Social semiotics and the “grammar” of visual content*

SFL-based research analyses modes of representing *patterns of experience* through linguistic and/or visual signs. In this respect, two notions are key: first, these representation modes are based on *choices*, depending on the communication purposes people want to achieve. Second, these choices are loaded with *meaning potentials* (see e.g. Ledin and Machin 2018). These two notions of *choices* and *meaning potentials* highlight how the SFL framework gives rise to an approach to (visual) semiotics that is not structuralist but grounded in the social aspect. As I will briefly outline here, this has repercussions on the definition of the sign and on the method of analysis.

In de Saussure's seminal structuralist theory, a sign is a two-sided entity that is composed of the Signifier (i.e. the material aspect of the sign) and the Signified (i.e. the mental concept that a sign refers to). Signification depends on the combination between one Signifier and one Signified; different combinations entail different significations. In other words, signification is structural, drawing on the two-sided structure of language. In this respect, the addressees of a message are invited to *recognise* pre-existing codes that are not influenced by actual forms of use. For example, when advisors for social media content managers claim that “[b]lue promotes a feeling of trust, therefore Twitter wants to gain your trust and find them indispensable” (Ślusarczyk n.d.), they adopt a structuralist approach to the meaning of colours. Here, the meaning of colour draws on a combination of one Signifier (the blue material) and one Signified (the concept of trust), irrespective of potential cultural conventions and meanings.

To distance themselves from the structuralist, pre-given understanding of the *sign*, some researchers in social semiotics favour the notion of *resource* (based on Halliday's work), which is, by contrast, affected by the ways people use it (van Leeuwen 2005).

Uses of the resource are an integral part of Peirce's (quite complex) semi-otic typology. In simple terms, for him the sign is no longer a dyad but a triad that combines a representamen (the material of the sign), an object (to which the sign refers) and an interpretant. Importantly, the interpretant is not the interpreter; it is not a person but the *key for interpreting* the sign. Let us take the basic example of a stop sign. It is a sign that is composed of a red board containing the word "stop" in white lettering (i.e. the representamen), the action of stopping (i.e. the object to what it refers) and the convention that this board means an obligation for drivers to stop (i.e. the interpretant). In this example, the meaning draws on a cultural convention that has become a code that drivers must comply with for their own and others' safety. The meaning of codes can be traced back to *choices* that people made and that have become a norm rather than relying on the internal structure of the sign. Since interpretants do not depend on the structure of the sign, but on experiences in life, they are different for every person in every situation, and therefore innumerable. It is cultural and social habits which, over time, will lead to certain interpretants being adopted as *final* interpretants, if they form a relative consensus within a given culture. Nevertheless, interpretants are never truly final; they are accepted temporarily and might be replaced by others, in line with cultural evolutions. This is how "dominant and preferred meanings" (Hall 1999 [1980], 513) emerge and evolve over time and space.

Meaning potentials are preferred meanings or "canons of use" (Ledin and Machin 2018, 22). As such, despite cultural and individual differences, they entail "a common understanding of the basic meaning potential of the resource. . . . It is easy to overstate either commonality or difference. Social semiotics seeks to do justice to both" (van Leeuwen 2005, 24). In this respect, O'Toole's theory as well as Kress and van Leeuwen's framework are more disposed towards commonality. The authors of *The Grammar of Visual Design*, as they titled their book, insist on the fact that theirs is a grammar of *theoretical* meaning potentials. Still, some representational, interpersonal and compositional visual patterns seem to be framed as more established conventions than they might be in practice. When there are as many, or even more, examples that contradict the rule rather than illustrate it, its applicability becomes a real issue in terms of the representativeness and replicability of the analysis, especially when most rules are only illustrated with one or two examples. They are seldom empirically *tested* against a representative corpus. It is sometimes challenging to consider some conventions as truly socially shared. Put simply, some conventions are more conventional than others. As Forceville already argued in his review of the first edition of *Reading Images*, many of Kress and van Leeuwen's analyses are convincing and illuminating, while many others are too easily assumed to be representative (Forceville 1999). In this respect, mixed-method research designs that combine qualitative semiotic analyses with quantitative content analysis would offer the best of both methods and would result in insights into fine-grained visual patterns *and* their representativeness.

A related issue concerns the intersubjective validity of frameworks of meaning potentials (Forceville 1999). For many of Kress and van Leeuwen's examples, there is no reason to believe that other interpreters would analyse the visual content in the same way. Some of their interpretations are very personal and less intersubjectively shared than the two authors claim. I briefly raised this issue when I discussed the angles or the left/Given versus right/New opposition in Section 7.2, for example. In such cases, the analysis does not seem to rely on visual rules but on pre-existing knowledge that is combined with arbitrarily selected visual rules (Machin 2017). Therefore, the implementation of some of their visual rules is closer to "impressionistic interpretative' analysis" that is subjective and unsystematic, and may rather be "a post hoc rationalisation of design decisions that occur on a page for quite other reasons" (Bateman, Delin, and Henschel 2004, 67). In such cases, meaning potentials are not actualised; meaning does not derive from structure but rather emerges from understandings that are external to the visual object itself. Consequently, the very relevance of the rule can be called into question.

7.4.2 *Units of analysis in visual content*

Drawing on de Saussure's theory, the relations between signs can be of two types: on the one hand, *paradigmatic* relations are relations in which signs can substitute each other. Speakers select one sign from all possible signs, based on their communication purposes. For example, they can choose "my grandmother," "grandma," etc. to replace "that woman" in the sentence "that woman is extraordinary." This is a relation *in absentia*, between one sign in the sentence and unselected signs. On the other hand, *syntagmatic* relations between signs are relationships of complementarity and positioning of the different signs that are assembled to produce meaning together. They are used in a sequence of signs that together create meaning. This is a relationship *in praesentia*, between the signs of the same sentence, for example. Identifying these two types of relations entails breaking up sentences into elements that are distinct from each other. However, unlike verbal text, which is composed of separate linguistic signs, visual content is not organised into components that can be easily distinguished from one another. Several methodological questions therefore arise: is it more relevant to analyse an image as a whole or to segment it into single components? In the second case, according to what criteria can the content of an image be broken up? These questions also concern quantitative content analyses.

Gestalt theory and SFL-based models offer different answers to these questions. They sometimes oppose each other, but they also share points of convergence.

The two paradigms address these issues both in terms of the structure of the image itself and the viewer's experience.

For some researchers in gestalt theory, it is the internal structure of visual content that entails a gestalt experience, “gestalt” being a German word for “shape” or “figure”:

Although the concept of the “gestalt” is often described as the whole being different from (or, even more ambiguously, as “more than”) the sum of its parts, it may be more accurate to say that a gestalt implies a configuration that is so inherently unified that its properties cannot be derived from the individual properties of its parts.

(Barry 1997, 42)

In this vein, it is not possible to discern separate elements, and therefore units of analysis, in *inherently unified* visual configurations. The internal structure of visual content cannot be broken down into separate components. Other researchers in gestalt theory focus more on the viewer’s experience than on the internal structure of the image. They consider that it is primarily the viewers who tend to organise bits of information into wholes; they group elements that share similar features and separate those with dissimilar properties, etc. Saving cognitive effort might partly explain gestalt experiences of visual perception: analysing an image as a whole reduces the cognitive load compared to analysing every visual element it contains. This allows us to process a maximum of information in a minimum of time and with minimum levels of (cognitive) energy (see e.g. Smith 2005). This might be particularly relevant when viewers perceive social media posts, since the abundance of messages as they scroll through the newsfeed invites scanning rather than longer and more detailed observations. In this approach, the viewer’s experience is a gestalt one and can be guided through a “propositional syntax of holistic logic” that would reinforce pre-existing tendencies to perceive visual elements as organised wholes (Barbatsis 2005, 307). Like meaning *potentials*, the composition of visual content can be organised in a gestalt fashion that both *proposes* and reinforces a holistic experience. It remains a potential that does not exclusively rely on the internal structure of the image. It is not a pre-given syntax, as is the case in structuralist models. In this respect, it is possible to identify different patterns of potential connectability between the different components of the image. Therefore, it should also be possible to identify units of analysis inside the visual content. In this vein, gestalt theory and SFL can converge to some extent. To find out how, let us briefly recap how O’Toole as well as Kress and van Leeuwen address the issues of visual segmentation and the unit of analysis in their models that I presented in this chapter. O’Toole’s model comprises five levels of units of analysis, from the broadest to the narrowest: the school/genre (outside the image itself), as well as the picture as a whole, the episode, the figure and the component. He insists on the importance of using units of analysis that allow us to address how viewers both perceive the image as a whole and simultaneously isolate single elements. As mentioned in Section

7.2.2, O'Toole's model consists of a double entry table, in which each of the five units of analysis is detailed for the three functions. By contrast, Kress and van Leeuwen's framework does not draw on a systematic articulation of units of analysis and functional patterns; they rather design their grammar of visual design around the functional patterns of narrative versus conceptual structures, interactivity, modality, information value, salience and framing. Instead of explicitly isolating units of analysis, they chose to use the broad concept of "represented participant" (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006, 47). Participants are not limited to human actors; objects, etc. can function as actors, too. Their further distinctions are not static and universal, as in O'Toole's model; they depend on their roles in the meaning potentials of the picture. At the representational level, narrative structures comprise an action that is visualised by a visible vector (as in diagrams) or an invisible one (as in images). In such structures, the "actors" are the participants from whom the vector departs, and to whom it moves. By contrast, in conceptual structures, the participants are "carriers" who possess "attributes." In the Monica meme for example (see Figure 7.1), Bill and Hillary Clinton, as well as their dog, are participants. Since the image comprises a narrative visual structure, they can be considered actors. However, in a conceptual family picture, these three participants would be carriers. If one were to use O'Toole's typology, they would be universally defined as figures and sub-defined as characters, independent of the meaning-making of the image. In the same vein, both "figures" and "members" can be actors, carriers or attributes in Kress and van Leeuwen's typology.

O'Toole's units of analysis rely on the (static) nature of the represented elements, while Kress and van Leeuwen's definition draws on their role in the meaning-making process. These two approaches are not mutually exclusive though. On the contrary, they can be combined by virtue of the two different views they offer on the segmentation of the image, that is, according to the nature of the represented elements or their meaning potentials. Going back and forth between these two levels of analysis allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the image. Furthermore, this combined approach also allows for more refined alternations between the analysis of the image as a whole and the isolation of its separate elements. Boeriis and Holsanova (2012) propose such a combination in distinguishing four levels of units of analysis: the whole, the group, the unit and the component (see Table 7.6 on page 143). These units only differ from O'Toole's suggestions at the "group" unit level, which replaces the "episode" unit.

In their model, Boeriis and Holsanova connect 14 SFL-based patterns with the unit(s) of analysis that they consider the most relevant for each of them. For example, the compositional pattern of "separation," defined as high distance between elements through empty or unused space, would typically combine figures into groups. Like O'Toole, they insist that visual segmentation is a dynamic experience that combines holistic and detailed perception. Interestingly, the two scholars empirically tested their model in

Table 7.6 Units of analysis in O'Toole's, Kress and van Leeuwen's and Boeriis and Hoslanova's frameworks

<i>O'Toole's units of analysis</i>	<i>Kress and van Leeuwen's units of analysis for the representational function</i>	<i>Boeriis and Hoslanova's units of analysis</i>
School/genre	N/A	N/A
Picture	N/A	Whole
Episode	Narrative or conceptual structures	Group
Figure	Actors in narrative structures, carriers or attributes in conceptual structures	Unit
Member		Component

Source: O'Toole 1990; Kress and van Leeuwen 2006; Boeriis and Holsanova 2012

an experiment that combines eye-tracking and verbal descriptions of the participants' interpretation process of one drawing. Although this research is limited by the low number of participants (i.e. five), their insights revealed some parallels between the patterns of connectability in the image and the informants' actual viewing experience, especially regarding the tendency to constantly zoom into and out of the visual content. Importantly, the two scholars emphasise how the constant interaction between image features and cognitive factors (e.g. viewers' goals, expectations and prior knowledge) during the interpretation process is still difficult to identify and determine. In some contexts, these two factors seem to converge. For example, during an eye-tracking experiment, Facebook users spent more time watching ads when they were visible in the newsfeed than when they were in the right zone of the Facebook home page (in computer layout). This can be explained by the salience of the ad (bigger size and centre positioning), as well as the users' knowledge that the newsfeed is the zone that contains the highest information density (Wang and Hung 2019). In other contexts, image features and cognitive factors competed with each other: in another experiment, readers of online newspapers were not attracted by advertisements despite their salience, because their prior knowledge about the low relevance of advertising contradicted salience (Holsanova, Rahm, and Holmqvist 2006).

Ultimately, since the eyes move from two to five times every second, the image on the retina is not fixed and is always in motion; what one perceives as fixed is only a temporary mental configuration created by the brain (Josephson 2005). In this perspective and in view of the existing models for analysing the image itself, combining broad and detailed static units of analysis with dynamic units that are based on culturally informed meaning-making processes seems the best way to address the vivid human viewing experience.

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8 Methodological standards for quantitative content analysis of social media posts

8.1 A rich variety of existing research designs

In this chapter and in Chapter 9, I turn to the research designs of studies in which visual citizenship on social media is examined and which meet four criteria. The first criterion concerns the empirical character of the studies: they must be based on a corpus of specific social media posts rather than propose general insights *in abstracto*. The second criterion concerns the context: as I have already argued, my approach addresses individual political views, not citizen movements and activist mobilisations. In the same vein, I do not cover the abundant research concerning online polarisation, populism, extremism, memetic warfare and the like, which are out of the scope of this book. Third, I have only included studies that rely on a methodology that is presented as reusable and replicable. This is not self-evident and often raises issues: in many research contributions, the concrete methods are only vaguely presented (partly due to the word limits of papers) and not explicitly disclosed with sufficient detail to allow for their replication. And “in the absence of replication efforts, one is left with unconfirmed (genuine) discoveries and unchallenged fallacies” (Ioannidis 2012, 645).

Fourth, also with a view to the transferability of research methods, I do not take into account studies which merely describe or paraphrase their corpus (see Chapter 6), without relying on methods or concepts. The research designs that I examine in this chapter are mostly manual methodologies, which are only occasionally combined with computer-based corpus linguistics.

While this overview is intended to be as encompassing as possible, it cannot be totally exhaustive, particularly with regard to the large body of studies on memes. That said, while these studies cover a multitude of subjects, most of them examine the same two main characteristics of memes, namely humour and intertextuality, as theorised in the first major publications on memes (i.e. Knobel and Lankshear 2007; Milner 2012; Shifman 2014). Table 8.1 on pages 148–149 lists the main features of the research designs used in the 26 selected scientific contributions, which provides a rich range of quantitative and qualitative methods.

Table 8.1 Overview of corpus-based studies of image-based social media posts

<i>Article</i>	<i>Objects of inquiry</i>	<i>Contexts</i>	<i>Methods</i>	<i>Rel. testing</i>	<i>Insights</i>	<i>Data</i>
Knobel and Lankshear (2007)	Main features of memes	No particular context	DA (discourse analysis)	N/A	Qual.	19 memes
Milner (2012)	Structures, social identities and political representations	No particular context	DA	N/A	Qual.	4890 memes collected on 4chan, Reddit, Tumblr, the Cheezburger Network, Canvas
Feltwell, Mahoney, and Lawson (2015)	Themes	2014 Scottish independence referendum	Thematic analysis	No	Quant.	684 Instagram posts
Howley (2016)	Ideology, intertextuality	“I have a drone” memes (2013)	DA, social semiotics	N/A	Qual.	6 “I have a drone” memes
Mahoney et al. (2016)	Themes	2014 Scottish independence referendum and 2015 UK General el.	CA (content analysis), thematic analysis	Yes	Qual.	881 Instagram posts
Bouko, Calabrese, and De Clercq (2017)	Topoi, narrative structures	post-2015 Charlie Hebdo attack	CA, DA	No	Quant., qual.	487 cartoons on Twitter + Google image
Grundlingh (2018)	Speech acts	No particular context	DA	N/A	Qual.	Memes (number and origin not mentioned)
Ross and Rivers (2017)	Deligitimisation strategies	2016 US presidential elections	DA	N/A	Qual.	26 memes collected from two meme websites
Bouko et al. (2018)	Connection to Brexit vote, valence, format and social relations	2016 Brexit referendum	CA	Yes	Quant.	5,877 Flickr posts
Bouko and Garcia (2018)	Topics and EU-related metaphors	2016 Brexit referendum	CA	Yes	Quant., qual.	5,405 Flickr posts
Caple (2018)	Affiliating and distancing patterns	2016 Australian Federal election	CA and corpus linguistics	No	Quant.	982 Instagram posts (6,299 for corpus linguistic analysis)
Ross and Rivers (2018)	Humour, delegitimation, intertextuality	2016 US presidential elections	DA	N/A	Qual.	40 memes collected from two meme websites and via Google search
Seiffert-Brockmann, Diehl, and Dobusch (2018)	Mutations of Obama Hope memes	Obama Hope Meme diffusion and mutation (2008–2015)	Thematic analysis	No	Qual.	394 items of the Obama Hope Meme, collected from Flickr

Bouko and Garcia (2019)	Connection to Brexit vote, valence, topics, format, social relations, subjectivity	2016 Brexit referendum	CA, DA	Yes	Quant., qual.	1,542 Twitter posts
Caple (2019)	Topics, actors, settings, affiliating and distancing patterns	2016 Australian Federal election	CA, DA, corpus linguistics	No	Quant., qual.	92 Instagram posts
Giaxoglou (2019)	Story frames	2015 death of refugee boy Alan Kurdi	CA	No	Quant.	230 Instagram posts
Ross and Rivers (2019)	Frames	Climate change debates	DA	N/A	Qual.	19 memes collected from two meme websites
Bouko and Garcia (2020)	Emotion, narrative versus conceptual representations, text-image relations	2016 Brexit referendum	CA	Yes	Quant.	173 Flickr posts
Kirner-Ludwig (2020)	References to US politicians, telecinematic and pop cultural components, intertextuality features	2020 US presidential campaigns	CA	No	Quant., qual.	495 memes collected via Google Image and from Reddit
Wiggins (2020)	Narrative devices	2018 Nike-Kaepernick controversy	Frame analysis	N/A	Qual.	Memes related to the N-K controversy (number: not mentioned)
de Saint Laurent, Glăveanu, and Literat (2021)	Persecutor, victim, hero and fool frames	COVID-19 pandemic (2020)	CA	No	Quant., qual.	241 coronavirus memes collected from Reddit
Marchal et al. (2021)	Format, mode, topics	2019 EU parliamentary election	CA	Yes	Quant.	1,097 images on Twitter
McLoughlin and Southern (2021)	Partisan leaning, topics	2017 UK General election	CA	Yes	Quant.	378 memes on Facebook
Murru and Vicari (2021)	Frames	COVID-19 first lockdown in Italy (2020)	Frame analysis	N/A	Qual.	9,548 COVID-19 memes on Twitter
Saji, Venkatesan, and Callender (2021)	COVID-19 metaphors	COVID-19 pandemic (2019–2020)	DA	N/A	Qual.	COVID-19 cartoons in traditional and on social media (number: not mentioned)
Butkowski (2022)	Displays of voting bodies and of relationality	2016 US presidential election day	CA	yes	Quant., qual.	2,000 “I voted” selfies on Twitter

DA = discourse analysis; CA = content analysis. Rel. testing = reliability testing, via intra- or inter-coder reliability; it only concerns quantitative analysis.

I will now present and discuss most of the quantitative methods with the aim of providing valid, concrete coding schemes, with regards to replicability, systematicity and reliability. This can only be achieved through a critical discussion of these research designs, and I adopt a self-correcting approach to science, in which concrete revisions or alternatives are suggested for specific methodological problems. Most of the research designs listed in Table 8.1 do not meet all the methodological requirements outlined in Chapter 6 and in this chapter. My own research is no exception, so I put my own house in order, too.

The scientific contributions in media studies are rarely truly comparable and compared; most of them rely on unique corpora and cannot be replicated, hence not improved or refuted if needed. Criticism is rarely formulated; researchers generally only refer to the sources that inspire them and that they consider valuable. Critical discussions are, however, essential for research to progress: “Errors are arguably required for scientific advancement: staying with the boundaries of established thinking and methods limits the advancement of knowledge” (Brown, Kaiser, and Allison 2018, 2563).

8.2 Data collection and selection

The datasets listed in Table 8.1 were collected from Flickr, Instagram, Reddit, Twitter and Tumblr as well as via the Cheezburger Network, 4chan, Canvas, meme websites and Google Images. I will now discuss to what extent the sampling methods for these datasets emphasise typical sampling issues found in manual social media content analyses.

Content analysis was created in the 1950s as a method for studying mass media communication, such as news articles, which were well archived and whose population (i.e. the numbers of study units) could be defined. By contrast, the population of social media content is unlimited, unknowable and unstable over time (Lacy et al. 2015). For example, in principle, the results of collecting newspaper articles for a specific period of time do not depend on the time of collection, whereas this time is decisive for social media posts, since they can be deleted at any time by their authors or by the platforms themselves, for example, when they violate community standards. This has major consequences:

The requirement that all units in a population have equal odds of being selected obviously becomes problematic if it is impossible to identify what constitutes a population. The representativeness of non-random samples, drawn from an unknowable universe, is pure conjecture. Tests of statistical significance with non-probability samples, while they may be calculated or computed, are of dubious value.

(Lacy et al. 2015, 793)

The first step to address these issues is, therefore, to contextualise the data collection by indicating not only the period of publication of the collected

social media posts but also the time of collection, which is more unusual in scientific contributions. For example, my research on citizenship on Twitter after the Brexit referendum only concerns tweets written in English between 24 June and 23 July 2016 but those were collected in January 2017 (Bouko and Garcia 2019). We proceeded in the following way to select the sample: we queried the advanced search function of Twitter to estimate the number of original tweets mentioning Brexit in the month following 23 June 2016, the date of the referendum. This resulted in a total of over three million publicly available tweets, a sample too large for manual annotation. To generate a reproducible sample of a fixed size, we used the tweet datasets curated by the Internet Archive. This sample is produced through the Twitter API, gathering approximately 1% of the tweets, as based on the millisecond number in which they were processed by Twitter. We filtered the 1% sample between 24 June and 23 July 2016 to select only tweets that contain “Brexit” or “#brexit” with or without capitals. Then we filtered out all tweets without visual content. From those, we derived a random sample of 10,000 tweets. We then removed the tweets that were not written in English. My corpus can be considered a probability sample, *but only* of the population of tweets containing “Brexit,” written in English and collected at a specific moment. In this respect, all the units in this specific population had equal odds of being selected in the sampling (provided Twitter gives them equal odds).

Ultimately, in the context of an ever-fluctuating social media population, scholars are recommended to elaborate and provide an explicit and finely contextualised protocol that describes the sampling procedure but that also addresses the research issues that these various filters entail (Lacy et al. 2015). These standards are not comparable to statistical standards, though. However, once any ambition to be representative of an unfiltered population is set aside, it is possible to get results that are not “pure conjecture” by explicitly explaining how they only concern a specific population. In that case, some statistical measures can be performed. In Section 8.3, I will discuss subsequent filters that allow us to contextualise a corpus to some extent.

8.3 Data contextualisation

The types of data vary among the research designs listed in Table 8.1: some research focuses on the visual content while other studies concern social media *posts* as a whole. The first type of data consists exclusively of visual content, which may contain embedded text, while the second type of content takes into account both the visual item and the text surrounding the image.

While including the surrounding text shows how the visual content is published in a specific post, analyses that are limited to visual content say nothing about how this content is shared online. For example, the way in which social media users appropriate (or not) memes or how they personalise their sharing of memes in personal text surrounding images is not the subject of such studies. This has significant consequences: ideally, the researcher will

consider the concrete uses of visual content in specific, contextualised social media posts, in line with recommendations of a maximum contextualisation of visual objects (see e.g. Rose 2016 and Chapter 6).

Of course, taking into account the social media post as a whole rather than solely its visual content is only a partial response to the context issue. Another partial response consists of identifying the types of authors, so as to remove posts written by collectives (public or private organisations, etc.) and to only consider posts published by individuals who express themselves as mere citizens and not as representatives of a group or institution. Three of the studies under scrutiny rely on such a procedure, based on various selection criteria. Caple (2018) removed Instagram posts written by the press, politicians and public-relation organisations from her corpus. In the same vein, I removed tweets written by profiles that we did not consider citizen-made and those written by bots (Bouko and Garcia 2019). Tweets from bots were likely to be present in the corpus of image-based tweets after the Brexit vote, since around 39,000 tweets were spread by Russian bots only the day after the vote (Lomas 2017). In order to eliminate bots from the corpus, we used the bot detection system Botometer, in addition to Twitter's own bot detection system. Botometer's algorithm generates three categories for the probability of bots: tweets that yield a score between 0% and 40% are considered having been posted by humans while tweets above 60% are regarded as coming from bots. The system comprises a grey zone, between 40% and 60%, where there is uncertainty about the classification. To avoid as many bots in the corpus as possible, I only selected tweets with a score between 0% and 40%. In doing so, I accepted that tweets from humans that yielded a score above 40% could be excluded from the corpus, but I chose to work on a corpus that was as bot-free as possible. Among the 6,612 tweets that we initially collected, 3,744 tweets were posted by an account that scored higher than 40% and 672 tweets came from accounts that no longer existed when we performed the bot detection (usually deleted bot accounts). After using the bot filter, the corpus shrank from 6,612 to 2,196 tweets. In a second step, I manually analysed each of the Twitter profiles that wrote these 2,196 tweets. Twitter users are not socio-demographically representative: "Twitter users tend to be highly motivated (with an axe to grind), younger than average (though not exclusively young) and are likely more often men when engaged in political debate. So any insights are partial" (Llewellyn and Cram 2016). However, I did not seek to be socio-demographically representative. Instead, I sought to identify Brexit-related reaction patterns among the citizens who express their opinions on Twitter by using the word "Brexit" in their tweets. Therefore, I limited myself to distinguish citizens' profiles from other types of profiles. To categorise profiles, Semertzidis, Pitoura, and Tsaparas (2013) analysed the most frequent keywords by relating them to categories (occupation, interests, etc.). I manually analysed the profiles with a view to drawing a distinction between tweets written by individuals and by collective, notably in examining the personal pronouns ("I" and "we" and their variations).

Among the tweets by individuals, I differentiated between tweets written by politicians, journalists and citizens who are not professionally involved in the EU referendum. In my research, a citizen's profile is considered an individual profile that does not mention any professional journalistic or political position. Of course, these criteria are not perfect, as Twitter users can express themselves in a professional capacity without their Twitter profile being a professional account, and vice versa. This is relatively unlikely but cannot be ruled out. Moreover, other professional categories could be excluded, such as public relations, as in Caple's (2018) study. However, the Brexit-related nature of this profession is more difficult to pinpoint and would require a highly contextualised, detailed analysis. Eliminating all profiles of individuals who work in the field of PR, without distinction, is therefore not ideal either. Ultimately, such contextualisation is necessary for my research question, but it undoubtedly raises issues regarding selection bias. Like for the other filters that I discussed in Section 8.2, this filter should be explicitly addressed in the detailed methodological protocol of any content analysis. In addition, to do this properly, the quality of this profile selection should also be evaluated by asking two coders to carry it out and then measuring the inter-coder reliability, as is done for the codings of other content categories (see Section 8.5).

I also carried out a profile analysis for my research on the Flickr dataset (Bouko et al. 2018). This social network is much less used for professional communication purposes than Twitter, but some (cultural) institutions nevertheless have a Flickr account through which they share visual content (Stuart 2019).

The third study under scrutiny in this chapter that includes profile selections concerns memes. The corpus was sorted based on the presence of watermarks, branding signs or brand stamps (McLoughlin and Southern 2021). The memes were considered citizen-created when such visible official markers of affiliation were absent from the memes.

8.4 The size of a valid sample

The size of the corpora analysed in the studies listed in Table 8.1 that deliver quantitative findings ranges from 92 to 5,877 occurrences (i.e. posts or visual content). Hardly any of these studies discusses the size of its corpus. Some authors sidestep this problem by claiming that the analyses are "qualitative," even if they (mostly) provide quantitative results (see Chapter 6). Only Butkowski (2022) addressed this issue: she determined the size of her sample of 2,000 tweets based on the sample size of existing social media content analyses. However, there is no scientific basis to regard the size of prior samples as relevant.

The lack of discussion of corpus size can be explained in different ways. One of the reasons may be that researchers who analyse visual aspects (of social media posts) generally come from disciplines such as linguistics and semiotics and are less familiar with statistical procedures, if at all. The good

news is that some statistical techniques are within reach of even those who are on bad terms with maths.

Unfortunately, there are no standards when it comes to the adequate size of non-probability samples, that is, when not all of the population is known. More is not always better; the sample size depends on the homogeneity of the population and the frequency of the variables: “when the units of text that would make a difference in answering the research question are rare, the sample size must be larger than in the case when such units are common” (Krippendorff 2013, 122). For example, if scholars seek to code categories that comprise rare variables, such as pictures of blooming flowers in a dataset related to winter, the sample will have to be higher than in a dataset related to spring. In this respect, Krippendorff provides Table 8.2, in which he determines the sizes of samples, depending on several parameters. The first parameter is the desired level of significance. The significance level of .05 in the fourth row refers to the commonly accepted confidence interval of 95% (in bold in Table 8.2). This means that there is (only) a 5% chance that a statistic’s value could be derived from a random error.

For instance, in order to have 95% certainty to have detected an event which occurs once in 1,000 cases (i.e. which has a probability of .001), the sample needs to be 2,995. For an event with a chance of 1 in 100, the sample size only needs to be 299 for the same 95% confidence, and 29 with a chance of 1 in 10. In other words, the more the dataset contains least likely units, the bigger the sample will have to be.

However, this table can only be indicative when samples are not probability samples, since we cannot calculate the actual probability of the distribution of the rarest occurrences in a population. Alternatively, Krippendorff outlines another method to evaluate the appropriateness of the sample size: the split-half technique. As its name suggests, researchers split their sample randomly into two parts of equal size. If the results from the two subsamples

Table 8.2 Sample size: least likely units and significance levels

	<i>Probability of least likely units in the population</i>					
		.1	.01	.001	.0001	.00001
Desired level of significance	.5	7	69	693	6,931	69,307
	.2	16	161	1,609	16,094	160,942
	.1	22	230	2,302	23,025	230,256
	.05	29	299	2,995	29,955	299,563
	.02	37	390	3,911	39,118	391,198
	.01	44	459	4,603	46,049	460,512
	.005	51	528	5,296	52,980	529,823
	.002	59	619	6,212	62,143	612,453
	.001	66	689	6,905	60,074	690,767

Source: Krippendorff (2013, 123)

do not exhibit significant differences, the size of the whole sample can be considered adequate. If the differences are significant, the size of the sample must be increased. This technique is an *a posteriori* technique, in the sense that it delivers insights about the size of the sample only *after* the research has been conducted, since it relies on results. In addition, it is important to note that the split-half technique does not deliver any insights regarding the representativeness of a sample; it only allows us to evaluate its reliability based on internal consistency.

Krippendorff recommends a split-half technique but does not specify which concrete statistical method(s) should be used. The Chi-Square test (or χ^2) appears as a possibility, for categorical data. Let us first outline the differences between categorical and numerical data. Nominal and ordinal data are the two main types of categorical data. Nominal data refer to items with no numeric value. They are distinguished by a naming system. The data is not ordered in comparison with other numbered items. For example, the variable “connection to Brexit,” which I will discuss in Section 8.6, provides nominal data: the three possibilities (i.e. no connection, indirect connection and direct connection) do not refer to quantities: I coded the *nature* of the connection. The three types of connection are mutually exclusive; the connection is absent, indirect or direct. Nominal variables can be coded with numbers, but the order is arbitrary and arithmetic operations cannot be performed on these numbers. I attributed one figure (0, 1, 2) per type of connection when I coded each social media post but these numbers have no significance in themselves. Ordinal data consist of elements that are ranked, ordered or that rely on a rating scale. For example, Casas and Williams (2019, see Chapter 6) coded emotion in images based on a 10 point Likert scale, with which the coders evaluated to what extent specific emotions were evoked by images. One can count and order ordinal data but, like nominal data, they are only the numerical translations of textual values. Ordinal data were very rare in my general review of the literature and none of the categories I suggest in Section 8.6 rely on ordinal data. Unlike categorical data, numerical data consist of quantities. These can be measured, since they entail numbers of measurement rather than natural language descriptions that were coded in numbers for practical purposes. For example, the variable “number of likes per post” is a numerical variable, and means and standard deviations can be calculated for it.

Importantly, using the Chi-Square test is inappropriate if any frequency is below 1 or if the expected frequency is less than 5 in more than 20% of the values. This means that the Chi-Square test is not appropriate for corpora which are very small or in which 20% of the values occur very rarely (i.e. less than five times).

Let us now illustrate the Chi-Square test by applying it to the variable “connection to Brexit.” In order to measure internal consistency, I first randomly split the corpus into two. The Chi-Square test can also be used when the corpus is split into more than two subgroups.

Table 8.3 Split-half technique to measure the internal consistency of results with a Chi-Square test

<i>Types of connection with Brexit</i>	<i>Whole corpus (N = 1542)</i>	<i>Half corpus 1 (N = 771)</i>	<i>Half corpus 2 (N = 771)</i>
Direct connection	1350	668	682
Indirect connection	162	87	75
No connection	30	16	14

After randomly splitting the corpus, the second and last step consists in entering the respective results for half corpus 1 and half corpus 2 into a Chi-Square test calculator (e.g. www.quantpsy.org/chisq/chisq.htm). I obtained the following results: p -value = 0.558; Chi-Square = 1.167; degree of freedom = 2. The degree of freedom corresponds to the number of values minus 1. In my example, three values are possible (direct, indirect, no connection). Accordingly, the degree of freedom is 2. It is the p -value that is the most insightful: the smaller the p -value, the stronger the evidence is to reject the null hypothesis, which in this case states that there is no significant difference between the two subcorpora (i.e. the observed differences are only due to chance). A p -value lower than 0.05 is considered statistically significant; a p -value higher than 0.05 is not statistically significant and indicates that the null hypothesis cannot be rejected. Therefore, the p -value of 0.636 suggests the latter: there is no significant difference between the results for the two subgroups. The corpus can thus be considered internally consistent.

Another method for nominal data is to bootstrap the results. In two words, bootstrapping generates multiple samples by random sampling *with replacements*: any item that is drawn from the pool to create a sample is not removed from the pool that will be used to create the subsequent sample and so on. By using this method, every item is equally likely to be included in each sample (Bouko and Garcia 2020). However, bootstrapping is very time-consuming and requires much more knowledge in data science and statistics than the Chi-Square test.

8.5 Intercoder and intracoder reliability and the size of the testing sample

Inter- and intracoder reliability concern two different levels of testing coding consistency: the consistency of the coding between two or more coders is expressed as intercoder reliability, whereas the consistency of one coder across time is captured by intracoder reliability. The first one allows us to measure the reliability of the categories and the second one grants insights into the individual coders' performance. For Lacy et al. (2015), the minimal standard is to evaluate intercoder reliability for any study, and intracoder reliability when the coding period is extended. Intercoder reliability is

addressed in most (but not all) content analyses; intracoder reliability is never addressed. Some of the studies I discuss in this chapter seem to rely on only one coder's single coding, which is highly problematic. In my Brexit-related papers, I addressed this issue in two ways: the reliability of our coding for the first paper draws on intercoder agreements based on a sample of the corpus of Flickr posts (Bouko et al. 2018). For the subsequent research regarding tweets, I did not evaluate intercoder agreement again, but I measured intracoder agreement instead by coding all the study units of the corpus (rather than a sample) twice, with an interval of one month (Bouko and Garcia 2019).

Several commonly used statistical coefficients allow us to calculate reliability: Scott's pi, Cohen's kappa, Krippendorff's alpha and Gwet's AC₁. They can be applied to both intra- and intercoder reliability. All of them have pros and cons, depending on the research fields and questions (see Lacy et al. 2015 for a discussion). Cohen's kappa and Krippendorff's alpha are particularly popular among media studies; Gwet's AC₁ was initially elaborated and might be more appropriate for health research but is also sometimes used in social media research (e.g. in Frischlich 2020).

Cohen's and Krippendorff's values are interpreted on a five-point scale (Landis and Koch 1977):

- 0.01–0.20 slight agreement
- 0.21–0.40 fair agreement
- 0.41–0.60 moderate agreement
- 0.61–0.80 substantial agreement
- 0.81–1.00 almost perfect or perfect agreement

The value .80 is considered as the threshold coefficient, unless the research design is truly exploratory and therefore does not rely on previous protocols and methodological insights (Lacy et al. 2015). The variables that reach an intercoder agreement below .70 are considered statistically weak and should be dropped from a study. Krippendorff is a bit more generous insofar as he considers that the threshold level for exploratory research designs is .667, provided that authors will only be “drawing tentative conclusions” (Krippendorff 2013, 325).

I have already discussed the size of the sample for the whole study in Section 8.4. Let us now discuss how to determine the size of the sample for the double coding, in case the entire dataset is not coded twice. Unlike Cohen's kappa, Krippendorff's reliability coefficient is computed based on the proportions of each category in the testing sample; it takes both coders together and corrects for small samples (Krippendorff 2013).

Ten percent of the complete dataset is an often-found benchmark for testing categories. Indeed, some scholars advise testing samples that range between 10% and 25% of the corpus (Wimmer and Dominick 2010); others consider that these subsamples should be no fewer than 50 items or less than

Table 8.4 Krippendorff's required numbers of values for testing samples

Krippendorff's required numbers of values for testing samples													
<i>K</i> 's α	.667				.800				.900				
<i>p</i> :	.100	.050	.010	.005	.100	.050	.010	.005	.100	.050	.010	.005	
<i>P</i> values													
.500	2	36	60	119	146	62	103	206	252	128	211	422	518
.333	3	41	67	135	165	71	116	233	285	144	238	477	584
.250	4	49	81	161	198	84	139	277	340	172	283	566	694
.200	5	58	95	190	233	99	163	326	400	202	332	667	815
.167	6	67	110	220	270	114	189	377	462	233	384	768	941
.143	7	76	125	251	307	130	214	429	526	265	436	872	1069
.125	8	85	141	281	345	146	241	481	590	297	489	980	1198
.111	9	95	156	312	383	162	262	534	654	329	542	1083	1328
.100	10	104	172	344	421	178	293	587	719	361	595	1190	1459
.050	20	200	329	657	806	340	960	1119	1372	657	1131	2263	2775
.020	50	487	802	1604	1966	825	1360	2719	3334	1675	2759	5534	6765
.010	100	966	1591	3182	3901	1640	2701	5403	6624	3307	5447	10896	13359

Source: Krippendorff (2013, 323)

10% of the corpus (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, and Bracken 2010). However, such standards are often established haphazardly or by convenience and are not statistically grounded (Lacy and Riffe 1996).

Krippendorff provides a table of recommended numbers of values for testing samples (see Table 8.4). Let us take a concrete situation to explain his recommendations: two coders (or one coder twice) seek to code whether an image provides information or not. In such yes–no cases, the coders have the choice between two coding options (i.e. yes or no, two values in Table 8.4). They decide to select the significance level of .050 and Krippendorff's α of .800, since they are common statistical benchmarks. As you can see in Table 8.4, these three criteria entail that the coding should deliver about 103 values (in bold in the table). In the case of two coders, that means that they both code 52 items, for a total of 104. If three coders code, this amount decreases to 35 items (i.e. 103 divided by the number of coders). This is theory. Things are a little bit more complicated in reality, for the reason that these figures are based on the theoretical assumption that the two coding options (i.e. the values of yes or no) are equally distributed, that is, that 26 units would be coded as “yes” and the other 26 as “no” (probability (p) = .500 in Table 8.4). However, theoretical probability is rarely met in reality; there is no reason that a “yes–no” pattern would deliver 50–50 results. Consequently, the number of 103 will probably need to be adapted, depending on the distribution of the values in the actual coding. If the yes–no distribution turns out to be 25%–75% in reality instead of 50%–50% in theory, the probability p shifts to .250 and the size of the testing sample should therefore

reach 139 values, that is 70 units coded by the two observers. If it is rather a 10%–90% proportion ($p = .100$), the testing sample will comprise 293 values, etc.

Since it is only possible to compare the theoretical and actual proportions once the coding has been performed, Krippendorff proposes to start with the theoretical assumption that the frequency of all values is equal. Therefore, for an example of the “yes–no” variable, the researchers should try using 103 values. If the actual probability of the least frequent value is .250 (i.e. 1 “yes” for 3 “no”), they should add the 36 units that are missing to reach the adequate sample size of values to be 139. This means that determining the actual size of the testing sample is a two-step process.

Its size also depends of the number of the coding options. If two researchers have to choose between eight visual genres ($p = .125$), the initial size is 241 values, that is, 120 per coder. Consequently, since the size of the testing samples is different for each number of coding options, the researchers should use different sizes of testing samples. Alternatively and more conveniently, they should determine the size of their single testing sample based on the highest number of possible coding options. In other words, if their categories comprise a yes–no possibility (i.e. two options) as well as a category including ten coding options ($p = .100$), the initial testing sample could be 293 in both cases.

Krippendorff’s numbers for an adequate testing sample demonstrate that there is no set and universal answer in terms of size, but only contextualised answers that depend on several parameters. They also emphasise that the size of the testing sample does not depend on the size of the whole dataset, which is, in fact, wrongly assumed in much of the research.

Importantly, one should bear in mind that these statistics to estimate the size of the testing sample and to measure reliability draw on the assumption that all the relevant variables and potential values are included in the code book. Evaluating categories on a testing sample allows us not only to assess their quality but also to ensure that they are exhaustive. Since content analysis is a deductive method, it is based on a code book that is in place before the analysis of the corpus. Admittedly, deduction based on prior research and categories does not stimulate innovation. Researchers in content analysis inductively find out and refine categories, but this takes place during a pilot coding, *before* the coding scheme is finalised (Neuendorf 2017). Prior analysis of a testing sample makes it possible to revise the categories, if necessary, before the analysis of the whole corpus. Therefore, the testing sample should be as varied as possible, in order to consider not only the least likely values, as I have discussed earlier, but also potential values that have not been discovered yet. In the context of her analysis of Twitter data, Marwick (2014, 118) claimed that “it is inevitable that the codebook will change throughout the coding process.” This is highly problematic. As a matter of fact, each time the code book changes during coding, the coding of the variable in question

must be set back to zero, for all the study units, otherwise they are not coded in a stable, consistent and reliable manner. Having these standards in mind, I will discuss concrete coding schemes and categories for visual content analysis in the next chapter.

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9 Categories for visual content analysis

After addressing the issue of data collection, contextualisation and size in Chapter 8, I now propose a set of coding categories that is structured around the SFL-inspired representational, interpersonal and compositional functions of image-based content (see an overview of these functions in Chapter 7). This set can be used for a large variety of contexts and research questions.

To recap, the representational function concerns the way any aspect of life is represented in (multimodal) discourse. In the interpersonal function, the discourse is considered an *exchange* that serves to express not only the social relations between the participants to the interaction but also how viewers are positioned in the discourse. Lastly, the compositional function concerns the internal organisation of the signs in terms of coherence, continuity and flow.

As I will outline here, the more the categorisations draw on manifest content, the better it is for the analyst, since this enables observation rather than inference, which is more subjective. Importantly, one should always keep in mind that the *observed* or *inferred* content only concerns what the *coders* were able to observe or infer. That means that their observations or inferences do not systematically converge with those of the user who created the social media post under study, or with those of the target audience for the post. Content analysis, like discourse analysis of (social media) content, does not give access to people's views and attitudes; they only allow consideration of the *traces* of content and discourse that can be analysed in order to try to capture people's accounts of the world. This issue especially concerns inference, and observation only to a much lesser extent, even though observation is never fully identical among people, including coders. Let us start with four categories that fall within the representational function.

9.1 Representational variables: connection with the research question, standard and specific topics, frames

9.1.1 Preliminary variable: the connection with the research question

Corpora of social media posts usually include “noise,” generated by fake profiles or by trolling practices (see Section 8.3). Noise can also come from

study units that have no observed or inferred relation to the topic of the analysis, even if they include one or several of the search words that were selected for data collection. Therefore, a preliminary categorisation is necessary to remove this type of noise. In the case of my research on citizens' reactions post-Brexit, I sought to consider social media posts which were Brexit-related and to exclude unrelated noise. This noise is partly due to the affordances of each social media platform. For example, unlike hashtagging on Twitter, Flickr members can add up to 75 tags. Tags may be unduly applied to content, hence even if posts are filtered on tags, the latter does not guarantee an obvious connection to – in this case – Brexit. While this is true for any hashtag on any social platform, it is a particular issue on Flickr and its tagging system with up to 75 tags. Therefore, I started the content analysis by coding all study units on the basis of the variable “connection to Brexit.” This variable is a latent variable; “connection” is an abstract concept that can be inferred more than observed. I drew the distinction between “no connection,” “indirect connection” and “direct connection,” in image and/or text, and I associated these three latent characteristics with concrete, manifest indicators that can be observed in the social media posts. Thus, the social media posts were coded as with “indirect connection” with Brexit when the word “Brexit” is only used as either a temporal or spatial *contextualisation* of an event that is not Brexit-related. It is mostly used as a *substitution* for terms like “London,” for example when people share their experience of their “Brexit stay,” which refers to a trip to the capital of the UK that coincided with the referendum. The same holds true for a post comprising a picture of “Brexit bikes,” which are merely public bikes in London. In such cases, the topic of the post is not Brexit in its own right; in my example, it is a tourist trip in London. Social media posts with no connection to Brexit are those without any substitution of terms, spatio-temporal indications or figurative association. Such study units generally only contain one image and hashtags with no apparent relation between the two and no other types of text. For example, a Flickr post including a picture of the Rocky Mountains in the USA coupled with the “Brexit” tag and no other words was regarded as having no connection to Brexit. There might be a connection in the author's mind, but it could not be observed or inferred by coders, and probably not by other Flickr users either. Finding potential associations between Brexit and the Rocky Mountains would be pure speculation. Lastly, the social media posts with a direct connection to Brexit comprise Brexit as an event and topic in its own right, and not as a mere contextual indication or substitution. This coding is defined both by the affirmative (i.e. Brexit as a topic) as well as by the negative, that is, by what it is not: no substitution and no spatio-temporal contextualisation. Importantly, the nature of the connection does not depend on whether Brexit is the *main* topic of the post or not; it can be a secondary topic. As I will argue later, manually determining the main topic among several ones is far from self-evident and frequently raises methodological issues.

9.1.2 Standard variables: standard topics

Topic analysis is extremely common in content analysis. In order to optimise the replicability of one's research design, it is recommended to use standardised topic taxonomies. I have listed the 17 topics and their definitions as elaborated by the International Press Telecommunications Council (IPTC 2022) in Table 9.1. I added the category "other" to guarantee that the list is truly exhaustive. This taxonomy and the related words and phrases are also available in ten languages other than English.

Lists of terms such as those provided by IPTC are used in corpus linguistics to determine the topics of textual content. While corpus linguistics can certainly provide interesting insights, I do not use for the reasons that it does not, of course, allow for the topic of a social media post to be determined via its visual content and it requires expertise in topic modelling that is beyond the scope of this book. Rather than using such lists deductively as in corpus linguistics, I opted for an inductive method. This consists of identifying one or more specific words, and/or specific visual content, which can be associated with a specific sub-topic and which itself indicates a broader topic. These specific words or visual content features serve as *indicators*: they concretely indicate the presence of a specific topic, which is, in turn, related to one of the 17 general topics proposed by the IPTC. For example, in Figure 9.1, the term "Boris" explicitly refers to Boris Johnson, one of the UK's leading pro-Brexit political figures, and indicates that the topic of this post is politics. The picture of the finger grass also refers to Boris Johnson and his easily recognisable haircut.

The more latent the variable and the more inference it entails, the more important it is to identify a specific element in the visual or linguistic content. In short, it should always be possible to associate concrete and manifest content with the coding, whether it be based on observation or inference. This is particularly important since, as I have explained in Chapter 6, the dividing line between the manifest and the latent, between the observed and the inferred, is sometimes fluid. I will discuss this regarding appraisal in Chapter 10. This guideline is probably self-evident to experienced coders, but many scholars do not specify in their coding designs on what kind of concrete content their observation or inference is based. While this issue can partly be explained by the word limit in papers, it nevertheless constitutes an obstacle for the replicability and comparability of research. In this respect, the systematic publication of the coding scheme would be more than welcome.

Going back to the topics in Table 9.1 on page 166, these are not mutually exclusive. They all constitute different variables and must be coded separately, each time identifying concrete content that justifies the coding. Since they are not mutually exclusive, the reliability of the coding should be measured for each topic separately through separate reliability calculations. Most lists of standard topics include a taxonomy of subtopics. For example, the

Table 9.1 Taxonomy of media topics elaborated by the International Press Telecommunications Council, version as of February 2022

<i>Name of the topics</i>	<i>Definition of the topics</i>
Arts, culture, entertainment and media	All forms of arts, entertainment, cultural heritage and media
Conflict, war and peace	Acts of socially or politically motivated protest or violence, military activities, geopolitical conflicts, as well as resolution efforts
Crime, law and justice	The establishment and/or statement of the rules of behaviour in society, the enforcement of these rules, breaches of the rules, the punishment of offenders and the organisations and bodies involved in these activities
Disaster, accident and emergency incident	Man-made or natural event resulting in loss of life or injury to living creatures and/or damage to inanimate objects or property
Economy, business and finance	All matters concerning the planning, production and exchange of wealth.
Education	All aspects of furthering knowledge, formally or informally
Environment	All aspects of protection, damage, and condition of the ecosystem of the planet Earth and its surroundings
Health	All aspects pertaining to the physical and mental welfare of living beings
Human interest	Item that discusses individuals, groups, animals, plants or other objects in an emotional way
Labour	Social aspects, organisations, rules and conditions affecting the employment of human effort for the generation of wealth or provision of services and the economic support of the unemployed
Lifestyle and leisure	Activities undertaken for pleasure, relaxation or recreation outside paid employment, including eating and travel
Politics	Local, regional, national and international exercise of power, or struggle for power, and the relationships between governing bodies and states
Religion	Belief systems, institutions and people who provide moral guidance to followers
Science and technology	All aspects pertaining to human understanding of, as well as methodical study and research of natural, formal and social sciences, such as astronomy, linguistics or economics
Society	The concerns, issues, affairs and institutions relevant to human social interactions, problems and welfare, such as poverty, human rights and family planning
Sport	Competitive activity or skill that involves physical and/or mental effort and organisations and bodies involved in these activities
Weather	The study, prediction and reporting of meteorological phenomena
Other	

Source: IPTC (2022)

Quick! Bring a shovel.
I've found where Boris is hiding!
[#Brexit](#)



2:59 AM - 27 Jun 2016

Figure 9.1 “Quick! Bring a shovel . . .” tweet

Source: Posted in the post-Brexit referendum context in 2016

broad topic of politics in the IPTC list divided into 28 subtopics, 11 of which can be further subdivided.¹

9.1.3 Contextualised variables: specific genres and topics

Unlike standard topics, specific genres and topics are contextual, depending on the data context and the research questions. Marchal and colleagues (2021) provide a taxonomy of ten categories of “visual modes.” While they used it for their Twitter analysis in the context of the 2019 EU parliamentary election campaign, these categories can be applied to any electoral process. Instead of “mode,” I will talk about “visual genres,” since “mode” has a broader meaning in multimodal theory, denoting socially shaped systems of representation (e.g. still and moving images, gesture, writing, music). They have relatively stable rules and regularities, although they evolve across time and space. One or several modes can be implemented in a medium (e.g. in a movie). According to the socio-cultural context and the communication purposes, such implementations can lead to the creation of genres. Genres are “configurations of semiotic choices unfolding as patterns of meaning in communicative objects and events which are particular to communities and

cultures” (Jewitt 2017b, 461). Perspective painting or photograph are established genres in Western cultures, for example. In short, following Bateman, “genre is a means to understand the link between social context and a meaning system” (Jewitt 2017a; see Bateman 2008). Marchal et al.’s ten categories are listed in Table 9.2. As I will outline here, I slightly modified or suggested revisions to some of them: some categories or words are deleted; additions are in bold.

These eight values are mutually exclusive. Marchal et al.’s Krippendorff’s alpha ($K's \alpha$) was .865, which indicates a good level of inter-coder agreement.

Marchal and colleagues did not specifically analyse citizens’ tweets, so their corpus, research questions and taxonomy are not specific to citizens’ expression

Table 9.2 Marchal et al.’s adapted categories of visual genres

<i>Type of visual genres</i>	<i>Description of each visual genre</i>
Official campaign communication	Official campaign material, including political party programmes, leaflet and event advertisements, and any communications from official candidate and party accounts.
Campaign event	Images of campaign events, including pictures of rallies, candidate appearances on TV, and photo ops.
Citizens’ political activism activity	Images of private citizens engaging in political activities, such as amateur, private photographs taken at demonstrations, and individual expressions of support for political causes and actors .
Evaluative political content	Political actors, decisions and/or events evaluated in memes, political cartoons, caricatures, satire, and other forms of evaluation.
Political humour	Memes, humorous cartoons, satire, and other forms of humour directed at or derived from actors involved in the political process.
News media reporting	Images of news media reports, such as newspaper articles, but excluding including composites of multiple media sources.
Non-party and satellite campaigning	Campaigning material generated by non-party actors, such as satellite groups, registered campaigners and other democratic intermediaries. This includes event announcements, unofficial campaign material, and get-out-the-vote initiatives.
Voting day	Visuals of the vote, such as pictures of ballot cards, and citizens or politicians engaging in the act of voting.
Other political	Other images of political nature that do not specifically relate to the campaign.
Miscellaneous/spam	Images unrelated to politics.
Event-related symbols and tropes	Symbols and tropes that are directly related to the event or that are more universal symbols applied to a specific context.

Source: Marchal et al. (2021, 163)

on social media. Only the category “citizens’ political activism” is specific to citizens, yet it is limited to the most active forms of political engagement.

Three of the categories raise some questions. First, in news media reporting, Marchal et al. exclude composites of multiple media sources. Unfortunately, they do not explain why since there is no apparent reason why such composites do not relate to news reporting. Furthermore, there is no other potentially relevant category for such visual items. Second, the category “humorous content,” which includes political cartoons, memes, satire, etc., seems to draw on the assumption that all these types of visual content are humorous. Yet many of them are not (see Section 9.2). Moreover, humour is a rhetoric device for framing content; it does not constitute the visual content as such. It is, therefore, better to define the value based on characteristics that apply to all the items that fall under this value. In the present case, it is not humour that is the smallest common denominator. The value “evaluative political content,” however, is a characteristic that does fulfil this condition. Prior research has already underscored the evaluative nature of political cartoons (e.g. Swain 2012). The general knowledge English-language encyclopaedia *Britannica* also draws on the genre’s evaluative nature when it defines a political cartoon as “a drawing (often including caricature) made for the purpose of conveying editorial commentary on politics, politicians, and current events” (Knieper n.d.). This definition primarily concerns professional political cartoons, also known as editorial cartoons. However, it is not strictly limited to such drawings and is also appropriate for other types of visual content that fall under this value (memes, etc.). Not all of them are humorous, but they all express an evaluation of political actors, decisions or events.

Third, the category “voting day” concerns photographs of political actors or voters engaged in voting, including ballot selfies. It raises issues since it concerns the *represented* content (citizens or political actors in the polling station, etc.) rather than a type of genre. The same goes for “campaign event,” which I removed, too. This stresses the importance of distinguishing between what is represented in the image versus what visual means is used to represent that content. As a matter of fact, “voting day” can be subsumed under the genre categories of news media reporting, campaign event or citizen political activity. Given Marchal et al.’s (2021) research questions, it is logical that they did not analyse the last two categories in more detail, namely “other political” and “miscellaneous/spam.” Nevertheless, these last two variables are interesting for the study of citizens’ expression in other research, since citizens can associate their points of view with political visual content, but also with content unrelated to politics (see Chapter 11). Therefore, I added the variable “symbols and tropes” which comprises both specifically event-related and universal content. In the Brexit vote for example, the EU flag losing one star is specific and event-related while symbolic visuals of hearts, tears, sunrise and the like are more universal and not specific to the event in question.

In contrast to typologies like Marchal et al.’s (2021) that focus on visual genres, Mahoney et al.’s (2016) categorisation is meant to code *themes*. There

is no clear agreement about what thematic analysis is and how it should be performed; rather, themes seem mostly to be considered broadly, as “patterns within data” (Braun and Clarke 2006, 7). In Braun and Clarke’s paper for example, the terms “patterns” and “themes” are used as synonyms. This broad definition of themes entails that themes can be found in visual genres, topics or represented content. Consequently, themes and topics are not synonymous. Mahoney et al.’s typology concerns the represented content within the image.

Table 9.3 Mahoney et al.’s adapted code hierarchy of themes

<i>Second-order themes</i>	<i>First-order themes</i>	<i>Description of the first-order themes</i>
Political expression	Personal political expression	Reacting to something, selfie with political affiliation, badges on clothing, encouragement to vote, question to candidate, musician with affiliation, selfie with politician, voting intention , children or pets with affiliation
	Creation and showcasing	Defacement, yes and no signs, graffiti, quotes, memes, cartoons, satire, manipulated images
	Voting visibility	Voting intention, postal voting, dogs at polling stations, poll card selfie, polling station selfie, “I voted” statements, personal poll cards & ballot papers
Symbolism	National identity	National symbols, for example, flags
	Historic references	Nostalgia, suffragette movement
Egocentrism	Co-opted symbolism	Appropriated from film and TV, celebrity or famous figure
	Presentation of one’s environment	Animals, life scenes, city and countryside scenes
	Presentation of self	Profile image, selfie, social media and communication (but no selfies that fall within political expression)
Documenting the process	Political parties and movements	Political event, campaign materials, political party symbols and slogans, public demonstrations and events, politicians, parties’ views and policies, representation of politics and power, other independence movements
	Personal reportage The voting process in its own right	Postal voting, dogs at polling stations, behind the scenes, maps, political stations, vote counting, poll card selfie, polling station selfie, “I voted” statements, media coverage, impersonal poll cards & ballot papers

Source: Mahoney et al. (2016, 3344)

I suggest some adaptations, again through additions in bold and deletions. First, it is important to note that the themes “symbolism” and “egocentrism” are second-order themes of observed visual content, while the themes “political expression” and “documenting the process” are second-order themes that are *inferred* from the first-order themes. With these last two themes, Mahoney et al. assume specific intentions in the social media user’s mind. Nevertheless, it is problematic to assume that some visual content, such as dogs at polling stations, is meant to document the process instead of expressing political views about voting, especially without considering the surrounding text in the social media post. Consequently, I added the first-order theme “voting visibility” under the second-order theme “political expression.” In doing so, I address several types of visual content as expression that are considered documentation by Mahoney et al. Undoubtedly, visual content containing postal voting or dogs and selfies at polling stations can also be shared to document the process. However, making visible one’s intention or action to vote is undeniably part of the connective actions that help promote voting, even very indirectly, especially when voting is not mandatory. In contexts where voting is compulsory, making one’s vote visible can be a promotion of the act of voting, a mere response to an obligation or a criticism of this obligation. Visual content alone rarely distinguishes between enthusiastic and unwilling voting. Considering the surrounding text can refine the analysis. Conversely, indicating that one does not vote is also a political expression. In any case, by posting such social media posts, their creators may be documenting the voting process but are undeniably expressing their views on whether to vote or not. Ultimately, I suggest limiting the analysis to the observation of manifest content, namely voting visibility, and to potentially infer the social media users’ intentions at a subsequent stage, and through including the surrounding text. Importantly, since the four second-order themes are not mutually exclusive, I suggest avoiding coding “the primary focus of the image, as judged by each researcher” (Mahoney et al. 2016, 3343). This is because judging can be highly subjective and determining one primary focus is not always possible nor relevant.

Lastly, Mahoney et al.’s code hierarchy is the result of a bottom-up mapping of themes in Instagram posts shared in the context of two specific political events (the 2014 Scottish independence referendum and the 2015 UK general election). For the sake of standardisation in future applications, some of their types of visual content, such as “musician with affiliation” or “suffragette movement” might be extended to be less specific and include other similar visual items. Furthermore, “nostalgia” is a feeling that can go with a historic reference, not something that is referred to.

Having looked at Marchal et al.’s typology of visual genres and Mahoney et al.’s of themes, let us now discuss how McLoughlin and Southern (2021) designed a campaign-related typology of *topics* in political memes. The difference between genre, theme and topic is subtle but significant. Marchal et al. *observe* what the visual genre in the image consists of and Mahoney et al.’s first-order themes relate to the content that is represented in the image,

whereas McLoughlin and Southern rather *infer* what the meme is *about*, from the visual content and the text embedded in memes. Here, the manifest content from which the topic variables are inferred is fairly close to manifest variables and observation processes.

Their topics are structured into six variables, which I slightly adapted here, again with additions in bold and with deletions:

- Particular person or people
- **Political input: proposals, arguments, claims, decisions and political actors' reactions to them** (~~policies announced by political parties~~)
- Particular **political** events (**professional or amateur**)
- Particular **unpolitical** events (**professional or amateur**)
- The unfolding process of the campaign (only applicable in a campaign-related context)
- Politics in general
- Other

The authors also coded political leaning and indicated that all their Krippendorff's alphas were above .80, but without giving any more details.

Their classification concerns memes but can be applied to social media posts as well. It is broad and includes politics in general, rather than only referring to election campaigns. This typology is well suited for analysing how politics in general is discussed on social media. For more specific and context-based research questions, however, more detailed taxonomies are necessary. Besides these general remarks, I also suggest some slight adaptations. I define political events as events which involve political actors, such as political debates or other political activities, as well as citizens' events and activities, such as demonstrations. These types of political events can also be split into two distinct variables where relevant: professional or amateur. Furthermore, I specified the variable "particular events" by adding their political nature and by creating a separate variable for unpolitical ones. In addition, the variable "policies" seems very specific and might be extended to include any political input, namely political proposals, arguments, claims, decisions, as well as political actors' reactions to such input.

Lastly, one should keep in mind that these variables are not mutually exclusive since one social media posts can comprise several topics. These variables rely on the aspects *who* (variable 1), *what* (variable 2) and *where/when* (variable 3, spatio-temporal setting), which can be combined. Like Mahoney et al. (2016), McLoughlin and Southern (2021) addressed this issue in judging what the "primary focus of the meme" was, which I do not recommend. Instead, I prefer to code the presence of all the relevant variables separately, through "yes-no" patterns.

The combination of several topics is a particularly important issue insofar as memes are mostly based on incongruous associations between two ideas (see Chapter 7). In Figure 9.2, the creator of the meme compared Brexit with



Figure 9.2 “Brexit is like . . .” meme

the singer Geri Halliwell’s decision to leave the British band The Spice Girls that was popular in the 1990s.

This meme contains two types of content, namely a portrait of Halliwell and the embedded sentence comparing Brexit to her. This is manifest content. Following Marchal et al.’s typology, the visual genre of memes falls within the value “evaluative political content” but the topic of the meme, namely the Brexit vote, can be coded as “political input” following’s McLoughlin and Southern’s adapted typology. These two codings are not mutually exclusive since they rely on two different levels of coding. This example highlights how important it is to distinguish between the visual genre and the topic of any visual content. Nevertheless, some coders might consider coding this meme under McLoughlin and Southern’s value “other,” if they consider that the singer is also a topic here. I argue against coding it in this way since Geri Halliwell is not a *topic* in this meme. I claim this based on the metaphorical

construction of this meme, in which one of Halliwell’s characteristic (i.e. her optimism regarding a solo career) is transferred to the Brexit decision. In metaphor terminology, Halliwell’s optimism is the *source domain* and the Brexit decision is the *target domain* (e.g. Forceville 2002). Put differently, the target domain is the “topic” and the source domain is the “phenomenon the target is compared to” (Forceville and Van De Laar 2019, 294). In this respect, the image of Halliwell is a device to discuss Brexit, which is the target of the metaphor and hence the topic of the meme. In another typology, Kirner-Ludwig draws on the references to political or cultural figures as such, but, like Marchal et al.’s, she limits her taxonomy to the visual content and does not clarify for what topics these references are used (see e.g. Kirner-Ludwig 2020).

Besides these three typologies that allow to code visual genres, themes and topics in a general fashion, Butkowski provides a classification that is specific to one genre of political engagement, namely ballot selfies (see Table 9.4). Her variables are observable in visual content (like in the first two typologies), while McLoughlin and Southern’s are *inferred* from manifest content. Her category of the displays of voting bodies comprises nine variables:

Curiously, the variable “voting clothing” raised coding issues, considering that their Krippendorff’s alpha is only .72, which is below the reliability thresholds discussed in Chapter 8. This highlights how variables that seem to

Table 9.4 Butkowski’s classification of displays of voting bodies in ballot selfies

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Description of the variable</i>	<i>K’s α</i>
Visible “I voted” sticker	Whether the selfie comprises an “I voted” sticker	.91
“I voted” sticker location	Where the sticker is located (for selfies with such a sticker)	.93
“I voted” text	Whether the selfie contains “I voted” text	Provided by Twitter
Polling place sign(s)	Whether the voters position themselves in front of polling place signs	.87
Polling place	Whether the voters took their selfie inside or outside polling places	.79
Ballot	Whether the voters hold ballots, completed or blanks	.87
Voting clothing	Whether the voters are wearing clothes that mention voting	.72
Candidate affiliation	Whether hashtags, text or visual content includes candidate affiliation	.94
Edited photos	Whether the selfie was edited with political overlays, like special occasion Snapchat filters or other voting-related text	.87

Source: Butkowski (2022, 9)

be unambiguous *a priori* are not always so. This classification concerns the selfie itself and does not address how their creators communicate with their selfies, through analysing the rest of the social media post, except for candidate affiliation. Nevertheless, Butkowski discusses some interpersonal aspects, including affiliation, in another typology, which I will describe in Section 9.2.

9.1.4 Latent variables: frames based on manifest or latent content

After discussing how represented content is observed and topics are inferred in Section 9.1.3, I now go one step further in the inferential nature of coding the representational function by discussing how content and topics are *framed* in social media posts. Frame analysis was developed in the 1970s, particularly following the publication of Erving Goffman's seminal book *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (1974). Since then, this type of analysis has been frequently used in quantitative or qualitative, deductive or inductive ways to examine mass communication, and nowadays also social media communication. Frames can be identified in text as well as in visual content. Frames are latent variables that are specific to each research context, for example regarding climate change or the COVID-19 pandemic (see e.g. Ross and Rivers 2019; Murru and Vicari 2021, respectively). Given the multitude of contexts that have been studied using frames since the 1970s, an overview is beyond the scope of this book. Yet many context-based frames share common characteristics. Consequently, I will focus on the overarching structures that frames (i.e. social constructions of reality) share, which can serve as a basis for investigating frames within any specific situation.

Let us start with a quick terminological clarification by distinguishing between the closely related concepts of frames, topoi and narratives, which are sometimes conflated in research although they require different methods of analysis:

A frame may be understood as an actor's perspective, while a narrative is a product of that perspective. The root of the conceptual confusion stems from the act of storytelling as it represents the link between the two concepts. Storytelling, i.e. the expression of a frame in a "storified" structure, represents a "textualization" of formerly pre-linguistic ideas about a [policy] situation.

(Aukes, Bontje, and Slinger 2020, 14–15)

The concept of topoi is borrowed from literary studies and refers to "characters or settings which appear again and again in stories from ancient civilizations, religious texts, art, and even more modern stories" (Zagar 2010, 20). Topoi are considered cultural "commonplaces" (Saïd 2015).

As for the overarching structures of frames, Murru and Vicari identified five frames in their corpus of image-based Italian tweets on COVID-19: "we are all in this together," "there are good citizens and rule breakers," "down

with leaders,” “down with experts” and “the Italian model doesn’t work.” Ross and Rivers analysed how five frames related to climate change that were previously identified (in Jang and Hart 2015) are expressed in memes: “the risk is present/real frame,” “the scientific claim of the risk is true/hoax frame,” “the risk is caused by human activities/cause frame,” “the potential consequences of the risk/impact frame and “how to handle the risk/action frame” (Ross and Rivers 2019). Although the two sets of frames relate to completely different contexts, they illustrate how frames can share a common overarching feature, or master frames. In being generic and not context-specific, master frames are wide in scope. In his *Introduction to Social Movements*, Wilson (1973) emphasised how ideological structures consist of three parts, which can be related to three types of master frames:

- Diagnosis – what is wrong: critique of society, locating the sources of present trouble, fault-finding of discontents, identification of responsible agents
- Prognosis – what must be done: visions for a better future, hopes for the alleviation of discontent
- Rationale – who must do the job: convincing the population of the need of collective action and of supporting movements, calls to arms

The diagnosis and the prognosis can both be applied to citizens’ expression. As currently defined, the *rationale* is more specific to social movements, but it can easily be adapted for situations which comprise lower levels of participation than social movements, such as demonstrations or voting, as well as for civic engagement: “who must do the job” might refer to political actors, to other representatives of the population and to any actors involved in politics in the broad sense. Building on Wilson’s theory, Benford and Snow suggested three types of master frames, namely *diagnostic* frames, *prognostic* frames and *motivational* frames for analysing social movements (see e.g. Benford and Snow 2000). Following the adaptation of prognosis for citizen-related contexts, I suggest transforming motivational frames into *action* frames, in which action may, but need not, come from citizens engaged in social movements.

Such a tripartition forms the theoretical basis of a very large body of research, notably on social movements and online extremism. For example, Ahmed and Pisoiu (2019) analysed image-based tweets of the German far right according to these three types of master frames. The frames analysed by Murru and Vicari’s as well as Ross and Rivers’ can also be structured around this tripartition. Other tripartitions are relatively close to Wilson’s structure. For example, Ingram (2016) identified crisis, identity and solution frames in militant Islamist online propaganda. They can also be relevant for research questions related to non-extremist and citizen-based contexts.

Other typologies are specifically designed to analyse how the various participants in a situation are framed. For example, de Saint-Laurent et al. drew on Karpman’s (1968) of three actor roles, namely, the *persecutor*, the *rescuer* and the *victim*, the inter-relatedness of which forms the “drama triangle.” de

Saint-Laurent et al. suggest referring to the role of the rescuer as “hero,” to widen its scope. The examples here illustrate how the participants in these memes are framed as persecutor, heroes or victims, respectively. In the same vein, Koller (Forthcoming) emphasised how supporters of the populist Brexit party framed the EU and its representatives as oppressors of the British people, in the Instagram posts they published during the 2019 European elections.



Figure 9.3 Boris Johnson as a persecutor



Figure 9.4 Soldiers as heroes



Figure 9.5 Abraham Lincoln as a COVID-19 victim

In Karpman's typology, these three roles are the only ones that are needed in drama. Other models include additional dramatic roles. In order to capture the role at play when participants act unwisely, with little understanding or sense, typically in memes, de Saint-Laurent, Glăveanu, and Literat (2021) added the action role of the *fool* to their typology of COVID-19-related



Figure 9.6 Boris Johnson as a fool in “Boris Johnson . . .” meme

memes. In such memes, the participants are framed as foolish or ridicule, like in Figure 9.6.

Since delegitimation strategies are common on social media, especially in memes (see e.g. Ross and Rivers 2017), the persecutor and fool frames are much more prevalent than the hero and victim frames, in which the participants are legitimised.

To infer frames based on specific and concrete manifest content, some insights from discourse analysis can be very helpful. In this respect, Wodak proposed a typology of discrimination and othering that she structured into five discursive strategies, namely referential/nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivisation and intensification/mitigation (Wodak 2012). In the same paper, Wodak illustrated some of these patterns with a poster used by the right-wing populist Freedom Party in Austria (Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs, FPÖ) during the 2010 Vienna election campaign. Wodak’s strategies of nomination and predication encapsulate the major discourse features

Table 9.5 Wodak's discursive strategies for referential/nomination and predication of social actors, objects, phenomena, events and processes, and actions

<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Devices</i>
Referential/ nomination	Discursive construction of social actors, objects, phenomena, events and processes, and actions	Membership categorisation devices, deictics, anthroponyms, etc. Tropes such as metaphors, metonymies and synecdoches Verbs and nouns used to denote processes and actions
Predication	Discursive qualification of social actors, objects, phenomena, events, processes and actions (more or less positively or negatively)	Stereotypical evaluative attributions of negative or positive traits (e.g. in the form of adjectives, appositions, prepositional phrases, relative clauses, conjunctive clauses, infinitive clauses and participial clauses or groups) Explicit predicates or predicative nouns, adjectives, pronouns Collocations Explicit comparisons, similes, metaphors and other rhetorical figures Allusions, evocation, presuppositions, implications

Source: Wodak (2012, 407)

that can be used to frame participants, actions or settings. When observed in social media posts, these devices are manifest content that the analysis can rely on.

I relied on Wodak's typology in a previous analysis of Salafist image-based Facebook posts to identify to what extent and how they comprised crisis, identity and solution frames that contrast the Salafists with the Western world (Bouko, Van Ostaeyen, and Voué 2021). The binary dimension of Salafist ideology, advocating a Manichean worldview, was well suited for a quantitative frame analysis that mostly relied on manifest content.

Frames and topoi are closely related concepts. Let us now briefly discuss the second concept. As I have highlighted earlier, topoi have a collective dimension which frames do not always have. Frames can, over time, become topoi in specific cultures, that is, cultural products and collective symbols. In an earlier study (already mentioned in the previous chapters), colleagues and I analysed the topoi that were shared online after the Charlie Hebdo attacks in 2015, based on images and the textual elements surrounding them (Bouko, Calabrese, and De Clercq 2017). As with any other high-impact event taking place in the era of social networks, audiences reacted on a large scale by sharing, liking and circulating those slogans and images. Very quickly, those images started to represent arguments, social stances and ideological positions, evoking basic principles of what people recognise as typical Western values, such as freedom of speech or the right

to inform and be informed. We identified and subsequently coded eight frames during the inductive pilot study. We based the coding of these latent variables but manifest content on action, the participants and the setting (e.g. the manifest presence of a sword or a candle). Due to the researchers' lack of statistical knowledge at the time, we limited ourselves to discuss inter- and intra-coder reliability without using statistical procedures, which is clearly to avoid.

To overcome the rigidity of quantitative methodological constraints, several of the studies listed in Table 8.1 in Chapter 8 are based on an inductive frame analysis (de Saint Laurent, Glăveanu, and Literat 2021; Feltwell, Mahoney, and Lawson 2015; Mahoney et al. 2016; Murru and Vicari 2021; Seiffert-Brockmann, Diehl, and Dobusch 2018; Wiggins 2020). However, this choice also raises a methodological issue: most of these studies provide numerical results, and therefore quantitative insights, but they are not based on a quantitative methodology which ensures the quality of the categories and of the coding by testing inter- and/or intra-coder reliability. For example, de Saint-Laurent et al. claim that “the objective was not, therefore, to check one reading against others (as in inter-coder reliability), but to reflect on plausible interpretations” (de Saint Laurent, Glăveanu, and Literat 2021, 5–6). This methodological choice seems rather incompatible with the quantitative results they provide. Since their insights are generally not more qualitative and contextualised than the results discussed in quantitative analyses, the question arises as to whether such inductive frame mappings are a more appropriate alternative to quantitative analyses. Ultimately, I suggest that inductive analysis should be restricted to a pilot analysis. The categories that emerge from it should then be used in a subsequent quantitative analysis (see Section 9.5), as done by Butkowski (2022), to make inductive exploration and reliable quantitative insights compatible.

9.2 Interpersonal variables

As I have already outlined, the interpersonal function focuses on how discourse is also an *exchange* that constructs the social relations between the participants to the interaction as well as their relation with the viewers. Affiliation is a key interpersonal pattern, and several of the studies listed in Table 8.1 in Chapter 8 address political affiliation: affiliation with political actors or causes is included in Marchal et al.'s, Mahoney et al.'s and Butkowski's typology of contextualised variables. Caple (2019) also analysed how affiliation and distance can be observed in image-based Instagram posts shared in the context of the 2016 Australian federal election. While affiliation was both expressed visually and textually in her corpus, distance was only observed in the surrounding text of one instance of visual content.

Relationality is another key interpersonal aspect. Butkowski (2022) coded four displays of relationality in the visual content and four in the surrounding text in her corpus of “I voted” memes (see Table 9.6).

Table 9.6 Butkowski's displays of relationality

Displays of relationality in the visual content and K's α		
Group selfie	Multiple foregrounded people looking at the camera	.96
Crowd presence	Groups of two or more people visible in the selfie background	.90
Obscured eyes	Facial features outside of the edge or covered	.91
Subjective camera	Bodies from the photographer's point of view	.86
Displays of relationality in the surrounding text and K's α		
Civic duty mention	Collective concepts such as civic duty, patriotism and history	.73
Directive	Directives or calls to action	.78
Question	Questions to the audience	.97
Collective pronoun usage	Pronouns that position the audience as subject (e.g. you, we, us, our)	.83

Source: Butkowski (2022, 9)

By means of these categories, Butkowski analysed how voters demonstrate their relations with the other voters on site as well as with their online audience, and how they potentially align their voting action with others', notably through anonymising their pictures.

Displays of relationality can also be coded relying on categories measuring the offer – demand behaviour and the social distance between the represented participants and the viewers. Drawing on Kress and van Leeuwen (see Chapter 7), Bell (2001) suggests the variables and values in Table 9.7 (on page 183), which he applied to women's magazine covers.

Since Bell's typology was developed for persuasive communication by models on magazine covers, I slightly broadened the variables by adding the "offer – not ideal" pattern (in bold). I also suggest removing the smile in the demand – affiliation and submission patterns, since affiliation and submission can be effected with or without smiling, especially when the content is serious. Lastly, seduction can also be expressed by looking down at the viewer.

Other levels of social relations can be inferred from social media posts as well, by considering the visual content in combination with the surrounding text. Informed by the uses and gratifications framework according to which people consume certain media for specific uses and because they expect specific gratifications, I sought to address the types of relationship that social media users might seek to build with others when sharing specific types of posts. Research on uses and gratifications is generally based on surveys. Importantly, I do not analyse the relationship from the point of view of the creator's intention, as that is unknown to researchers conducting a content analysis of social media posts. Instead, I focus on markers that allow us to analyse the relationship from the point of view of the audience. In other words, I seek to identify what types of relationships recipients can infer from

Table 9.7 Bell’s variables of behaviour and social distance

<i>Behaviour</i>	
Offer – ideal	The model depicted offers herself/himself as an idealised exemplar of a class or attribute, looking away from the viewer, typically in advertising.
Offer – not ideal	The represented participant looks away from the viewer and offers them information that is not idealised.
Demand – affiliation (equality)	Model looks at the viewer, directly, smiling.
Demand – submission	Model looks down at the viewer, not smiling.
Demand – seduction	Models look up or down at the viewer, head canted, smiling or “pouting.”
Other	
<i>Social distance</i>	
Intimate	Face or head only
Close personal	Head and shoulders
Far personal	From the waist up
Close social	The whole figure
Far social	The whole figure “with space around it”
Public	Includes the torsos of at least four or five people

Source: Bell (2001, 32)

social media posts and what recipients assume the posters’ motivation to be. Four main purposes explain why individuals use social media, both as viewers or as producers of content (see e.g. Pelletier et al. 2020):

- informational purposes: people seek information and self-education
- entertainment purposes: people seek enjoyable experiences
- social purposes: people seek to interact with others and gain a sense of belonging
- convenience purposes: people seek to maximise convenience (e.g. easy and cheap communication)

In the same vein, four motives can explain why social media users engage in leaving comments, split into individual and social reasons (Barnes 2018):

- individual-centric reasons
 - informational reasons: people seek to provide information and educate others
 - entertainment reasons: people seek to provide enjoyment and fun
 - personal-identity reasons: people share their opinions and emotions with the community
- social interaction: people seek to build relationships, interact with others and gain a sense of belonging

Barnes' four reasons for leaving comments can be broadened to sharing social media content in general. Let us now see how to infer these reasons from manifest content. Prior research has quantitatively inferred these motivations from *informational*, *entertaining* and *relational* social media content. For example, Dolan (2015, 109) defines the variable of relational content as

gratifications of integration and social interaction [that] involve members gaining insights into the circumstances of others, social empathy, identifying with others, gaining a sense of belonging, finding a basis for conversation and social interaction, helping carrying out social roles, and enabling a user to connect with family, friends and society.

It is evident from her definition that personal-identity reasons and social interactions are intertwined and impossible to separate from each other.

I elaborated a typology of seven social relations that are inferred from social media content in the Brexit context (Bouko et al. 2018). Like in Dolan's typology, there is no variable of social content as such that would be related to the motive of social interaction; rather, social relations permeate in informational, personal and entertainment content. As their name suggests, social media posts are social by nature.

Table 9.8 Types of social relations inferred from informational, relational and entertainment content

<i>Types of social relations</i>		<i>Informational, relational and entertainment content</i>	<i>C's k</i>
Informational	Information sharing	Forwarded news, link to external content, informational statements and/or others' points of view	.878
	Eye-witnessing	Amateur pictures of events that the individual attended, possibly with text that refers to eye-witnessing	.944
Personal identity	Intimacy sharing	Event-related intimate moments in visual content and/or in text	.733
	Personal points of view and appraisals	Self-expression and appraisal in visuals and/or text	.890
Entertainment	Playing	Playful content in visual and/or textual content, based on incongruity and/or exaggeration	.957
	Artistic renderings	Drawings, paintings and photographs with an artistic dimension, as well as written art (poems)	.949
Other			.921

Source: Bouko et al. (2018)

Importantly, and contrary to most typologies discussed so far, this categorisation of variables must be applied to social media posts as a whole (visual content and text), and not to the visual content alone. Furthermore, these variables are not mutually exclusive: very often, several types of social relations can be inferred from each social media post, for example, informing and expressing one's point of view at the same time. This typology also allows us to analyse how the same visual content can be used for various purposes. For example, a news image can be used for an informational reason, but it can also be used to express one's point of view or for play. This variety of purposes can only be inferred when the surrounding text is included in the coding.

When coding personal points of view and appraisals, the question always arises as to whether the creator of the post is sharing content that they have created themselves or whether they are merely sharing without necessarily endorsing. Social media posts do not systematically contain markers of subjectivity or appraisal, especially when visual content is published without any surrounding text. For example, how to address the fact whether the social media user endorsed the evaluation of the Brexit vote in the cartoon they shared? In such cases, I considered that silence means consent, even while I am aware of the discussions this choice may provoke.

The variable of *play* draws on incongruity theory. Incongruity involves the juxtaposition of two incongruous frames of reference, that is, the simultaneous presence of two contradictory meanings (Koestler 1964). Following this theory, the violation of an expected pattern may provoke humour in the observer (Parovel and Guidi 2015). A large body of social media posts, especially memes, draw on incongruity as a delegitimisation strategy (see e.g. Ross and Rivers 2017). In the tweet in Figure 9.1 for example, incongruity is created by comparing Boris Johnson's haircut to yellow grass. It is important to note that the variable of play focuses on the production strategies of incongruity and excludes coding the potential effects on recipients (e.g. amusement), given that those are particularly subjective. Therefore, social media posts should not be coded according to subjective positive appraisals like funny, comical or negative ones, like shock. In this respect, play cannot be conflated with its effects. Besides incongruity, playful techniques can also be based on the exaggeration of physical traits, situations, etc., which are typical in caricatures. As I discussed in Chapter 4, purposeful play is constitutive of citizenship in the DIY framework, which emphasises how creativity can trigger citizens' expressions and actions (e.g. Hartley 2010). In this respect, creativity is performed by playing with vernacular codes and repertoires. A large body of research has already listed the many ways in which popular culture codes can be played with through memes and other types of macro images (see key references in Chapter 8). The main focus is on creative play in terms of *content*, for example, by changing the meaning of the represented content in parodies. In the same vein, cartoonists also explore the subject they cover in terms of content, in order to provide an immediate and easily legible

illustration of it. While cartoonists are undoubtedly artists, their work may be more directly associated with the opinions they express rather than the artistic *form* that they explore. In this respect, the definition of the category of play in terms of *content* contrasts with that of artistic renderings, which focuses on the criterion of art as a *form*. While I could devote my entire scientific career to trying to define art and aesthetics, I will, within the scope of this book though, limit myself to Dutton's (2005) list of "recognition criteria" that are cross-cultural features of art. Dutton's recognition criteria comprise *skill or virtuosity*, *style*, *novelty* and *creativity*, and *imaginative experience*, which he considers the most important criterion:

Objects of art essentially provide an imaginative experience for both producers and audiences. A marble carving may realistically represent an animal, but as a work of sculptural art, it becomes an imaginative object. The same can be said of any story well told, whether mythology or personal history. . . . This is what Kant meant by insisting that a work of art is a "presentation" offered up to an imagination that appreciates it irrespective of the existence of a represented object: for Kant, works of art are imaginative objects subject to disinterested contemplation.

(Dutton 2005, 372–373)

The elements of such lists will always be debatable; other lists do exist and Dutton himself published several revisions of his own list. Here, however, I define variable *artistic renderings* for the purpose of conducting a quantitative analysis that is not specifically aesthetic. Furthermore, I do not think that all criteria listed by Dutton must be met to code a social media post as an artistic rendering.

In this view, drawings, paintings and photographs as well as poems are artistic forms when they offer an imaginative experience, which goes beyond immediate and easily legible representations. Based on this definition, most items that are coded as playful practices are not cross-classified as artistic renderings, even though the two variables are not mutually exclusive. Although many amateur practices might not immediately adhere to a more literal interpretation of virtuosity and novelty (as these skills might still be in the process of being developed), this does not prevent them from offering an artistic experience. The quality of the artistic form is not a criterion in the coding.

My last discussion in this section concerns narratives in social media posts. A narrative can be constructed through personal-identity patterns and be potentially interwoven with informational and/or entertainment content. Following Aukes, Bontje, and Slinger (2020), a narrative is the *product* of an actor's perspective, while a frame consists in the perspective as such (see Section 9.1.4). Often described as *small stories*, narratives on social media can take various forms. Some remain close to the characteristic of the linear temporal sequence established in traditional narratology; other small stories distance themselves from it in favour of relative *fleetingness*: "the notion of

smallness encapsulates the fleetingness of stories in interactional moments, their embeddedness in local contexts and the analyst's attentiveness to the emergence of plots in the microcosm of everyday life experience" (Georgakopoulou, Iversen, and Stage 2020, 13–14). This temporality is constructed at three levels: in the social media post itself, in the minimal standard narrative which the social media platforms automatically generate (i.e. date and time of publication), as well as potentially in the other posts and updates published before or after the post itself by the same person (Page 2012). This has obvious methodological consequences. Since narratives are often constructed over several posts, it is necessary to collect these series of posts, which a random data collection does not do, making it only suitable for social media posts that are analysed independently of each other. A qualitative analysis, in which posts by the same author are considered and contextualised in relation to each other, is more appropriate (see e.g. Dayter 2015) when looking at narrative. That said, specific objects of inquiry might be suited for a quantitative analysis of narratives in single posts. In this respect, Giaxoglou (2019) coded 230 #JesuisAylan Instagram posts that were shared on the platform after refugee boy Aylan Kurdi's dramatic drowning in the Mediterranean in 2015 (see Section 5.3.3). She did so in order to identify the salience of four story frames: the story realm (the act of storytelling), the tale world (world in which the characters evolve), the outside world (references to wider issues and concerns) and second stories, which are "prompted by Aylan's story." However, the author herself raised the difficulty of coding these story frames. Some issues might come from the fact that these variables were coded as mutually exclusive, by only coding the primary variable on which the Instagram post focuses (see earlier discussion about coding primary focus). Furthermore, the distinctions between the variables were not easy to draw, especially between the outside world and second stories.

9.3 Compositional variables

As I have outlined in Chapter 7, the compositional function is related to the internal organisation of the signs in terms of coherence, continuity and flow, as well to how they relevant to the message and its context. In the previous chapter, I discussed how it could be challenging to analyse interpersonal and compositional visual patterns in a qualitative fashion, especially to avoid personal interpretations that are not as shared as the researchers might think. In this respect, the methodological challenges for a quantitative analysis of such patterns would be even more serious. Consequently, I neither provide nor discuss coding categories of compositional variables. Nevertheless, socio-cultural regularities in the uses of compositional patterns lead to the emergence of visual and multimodal genres. Genres articulate visual or multimodal materials with communicative purposes, in specific space-time contexts. Compositional patterns and their relation to communication purposes can be observed more easily in established genres than in emerging

ones. However, definitions of (visual) genres are the subject of much debate. Some researchers advance topic-based definitions of genre and insist on the materiality of the visual content, while others insist on the importance of purpose-based typologies which also consider meaning-making. Examples are Roth's (2021) seven visual storytelling genres or Keçdra's (2016) discussion of purpose-based genres in photojournalism, the latter being split between news journalism and opinion journalism.

A key issue lies in the fact that the same visual or multimodal material can be used for a large variety of communication purposes and situations, and in such cases, characterising specific formats as genres is not helpful. Bateman (2014) illustrated this with the example of picture books and comics when they are described as different genres, although the large variety of their uses prevents these two genres from being defined in terms of different meaning-making processes. In the context of social networks, visual content can likewise be created, used and remediated for a multitude of communicative purposes. In this respect, visual *formats* might be more suitable for coding than visual genres. Marchal and colleagues (2021) provide the typology of visual formats in Table 9.9 on page 189; my additions are written in bold.

By limiting themselves to coding the materiality of visual content, their types of visual format group together visual content with different communicative purposes. For example, in most cases, meanings made through selfies, official or stock photos have little in common. Photographs, illustrations and composites comprise particularly heterogeneous types of visual items. Nevertheless, these five broad types have the advantage of being mutually exclusive in quite an unambiguous way. The variable "poster" might be an exception though, since it might conflate the content of the visual item and its format, for example in the case of a photograph of a campaign poster. There, the poster is the content inside the image, while the photograph is its format.

Furthermore, Marchal et al.'s (2021) categorisation is strictly limited to format and does not mix the compositional function with other levels of analysis, such as interpersonal communicative purposes. Regarding the typology I developed for my research in the Brexit context (Bouko et al. 2018), I realised afterwards that I had combined format-based (e.g. diagrams and graphs) and patterns of visual content (Brexit-related vs. unrelated photographs). Basically, I performed a thematic analysis. This choice appeared to be a methodological error insofar as several levels of analysis are examined at the same time.

I merely suggest some subdivisions of Marchal et al.'s variables of photographs and illustrations. These do not relate to the materiality of the visual content as such but rather to (1) the type of authors (i.e. amateurs vs. professionals) and (2) the selection of the visual content (i.e. manually selected or automatically uploaded).

Photographs and illustrations can be split into amateur and professional since creating and sharing amateur drawings or photographs (whether they

Table 9.9 Marchal et al.’s adapted typology of visual format, K’s $\alpha = .843$

Type of format	Description of the type	Description of sub-levels of analysis
Photograph	Pictures taken with a camera – including selfies, user-generated, official, and stock photos – that have not been visibly modified	By amateurs By professionals: selected By professionals: unselected Impossible to determine
Illustration	Drawings, sketches, cartoons and computer-generated images	By amateurs By professionals: selected By professionals: unselected Impossible to determine
Screen capture	Images displaying the content of a phone, TV or computer screen, including captures of webpages, newspaper articles, and screenshots of social media posts	
Infographic	Visual representations of information and data, including statistics, maps, and visual explainers	
Composite	Visual that has been altered to combine different graphical elements (e.g. photo, text and drawing), such as photo montages, memes and GIFs	
Quote	Images featuring a phrase attributed to an individual or plain text that has not been visibly altered	
Poster	Promotional posters, campaign posters, leaflets, event announcements and party logos	

Source: Marchal et al. (2021, 163)

are personal or not) or forwarding external professional content are two fundamentally different ways of having a say. The difference is not always visible, though, especially if the surrounding text does not help to clarify the meaning. Furthermore, apparent quality cannot be a valuable indicator, since talented amateurs can provide higher quality than some professionals, especially on social media platforms dedicated to photography like Flickr. Therefore, photographs and illustrations could be coded as “amateur,” “professional” or as “impossible to determine” with the help of the surrounding text.

The sub-variable amateur versus professional (or indeterminate) is related to the types of creators of visual content. By contrast, the second sub-variable I suggest concerns the *manner* in which professional and media images or illustrations are uploaded in the social media post, namely whether the users

manually upload a picture of their choice or include images that are automatically uploaded as visual content of a news article when a news link is inserted in the post. Therefore, I suggest separating selected and unselected professional and media images. To do so, I clicked on every link to determine whether the visual content in the social media post is a direct duplicate of what is used in the news article on the news website.

Ultimately, revisiting my typology highlights how representational, interpersonal and compositional functions interweave to create meaning in image-based (social media) content and how they should be coded with variables that clearly distinguish these three levels of analysis, which can be challenging.

Note

1 For IPTC's tree diagram of subtopics, see <https://show.newscodes.org/index.html?newscodes=subj&lang=en-GB&startTo=Show>.

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10 Appraisal in text–image social media content

10.1 Emotion, opinion and the issue of observability

In Chapter 9, I inferred how creators of social media posts evaluate actors, objects and situations by means of (1) representational and interpersonal variables, and especially diagnostic, prognostic and motivational frames of situations and (2) frames of participants (presented as heroes, persecutors, victims or fools). In this chapter, I will continue in this vein by discussing techniques for identifying appraisal patterns in text–image content. I will outline how to observe or infer opinions and/or emotions in image and text and I will address to what extent opinions and emotions are intertwined or opposed to each other, depending on the theoretical models and levels of analysis (i.e. direct or indirect as well as micro- or macro-levels).

A major challenge with appraisal lies in its elusive nature (see Chapter 5). Relying on a broad approach to affect that addresses appraisal in general, since the latter includes attitudes, feelings, moods, as well as dispositions in relation to topics, objects or events, Ochs and Schieffelin (1989, 22) insist on the wide variety of linguistic means by which affect can be expressed: “Affect permeates the entire linguistic system. Almost any aspect of the linguistic system . . . is a candidate for expressing affect.” In other words, appraisal – or affect in this broad sense, including emotion and opinion – can be particularly hard to grasp. This is even more challenging when appraisal is not merely denoted but also connoted. Besides, opinions and emotions are not clear-cut categories and are often difficult to distinguish from each other, depending on the types of units and methods of analysis. In this respect, linguists also address how emotion and opinion are interwoven in discourse. For example, Caffi and Janney (1994, 354) emphasise how a large range of heterogeneous “evaluation devices” can double as “emotive devices.” Lastly, many researchers have already emphasised how nearly any word or pattern can be endowed with emotional *connotation*, to the extent that “one has the feeling that emotions slip through the net and . . . are both everywhere and nowhere in language” (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2000, 57, translation).

When faced with such elusive objects of inquiry, the key issue of observability is even harder to deal with. In order to propose an answer to this

challenge, I will draw on typologies that are structured around three broad modes of semiotisation of emotion in discourse: (1) “thematised emotions,” which are the object of discourse (Fiehler 2002), that is, language *about* emotion, (2) signal-like emotions, which are shown through patterns that are *consequences* of emotion in discourse, that is, language *as* emotion and (3) supported emotion, that is, emotion-inducing frames that reflect the writers’ schematisation of a situation that they experience as emotional (Micheli 2014; Plantin 2011). In this third mode of communicating emotion, the schematisation allows to infer the *causes* of the inferred emotions. Importantly, as I will outline, emotion and opinion are interwoven in my framework.

My framework is intended to be both comprehensive and integrated. It is comprehensive because it is based on the deliberately generic category of “semiotised” emotion (Micheli 2014, 18), which allows for all modes of communicating emotion to be taken into account, beyond the emotion denoted in emotion terms (e.g. love, sad or joyful).

In this respect, the generic notion of semiotisation does not presuppose the *way* in which the semiotised units, that is signs, communicate emotion. Moreover, defining emotions as being “semiotised” does not predetermine the *nature* of the units of analysis. Consequently, it does allow us to examine the lexico-grammatical, morphological or syntactic dimensions that have been established in prior research on appraisal (see Section 10.2 onwards). Moreover, semiotisation also indicates an approach that moves away from language sciences only and is additionally informed by cognitive psychology in order to focus on the writer’s socio-culturally shared schematisations of emotional situations. Finally, thanks to the generic idea of semiotised emotion, it is possible to include non-verbal signs. This openness to non-verbal signs is particularly relevant when developing methodological designs capable of addressing both the visual and verbal components of social media posts. By including all modes of communicating emotions, such deliberately broad typologies are both comprehensive and integrated since they avoid opposing micro- versus macro-units. These two broad types of units are usually analysed independently from each other as a result of different research methods. Put simply, this approach to three modes of semiotisation (thematized, signal-like and supported) addresses the issue that

in essence, by focusing on one element (i.e. verbal) of the emotional appeal at the exclusion of the other dimensions of the message (i.e. nonverbal), researchers are no longer studying valid communication processes, but rather disassociated parts of the whole.

(Jorgensen 1996, 407)

Jorgensen focuses on the combination of verbal versus non-verbal signs, but this claim is also true of combining separate levels of analysis, that is, thematised, signal-like and supported emotion.

For example, the tweet in Figure 10.1 combines thematised, signal-like and supported attitude in only a few words and one image: the emoji consists in visually thematised attitude (i.e. visually denoted emotion in “face screaming in fear” emoji); the interjection “Uh Oh” in signal-like attitude (i.e. a *consequence* of attitude visible in discourse) and the sentences “What have you done?” as well as “Pound is falling down” are signs of supported attitude (i.e. the *causes* of attitude). Additionally, the picture of former UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher thematises judgement through a conventional bodily sign of judgement (finger pointing at an absent addressee who



Figure 10.1 Example of attitudinal prosody in a tweet that combines thematised, signal-like and supported attitude

Courtesy: Ibdilillah Ishak

could be interpreted as a Leave voter in the present case) and a stern facial expression. The Iron Lady was famous for the confrontational nature of her discussions with opposing parties, and this gesture has become an icon of her uncompromising stance.

In a bid to analyse citizens' political views on social media posts, I turn my attention to *authorial* emotion and opinion, that is, what and how the writers themselves feel rather than other people's emotions they potentially share in the content they publish. In Figure 10.1, it is thus the thematised judgement by the creator of the tweet, as *inter alia* encapsulated in the facial expression of the former Prime Minister, that is the analytic focus. Margaret Thatcher's emotions *as such* are out of scope. In this respect, it is the writer who is the "emoter," that is, the one experiencing the emotion (Bednarek 2008). In this context, besides its inclusive character, the notion of semiotised emotion underlines how important it is to distinguish between what is experienced by the writers (i.e. their inner states) and what they share by means of verbal or non-verbal resources, namely how they construct emotions and opinions in discourse. The object of the analysis concerns only the emotion and opinion patterns that are observed in, or inferred from, discourse, independent of what the writer actually experiences. This is because it is not always possible to distinguish between experienced and communicated emotions. And unless communicated somehow (discursively or through reactions), experienced emotions are not accessible to someone else.

Indeed, authenticity is impossible to determine formally: emotion patterns can just as easily illustrate genuine or simulated emotions. In order to know whether an emotion is performed or experienced, the writer would have to undergo physiological tests (like passing through an emotion detector), and even then the assumption would be that the emotional state is deducible from the physiological state. Consequently, since lying takes a greater psychological toll on the writer than the truth, it can be assumed that they will tend to reduce the dissonance between what is experienced and what is communicated, in the same way that one lies more effectively if one believes in one's lies; one communicates emotions and opinions better if they are not too far removed from one's emotional state. Ultimately, more than the sincerity of the emotions and opinions, it is the patterns that can be identified by the recipient that matter. The issue of authenticity is secondary; there is no attempt to determine whether the emotions communicated in discourse are sincere or not (Plantin 2011).

The issue of authenticity is coupled with that of intentionality. In communication, especially spoken, intentional and unintentional information are often combined. Relying on Marty's (1908) theory that was formulated at the turn of the previous century, Caffy and Janney distinguish between "emotional" and "emotive" communication, which they defined as:

[T]he intentional, strategic signalling of affective information in speech and writing (e.g., evaluative dispositions, evidential commitments, volitional stances, relational orientations, degrees of emphasis, etc.) in

order to influence partners' interpretations of situations and reach different goals. Marty contrasted the notion of "emotive communication" to the notion of "emotional communication", which he regarded as a type of spontaneous, unintentional leakage or bursting out of emotion in speech.

(Caffi and Janney 1994, 328)

In passing, the observant reader will have noted that the definition of emotive communication refers explicitly to evaluation and stances, that is, to opinions, which underlines once more how emotions and opinions are interwoven. For Caffi and Janney, only emotive communication can be the object of analysis. However, this position seems only relevant when the research goal is to analyse emotion from a rhetorical point of view, that is, look at the "strategic signalling . . . *in order to influence* partners' interpretations of situations" (cf. quote by Caffi and Janney, italics added). Furthermore, a formal distinction between emotive and emotional communication is highly challenging, given that a particularly effective rhetorical strategy for emotive communication is to make it look like emotional communication, which is perceived as *de facto* spontaneous and authentic. Consequently, the possible unintentional spontaneity of emotional communication, compared to emotive communication, must be discussed in context. Indeed, in the case of social media communication, social media platforms create affective environments that encourage users to express their emotions (see Chapter 5). This being said, social media users have the option of editing or deleting their posts and comments on social media platforms. It can therefore be assumed that all the elements of the posts that are collected for research purposes are intentionally communicated by their creators. Given the possibilities of editing, the distinction between intentional and unintentional communication is less relevant for the analysis of social media posts. As with the issue of authenticity, the issue of intentionality is beyond my objectives and methods: in the case of citizens' social media posts, some convergence between authentically experienced, intentionally communicated, and the observed or inferred emotions by the recipient can be hypothesised, but this convergence is by no means guaranteed without the use of other research methods, such as interviews.

I provide an overview of my framework of thematised, signal-like and supported attitude in Table 10.1, which I will detail and discuss in the subsequent sections. Thematised attitude is divided into inscribed and evoked attitude: inscribed attitude relies on attitudinal lexis (e.g. joyful, loyal, fascinating, and includes psycho-physiological expressions of emotion like "her voice broke") as well as fixed figurative expressions (e.g. my heart is broken) while evoked attitude is "flagged" through figurative language or non-core attitudinal vocabulary that often connotes rather than denotes appraisal (Martin and White 2005). For example, the two scholars illustrate non-core attitudinal vocabulary with the metaphor of "children being herded up," which was used in a human rights report into the separation of Aboriginal children from

Table 10.1 Thematised, signal-like and supported attitude framework

<i>Thematised, signal-like and supported attitude</i>	
Thematised attitude	
Observability of emotions versus opinions	Emotions (affect) are inscribed (denoted) or evoked (connoted). They are separated from opinions (judgement and appreciation, which are ethics- and taste-based, respectively)
Units of analysis	Inscribed attitude: attitudinal lexis and fixed figurative language Evoked/flagged attitude: less conventional figurative language or non-core attitudinal lexis and/or visuals (micro-level)
Potentially in text and/or visual content?	Both
Type of method	Observation of emotions and opinions in attitudinal lexis and expressions
Signal-like attitude	
Observability of emotions versus opinions	Opinions are inscribed or inferred, depending on the type of markers. Emotions are inferred. Both are observable mainly when linked to co-text and context.
Units of analysis	Visible lexical, morpho-syntactic and typographical cues of the <i>consequences</i> of emotion and opinion in discourse (micro-level)
Potentially in text and/or visual content?	Only in text
Type of method	Inference of attitude from its consequences, as encoded in discourse
Supported attitude	
Observability of emotions versus opinions	Inferred emotions and opinions
Units of analysis	Content and discourse markers related to eight appraisal criteria (macro-level)
Potentially in text and/or visual content?	Both
Type of method	Inference of attitude from its causes, as encoded in discourse

their families and communities, in Australia (Commonwealth of Australia 1997; Martin and White 2005, 65). Hence, inscribed versus evoked attitude relates to the denotation-connotation opposition. For example, emotions are evoked rather than inscribed in similes like “I feel like a native American surrounded by cowboys” and in the use of the noun “massacre” in “chain-saw massacre of the world’s forests,” which connotes negative judgement. As used in this example, “massacre” has a referential as well as an affective meaning. When selecting affective meaning in their communication practices,

writers evoke opinions and signal emotions. In this respect, affective meaning is a way of both thematising and signalling emotions. Other types of lexical as well as morpho-syntactic and typographic markers can also be used to analyse signal-like attitude. Lastly, analysing supported attitude does not rely on specific linguistic patterns but, more broadly, on types of content that illustrate one or several of eight appraisal criteria by means of which citizens frame situations that they experience as sources of attitude (e.g. persons involved, proximity in time and space, see Table 10.8).

Other researchers have developed theoretical subdivisions that combine linguistic and cognitive psychological approaches to emotions and opinions. Planalp and Knie (2002, 87–89) distinguish between four types of emotion-related “practices,” namely: (1) the “verbal labelling of experiences and emotions,” (2) the “descriptions of experiences and emotions (it boiled within me, etc.),” (3) “labelling/describing events and circumstances relevant to an experience” and (4) “description/narration of the situational circumstances of an experience.” Roughly, verbal labelling and descriptions of emotions both fall within my category of thematised emotions. Importantly, “experiences” mean “experiences of emotion” here, that is, the emotion being experienced. By contrast, labelling/describing versus narrating events and circumstances fall within my category of supported emotion. However, the difference between Planalp and Knie’s labelling/describing versus narrating is not totally clear and operational: level 4 seems to be a subcategory of level 3 that differs in the kind of circumstantial detail provided. Descriptions/narrations would be reported “*in order to clarify an experience in the situation concerned*” (2002, 89, original italics). Besides, describing and narrating are not the same thing, nor are labelling and describing.

10.2 Thematised emotions and opinions in text and image

In the case of thematisation, emotions are verbalised to become the topic of discourse (Fiehler 2002). Verbalisation, that is, expressing something with words, finds its parallel in visualisation, in the sense of putting something into visual form, so that thematisation can also be applied to visual content. In thematised attitude, emotions and opinions are explicitly separated from each other. Indeed, as I will outline in this section, thematised emotions are “attitudinal assessments which are indicated through descriptions of the emotional reactions or states of human subjects,” while opinions are “assessments under which a positive or negative quality is said to be an inherent property of the phenomenon being evaluated” (White 2004, 232).

Thematised opinions and emotions are visible in literal or figurative labelling and descriptive terms, expressions or visual content. Martin and White’s (2005) appraisal theory is a seminal reference addressing thematised emotions that has been applied to textual as well as multimodal corpora. I will discuss their work in the next sub-section.

10.2.1 *Thematised attitude: affect, judgement and appreciation*

Martin and White’s theory relies on three elements of appraisal: *attitude* relates to “ways of feeling” (p. 42); *engagement* concerns “sourcing attitudes” (p. 35), that is, how the writer’s and any external voices are articulated and potentially (dis)aligned in discourse, whereas *graduation* accounts for the ways the focus and force of attitudes (i.e. intensification and quantification) are made visible in discourse. I will mainly discuss attitude; engagement will be briefly outlined in Chapter 12, while graduation remains beyond the scope of this book. *Attitude* is the superordinate node that broadly relates to “feelings, including emotional reactions, judgements of behaviour and evaluation of things” (Martin and White 2005, 35). Attitude is divided into the lexico-grammatical categories of *affect*, *judgement* and *appreciation*. Affect relates to their definition of emotion whereas judgement and appreciation fall within their definition of opinion. More precisely, affect is related to emotional responses observed in emotion terms and expressions (e.g. love, hate, surprised, broken heart), while judgement concerns the evaluation of behaviour based on values of social esteem and social sanction:

Judgements of esteem have to do with “normality” (how unusual someone is), “capacity” (how capable they are) and “tenacity” (how resolute they are); judgements of sanction have to do with “veracity” (how truthful someone is) and “propriety” (how ethical someone is).
(Martin and White 2005, 52)

Lastly, appreciation deals with the evaluation of “things” (original quotation marks) in terms of whether and how they catch one’s attention and please us (reaction patterns), to what extent they are balanced and complex (composition patterns) as well as their value regarding their innovative character, authenticity, timeliness, etc. (value patterns). In other words, affect, appreciation and judgement concern “feelings, tastes or normative assessments,” respectively (Martin and White 2005, 95). Through judgement and appreciation, Martin and White (2005, 42) distinguish between *ethics* and *aesthetics*, and the two forms of appraisal can be considered ethics-based and aesthetics-based opinions, respectively.

Martin and White insist on the connections between affect, judgement and appreciation when they emphasise how both social *values* (in judgement) and social *tastes* (in appreciation) are shared communal values based on affect. In this respect, judgement and appreciation are “institutionalised affect” (Martin and White 2005, 45), which emphasises how affect is one type of attitude that is interwoven with the other two. Nevertheless, despite these connections, the three types of attitude remain separated in their theory. This is represented by solid lines in Table 10.2. The separation relies on the combination of two criteria: the type of entity that is thematised (i.e. emoters, behaviours, things) as well as the lexis used. The type of entity that

Table 10.2 Thematised attitude framework

<i>Thematised attitude</i>			
	<i>Affect</i>	<i>Judgement</i>	<i>Appreciation</i>
Entity under scrutiny	Emoter's emotion: overt affect (<i>I am surprised</i>) People, behaviours and objects: covert affect (<i>Her reaction was a surprise</i>)	People, behaviours and objects through values of social esteem and sanction (<i>This person is loyal</i>)	People, behaviours and objects through tastes (<i>This book is boring</i>)
Observability of emotions versus opinions	Emotions	Ethics-based opinions	Aesthetics-based opinions
Units of analysis for inscribed attitude: attitudinal lexis	Affect lexis: mental disposition terms (<i>joyful</i>) + psycho-physiological expressions of emotion (<i>My cheeks are red and I am trembling</i>) + fixed figurative expressions (<i>over the moon</i>)	Judgement lexis: judgement terms and expressions + fixed figurative expressions (<i>I hang on their every word</i>)	Appreciation lexis: appreciation terms and expressions + fixed figurative expressions (<i>I hang on their every word</i>)
Units of analysis for evoked attitude: non-attitudinal lexis	Flagged attitude: less conventional figurative language and non-core attitudinal lexis that often connotes rather than denotes attitude (<i>I feel like a native American surrounded by cowboys; chainsaw massacre of the world's forests</i>)		

Informed by Martin and White (2005); Bednarek (2008, 2009)

is evaluated is the main differentiating criterion: the entity is the emoter for affect (e.g. I am happy), people or behaviour for judgement (e.g. this behaviour is not right) and “things” for appreciation (e.g. this movie is captivating). Martin and White provide lists of example of terms and expressions that indicate judgement (e.g. lucky, weak, brave, honest, evil) or appreciation (e.g. boring, elegant, nasty, pricey). It should be noted though that the meaning of these listed words is often context dependent. For example, adjectives like “slow” can be either positive or negative, depending on the context.

In Martin and White's theory, affect, judgement and appreciation are regarded as thematised attitudes that involve specific entities and lexicogrammar patterns. Bednarek (2008) points out that these two criteria are up for debate though. Concerning the “entity” criterion, Bednarek suggests distinguishing between *overt* emotion and *covert* emotion. Let us compare

two similar, yet different examples: “I was surprised by her decision” versus “Her decision was a surprise.” Technically, only the first sentence falls within affect, since it is an emotional response in which the evaluated entity is the emoter (“I”). Following Martin and White, the second example falls within judgement, since the entity is a behaviour (“her decision”) and not the emoter. In the first case, the emotion is *inscribed* in the sentence; in the second case, a judgement is inscribed, but the judgement term “surprising” also allows to *infer* the emotion of surprise. Similar overlaps are possible between affect and appreciation, too. Consequently, Bednarek insists that such cases of judgement or appreciation are “bridges between appreciation/judgement and affect” at the level of thematised emotions, when emotions are *covert* (Bednarek 2008, 182). This shows that the separation between affect as emotional responses on the one hand, and judgement/appreciation on the other, is not that clear-cut, even when it comes to thematised emotions and opinions.

The second criterion, concerning lexico-grammar patterns, can also be problematised. Indeed, in another publication, Bednarek (2009) highlights how it is technically not possible to rely on lexis and other language patterns to differentiate between judgement and appreciation; the same attitudinal lexis can often be used for both. The entity criterion can come to the rescue, but only to a certain extent, as we have just seen.

Eventually, it is not always possible and/or relevant to discern between judgement of people and their behaviours and appreciation of things; they are commonly intertwined since things are often the result of behaviours. A political treaty is the result of decisions, for example, even though it is a “thing.” Besides, the two would be even more challenging to distinguish in visual content, which does not draw on strictly defined evaluated entities, while in sentences these can be inscribed through precise terms. Therefore, unlike Swain (2012), I consider for example that a political cartoon evaluating the content of the EU’s Lisbon Treaty (which gave the EU a full legal personality in 2007) is more of a judgement than an appreciation since the cartoon comprises an ethical and not a taste-based valuation of a property of this treaty. This example emphasises how the notion of valuation must be restricted to aesthetical aspects and “tastes” when it comes to appreciation (Mills et al. 2020). Accordingly, I share Fawzy’s (2019) views when she distinguishes between judgement of content and appreciation of aesthetical properties in her analysis of how many Pulitzer-winning photographs visualise a dissonant attitude in both providing a visual negative judgement of a situation (e.g. the lack of assistance to refugees on the sea) and at the same time a positive aesthetical appreciation of the same situation (e.g. a beautiful sunset on the sea behind the refugees). Ultimately, since I focus on citizens’ political views and not on tastes about properties, appreciation is beyond the scope of this book. I summarise my framework for thematised attitude in Table 10.2. The dotted lines indicate the absence of clear-cut boundaries between some categories. The same example of “I hang on their every word”

highlights that the distinction between ethics-based and aesthetic-based opinions is context-dependent, not clearly separable and not necessarily fully inscribed in the lexical choices.

10.2.2 *Literal and figurative thematised emotions: major sets versus basic emotions*

Emotion terms are traditionally identified on the basis of linguistic criteria, such as the combination of an emotion term with verbs like “feel [joyful, sad, etc.],” or with nouns such as “a feeling of [joy, sadness, etc.].” Such criteria make it possible to set up lists of emotion terms. Content criteria can also be used: for example, whether a writer regards something as true or not determines whether the content is debatable or not. And thematised emotion as an object of discourse can be debated and contradicted (Micheli 2014). For example, if the writer writes “I was very angry with him after he told me what he thought about my father,” it is technically possible to suggest an alternative view and say that the writer was not very angry. Of course, it is not about who is right or not; the truth criterion only serves as an indication of thematised emotions. Unlike thematised emotions, signal-like emotions and supported emotions cannot be debated as such. For example, if a speaker says, “I got dumped yesterday,” it is technically not possible to debate their emotion of sadness (or any other one) since this emotion is not thematised in the sentence. I will further discuss this case in Section 10.4 when I address supported emotion.

This content criterion is particularly appropriate for emotions that are not thematised via emotion terms but via sentences that are figurative or that describe the emotion being experienced. Descriptions of bodily symptoms and behaviour are of that kind, for example “my hands are shaking” or “my teeth are chattering,” even though their meaning is often context-dependent: teeth can chatter because of fear as well as cold, for example.

Since such descriptions do not include emotion terms, they cannot be associated with specific emotions as easily as emotion terms. Ultimately, there is no one-to-one relationship between lists of emotion terms and isolated emotions (Bednarek 2008). Bednarek proposes an adaptation of Martin and White’s four sets of emotion to comprise five categories: un/happiness, in/security, dis/satisfaction, surprise and dis/inclination. Surprise has become a separate category, which can be either positive or negative, while Martin and White only associated it negatively with insecurity. The second modification concerns dis/inclination: in order to avoid overlaps with insecurity (including fear), dis/inclination is no longer defined in terms of positive desire and negative fear but draws on the polarity between desire/volition and non-desire/non-volition (see Bednarek 2008). Besides, inclination and disinclination are not systematically positive and negative, respectively.

As Table 10.3 outlines, these major sets of emotions are broad categories that comprise specific emotions.

Table 10.3 Comparison of affect types between Martin and White’s “old” model on the left and Bednarek’s “new” model on the right

<i>Bednarek’s comparison of affect types</i>			
<i>Old</i>		<i>New</i>	
	Un/happiness		Un/happiness
Misery, antipathy	Cheer, affection	Misery, antipathy	Cheer, affection
	In/security		In/security
Disquiet, surprise	Confidence, trust	Disquiet, distrust	Quiet, trust
	Dis/satisfaction		Dis/satisfaction
Ennui, displeasure	Interest, pleasure	Ennui, displeasure	Interest, pleasure
	Dis/inclination		Dis/inclination
Fear	Desire	Non-desire	Desire
		Surprise	

Source: Bednarek (2008, 169)

There is no consensus on the designation of some emotions as basic emotions, the labels of which have evolved over time (see Ekman 1992). Furthermore, the very existence of basic emotions has been questioned for decades (see e.g. Ortony 2022 and Chapter 5). It is important to underline though that basic emotions are emotions that can be isolated from others because of their specific properties, such as being “distinctive universal signals” (Ekman 1999, 47), whereas emotion *sets* are clusters of closely related emotions. These sets are more inclusive and I therefore consider them to be more appropriate to use than detailed typologies of emotions that raise questions as to how to distinguish them. As I will now discuss, this is particularly the case for visually thematised emotions.

A large body of research has already been conducted into visually thematised emotions, involving various visual artefacts, such as European comic books, mangas, the Bayeux tapestry, stock photographs or screenshots from films (see e.g. Forceville 2005; Shinohara and Matsunaka 2009; Díaz Vera 2015; Zieba 2020; Jing 2021, respectively). The objects of inquiry in such studies are facial and bodily expressions indicating thematised emotions. Surprisingly, given the aforementioned remarks, most of them rely on basic emotions. I suggest a list of visual patterns of thematised emotions in Table 10.4 (on page 206), which is informed by Jing (2021) as well as by Feng and O’Halloran (2012). As can be seen, I do not associate these visual expressions with specific emotions that they could potentially inscribe.

Interestingly, the two existing typologies do not include the presence or absence of tears. Technically, these are not a facial expression but a physiological reaction, which explains why I added them in brackets. Taken separately, these facial and bodily expressions cannot be associated with specific emotions. However, when these expressions are combined, they can potentially inscribe a set of emotions (rather than a basic emotion), as long as the co-text

Table 10.4 Facial and bodily expressions that thematise emotions

<i>Facial expressions</i>		
Eyebrows	Direction (distance from the eyes) Shape	Raised versus lowered Flat Angled: pyramid versus inverted pyramid
Eyes	Open type Direction of gaze (Presence or absence of tears)	Spectrum between closed, narrowed and widened Non directed Directed: up versus down
Nose	Spectrum between wrinkled and smooth	
Mouth	Open type Corners of the mouth	Closed versus open Up versus down
Cheeks	Raised or not	
Forehead	Spectrum between wrinkled and smooth	
<i>Bodily actions</i>		
Body direction (vertical)	Up versus down	
Body orientation (horizontal)	Forward (drawn in) versus backward (driven off)	
Body span	Stretch versus contract	

Adapted from Jing (2021) and Feng and O'Halloran (2012)

and the socio-cultural context are considered. Instead of adopting models that draw on the possibilities of identifying basic emotions from facial and bodily expressions, I rather follow more cautious models according to which minimal patterns of thematised emotions, namely valence and arousal, can be identified in facial and bodily expressions, but no higher-level divisions can be made (see e.g. Döveling, von Scheve, and Konijn 2011). When choosing between two options, I prefer to err on the side of reliability and replicability.

It is no coincidence that most research on visually thematised emotion focuses on artefacts, such as manga, comics or political cartoons that exaggerate physical expressions and rely on relatively established conventions of facial and bodily expression. Observing specific inscribed emotions is challenging, even in stock photos that are considered prototypical photographs of emotional experiences. For example, stock photos tagged as happiness-related on Shutterstock contain hedonic (e.g. signs of pleasure) and eudaimonic social conventions of happiness (e.g. signs of values such as professional self-realisation), which are not clear-cut (Zieba 2020). Therefore, attempting to do so for more complex types of photographs seems even more hazardous. Ultimately, defining and designing even the most basic and conventional signs of specific emotions can be challenging: in 2016, Facebook introduced five additional emojis (love, care, haha, sad and angry) to supplement the

“like” button, in order for Facebook users to comment on posts. This was done after extensive research with scholars to determine what emojis would be the most appropriate. Choosing animated emojis instead of static ones appeared to make the selected emojis clearer: “When we started animating them, everyone instantly got it,” according to Julie Zhuo, a product designer director at Facebook who worked on the emojis (quoted in Stinson 2016). Other features were considered as well to make the emojis’ meaning even clearer: Dacher Keltner, a professor of social psychology who was involved in the creation of the Facebook emojis, suggested exploiting the fact that voice is a rich carrier of emotions and add little vocalisations to the emojis (Stinson 2016). For technical reasons, Facebook did not take up this suggestion.

Apart from the six comment emojis, the “how are you feeling?” Facebook emojis underline how associating visuals with specific emotions is quite an arduous task. For example, Facebook assigned the same standard yellow smiling face to 23 “feelings,” which are often quite semantically distant from each other: happy, amused, wonderful, glad, satisfied, good, welcome, refreshed, better, alive, human, kind, whole, honoured, fine, nice, wanted, light, full, generous, free, comfortable and well.

In addition to being linguistically encoded, descriptions of bodily symptoms and behaviour caused by emotions and opinions being experienced can be visualised, too: Figure 10.2 features *South Park* character Stan and Leave



Figure 10.2 Brexit-related Flickr post featuring *South Park* character Stan and Boris Johnson

Surrounding text: “🤮#brexit #bojo”

campaigner Boris Johnson and was posted on Flickr on 24 June, the day after the results of the EU referendum in Great Britain. This meme is coupled with the text and emoji “😬#brexit #bojo,” which also thematises emotion, this time through a facial expression.

Observability and differentiation become even more critical in the case of *figurative* patterns that thematise emotion. Figurative language is a particularly rich resource for describing emotions. For example, the first edition of the Oxford Dictionary of Idioms, published in 1999, contained over 500 figurative English idioms that describe emotional states or reactions, accounting for 10% of the whole dictionary (Breeze and Casado-Velarde 2019). At least three reasons explain why people make abundant use of idioms, including metaphors, that describe their emotions. First, like for other conceptual metaphors, emotion metaphors make it possible to communicate abstract and subjective ideas in concrete terms (Kövecses 1990; Lakoff and Johnson 1980). A related reason lies in the complexity of the emotional experiences, which make literal language inadequate to report them (Crawford 2009). Third, the need for expressivity can explain the use of figurative language as well:

emotions are typically not a neutral topic of conversation. When we talk about emotions, in particular when we talk about our own emotions that we have felt in critical situations, we are emotionally involved, and this stimulates the use of expressive language.

(Foolen 2012, 359)

In this respect, emotional intensity is reported to increase the use of figurative language about emotions (Crawford 2009). The fact that emotion talk is abstract, subjective, complex and triggers expressivity makes the use of metaphors more likely, but does not determine how easy it is to associate those metaphors with specific emotions. For example, the source domain of “living organism” in the metaphor “emotion is a living organism” can be used for any emotion as well as for non-emotional domains. Only a few source domains and related metaphors are restricted to specific emotions, like the “fear is a hidden enemy” metaphor (Kövecses 2000). In such conditions, trying to identify specific emotions is particularly challenging.

Like many metaphors in general, a large body of emotion metaphors are related to the body and to the master “emotion is force” metaphor (Kövecses 2000). Some of the most common metaphors relate to (Breeze and Casado-Velarde 2019):

- the absence or presence of emotion: to have no heart, to have a thick skin
- the intensity of emotion: to be left with one’s mouth open (inability to speak due to emotion)
- containment: to keep one’s cool (in relation to body temperature)
- release: to boil over
- effects of displacement by force: to be beside oneself

Emotion metaphors are also commonly visualised, for example, an image of a broken heart is a metaphoric visualisation. In this vein, Forceville (2005) analysed the patterns that visualise anger and its most common metaphor “anger is the heat of a fluid in a container” in a comic book. He observed two types of pictorial metaphorical signs of anger. On the one hand, bulging eyes, wide mouth, red face, etc., are considered as clear indexical signs of the release of anger.¹ On the other hand, he drew on Kennedy’s definition of pictorial *runes* as

pictorial devices which are metaphoric, but which have no clear equivalent in language. . . . A pictorial rune is a modification of the literal depiction of an object, making some aspect of the object become easy to depict, that aspect of the object being difficult for the literal depiction to convey.

(Kennedy 1982, 600)

Spirals or straight lines, lines that come out of the mouth or smoke that emanates from the head, are standardised pictorial runes that metaphorically visualise anger. Forceville’s study is specific to one emotion (i.e. anger, which is among the most easily identifiable ones) as depicted in a specific genre, that is, a comic book. Unfortunately, its research design can hardly be transferred to other objects of study and thus underlines how the analysis of figurative thematised emotions is currently still limited to the least challenging data.

10.2.3 *Literal and figurative opinions: inscribed or evoked judgement*

There are many lists and corpora of affect terms, which are for example used for machine learning in sentiment analysis. Similar lists for judgement, like the ones Martin and White provided, are more challenging, since judgement is even more context-dependent and not linked to relatively visible emotional states in discourse. Furthermore, inscribed judgement is only the tip of the iceberg, just as I have outlined for inscribed emotion; judgement and affect are very commonly expressed without any explicit lexis. Apart from inscribed (explicit) lexis, attitude can also be thematised through evoked (implicit) lexis. Following Martin and White, thematised attitude (i.e. affect, judgement and appreciation) can be *flagged* by means of non-core vocabulary. Former US president Georges W. Bush’s speech after the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington on 11 September 2001, contains many examples of attitude without judgement lexis, for example: “Terrorist attacks can shake the foundations of our biggest buildings, but they cannot touch the foundation of America. These acts shatter steel, but they cannot dent the steel of American resolve.”

Inscribed and evoked patterns of thematised judgement can be coupled with various discourse *strategies* of judgement, which multiplies the options for direct and indirect realisations of judgement. In this respect,

Table 10.5 Van Leeuwen's (de)legitimation strategies in discourse

van Leeuwen's (de)legitimation strategies in discourse

Authorisation	Legitimation by reference to the authority of tradition, custom/conformity and law, and of persons in whom institutional authority of some kind is vested: expert, role model, personal authority (e.g. parents or teachers in relation to children)
Moral evaluation	Legitimation by reference to value systems, through evaluation terms, abstraction and analogies. Abstraction refers to the abstract ways that moralise practices by distilling from them a quality that links them to discourses of moral values, in, for example, "the child takes up independence" versus "the child goes to school for the first time." Analogies link practices with other ones that are associated with positive or negative values.
Rationalisation	Legitimation by reference to the goals and uses of institutionalised social action, and to the knowledge society has constructed to endow them with cognitive validity. It can be instrumental (related to purposefulness or effectiveness) or theoretical (related to some kind of truth, close to naturalisation).
Mythopoesis	Legitimation conveyed through narratives whose outcomes reward legitimate actions and punish non-legitimate actions. This storytelling can be in the form of moral tales or cautionary tales.

Source: Van Leeuwen (2007, 92)

van Leeuwen (2007) distinguishes four discourse strategies of (de)legitimation, through which targets are characterised negatively, as listed in Table 10.5.

As in the case of thematised emotions, figurative language is a central technique to thematise opinions as well. Metaphors abound to offer interpretative lenses for political contexts, such as policy-making or election campaigns (Hanne 2015). Among the myriad of existing metaphors, the medical metaphor is key to justifying political or military decisions. Syria's president Bashar al-Assad's rhetorical questions when addressing the Houla massacre perpetrated in Syria in 2012 are a tragic example: "When a surgeon . . . cuts and cleans and amputates, and the wound bleeds, do we say to him your hands are stained with blood? Or do we thank him for saving the patient?" (quoted in Borger 2012; see Hanne 2015, too).

The use of figurative language is certainly as frequent in visual content as in text, if not more so. In her analysis of Western television news related to distant suffering, Chouliaraki (2017, 262) distinguishes between "perceptual realism" and its "claim to facticity" through "descriptive language," versus "psychological realism" and its "claim to the emotion (of suffering)" and

its “claim to justice (around the cause of suffering).” There are often only thin and sometimes imperceptible dividing lines between these two types of meaning-making, both of which draw on realism.

Attempts to identify judgement patterns in visual content brings to the surface the recurrent issue of distinguishing between visually inscribed versus evoked content. Given the various possible interpretations of visual content, Križan (2016) limited her analysis of judgement in multimodal ads to their textual components. For Economou (2009), the visual signs that inscribe judgement in news images are limited to a very few conventional gestures. Importantly, the signs she discusses illustrate judgement *responses*, that is, the act of judging in its own right. Some of them visualise (dis)alignment through body language: participants clapping hands and thereby express aligned judgement or sarcastic disalignment, like in many memes, as well as pointing their thumbs up or down, are probably the most common ones. When only hands are represented (and not the participant’s body), the appraisers can more easily identify with them and use this type of signs as a token of their own (dis)alignment. Lifting up sports champions after their victory is another conventional visual sign of judgement reaction, in this case a positive one. In all these instances, it is the judgement of the represented participants that is visualised. Unlike Economou, Swain (2012) argues that it is also possible to identify inscribed judgement in visual content, at least in political cartoons. As for thematised emotion, (political) cartoons are a type of visual content that is particularly suited to analysing thematised visual patterns of judgement. Indeed, they are evaluative by nature and the evaluation of political actors or situations they contain needs to be easily understood by the readers, which entails the use of exaggerated visual frames: cartoons “deform to inform” (Harrison 1981, 67). Swain does not discuss the represented participants’ judgement responses; like me, she focuses on authorial judgement. She insists on how authorial judgement can be visually inscribed, and not only evoked, in cartoons since they draw on a “repertoire of stereotypes, icons, stock visual metaphors and formulaic facial expressions and gestures . . . , many of which come pre-inscribed with attitudinal meanings” (Swain 2012, 84). For example, she analysed a cartoon showing former Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein naked and running away as two signs of inscribed judgement. More precisely, his nakedness would visualise inscribed negative normality (in terms of how unusual he is) and his escape would inscribe negative tenacity (in terms of how resolute he is, see Martin and White’s model in Section 10.2.1). However, the intersubjective validity of Swain’s repertoire of inscribed judgement is debatable, since some of her interpretations seem quite personal and potentially less intersubjectively shared than she claims. As I argued for visually inscribed emotion, cartoons can definitely inscribe valence and arousal, but identifying a precise judgement is often far riskier. For example, Swain regards some inscribed judgement in a cartoon featuring UK ministers as relating to clumsiness, but that interpretation does not draw on specific signs of clumsiness. The

judgement in the cartoon could therefore be interpreted in alternative ways. In other words, specific judgement is often *inferred* rather than inscribed.

As I have already argued in Chapter 7, interpretation is all about balance: meanings are meaning *potentials* which entail shared understandings of meaning-making but, at the same time, “it is easy to overstate either commonality or difference” (van Leeuwen 2005, 24). However, as I already stated in Chapter 8, the unit of analysis is the social media post as a whole and not the visual content on its own. Therefore, inferred judgement from visual content can sometimes be coupled with inscribed or inferred judgement from the surrounding text. Ultimately, for the sake of caution and replicability, I consider most visual signs of judgement to be inferred/evoked rather than inscribed patterns. Therefore, inferring them in replicable ways is quite challenging; inter- and intra-coder reliability tests will measure to what extent the interpretations can be considered consistent and consensual, at least between two coders or codings. Otherwise, depending on the level of expected granularity and detail of the analysis, qualitative designs might be more appropriate. Ross and Rivers’ (2017) list of questions to identify (de)legitimation strategies in memes can help to guide the analysis of inscribed and evoked judgement in text–image content. The questions they suggest are informed by van Leeuwen’s framework and have been adapted and complemented in Table 10.6. Ross and River’s questions are in italics.

Table 10.6 (De)legitimation strategies and prompt questions for the analysis of inscribed and evoked judgement in text–image content

<i>(De)legitimation strategies</i>	<i>Prompt questions for analysis of inscribed and evoked judgement in text–image content</i>
Authorisation	<p><i>How is authority represented in the meme?</i> <i>How is the authority portrayed in the meme utilised as a form of delegitimation?</i> How is authority represented in the text–image content? How is it (de)legitimised in terms of (physical) appearance, action and/or settings? Do the represented participants embody particular roles (expert, role model, personal authority) and/or does the text–image content refer to tradition, custom/conformity and/or law to (de)legitimise?</p>
Moral evaluation	<p><i>What moral values are invoked by the meme?</i> <i>What moral evaluative techniques are used to delegitimise?</i> What moral values are involved in the text–image content and through what manifest content can they be inferred? What moral evaluative techniques are used to (de)legitimise, for example, nomination and/or predication patterns to inscribe judgement and/or evoke judgement through provoked, flagged and/or afforded evaluation? Does the text–image content draw on inscribed and/or evoked abstractions and analogies?</p>

<i>(De)legitimisation strategies</i>	<i>Prompt questions for analysis of inscribed and evoked judgement in text–image content</i>
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Rationalisation	<p><i>Does the content of the meme represent some kind of (un) truth? Is it representative of the way things are not?</i></p> <p><i>Does the meme utilise specific (ir)rationalisation techniques to delegitimise the candidate?</i></p> <p>Does the text–image content refer to the goals and uses of institutionalised social action?</p> <p>Is social action (de)legitimised in instrumental and/or theoretical terms?</p> <p>Do some elements of the text–image content represent some kind of (un)truth? Is it representative of the way things are <i>not</i>?</p> <p>Does the text–image content utilise specific (ir)rationalisation techniques to (de)legitimise the represented (political) actors?</p>
Mythopoesis	<p><i>Does the meme offer any alternative future projections?</i></p> <p><i>Does the meme reflect a moral or cautionary narrative?</i></p> <p><i>Is the strategy of mythopoesis adopted by the meme?</i></p> <p>Does the text–image content offer (alternative) narratives of the past or future projections?</p> <p>Does the text–image reflect a moral or cautionary narrative?</p>

Informed by van Leeuwen (2007) and Ross and Rivers (2017)

Some studies empirically address similar issues. For example, Howley (2016) emphasises how several of these strategies are used to analyse “I have a drone” memes with “I have a dream” memes. Now that thematised emotions and opinions in text and image have been addressed, let us move to signal-like emotion.

10.3 Signal-like emotions and opinions in text

The thematised emotions I have discussed in the previous sections constitute “emotion talk” or “language *about* emotion,” as opposed to “emotional talk” or “language *as* emotion” (Bednarek 2008, 11 italics added). Bednarek’s division between emotion and emotional talk can be extended to encompass language *about* attitude and language *as* attitude. The signal-like emotions and opinions that I will discuss in this section fall within language *as* emotion or judgement. In this regard, signal-like attitude is not the object of discourse like thematised attitude; it consists of conventional *cues* for emotions and opinions in discourse. In Planalp’s (1999) terms, language *about* versus *as* emotion differs in that the former consists of *substance* and the latter of *property* of language. These two types of patterns are complementary and do not necessarily coincide:

Normally, we think first of communicating *emotion* – letting another person know that we are angry, sad or happy. The emotion itself is the substance or topic of the message, like weaving colour for its own sake.

In addition, we communicate *emotionally*. In this case, the emotion itself may not be the substance of the message, but rather a property of the message. . . . Of course, the emotional substance and the emotional tone of a message need not coincide. A person may say she is not angry using a very angry tone of voice or speak of her great sadness in a very bland, apathetic way.

(Planalp 1999, 43, original italics)

The tone of voice that Planalp refers to is not the only type of signal for emotions or opinions. In addition to signals that are specific to spoken interactions, there are markers that *cue* the *consequences* of an emotion or opinion; these are visible in written discourse. However, their observability raises a certain number of issues. In the previous sections, I discussed how difficult it can be to associate patterns of thematised emotion with specific emotions and how the distinctions between judgement and appreciation are not straightforward. This difficulty is even more pronounced in the case of signal-like attitude. For Martin and White (2005, 69), signal-like attitudes are “emotional outbursts” which are hard to classify as either affect, judgement or appreciation and suggest regarding them as unspecified types of attitude. It depends on the type of markers, though: while an expletive interjection like *Jesus* might relate to emotion, a swear word like *jerk* refers to an opinion. Emotions and opinions are even more interwoven in signal-like than in thematised attitude. This is in line with many studies that do not draw on lexico-grammar but rather on discourse semantics and that underline how people often communicate emotions without those being the topic of the discourse. Therefore, they communicate their emotions through the *manner* in which they express themselves about the topic. Additionally, some signal-like patterns, like exclamation marks, are difficult to classify as affect, judgement or attitude because their mere presence is rarely sufficient to interpret them as signals of attitude. In contrast to a thematised attitude pattern, inferring attitude on the basis of signal-like patterns requires combining several cues and considering the co-text and context. Consequently, the unit of analysis is a signal *that is coupled with* other textual or visual elements in the social media post, as well as with the context.

Lastly, to the best of my knowledge, prior studies do not provide methodological guidelines to detect signal-like patterns in visual content. The types of textual patterns that I will now discuss cannot *a priori* be applied to visual elements and I have not (yet) been able to identify specific visual signal-like patterns.

I have listed the major sets of linguistic patterns of signal-like attitude in Table 10.7 on page 215. They comprise lexical, morpho-syntactic and typographic markers. Examples are provided in italics.

The first type of lexical markers concerns affective meanings and connotation. It assumes that the existence of affective meaning relies on the division between referential/descriptive meaning and “expressive” meaning, by which

Table 10.7 Framework of signal-like attitude

<i>Signal-like attitude</i>		<i>Observability of emotions versus opinions</i>
Lexical markers	Words and expressions connoting affect (<i>the massacre of forests</i>)	Evoked/connoted opinions (cf. thematised attitude); affective meaning inferred from signal-like emotions
	Swear/taboo words (<i>jerk</i>)	Inscribed opinions; referential and affective meaning inferred from signal-like emotions
	Expletive interjections (<i>Jesus, gosh, wow, damn!</i>)	Signal-like emotions and opinions not separable from each other and inferable when coupled with co-text and context
	Diminutives (<i>Matty</i> instead of <i>Matthew</i>)	Signal-like emotions and opinions interwoven in discourse inferable from expressive meaning
	Intensifiers (<i>horribly</i>)	Signal-like emotions and opinions interwoven in discourse inferable from graduation analysis when coupled with co-text and context
Morpho-syntactic markers	Word order rearrangements (<i>Suis-je bête!</i> instead of <i>Je suis bête!</i> in French)	Inscribed opinions and signal-like emotions inferable from referential meaning and word order
	Word deletions (<i>What, me, lie?</i>)	Signal-like emotions and opinions interwoven in discourse and inferable when coupled with co-text and context
	Exclamative words (<i>What a liar! How this film bores me!</i>)	
Typographic markers	Exclamative marks (<i>He is a liar!</i>)	

Informed by Bednarek (2019); Downing and Martínez Caro (2019); Foolen (2012); Micheli (2014); Szcześniak and Pachol (2015)

the writer expresses their (mainly negative) attitude (Löbner 2013, 35). Affective meaning is one type of expressive meaning. For example, the referential meaning of the noun “massacre” consists in “the act or an instance of killing a number of usually helpless or unresisting human beings under circumstances of atrocity or cruelty” according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary (2023). Consequently, the referential meaning of the noun is used when the attack that took place in Syria in 2012 is designated as the “Houla massacre” (see Section 10.2.3). By contrast, the expression “chainsaw massacre of the

world’s forests” draws upon an affective meaning that connotes judgement and simultaneously allows to infer (negative) emotion. In this sense, connoted judgement through affective meaning can act as a signal-like pattern of emotions. In other words, judgement is inscribed and thematised while emotions are signalled and thereby give rise to affective meaning.

Swear/taboo words convey conventional attitudinal meanings, too. Unlike Martin and White (2005), who suggest considering swear words as outbursts that express unspecified types of attitude, Bednarek (2019) insists on considering them as outbursts of emotion, not just evaluation. Specific emotions (e.g. anger) can sometimes be inferred from swear words with the help of co-text and context (Bednarek 2019). My Brexit-related corpus of social media posts revealed occasional creativity in using swear words, as in Figure 10.3. The surrounding text of this Flickr post was “Love me tondeur. Brexit day.”

Third, expletive interjections are interjections “whereby the speaker enacts his own current attitude or state of mind” (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004, 134). Expletive interjections can be of two kinds: primary interjections are discourse acts by themselves and are not normally connected to other word classes. “Wow” or “Oh!” are examples of primary interjections. By contrast, secondary interjections have an independent semantic value and can be added or removed without compromising the overall sentence. They



Figure 10.3 Flickr post with visual creativity for signal-like emotion

Surrounding text in the post: “Love me tondeur. Brexit day” (“tondeur” means “shearer” in English play on the words “Love me Tender” – song by Elvis Presley)

Courtesy: Didier Darrigand

comprise a referential meaning but also conventionally express a mental attitude or state. “Help,” “damn,” “hell,” “heavens,” or “shame!” are secondary interjections (Ameka and Wilkins 2006).

The fourth category of lexical markers for signal-like attitude is intensifiers. Importantly, analysing intensifiers would take us from the analysis of *attitude* to the analysis of *graduation*, following Martin and White’s appraisal framework. As I have mentioned earlier, this facet of appraisal analysis is beyond the scope of this book, so let us just note in passing that swear/taboo words can also be categorised following a cline of intensity, which is likely to reflect the intensity of the writer’s emotion, such as in “darn you” versus “fuck you” (Jay 2000).

Besides lexical markers, emotions and opinions can also be signalled by morpho-syntactic patterns that deviate from canonical conventions. These deviations particularly highlight how attitude is expressed spontaneously and impacted by the (relative) intensity of the experience. Like the other types of signal-like attitude, these deviations are, therefore, a consequence of the intensity of the experience. The words of the clause remain the same as in the canonical version but their order is rearranged. Word deletions like in “What, me, lie?” or “Him, keep a secret?” are response constructions through which writers express their surprise and incredulity, also known as miratives (Delancey 1997; Szcześniak and Pachoł 2015). Such deviations from canonical syntax are signals of emotions and opinions. In these three types of morpho-syntactic patterns, emotions and opinions are interwoven and cannot be observed in isolation. Furthermore, like many other patterns of signal-like attitude, they mainly serve to express valence and arousal, rather than specific emotions. This is all the more true for typographic markers such as exclamation marks, which inscribe exclamation but inevitably need the co-text and context to make sense as signal-like attitude.

10.4 Supported emotions and opinions in text and image

As outlined in the previous section, talk *as* attitude can be defined as the linguistic expressions and constituents that signal the writers’ attitude without inscribing it through attitudinal lexis. Such signals are indices of the writers’ attitude and therefore concern the *consequences* of attitude in discourse. By contrast, supported attitude, which I will discuss in this section, concerns the *causes* of attitude, but can likewise be inferred in discourse. I therefore switch from the downstream analysis of attitude (consequences and signal-like attitude) to its upstream analysis (causes and supported attitude). These causes can be inferred from the writers’ framing of situations that seem to induce emotions and/or opinions in them. The research methods differ: thematised and signal-like attitude draw on language patterns and are, consequently, the objects of linguistics and discourse analysis, while supported attitude is not anchored in specific language patterns; its analysis is rather informed by

cognitive psychology. In addition, the level of analysis shifts from a rather micro-perspective to a more macro one.

10.4.1 *Content patterns and related methodological questions*

In the case of supported attitude, emotions and opinions are particularly interwoven as they are inferred by analysing the writer's framing of the situation without specific discourse patterns. As I have previously argued:

by the same rules that allow to assert arguments or simply a coherent discourse, the writer expresses him/herself in a rational and emotional way that cannot be distinguished. Rational and emotional representation are carried by the same words, the same patterns, the same arguments; they are the result of the same discourse intentions.

(Plantin 2011, 2, translation)

Emotion and opinions are commonly considered “interwoven and mutually conditioned, both in our life and in linguistic expression” (Daneš 1994, 251).

As early as in Aristotle's theory on the passions, emotions have been analysed from a cognitive point of view:

When Aristotle considers specific emotions, he consistently analyses them in terms of their cognitive antecedents rather than in terms of their consequences for cognition. The latter causal connection is contingent: People may be angry or ashamed without having their judgement distorted by the emotion. The former is necessary: Anger cannot arise without an antecedent belief about another person.

(Elster 1998, 55)

The close connection between emotions and opinions is a core premise in cognitive psychology research on attitude: “The nature and intensity of the emotion are predominantly determined by the subjective evaluation of the meaning and consequences of an event for the individual concerned” (Scherer 2004, 140). This definition also emphasises how supported attitude involves a subjective evaluation of an event or situation, and not the event itself: while many events are culturally directly associated with certain opinions and emotions, such as the birth versus the loss of a child, all events can give rise to different subjective evaluations and emotions. For example, taking an exam may be a terrifying experience for some students, while – strange but true – it may be a stimulating and positive one for others. Nevertheless, while the evaluation is individual and subjective, it is typically based on shared socio-cultural conventions; otherwise, it would not be possible to infer it.

Researchers who adopt the traditional view of differentiating emotion commonly start from a pre-defined list of categorical emotions and seek to observe related physiological and/or behavioural response profiles. Another

psycho-cognitivist approach involves proceeding in the reverse way, through focusing on (1) the factors that trigger emotions and (2) the physiological and behavioural response profiles these factors induce, before analysing (3) the emoter’s conscious representation of these response profiles and (4) the emoter’s categorisation of specific emotions (see e.g. overview in Scherer and Moors 2019). In this vein, a large body of research, including that by Scherer and his team, has discerned appraisal criteria to categorise event frames and measured how they induced action tendencies/behaviours, psychological responses or facial/vocal/gestural expressions. Such typologies of appraisal criteria of situations were initially elaborated to measure their effects in cognitive psychological experiments, but several linguists adapted them in order to infer supported emotion in discourse.

I propose a list of eight criteria, informed by Scherer’s, Plantin’s and Micheli’s typologies (see Table 10.8 on page 221). The various frameworks I discussed in Chapter 7 also offer useful insights for analysing supported attitude. My list is suitable for inferring emotions as well as opinions. The first two questions are related to the notion of arguments, which I will specifically address in Section 10.4.2.

Plantin’s typology also comprises the appraisal criterion of “intensity and quantity.” As the researcher himself mentions, this criterion can be applied to other criteria, such as the consequences or the persons involved (e.g. 3 vs. 300 persons involved, minor vs. major consequences). As a result, in my approach, the criterion of intensity and quantity is considered a transversal criterion that reinforces the eight criteria rather than a separate criterion.

Ultimately, several of these appraisal criteria echo some news values, such as (1) surprise (i.e. with an element of surprise or contrast), (2) bad news (e.g. conflict or tragedy), (3) good news (e.g. rescues and cures), (4) magnitude (i.e. significant in quantity/intensity or impact) and (5) relevance, that is, content regarding issues, groups and nations that are relevant to the audience (see e.g. Harcup and O’Neill 2017). The convergence between several appraisal criteria and news values is not surprising, since both are related to situations that are of interest and concern to citizens, and which are, therefore, particularly likely to generate attitude, that is, emotions and opinions that can be reflected in readers’ practices (i.e. engagement by reading, clicking).

Let us revisit the cheating and dumping scenario example I mentioned earlier and focus on the words that the writer could use to frame it:

We had been together for five years, but he cheated on me with Ellen and now he’s dating her. I found out by accident. They post lots of pictures of themselves on Instagram and many of my friends like their posts. Ellen was my friend; she will never be again. Now I understand Natalie Portman in the movie *Closer*. What’s more, he left me the day before my exams. He knew that I was struggling to study and that I had already failed the geography exam twice.

In this scenario, the people involved are friends or lovers of the writer, so proximity in space is very high. Proximity in time is also a major factor, since her partner is dating someone else now. The writer frames her potential third exam failure as a consequence of their break-up. Ellen and the writer's former partner are responsible for this situation, which is out of the writer's control. She is drawing an analogy with the drama *Closer* (released in 2004). Breaking up with someone the day before exams flies in the face of norms and values of minimal consideration and care for others. The fact that her friends like the new couple's Instagram posts can be interpreted as betrayal, and therefore against some norms and values, too. Lastly, the writer describes her partner's new relationship with Ellen as a surprise that she found out by accident.

Not all eight criteria have to be met to infer supported attitude, though. This is an important issue for social media corpora, in which the text is often short, especially in text-image posts. Studies on news headlines indirectly provide useful insights into this issue. Indeed, a large body of research has revealed how headlines, which are also very short, can still contain frames. Dor (2003) underlines how quality papers exploit headlines as "relevance optimisers" in selecting a frame that has the highest news values for the readers. For example, the news frame of human interest would make stories more interesting for the target readership and was, therefore, chosen to report the story of an accident of two military helicopters, instead of a military frame that readers are less familiar with and less interested in, according to the editors. Drawing on Lindemann, Dor claims that tabloid headlines, which deviate from the headline-as-summary model written in a telegraphic style, go even further when they "trigger frames and belief systems in the reader's mind . . . and then get them resolved in the ensuing text; they evoke images and scenarios in the reader" (Dor 2003, 698–716; Lindemann 1990). Twenty years after the publication of Dor's article, the boundaries between the two types of headlines have sometimes become blurred in the context of a shrinking readership and the need to constantly develop strategies to attract readers. A large body of corpus-driven analyses adopts the same assumption that emotions (and opinions) can be induced from attitudinal lexis, like in thematised attitude, but also from lexis that frames situations without being attitudinal in itself. In the second case, attitude is supported by the schematisation of the situation, with no visible signs of attitude in discourse. For example, a sentiment analysis of over 140,000 English news headlines related to COVID-19 revealed that 52% of them could be classified as negative, 30% as positive and only 18% as neutral (Aslam et al. 2020). The researchers inferred valence from emotion terms (e.g. fear, relief) but also from terms that schematise situations without attitudinal lexis (e.g. emergency, risk, die, isolation, expert, protect, fan). In a second phase, they classified these headlines according to eight emotions that, according to them, can be inferred from them.

In Table 10.8, I coupled the appraisal criteria with questions regarding content and discourse that can guide researchers to elicit attitude through

Table 10.8 Eight appraisal criteria and questions to elicit supported attitude in discourse

<i>Supported attitude</i>		
	<i>Questions for the researcher (content level)</i>	<i>Questions for the researcher (discourse level)</i>
Appraisal criteria	Does the writer frame the situation with only textual features, only visual features or a combination of the two?	How does the writer construct textual and/or visual features?
Persons involved	Who are the represented participants; what are their roles and their connections to the writer?	How are they described and framed in discourse?
Proximity in time and space	Is the situation close to, or distant from, the writer, in terms of time and space?	How does the writer express proximity or distance?
Consequences and their degree of probability	Does the situation have no, indirect or direct consequences for the writer or for the communities they belong to (e.g. family, local, national levels)? How likely are these consequences?	How are any consequences described and framed in discourse? How are they connected to the writer (or not)? How is the level of probability expressed (e.g. graduation devices)?
Agency and responsibility	Who or what is considered responsible for the situation? Does the writer consider him/herself or others responsible? Are responsible people or organisations associated with specific roles, functions or values?	How is responsibility assigned?
Control of the situation	Is the situation out of control or is it possible to influence its outcome? Is control or the absence thereof actual or prospective?	How is the degree of potential control over the situation expressed?
Analogy with other situations	Does the writer draw an analogy between the frame situation and another one?	How are any analogies expressed? Are they literal or figurative?
Compatibility with norms and values	Is the situation compatible or not with the writer's norms and values?	How is ideological meaning expressed?
Novelty and expectedness	Does the writer describe or frame the situation as unexpected and involving elements of surprise?	What markers can surprise or unexpectedness be inferred from?

Informed by Scherer (1984); Plantin (2011); Micheli (2014)

concrete markers in discourse (Micheli 2014). In this way, it is possible to ground the analysis in manifest content, at least in the linguistic elements of the social media posts. I will discuss the scope for visual content in the next section, building on the notion of *visual argument*.

10.4.2 *Text–image rhetoric: attitude in visual arguments*

In the example of the love affair I discussed in Section 10.4.1, the writer *narrates* her experience. The appraisal criteria are not made explicit; they are inferred from the narration. The writer could just as well have framed her experience by explicitly stating the appraisal criteria in the following way:

Fidelity and friendship are fundamental values for me. Without fidelity, a couple can't last, at least not in my opinion. And dumping someone just before their exams is really inflicting a double penalty: being left is painful enough, there's no point in making someone miss their exams on top of it. He could have waited two weeks; it wouldn't have made any difference to him. And Ellen will never be my friend again. Friendship is sacred to me. Not to her, apparently.

In this alternative framing of the situation, the writer does not narrate her experience but concretely elaborates on the values she holds dear and from which we can infer supported attitude. In other words, she provides her *arguments*. Like in verbal arguments, visual arguments must contain reasons for accepting a point of view (Blair 2004). Subjective narrations and arguments are two ways to frame an experience that can be performed without using attitudinal lexis or signal-like attitudinal patterns (or often combined with them, as I have already argued). The notion of argument will be particularly useful for analysing supported attitude in visual content.

In Chapter 7, I already addressed how challenging it is to determine whether meaning is inscribed in the visual content or merely inferred from a multitude of potential meanings. In the section on thematised attitude, I specifically discussed how to determine whether a judgement is inscribed or rather evoked in political cartoons. I referred to major visual conventions for expressing appraisal in political cartoons: cartoonists express a judgement by metaphorically associating the represented participants (actors, etc.) with elements that are considered negative. For example, negative metaphorical framing through animal metaphors has been used in various political contexts over time (see e.g. Hart 2021). Moreover, exaggerating physical traits or people's behaviours is another key technique for visualising appraisal in cartoons. Not all political cartoons are based on these two techniques, though. Some frame situations without figurative language or exaggerations that evoke judgement. Instead, they provide arguments. Others combine visual conventions and visual arguments. Let us compare two cartoons, which were both shared in Flickr posts in the Brexit context in 2016 (Figures 10.4

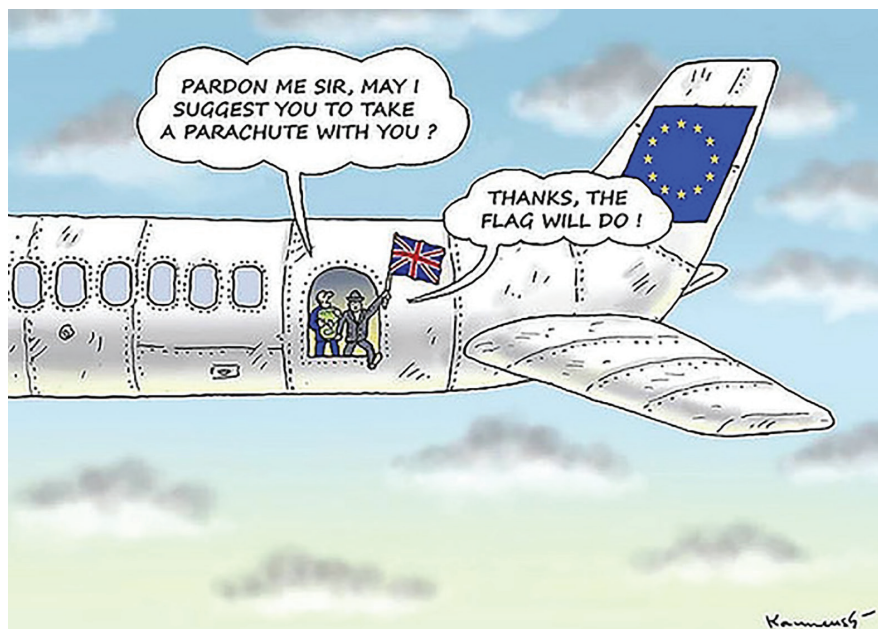


Figure 10.4 Marian Kamensky's cartoon shared in a citizen's Flickr post after the Brexit vote in 2016

Surrounding text of the Flickr post: "The passion of Brexit-ers"

Reproduced with the artist's permission

and 10.5). Figure 10.4 by cartoonist Marian Kamensky relies on a metaphor that compares the UK's wish for independence from the EU after the Brexit vote to flying without a parachute. This metaphor is evaluative in itself: flying with a flag alone is not considered a smart choice by anyone. The valence of this cartoon is explicitly negative. Through negative figurative patterns, Figure 10.4 evokes judgement and consequently falls within thematised attitude. The citizen who shared this cartoon in a Flickr post added the surrounding text "The passion of Brexit-ers," which also consists in negative thematised judgement against Brexit-ers.

Other cartoons frame situations without relying on evoked judgement. Instead of falling within thematised attitude, they can rather be considered tokens of supported attitude. Figure 10.5 is a case in point. In his cartoon, Patrick Chappatte illustrated how he saw the UK as disunited on 7 May 2015, the day of the 2015 UK General Election. The cartoon as such is not strictly evaluative: it portrays that while England is trying to break ties with the EU, Scotland is doing the same with England.

This cartoon acquired an appraisal dimension in the Flickr post that a citizen posted one year later in the context of Brexit. In that post, the cartoon



Figure 10.5 Patrick Chappatte’s cartoon shared in a citizen’s Flickr post after the Brexit vote in 2016

Surrounding text of the Flickr post: #brexit #uk #scotland #eu #hilarious #laugh #laughing #tweegram #fun #friends #photooftheday #friend #wacky #crazy #silly #witty #instahappy #joke #jokes #joking #epic #instagood #instafun #funnypictures #haha #humor

Courtesy: Patrick Chappatte

can be interpreted as a focus on the consequences of Brexit regarding the unity of the UK (appraisal criterion 3). That said, the cartoon does not contain inscribed valence: if this cartoon is shared by a Flickr member who happens to be a supporter of Scottish independence, for example, disunity would be a positive consequence of the Brexit vote for them. However, some of the hashtags that the writer added in the Flickr post guide the inference of negative valence (i.e. #wacky #crazy #silly #witty #epic). Therefore, the valence of the Flickr post as a whole is negative.

Ultimately, the Flickr posts that feature Figures 10.4 and 10.5 discuss the consequences of the situation but do so through distinct patterns. The first one relies on an evaluative visual frame that thematises attitude regarding the consequences of Brexit; the second post draws on a visual frame that is non-evaluative, but which gets valence thanks to the surrounding hashtags.

These two Flickr posts draw on *visual arguments*. For Blair (2004), the criterion for defining visual arguments is the same as for linguistic arguments:

the argument must contain *reasons* for accepting a point of view. For example, the aforementioned cartoons communicate an argument that Brexit is a bad decision because (1) it is based on the UK overestimating its ability to manage without the EU or (2) it further aggravates the disunity between Scotland and the rest of Great Britain. These two arguments are related to the third appraisal criterion, that is, consequences of a situation (see Section 10.4.1). Blair claims that the way to identify a visual argument is to translate it into words, like I have just done for these two Flickr posts. Unsurprisingly, he insists that a linguistic argument and a visual argument are two different matters, given their distinct evocative powers, so translating visuals into text is inevitably reductive. Nevertheless, such translations from the visual to the verbal allow to “abstract from the visual presentation the component that constitutes a reason for the claim being advanced” (Blair 2004, 49). This also means that some concrete components of the visual content must evoke the reason(s), which entails that the number of potential arguments in visual content remains limited. Premises must be reconstructed from the visual content.

As I will now briefly discuss, Blair’s strict approach to visual arguments as reasons evoked in visual content contrasts with broader definitions of visual arguments that allow for inferring arguments and supported attitude. Two issues are the object of discussions. The first concerns the evocative potential of images and the criteria for differentiating between visual arguments and other means of visually influencing viewers: “Arguments are one way of gaining assent. They are one mode of symbolic inducement. But not all symbolic inducements are arguments, and arguments are not the only way of gaining assent” (Jacobs 2000, 263). The evocative power of arguments does not rely on the same communicative strategies as evocation in many advertisements, for example, which associate a positive value with the promoted product and, therefore, seek to gain approval by associations. For example, advertisements for male deodorants associate the product with virility and beauty, without arguing that the deodorant makes men more handsome and muscular. It is through identification with the character in the advert that it potentially reaches its target, not by offering a rational argument. In other words, the fact that the evocative power of images is at the service of argumentation versus identification/fascination is a dividing line between arguments and other types of symbolic inducements.

The second issue concerns the typical nature of visual arguments as *enthymemes*. According to Blair:

[A]n Aristotelian enthymeme is an argument in which the arguer deliberately leaves unstated a premise that is essential to its reasoning. Doing so has the effect of drawing the audience to participate in its own persuasion by filling in that unexpressed premise. This connecting of the audience to the argument is what makes the enthymeme a rhetorical form of argument.

(Blair 2004, 41)

In this line of thought, an enthymeme is a *truncated syllogism*. Blair illustrates this approach to visual enthymemes with the example of a Democrats' anti-Goldwater political video advert that was released during the American presidential race in 1964, that is, during the Cold War period. The message consisted in considering voting for Goldwater, the Republican candidate, as voting for someone who would be capable of triggering a nuclear explosion on a whim.

Here is a description of the ad which the CNN provided (in Blair 2004, 49–50):

This chilling ad begins with a little girl in a field picking petals off a daisy, counting. When the count reaches ten, her image is frozen and a male voice commences a militaristic countdown. Upon the countdown reaching zero, we see a nuclear explosion and hear President Johnson's voice: "These are the stakes, to make a world in which all God's children can live, or to go into the darkness. Either we must love each other or we must die." Fade to black. White lettering. "On November 3rd vote for President Johnson."

This ad is an enthymeme insofar as Goldwater is not inscribed, or even evoked as such, in the visual content; he can only be inferred by the viewer from the context. His absence is the truncated part of the syllogism. However, some researchers argue against this definition of Aristotle's enthymeme and claim that "truncation is not a requirement" and that enthymemes are rather a combination of "probable premises and conclusions" (Smith 2007, 117, 119). As Smith explicitly argues, such a broad approach paves the way for multiple interpretations. This has major methodological implications for the inference of visual arguments. For example, she refers to an image discussed by Birdsell and Groarke (1996) in which a piece of cake is held under a dieter's nose. Following Blair's definition, this does not constitute a visual argument. For Birdsell and Groarke (1996, 8), however, it does:

Why not take the holding of the cake in front of the dieter's nose to be a particularly forceful way of expressing the arguments that "eating this cake would be wonderful, therefore you should forget your diet and eat it".

The two researchers ground their claim in the collapse between "psychological and logical proof" in Aristotle's notion of *pathos*. Irrespective of these philosophical issues, which are beyond the scope of this book, I suggest adopting Blair's stricter approach instead of a broader one that makes interpretation open to a multitude of possibilities without basing them on manifest content. Birdsell and Groarke's argument of the cake being wonderful is highly probable but is nevertheless not evoked as such in the visual content. Their translation into words goes much further than verbally describing a

visual argument. In Birdsell and Groarke’s own words, this type of argument “*is an argument. But it is also an attempt to circumvent the reasoning and the reflection*” (1996, 9, original emphasis). Such circumventions of reasoning are the exact opposite of what Blair considers visual arguments, namely visual manifest elements that concretely evoke reasons. When applying the broad approach, the notion of enthymeme loses its distinctiveness and hence its discriminating character.

By contrast, the two cartoons in the Flickr posts (Figures 10.4 and 10.5) can be considered enthymemes in the strict sense of the word. As in Blair’s example of the anti-Goldwater political ad, the entity that is being evaluated is absent from the visual content: Brexit is visually absent from the visual arguments “Brexit is a bad decision because reason 1/reason 2.” Instead, the reader is invited to fill in the gaps by making a connection between the entity and the reason with the help of the co-text (i.e. the surrounding text) and the political context of that time, in 2016. The absent elements to be inferred differ in nature in the strict and broad approaches to enthymemes: in the broad approach, it is the reasons themselves that are absent, whereas in the strict approach, it is only the entity that is absent and can be deduced easily from the co-text and context. Eventually, the example of the piece of cake invites the viewer to fill in the gaps about the argument as a whole, and not only the missing element in a precise syllogism. The evocative force is thus dispersed, and the viewer interprets the visual content according to their own discretion. As for the example of the deodorant ad, one might claim that the argument could be that men would *feel* more self-confident and more beautiful when using the product. But again, this purchasing motivation does not draw on reasons that are evoked in manifest content but rather on psychological associations. Ultimately, not all the premises and conclusions that are probable can be inferred from concrete manifest content. Therefore, not all of them are visual arguments, at least when the strict approach I adhere to is followed, according to which some concrete components of the visual content must evoke the reason(s).

Additionally, and unlike commonly assumed, the criterion of precise argumentation does not invalidate the idea of visual arguments, since many linguistic arguments are vague, unclear or imprecise (Blair 2004). That said, it is true that the dialectical power of visual arguments is very limited:

The visual makes an argument in the sense of adducing a few reasons in a forceful way. It might contain or present a *didactic narrative* – a story that supports a point. But it does not permit the complexity of such dialectical moves as the raising of objections in order to refute or otherwise answer them.

(Blair 2004, 52)

As a matter of fact, a large body of research on polarisation has made clear that the dialectical dimension of most social media posts is limited, whether they contain visual content or not.

Figures 10.4 and 10.5 were shared in social media posts during Brexit as visual tokens of citizens' thematised or supported attitude (or a combination of the two). Another prevalent practice is sharing symbolic pictures, which can also be considered visual arguments based on visual enthymemes. Images of a torn UK flag exemplify how supported attitude can be inferred from minimalist text–image posts on social media. In some of the posts, the text that surrounds the flag is limited to “Brexit . . .”

Such posts can be analysed as being composed of a visual enthymeme: the connection with Brexit is not inscribed in the image; it is only made possible by the co-text and context of the post. Like many Brexit-related posts, it focuses on the consequences of the Brexit vote. Its valence is rendered negative by the symbol of the torn flag.

Lastly, many social media posts contain supported attitude in text whereas the visual content does not fulfil this function at all. In many cases, the image instead serves to emphasise the personal experience of the situation (see Chapter 3). Posts comprising pictures of British products, such as Marmite, a British savoury food spread based on yeast extract, illustrate this pattern: the text “After the #brexit, how are we gonna get our #marmite???” focuses on the impact of Brexit regarding the purchase of the salty spread Marmite (i.e. supported attitude) while the image only illustrates the citizen's personal experience with that product.

10.4.3 Specific emotions in supported attitude

For Micheli (2014), the more meticulously the appraisal criteria are observed, the easier it is to identify specific supported emotions. In this respect, the type of corpus obviously plays an important role: Micheli's corpus consists of long texts, whereas the content of social media posts is much more limited in terms of number of words and its visual content is more open to interpretation. At most, it may be possible to identify sets of emotion, that is, un/happiness, in/security, dis/satisfaction, surprise and dis/inclination, which are often combined. That said, like I argued in Section 10.2.2, limiting the research goals to inferring valence and arousal but not specific emotions might be a cautious and hence the preferred option in many cases. One of Scherer and Moors' (2019) experiments indirectly confirms my call for caution: more than 3,000 participants were asked to imagine a situation in which the respondents happen to notice that two of their friends invited to a party are badmouthing them. The researchers then asked the participants to indicate whether this situation induced emotions in them and, if so, which from a list of pre-defined emotions. The results revealed a great heterogeneity of responses: anger was reported in 42.8% of the responses, sadness in 38.3%, contempt in 23.8%, good humour in 14.2%, worry in 5%, shame in 4%, guilt in 2.3% and fear in 0.7%. Many respondents indicated more than one emotion. To my knowledge, no research has already attempted to infer specific emotions based on a text–image schematisation of a situation, and I will not recommend it either.

In addition, it can be assumed that the heterogeneity of responses in Scherer’s experiment would have been even greater if respondents had been asked to choose one or more emotions without being restricted by a predefined list.

One can also imagine that the researchers’ own emotional reaction might interfere with their analysis of authorial emotion when there are no inscribed emotion signs in discourse, which would have an impact on the emotions they infer. Another experiment conducted by Scherer (2021) supports this assumption. For this second study, professionals were asked to report the extent to which they would feel each of eight pre-defined emotions (the same as in Scherer and Moors 2019) in nine prototypical professional scenarios: being criticised by colleague, being late for work, losing one’s job, experiencing troubled relationships, being badmouthed by friends, forgetting an appointment, having an unfaithful partner, offending a friend and discovering mistakes in one’s work. Like in study 1, the results showed heterogeneity between the participants’ responses but also significant levels of homogeneity in the responses given for similar situations. This can be attributed to “emotion dispositions,” which are defined as “stable positions to react more readily with certain emotions” with regards to similar scenarios (Scherer 2021, 1227). In other words, people infer different emotions from the same situation but their individual inferences are stable in the responses they provide for similar scenarios. It can, therefore, be assumed that analysts of social media posts also have emotion dispositions that make them likely to infer certain emotions from similar situations in a stable way. This may, therefore, affect the inference of authorial emotions in discourse and reveals once more how challenging it is to infer specific emotions.

In Part 3 of the book, I will apply the concepts and guidelines explored in the first ten chapters to a dataset of image-based social media posts published in the context of the Brexit vote.

Note

- 1 Forceville relies on Peirce’s distinction between three types of signs, namely icon, index and symbol (Peirce 1998). Indexes are mere *signals* of external elements, e.g. smoke as an index of fire, a footprint as an index of a foot or dark clouds as an index of forthcoming rain. Technically, however, the *images* of smoke, of a footprint, of dark clouds or of bodily symptoms of anger, like in Forceville’s paper, are *icons* of such indexes; they are “signs of signs,” as Feng and O’Halloran (2012) rightfully pointed out.

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Part III

Empirical insights



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11 The Brexit vote and its aftermath

Quantitative results

On 24 June 2016, the day the results of the British referendum on EU membership were announced, more than four million posts that included the hashtag #Brexit were written worldwide on Twitter within a matter of hours. Two and a half years after the Brexit vote, Twitter indicated that more than 200 million tweets had been sent referencing Brexit, to the extent that the social media platform had published tips for users who wish to hear less about this topic in their newsfeed (National Newsdesk 2019). The Brexit vote also generated high levels of engagement on other social media platforms: for example, the media monitoring platform Newswhip detected 5.9 million interactions with Brexit-related content posted on Facebook news pages over the 36-hour period between polling day and noon of 24 June (Newswhip 2016).

This plethora of social media content has been the subject of a large body of research, involving a wide variety of research designs involving semantic analysis, sentiment analysis, network analysis, corpus linguistics and discourse analysis. Complementing these lines of research, I focused on posts written by “ordinary citizens” that are based on text–image content, in order to explore the under-theorised field of visual citizenship. The issues I examined to quantitatively identify the content patterns of visual citizenship concern topics, visual genres and stance. I added the analysis of social relations to these three angles (see Chapter 9). Additionally, before analysing these four aspects, I filtered the social media posts of the corpus by distinguishing between those with no connection to Brexit, those with an indirect connection and those with a direct link to it. This preliminary analysis is the subject of the next section; the other analyses will be presented subsequently.

Let us end this introduction with some details about my Flickr and Twitter corpora. Contrary to most research on social media, my Flickr corpus is exhaustive: with David Garcia, we collected *all* the Brexit-related posts written between 24 June and 23 July 2016 which referenced “Brexit” in the text or tag. All these 5,405 Flickr images were analysed separately (see Chapter 8) but we present results for a *weighted* corpus of 2,229 Flickr items. To construct this weighted corpus, I took one image per series into account. Series are sets of photographs taken at the same place by the same person during a short period of time, with the same titles and descriptions. Most

series are compiled in Flickr albums and often consist of dozens of photographs. A typical example of this is a series of 50 pictures of an anti-Brexit march, taken and shared by one Flickr member. Such pictures do not differ in terms of topic, visual genre, social relation or stance. By opting in favour of a weighted corpus, I avoid awarding disproportionate weight to images taken in series. This sampling issue is specific to Flickr and does not concern my corpus of 1,542 tweets. These were selected based on the sampling choices that I outlined in Chapter 8.

11.1 The connection with Brexit and tagging practices

As my research focuses on text–image social media posts that are directly about Brexit, I started by filtering out those that referred to Brexit only indirectly or had no link that the coders could identify (see Table 11.1).

The Flickr posts with a direct connection comprised 75% of all posts, followed by those with an indirect connection (16%) and no connection (9%). Also, 88% of the tweets are directly connected to Brexit; 10% have an indirect connection and 2% do not have any. Based on a Chi-Square test, the differences between the Flickr and Twitter corpora are statistically significant (Chi-Square = 116.135; degree of freedom = 2; p-value = 0; Yates' chi-square = 114.415; Yates' p-value = 0).

Compared to tweets, the Flickr posts more often include an indirect connection or no connection. These differences may originate from the affordances of each social media platform as well as in the Flickr and Twitter members' most frequent uses of the affordances. These two reasons are inter-related. The higher volume of indirect and no connections on Flickr might be explained by the tagging possibilities on this social media platform. Tagging is indeed a major practice on Flickr: according to a survey conducted among 237 Flickr users in 2008, they use 370 unique tags on average (median = 149), albeit with a high level of heterogeneity between the respondents (Nov, Naaman, and Ye 2008). Flickr users can use up to 75 tags per visual item,

Table 11.1 Corpora of Flickr and Twitter text–image posts with direct, indirect or no connection with Brexit

Corpora of Flickr and Twitter text–image posts with direct, indirect or no connection with Brexit

C's $k = .880$

	<i>Flickr</i> (<i>N</i> = 2,229)	<i>Twitter</i> (<i>N</i> = 1,542)
Direct connection	75%	88%
Indirection connection	16%	10%
No connection	9%	2%

Note: Cohen's kappa measured on the whole Flickr dataset

although they rarely assign more than 20 tags to each piece of visual content (Barton 2015). Still, 20 is generally more than the number of hashtags included in a tweet which, unlike Flickr tags, form an integral part of the tweet and of the 280 available characters. In other words, the technical affordances of Twitter limit the use of tags more than those of Flickr. This is one reason why Flickr posts with no apparent connection to a topic are more common in my corpus. For example, a Flickr user shared pictures of the Modball car rally and added 29 very heterogeneous tags, among which “Brexit,” without any connection to the EU referendum.

Apart from these technical affordances, specific uses on each platform can explain the different saliences in my corpus. A large body of research on the types of Flickr tags has highlighted how they are often extremely broad: tags mostly refer to the year of the photo, to colours, to seasons or to photographic vocabulary, that is, macro, portrait, etc. (e.g. Ding et al. 2009; Mathes 2004; Sigurbjörnsson and Zwol 2008). In 2022, the most popular tags listed on Flickr were very stable and had not changed significantly since the early 2000s. Other research suggested that the use of broad tags is because Flickr users use the platform primarily for communication and not for archiving, for which they would need more precise tags. For example, among 456 Flickr users who responded to a survey, the main motivation for using Flickr was social communication; only 3% of them referred to self-communication, that is, organising archiving images (Stuart 2012). In the same vein, tagging on Flickr is also performed in creative ways for communication purposes (Barton 2018). Rather than investing time in selecting specific tags, Flickr users are more likely to take advantage of the communicative possibilities of the titles and descriptions that can be added to every visual item. The titles are limited to a few words, but the descriptions can consist of long texts, which often contain a direct, yet secondary, connection to Brexit in favour of more personal considerations. The following example illustrates the tendency towards the personal on Flickr. This text was shared with the picture of a snowy landscape in Iceland:

I’m taking a long break from posting photos on Social Media until October but given I’ve just returned from Iceland and the social media seems permanently occupied by terrorism, brexit and all manner of depressing things, I asked the good people of Twitter whether they would like me to post a photo as a one-off. They chose to see an image from Iceland, so here it is. This image was taken near the Hrafninnusker Hut in the Fjallabak national park along the Laugavegur trail. The trip itself was a mixed bag. The weather wasn’t great, at least not for photography, lending itself to moody shots rather than outright spectacular, and I was carrying a number of niggling injuries which curtailed my enjoyment. The company I had with me, three good friends more than made up for it though. Until October, this is me signing off.

(Greg Whitton/Flickr)

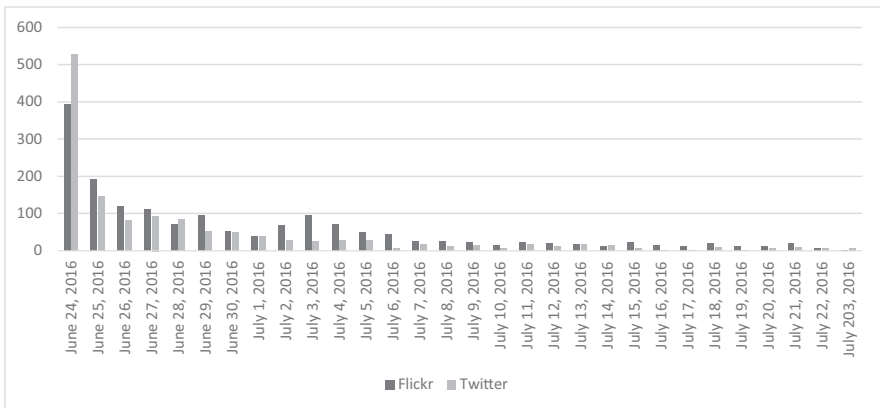
This text underlines how Flickr users, far from limiting themselves to sharing visual items, also share personal, even intimate, views or experiences on the subject photographed (here, Iceland) or on other, unrelated topics. Examples which include a photograph of a tourist spot accompanied by a verbal account of the tourist experience are common in the corpus. As I explained in Chapter 8, indirect connections consist of referring to Brexit as a time period and not as an event in its own right, as in “I went to this exhibition before Brexit” or “post-Brexit British holiday,” again in relation to personal experiences citizens share on Flickr. These should not be conflated with the direct, yet secondary, connections, that I have illustrated earlier.

The subsequent codings regarding topics, visual genres, social relations and stance only concern the Flickr and Twitter posts written by citizens that contain a direct connection with Brexit, amounting to 1,676 Flickr and 1,343 Twitter items.

Table 11.2 indicates the number of citizens’ Flickr and Twitter posts in the corpus with a direct connection to Brexit written per day. As already mentioned, the Flickr corpus is an exhaustive and weighted corpus, so it includes all the posts from each day during the selected time. My corpus of tweets was collected thanks to the Twitter sample API, which provides a 1% sample of all the tweets which are written every second. The sample is proportional to the total volume of tweets: if more tweets are written on certain days, there will also be a proportionally higher number in the sample. Consequently, the Twitter corpus is both random and proportional (see e.g. Pfeffer, Mayer, and Morstatter 2018 for further discussion on Twitter API in 2018).

Unsurprisingly, users posted the most Brexit-related content on the day after the vote. The number of posts slowly declines as the month of analysis unfolds, with a jump on Flickr around 2 July, when several EU marches were

Table 11.2 Distribution of the corpus of text–image Flickr and Twitter posts in the month of analysis (24 June to 23 July 2016; Flickr N = 1,676; Twitter N = 1,343)



held in the UK and many users shared their own picture of these events on the social platform. This increase of eye-witness content on Flickr is not visible on Twitter, as the analysis of the visual genres will confirm (see Section 11.3).

11.2 A threefold concentration of topics

It goes without saying that Brexit was a hot topic in both British and in international media during the EU referendum campaign. One could not open a newspaper (or media website), switch on the television or scroll one's social media newsfeed without getting Brexit-related content. Yet, although the EU referendum was on everybody's lips, a large body of research emphasises how the discussions centred around a limited number of topics in relevant tweets. For example, the Centre for Analysis of Social Media DEMOS examined 100,000 EU referendum-related tweets sent to UK Members of Parliament (MPs) between 20 May and 2 June 2016 (Krasodonski-Jones 2016). They revealed a narrow focus for both Remain and Leave supporters, with around 50% of the tweets centring around the same three issues, namely the economy, immigration and national sovereignty. Their salience is not the same on each side, though: within the tweets that relate to these three specific issues, 24% of Leave backers' tweets were immigration-related, 40% were about the economy and 36% about sovereignty, while the Remain backers focused first on the economy (58%), then on sovereignty (26.5%) and lastly on immigration (15.5%).

Quantitative topic analyses carried out after the outcome of the vote highlight how the major topics covered during the campaign continued to be the subject of many reactions on social media after the day of the referendum. Some of them gained in importance; others remained dominant while a third type of topic took a back seat. Researchers at the University of Sheffield analysed three million tweets written over a six-month period between June and November 2016 by Leave supporters, Remain backers and, to a lesser extent, users that had not been identified as supporters of either camp (in Ball and Applegate 2016). They compared the salience of four key topics on Twitter before and after the referendum, namely the National Health Service (NHS), law and justice, immigration and Article 50 of (the Treaty of the European Union, which sets out how a country can leave the EU). Before Referendum Day, Leave supporters tweeted much more about the healthcare system than Remain supporters. However, this trend flipped in the months following the vote. The claim by the Leave campaign that Brexit would bring £350 million a week extra for the NHS explains the popularity of this topic among the Brexiteers before the vote. Law and justice were a key issue that was predominately addressed by Leave supporters in pre-referendum discussions on EU and UK laws as well as after the referendum, with Leave supporters tweeting about this topic around twice as much as the Remain side. To a large extent, the Leave campaign made the vote on Brexit a vote on immigration (see e.g. Moore and Ramsay 2017). Unsurprisingly, in this context,

the number of pro-Remain tweets regarding immigration were exceeded by those of the Leave supporters: Remainers tweeted more on this topic than the pro-Brexit camp did on only 15 of the 146 days covered by the research (and never before the vote). Before the referendum, the Leave side tweeted about immigration and the economy in similar proportions, while the economy was always a much more prevalent topic than immigration in pro-Remain tweets. Lastly, the Remain part of the corpus contained only a very small number of tweets related to Article 50 before the vote. After the vote for Brexit, Article 50 slowly rose in prominence on both sides.

The researchers' method of analysing these three million tweets written after the referendum is topic modelling, based on automatic data analysis. This is the same for other studies on that issue which, however, focus on more recent time periods between November 2017 and February 2020 (see e.g. Calisir and Brambilla 2020; del Gobbo et al. 2021; Ilyas et al. 2020). Apart from automatically generated insights, some analyses provide results based on a manual topic analysis. For instance, Alsuhaibani (2018) coded the topic of 1,304 randomly selected #Brexit tweets that were written between 10 June and 7 July 2016, that is, approximately 48 from each day. His coding revealed that the major topic in his corpus was the economy (23.4% of the tweets), followed by the Brexit vote (11.2%), Europe (10.8%), the UK's then government (9.9%) and the campaign itself (8.5%). Alsuhaibani's variables are not mutually exclusive, but interestingly, only 6% of the tweets were coded for more than one topic. However, the insights from these figures are difficult to contextualise due to the fact that the corpus includes both tweets written before and after the referendum (three quarters of them after), without these being separated into subcorpora. In addition, like most studies, they were written by Twitter users of all types (citizens but also political or media organisations, etc.).

In order to complement these studies on text-only tweets, I coded the topics of text-image Flickr and Twitter posts to see if citizens were sharing content on a particular aspect of Brexit and if so, which one(s) (see Table 11.3 on pages 243–244). I drew on prior topic analyses in media and social media, before and after the vote, to select the topics. Subsequently, I tested them during a pilot study before refining them and coding the whole corpus. For all quantitative insights, intra-coder agreement was measured on the whole corpus of Flickr posts (because I started the research with the Flickr dataset).

My typology of nine topic variables includes both standard and more specific ones (see Chapter 9). They are not mutually exclusive: for example, a post about a political actor's views on migration would be coded as content related to both politics and migration. The first variable consists of Brexit in its own right, without relating it to any specific aspect. For example, the topic of a Flickr post comprising a black and white picture with "still Brexit blues" as surrounding text is Brexit in its own right. The Flickr user's emotions, namely "blues," are not a topic as such but an inscribed emotion about Brexit as a whole and is not about a specific aspect related to

Table 11.3 Classification of Brexit-related topics and their salience in Flickr and Twitter text–image posts

<i>Classification of Brexit-related topics and their salience in Flickr and Twitter text–image posts</i>				
<i>Variable</i>	<i>Description of the variable</i>	<i>C's k</i>	<i>Flickr Results</i> N = 1,676	<i>Twitter Results</i> N = 1,343
No subtopic	Brexit in general without any specific aspect, for example, excluding the vote and its results	.842	36%	26%
Standard International Press Telecommunications Council (IPTC) topics and subtopics				
Politics	Local, regional, national and international exercise of power, or struggle for power, and the relationships between governing bodies and states, including content regarding political actors, parties, events and developments, but excluding the future of the UK as a nation and of the European Union when not related to a political actor/organisation.	.863	22%	23%
Migration and mobility	Mobility of citizens, including migration for asylum purposes (i.e. as a result of forceful displacement), as well as the working conditions of foreign residents in the UK	.948	5%	5%
Economy, business, finance and labour	All matters concerning the planning, production and exchange of wealth, including the potential economic consequences of Brexit for the UK and the rest of the world as well as labour market, employment, unemployment, including the potential consequences of Brexit on labour.	.851	19%	22%
Specific topic variables				
UK's national sovereignty	The independence of the UK as well as its right and ability to regulate its internal affairs without foreign interference, including future EU-UK relationships (e.g. independence vs. isolation).	.916	5%	4%

(Continued)

Table 11.3 (Continued)

Classification of Brexit-related topics and their salience in Flickr and Twitter text-image posts

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Description of the variable</i>	<i>C's k</i>	<i>Flickr Results</i> N = 1,676	<i>Twitter Results</i> N = 1,343
The vote and its results	The voting process as well as the vote in general or specifically per age, region, etc., including Remain supporters' comments on Leave backers and vice versa, but excluding comments on political actors	.953	9%	17%
Future of the UK as a nation	Future relations between the four nations of UK (England, Wales, Northern Ireland, Scotland)	1	6%	4%
European Union	Future of the European Union (e.g. potential other exits from the EU), including European (dis)unity, EU as a value, love/hate for the EU.	.961	10%	4%
Other	Brexit-related social media posts whose topic falls outside the other seven variables, for example, the NHS, security, asking for a second referendum, defence	.849	4%	7%

Brexit. This example points out that it is important to distinguish between a topic itself and the potential appraisal of the topic. The description of the other topic variables outlines what is included in and what is excluded from each of them. The topics were considered to be present in the social media post when they were observed either in the text or in the visual content or in both.

The percentages in these columns add up to more than 100, since these topics are not mutually exclusive. The quantitative analysis of the topics provides results that are interesting to compare with those obtained in the three studies presented earlier. Like the analysis of tweets carried out by the British educational charity DEMOS, the social media posts in my corpus focus on three topics. However, those in my study are not the same as those by DEMOS: both in my Flickr and Twitter corpora, the topics of politics and the economy/labour are discussed most; the other major topic consists of Brexit without any specific aspect. For example, a post in which citizens express their attitude towards Brexit in general as such are of that kind.

Together, these three topics concern 77% of the Flickr and 70% of the Twitter posts, respectively. The concentration of the posts on these three topics is higher than in the DEMOS analysis, where the three major topics were present in only 50% of their corpus. Compared to those obtained by the researchers at the University of Sheffield, my figures reveal that immigration/mobility and national sovereignty are minor topics in my corpus. The same is true for the NHS, which has been coded as part of the “other” variable and is almost never mentioned. Article 50 hardly comes up in my corpus either. Lastly, the economy is nearly as salient in my corpus of tweets as in Alsuhaibani’s (i.e. 22–23%). While it is slightly lower in my corpus of Flickr posts, at 19% it is still a major topic. The variable “voting” accounts for 9% of the Flickr posts and 17% of the tweets in my corpus. However, Alsuhaibani’s figures cannot be compared with mine in detail as this variable is not defined in exactly the same way in the two studies. Interestingly, the frequency of this variable is almost twice as high in the tweets as in the Flickr posts. This can be explained by the much higher number of tweets that are critical of the other side (i.e. Remain or Leave supporters), whereas this polarisation is much less visible on Flickr.

The volume of content that relates to the vote and its results differs significantly between Flickr and Twitter, with 9% versus 17%, respectively. Most of these social media posts criticise the other side, especially Leave supporters. Aggression and derogation are much more prevalent on Twitter, notably through frequent “Congratulations, you just played yourself” memes, which were absent from the Flickr corpus. (Memes are present but are not a prominent feature on Flickr.) DEMOS carried out a thematic analysis of approximately 450 tweets containing either the #Brexiteer (Leavers) or #Remainiac (Remainers) hashtags, which were both seemingly used as pejorative terms to frame the other side. The researchers identified three major frames to describe the opponents. On the one hand, Leave supporters were framed as people who (1) did not know what they were voting for and who prioritised the wrong issues (e.g. migration), (2) were brainwashed by campaign slogans and (3) are uneducated and old. On the other hand, Remainers were also pejoratively framed through demographics, that is, as “an overly precious ‘Generation Snowflake’, who wilfully shout at Brexiteers from the comfort of their ‘safe spaces’” (Dale 2016). They were likewise framed as brainwashed and also as eternal victims. I observed these themes as well, although most items in my corpora criticised the other side without providing arguments.

Finally, it is interesting to note that the topic frequencies are relatively similar in my two corpora. As a matter of fact, citizens use two very different social media platforms but largely discuss the same topics. However, I could not calculate whether the differences between Flickr and Twitter are statistically significant by running a Chi-Square test because more than 20% of the figures are below 5, which makes the use of this test irrelevant (see Chapter 8).

11.3 An unexpected variety of visual genres

I established the variables regarding visual genres listed in Table 11.4 after carrying out an inductive pilot study on the Flickr corpus. I coded them in a subsequent quantitative analysis in order to determine which types of visual genres social media users employ in their text–image posts.

The first level of analysis is limited to visual genres in the strict sense: diagrams and graphics, photographs, visual designs, screenshots, plain-text posts and the variable “other.” In addition to these general levels, I refined the analysis of the photographs by distinguishing several types. On the one hand, I distinguished between the photographs selected by the social media users themselves and those that were automatically added by default to their post when they share news articles that contain visual content. Although these two types of pictures belong to the same visual genre (i.e. photographs), they do not refer to the same practices of sharing text–image content on social media platforms. This distinction does not, therefore, relate to visual genres but to the deliberate choice (or not) of sharing specific photographs. Visual content has to be uploaded to Flickr before being shared and is never automatically added to any Flickr post. Unselected images are, therefore, not applicable to this social media platform. Only a few Flickr posts do contain links to external news. They only consist of mere links, unlike news teaser tweets, which incorporate the title of the article and potentially a part of the lead.

Table 11.4 Types of visual genres in the Flickr and Twitter text–image posts

<i>Types of visual genres</i> (C's $k = .846$)		
	<i>Flickr results</i> N = 1,676	<i>Twitter results</i> N = 1,343
1. Diagrams and graphs	2%	12%
2. Photographs		
2.1. Unselected photographs (images from web link)	N/A	10%
2.2. Selected photographs (no images from web link)		
2.2.1. Photographs unrelated to Brexit	26%	9%
2.2.2. Brexit-related photographs of settings, actors, events	39%	9%
2.2.3. Brexit-related photographs of news content	8%	21%
3. Visual designs		
3.1. Memes and image macros	9%	19%
3.2. Figurative drawings and paintings, cartoons	13%	8%
3.3. Visuals of cultural artefacts	< 1%	5%
4. Screenshots of other social media posts	1%	3%
5. Plain text	< 1%	1%
6. Other	< 1%	3%

On the other hand, I further refined “selected photographs” by distinguishing between Brexit-related and unrelated represented content. Brexit-related represented content consists of pictures of news content, and pictures of actors, settings, events, etc., who/which are involved in the EU referendum and the subsequent discussions, in the months leading up to and after its outcome. Regarding the represented actors, they are mainly political actors (from Great Britain and the rest of the world), but they can also be professionals from the business world or artists who have their say on Brexit. Brexit-related events consist of political meetings, press conferences, scientific conferences, anti-Brexit marches, celebratory meals, etc. Brexit-related settings and symbols are closely related to actors and events, for example, pictures of the European Parliament in Brussels or of the British and European flags.

By contrast, the represented content that is considered unrelated to Brexit consists of pictures of actors, events and settings who/that have no connection to the EU referendum. For example, portraits of the former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and Winston Churchill or, less frequently, former US president Ronald Reagan, are not Brexit-related since these major figures were not involved in the Brexit process. Photographs of unknown people, the sea, hills, closed gates or a London street in the rain are further instances of this type of represented content. In such cases, it is the social media user who establishes a connection between the represented content and Brexit; it is not intrinsic to the content. This connection is often achieved using figurative language, whereby the represented content becomes a visual metaphor for Brexit (see Chapter 13). In most cases, the verbal element is the target domain, and the visual element is the source domain.

“Visual designs” is the third cluster of variables of visual genre that I listed. I do not define visual design in the sense of a profession creating visuals for commodities that achieve aesthetic effects. Rather, visual designs are either created from scratch, like in hand or computer paintings and drawings, including cartoons, or from existing visual materials, like in memes or image macros. In addition, another visual genre identified in the pilot study consists of visuals of cultural artefacts. For example, one Flickr post contains the image of the Sex Pistols’ CD sleeve *God Save the Queen*. From a technical point of view, these visuals are visual designs. Yet they differ from memes and image macros insofar as they are not based on the manipulation of existing content. In the case of these visuals, the original materials are kept intact. Moreover, while using these visuals is a playful and creative way of making connections between Brexit and the generally iconic cultural artefact, it is usually done without the subversive and delegitimising dimension that is typical of memes. In other words, sharing visuals of popular cultural artefacts is a playful way to recontextualise them without altering their original form.

Lastly, I further distinguish the visual items that consist of social media posts from other platforms, as well as visuals composed of verbal text alone. In the variable “other,” I gather the remaining visual genres, mainly logos.

Observant readers would claim that these are visual designs, too. This is true; I merely did not distinguish them as such, since I do not consider them important neither in terms of salience in the corpus nor for my research purposes.

Flickr is a social network that is driven by photography, the “home to tens of billions of photos and 2 million groups” (Flickr n.d.). Flickr is intended for users who share original photos and video that they created themselves; their guidelines insist on respecting copyright laws in this regard (Flickr 2018). Therefore, it is already somewhat surprising that photographs make up only 73% of the visual genres in the Flickr corpus: the fact that one visual item out of four is not a photograph already reveals how its members use the platform in ways other than those intended by the Flickr developers, by sharing a large variety of visual genres. The figures are even more surprising when broken down further: among the photographs, 8% are news content photographs, that is, TV screenshots or front pages of newspapers displayed in the street. In total, 39% are Brexit-related photographs of settings, actors and events. It is not possible to determine the origin of the photographs, but it is reasonable to assume that most photographs taken in a professional context, such as pictures of press conferences, are not taken by amateurs but come from the internet. The same is true for Brexit-unrelated pictures of former British MPs, for example. These pictures were, however, a minority in comparison to the many Brexit-related “home-made” pictures of post-referendum demonstrations, which Flickr users frequently shared on the platform. Lastly, the majority of Brexit-unrelated images, such as pictures of flowers or of exit signs (often used in text–image metaphors), were probably taken by citizens in the context of their private lives, outside of any professional or political context. For example, several posts contain a picture of flowers and verbal elements like “Just some flowers to take away the Brexit pain.” In the same vein, pictures of consolation cakes are also quite common. As noted earlier, only 73% of the visual content are pictures in the first place, which means that a considerable 27% do not directly align with the photo-based spirit of Flickr. Additionally, of the 73% that do, the Brexit-related and unrelated photographs that were likely taken in a professional context do not fall within the more specifically user-made ethos of the platform either. While these professional context pictures represent only a minority, combined with the first finding, they call into question the somewhat simplistic claim that “Twitter is for news and links exchange, Facebook is for social communication, and Flickr is for image archiving, Instagram is for *aesthetic visual communication*” (Manovich 2016, 11, original emphasis, which Manovich himself nuanced, though). At least as far as life in society is concerned (e.g. events like Brexit vs. family moments), Flickr does not seem to primarily be about image archiving to the extent that has often been assumed. It would be interesting to find out whether my corpus is an exception due to its political dimension or whether other specific events, political or not, also give rise to such a variety of visual genres. At another level, Manovich himself qualified this claim by noting that in his large-scale analysis, 80% of the photos shared on Instagram are casual rather than professionally designed ones.

The majority of these casual photos do not follow aesthetic codes and can be considered poor quality from a technical point of view, that is, not as aesthetic visual communication (see Chapter 2). I reached the same conclusion as he did concerning the photos taken by Flickr users: the photographs in which the use of framing, light and/or colour techniques can be noticed are the exception in the corpus (i.e. 11%, see Section 11.4), even though they are still more numerous than in the Twitter corpus.

External and news-related visual genres are highly present in my Twitter corpus: one visual item out of ten is an image of a news article whose link is shared on Twitter and 21% are pictures of news content (the most frequent variable). Brexit-related photographs of settings, actors and events constitute 9% of the corpus, many of which are professional photographs circulating on the internet, like in the Flickr corpus. With the same informative purpose, graphs and diagrams, which generally visualise voting results by regions or post-EU referendum stock prices, are also much more present in the Twitter corpus than in the Flickr corpus (12% vs. 2%, respectively). For the same reason, Brexit-unrelated photographs are much less common than in the Flickr corpus (26% vs. 9%, respectively).

The types of visual designs also show major differences between the two corpora. The number of memes and image macros reveal the most significant difference: nearly one visual item out of five is a meme or an image macro in the Twitter corpus, while this visual genre is limited to approximately one Flickr item out of ten. This type of visual genre reveals how much voicing one's opinion on Brexit consists of criticising the outcome of the vote or of tweeting about the citizens of the other side, either Remain or Leave supporters, often in delegitimising terms, for which memes are the visual genre *par excellence*. The figures regarding social relations and stance (see Sections 11.4 and 11.5) will confirm a greater polarisation on Twitter than on Flickr.

The figures related to visual designs also point out how non-photographic content is far from an exception on Flickr. Lastly, it is interesting to note how often Twitter users use visuals of cultural artefacts playfully and creatively to express their views on Brexit (i.e. 5%). This very specific type of visual genre is almost absent from the Flickr corpus.

As for the topics, the differences between visual genres in the Flickr and Twitter corpora are statistically significant according to the Chi-Square test (Chi-Square = 722.369; degree of freedom = 9; p-value = 0; Yates' chi-square = 712.161; Yates' p-value = 0).

11.4 Self-expression as the main social relation

In Chapter 9, I discussed several coding schemes for topics and visual genres. In Sections 11.2 and 11.3, I provide alternatives that are more specifically suited to my research questions on visual citizenship on social media regarding the Brexit vote. A detailed description of the variables is listed in Table 9.8 in Chapter 9.

Table 11.5 offers two types of insights. The first two columns relate to the social relations in all cases, whether they are the only inferred social relation in each Flickr/Twitter post or whether several social relations were inferred. For example, 25% of the Flickr posts share information; 16% of them do so without realising any other social relation. The Chi-Square test revealed that the differences between the Flickr and Twitter corpora are statistically significant (Chi-Square = 649.303; degree of freedom = 6; p-value = 0; Yates' chi-square = 643.464; Yates' p-value = 0).

Self-expression is the most salient social relation in both corpora, concerning 46% and 62% of the Flickr and Twitter posts, respectively. However, when citizens confine their posts to a single function, it is primarily information sharing for Twitter and eye-witnessing for Flickr. These correspond to the core business of each; these results are, therefore, not surprising. What is more surprising is that one out of four Flickr posts (i.e. 25%) serves the purpose of sharing information. This result correlates with the wide variety of visual genres on Flickr discussed in Section 11.3: the platform reveals itself as particularly rich and diverse, both in terms of visual genres and social relations.

Play is a major social relation in both corpora, identified in 20% and 31% of the Flickr and Twitter posts, respectively. The results for Twitter indicate a concentration on three types of social relationships (self-expression, information and play); no other social function exceeds the 5% threshold. Unsurprisingly, the artistic dimension is much more frequent on Flickr (11%) than on Twitter, as many Flickr members explore their photographic talents. Some also share drawings, paintings or poems, but these are rather the exception.

Finally, sharing elements of one's personal life is a relatively infrequently realised social relation, especially on Twitter. This is even more so when the posts contain no other social relation: only 1% of the posts are strictly personal, in both corpora. This is not surprising, however, as this variable is very specific and typically consists of an additional personal perspective that explains the self-expression and therefore rarely occurs on its own. Expressing personal emotions as such relates to self-expression, whereas the variable "intimacy sharing" involves sharing personal life aspects. They are mostly interwoven, like in the tweet "I can sleep soundly tonight because my kids know this was #notmyvote but I am heartbroken for them. #brexitfail" (Brendan/Twitter). Furthermore, the personal and the political dimension almost always interweave in Brexit-related social media posts, so they are very rarely exclusively about personal life.

The total of the quantities is above 100%, since the variables are not mutually exclusive. Interestingly, the total percentages are relatively similar in both corpora: on average, 1.49 social relations were inferred per Flickr post versus 1.53 per tweet. In addition, 56% of Flickr posts contain only one social relation that could be inferred compared to 59% of the tweets.

Within information sharing, I noticed how many social media posts, in both corpora, can be considered as *news remediation*. This notion is inspired

Table 11.5 Types of social relations inferred from informational, relational and entertainment content in the Flickr and Twitter text-image posts

Types of social relations		Informational, relational and entertainment content	Flickr results	Twitter results	Flickr results	Twitter results
			N = 1,676	N = 1,343	N = 1,676	N = 1,343
			When combined with other social relations		When social relation is exclusive	
Informational	Information sharing (C's $k = .878$)	Forwarded news, link to external content, informational statements and/or others' points of view	25%	48%	16%	33%
	Eye-witnessing (C's $k = .944$)	Amateur pictures of events attended, possibly with text that refers to eye-witnessing	37%	5%	20%	1%
Personal identity	Intimacy sharing (C's $k = .733$)	Event-related intimate moments in visual content and/or in text	9%	5%	1%	1%
	Personal points of view and appraisals (C's $k = .890$)	Self-expression and appraisal in visuals and/or text	46%	62%	12%	15%
Entertainment	Playing (C's $k = .957$)	Playful content in visual and/or textual content, based on incongruity and/or exaggeration	20%	31%	7%	8%
	Artistic renderings (C's $k = .949$)	Drawings, paintings and photographs with an artistic dimension, as well as written art (poems)	11%	2%	0%	0%
Other (C's $k = .921$)			<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%
Total			149%	154%	56%	59%

Note: The percentages do not add up to 100 because the variables are not mutually exclusive. When combined with other social relations: when one post comprises at least that social relation and another one. When social relation is exclusive: when only one social relation coded in the post.

by Deuze (2006, 4), who claims that “we adopt but at the same time modify, manipulate, and thus reform consensual ways of understanding reality (we engage in remediation).” In a broad interpretation of Deuze’s definition, I define news remediation as relaying the outcome of the referendum without any personal comment, by selecting an image (e.g. the EU flag with a missing star), and sometimes also by means of text (“Brexit has arrived,” for instance). Remediation is the repetition of (news) content in another medium or in other ways in the same medium. By engaging in news remediation, the social media members personally relay the announcement of an event, although this information is no longer breaking and already known by most. The purpose of this relay may lie in information sharing as well as in the desire to personally take account of this major event and share this account with the online community. In this respect, news remediation is in line with the desired feeling of “being counted” in the course of events (Coleman 2013 in Papacharissi 2015, 25). Besides, producing visual content of an event allows individuals to face up to the shock, or at least the emotion, triggered by an event: when facing a trauma, producing visual content is an activity that allows one to regain a foothold and find one’s bearings (Gunthert 2015). This hypothesis could hold true for news remediation as well and could be applied to major events, such as the Brexit vote, which are not necessarily traumatic, but which affect many individuals, positively or negatively.

11.5 Stance and the issue of polarisation

An analysis of several UK population surveys indicates a higher and more intense Brexit-related identity (Remainers vs. Leavers) than party-related identity that led to polarisation between April 2016 until at least March 2019, when the study ended (Hobolt, Leeper, and Tilley 2021). In addition, like in any ingroup–outgroup polarisation, respondents from both sides were more willing to attribute positive traits to their ingroup (i.e. intelligent, open-minded, honest) and negative ones to the outgroup (i.e. selfish, hypocritical, close-minded). Finally, only a third of the respondents would be happy about a prospective son or daughter-in-law from the outgroup. The prevalence and strength of Brexit-related identity supports the hypothesis that Brexit led to a polarisation that is not just about the European issue and partisan contestation but which extended to British democracy and the nature of British identity as a whole (Brändle, Galpin, and Trenz 2022). This polarisation has been observed on social media, too. Many studies provided results on the volumes of social media activity of Leave and Remain supporters prior to the vote, notably to predict the outcome of the vote based on the prevalence of pro-Brexit content. After the referendum, big data analyses pointed out a reversal in terms of salience. For example, Calisir and Brambilla analysed users’ daily participation on Twitter (unit of analysis = user) between January 2016 and September 2018. On the day of the referendum, after the percentages narrowed in the last days before 23 June, they observed a participation

rate of 51% versus 49% for the Leave side and the Remain side, respectively, which was in line with the actual outcome. Their analysis also revealed a major change as soon as the outcome became public: while the Leave side was always more active on Twitter before the vote, the Remain participation ranged between 60% and 70% of the total participation from 24 June 2016 until September 2018, when the study ended (Calisir and Brambilla 2020).

Importantly, like mine, their study consists of a *stance* analysis, which must not be conflated with the examination of *valence*. In other words, they analysed whether the tweets were pro-Remain or pro-Leave, drawing on stance-indicative hashtags (applicable to 8% of their corpus) or through machine learning (for the remaining 92%). Although one might expect more positive tweets by Leavers than by Remainers, in fact tweets from both sides can be either positive or negative. For example, a Remainer's tweet like "I am so happy Cameron resigned. He is responsible that Brexit is becoming a reality" is a positive one although the overall stance regarding Brexit is negative. Stance and valence are close, yet different, perspectives. Lansdall-Welfare, Dzogang, and Cristianini (2016) opted for another research design, both in terms of corpus and of focus. They sought to identify public mood on Twitter and consequently analysed ten million tweets between 1 June and 30 June 2016 that were not systematically related to Brexit. They analysed valence (not stance) through a sentiment analysis of five affect components, namely negative affect as a whole, anger, anxiety, sadness, and positive affect as a whole. Between 24 June and 30 June, they established a sharp increase in the four negative patterns and a decrease of positive affect. However, their insights into public mood do not differentiate between tweets written by individuals, professionals of any kind (journalists, political actors, etc.) or organisations, including political parties, companies or media outlets. Therefore, the "mood" they inferred relates to "mood" in a very general sense and not to citizens' appraisal. Interestingly, all the figures came closer to their pre-referendum level as soon as 25 June. This highlights how the peak of intensity they observed came down very quickly once other topics and trends on Twitter succeeded the Brexit vote.

Bossetta, Segesten, and Trenz (2018) network analysis also reveals contrasting results in terms of social media participation and polarisation. The researchers analysed the extent to which Remainers and Leavers visited and generated engagement on the Facebook pages of the campaigns and of British media outlets before and after the referendum. They observed a rise in engagement after the referendum by citizens who only visit either campaign pages or media pages and also by those who visit both. For Bossetta et al., the more polarised political context after the Brexit vote might have encouraged citizens to engage more with online political content. The researchers also observed how Remain and Leave supporters tended to visit Facebook pages from their own side, which is in line with the hypothesis of polarisation whereby citizens find themselves in filter bubbles in which they no longer come into contact with media content from outgroups. However, they also

noticed how Leavers crossed into Remain arenas quite easily (and not vice versa), especially in commenting on the Facebook page of *The Guardian*, a pro-Remain British newspaper. This puts theories of polarisation by filter bubbles on social networks into perspective, provided that the comments written by pro-Leave individuals were constructive and not limited to pro-Remain bashing, a difference which Bossetta et al.'s study had no ambition to verify. Lastly, they emphasised how the Facebook users are more informed about politics than is often claimed. This also supports the hypothesis that the filter bubble theory is often overstated insofar as research rarely takes into account the totality of the media that citizens visit, online and offline. Indeed, in several research designs that address this issue of media diversity, citizens tend to avoid echo chambers in their media environment (e.g. Dubois and Blank 2018).

My analysis of the users' Brexit stance reveal how pro-Remain posts are prevalent, as shown in other studies, yet with a large proportion of undetermined content, too (see Table 11.6).

As in the previous research mentioned earlier, the Flickr results, too, show a prevalence of anti-Brexit posts. That said, those account for only 53% of the total volume; the number of undetermined posts is 40%. This latter percentage is largely explained by the high number of posts whose social relation is eye-witnessing and which do not contain any stance, as well as by posts that inform about the outcome of the vote without any particular appraisal, notably through news remediation. The number of undetermined posts decreases when only those that fulfil the social function of self-expression are taken into account (whether combined with other social relations or not). In this case, the posts against Brexit amount to 63% of the corpus and the undetermined ones to 27%; posts in favour reach 10%. These differences are statistically significant (Chi-Square = 39.081; degree of freedom = 2; p-value = 0; Yates' chi-square = 38.235; Yates' p-value = $1e-8$).

The same reasoning can be applied to the Twitter corpus in general, and when the tweets fulfil the social relation of self-expression, they show similar statistically significant results (Chi-Square = 49.767; degree of freedom = 2; p-value = 0; Yates' chi-square = 48.915; Yates' p-value = 0).

Table 11.6 Stance on Brexit in the Flickr and Twitter text-image posts

<i>Stance on Brexit</i> (<i>C</i> 's <i>k</i> = .855)	<i>Flickr results</i>		<i>Twitter results</i>	
	<i>In general</i> N = 1,676	<i>When self-expression</i> N = 769	<i>In general</i> N = 1,343	<i>When self-expression</i> N = 830
Pro-Leave	8%	10%	12%	15%
Pro-Remain	53%	63%	50%	62%
Undetermined	39%	27%	38%	23%

The proportions of text–image posts in favour, or against Brexit or undetermined, are relatively comparable between the Flickr and Twitter corpora. The main difference lies in the higher percentage of undetermined Flickr posts compared to Twitter. The differences between Flickr and Twitter posts comprising self-expression were also calculated as statistically significant (Chi-Square = 9.978; degree of freedom = 2; p-value = 0.00681247; Yates' chi-square = 9.429; Yates' p-value = 0.00896435).

For all categories except visual genres, the unit of analysis to code stance in the text–image posts is the post as a whole; the variables can be observed in the surrounding text and/or the visual content. Denoted emotions, which also indicate a stance on Brexit, are sometimes only denoted in the visual content; in these cases, the surrounding text does not reinforce, nuance or complete them. By contrast, when stances are inferred from judgements rather than denoted in emotions, the surrounding text almost always plays a role in expressing them. In other words, stances in judgement are almost never expressed exclusively by visual content. This is rather good news in terms of coding since interpreting an image is not always straightforward, even at the fairly basic level of the Brexit stance. Undoubtedly, the same visual content can lead to extremely different interpretations. In this respect, Lilleker's (2022) experiment with members of the Conservative Party who were supporters of Boris Johnson, as well as with Momentum supporters (a group that promotes socialism within the British Labour Party and oppose Johnson), is particularly insightful. The researcher invited both groups to bring pictures that best framed their feelings towards Johnson. Both groups shared the same image (see Figure 11.1) and the members of each group reached full agreement about how to interpret it. This image was taken in London on the day of Britain's first 2012 Olympic gold, when Boris Johnson was mayor of London. This picture became iconic as early as 2012, leading to life-size scarecrows and cakes featuring Johnson on the zip wire. It became viral again after the outcome of the EU referendum and led to multiple memes. This picture appeared multiple times in my corpus as well.

His supporters shared the interpretation of this picture as showing Johnson as a man of action, who is not afraid to look silly if this allows him to achieve his goals. With the two flags that symbolise his sense of patriotism, he is seen as a man who can sacrifice himself for patriotic purposes, with his facial expressions revealing pride. By contrast, his detractors agreed to regard this picture as an example how Johnson is a joke, with his foolish personae as a mask that hides finely calculated communication strategies:

While his supporters suggested that the image captured the essence of Johnson as a committed patriot and hardworking politician, his detractors argued his essence was a man without dignity, all show and spectacle, a national embarrassment and in one case “a flag-waving moron.”
(Lilleker 2022, 6)



Figure 11.1 Boris Johnson on a zip wire on the day of Britain's first 2012 Olympic gold

Photographer: Kois Miah

For Lilleker, confirmation bias is likely to be the source of these two divergent interpretations, insofar as both his supporters and detractors interpret the characteristics of the image, above all, according to their pre-conceived opinion of Boris Johnson, consciously or unconsciously. The analysis of the image is then more influenced by external psychological variables than by intrinsic

visual patterns, which are interpreted to confirm their political views. In contexts like this, inferring stances with the help of the surrounding text is more than welcome. And such cases, in which interpretations diverge along political divides, are probably more frequent than commonly assumed.

In the next chapter, I will further explore the issue of self-expression by focusing on posts that include a photograph, related or unrelated to Brexit, and self-expression.

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12 Opinions and emotions in text–image relations

12.1 Ten patterns of attitude in multimodal social media posts

The coding design is based on the types of markers summed up in Table 10.1 (Chapter 10). As I outlined in that chapter, thematised attitude can be inscribed in attitudinal lexis, in visuals (e.g. a smile vs. tears) and in fixed figurative language (e.g. “I am heartbroken” or the visual representation of a broken heart). Thematised attitude can also be evoked by non-core lexis or figurative language (e.g. chainsaw massacre of rainforests). Signal-like attitude covers the *consequences* of attitude in discourse and only concerns verbal elements (e.g. exclamation marks or swear words). Lastly, supported attitude is inferred from its *causes* that are visible in verbal and/or visual elements. Eight appraisal criteria make it possible to analyse how attitude is supported in discourse: persons involved, proximity in time and space, consequences and their degrees of probability, agency and responsibility, control of the situation, analogy with other situations, compatibility with norms and values as well as novelty and expectedness. While thematised and signal-like attitude concern the micro-level of lexical, morpho-syntactic or typographical markers, supported attitude is inferred at a more macro level combining linguistics and psychology, that is, through the frames that the writer uses to present a situation in the social media post. As I argued in Chapter 10, supported emotions and opinions cannot be fully distinguished from each other since they are inferred from the same eight appraisal criteria. Consequently, I only address them together, in supported attitude.

I coded all the Flickr posts that include a picture *and* that were coded as self-expression, that is, 468 posts (see Chapter 11). I coded all of them twice in order to measure intra-coder reliability and ensure consistency. For practical reasons, having the corpus coded by two different researchers proved impossible. Although inter-coder measurements are more accepted in the scientific community, intra-coder reliability can be a satisfying alternative in many situations, especially if the whole corpus, and not only a sample of it, is coded twice. I measured the intra-coder agreement with Cohen’s kappa (C’s k) and Krippendorff’s alpha (K’s α), in order to compare the two types of statistics. Interestingly, the rates were exactly the same. The first variable

Table 12.1 Ten patterns of attitude coded in Brexit-related Flickr posts that include a picture and the social relation of self-expression

<i>Ten patterns of attitude coded in the pictures and texts of Flickr posts (N = 468)</i>	<i>C's k and K's α</i>	<i>Results in %</i>
No attitude in pictures	.978	45
Thematised emotions in pictures (visual or verbal elements)	.991	15
Thematised judgement in pictures (visual or verbal elements)	.997	24
Signal-like attitude in the verbal elements of pictures	1	2
Supported attitude in pictures (visual or verbal elements)	.986	18
No attitude in text	.912	8
Thematised emotions in text	.956	43
Thematised judgement in text	.995	28
Signal-like attitude in text	1	15
Supported emotion in text	.991	53

that I coded was the presence of verbal elements in the image (C's $k = 1$, K's $\alpha = 1$) including photographs of leaflets or of demonstrators holding placards with verbal text. Also, 16% of the images do contain verbal elements that were coded as content in the pictures. I then coded ten patterns of appraisal, which I outline in Table 12.1. The variables are not mutually exclusive, so the percentages do not add up to 100.

Forty-five percent of the pictures do not contain any marker of attitude. That means that 55% of the pictures do, which can be considered particularly high. Thematised emotions or judgements as well as supported attitude in pictures can concern visual elements as well as verbal elements in the photographs, although the vast majority only concerns visual ones. The distribution between the three main types of attitude in pictures shows 15% (thematised emotions), 24% (thematised judgements) and 18% (supported attitude).

Most cases of thematised emotions are human facial expressions showing emotions (mainly negative ones). In addition, some pictures depict animals that are instrumentalised to express the authors' emotions (mostly cats and dogs, a common practice on social media). Thematised judgements include conventional or less conventional figurative language (see Chapter 10). In the corpus, this translates into numerous visuals depicting the source domains of conventional metaphors (sunset, barrier, dark clouds, etc.), which account for most cases of visually thematised judgements.

Unlike visual patterns of thematised judgement, cases of supported attitude are not based on visual evaluative conventions that carry a judgement, such as metaphors. Many cases of supported attitude focus on the consequences

of Brexit, like the potential rise in the cost of living. Other cases of supported attitude in pictures draw an analogy between the outcome of the referendum and other situations (e.g. the election of Donald Trump as US president in November 2016, WWII, the former UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's years in office), which is another of the eight criteria that enable us to infer how authors of posts frame situations and how this can be related to attitude.

The results also reveal that 8% of the texts (i.e. the verbal elements in the title and description zones of the Flickr posts, not those inside the pictures) do not contain any patterns of attitude. This mostly concerns posts in which citizens merely claim "I voted Remain." In minimalistic posts such as these, citizens express their opinions by voicing their stances, without thematised emotions or judgements, or even markers of supported attitude. In other words, self-expression and attitude cannot be conflated.

Forty-three percent of the posts contain markers of thematised emotions in text, which reveals that nearly half of the texts of the posts comprises explicit signs of emotions. Supported attitude is the most common pattern, inferred in 53% of the texts. The consequences criterion was by far the most prevalent one in the corpus (even though I did not code the criteria and cannot, therefore, provide precise quantitative results in this regard). Like I argued in the case of supported attitude in pictures, the texts are considered markers of supported attitude when they meet at least one of the eight appraisal criteria. Let us look at a few examples to illustrate the categories:

- Example 1: "Boris Johnson and Nigel Farage: The Liar and the Tw*t" + picture of the two Leave leaders
- Example 2: "Oops, #brexit oh well, cya #europeanfunding" + picture of a sign that gives information regarding EU-funded works
- Example 3: "This pointless catastrophe can still be stopped" + picture of a placard with this phrase written on it

Example 1 illustrates thematised judgement in defining the two leaders as liars and twats, respectively. "Liars" and "twats" are judgement terms, and "twat" in particular is a swear word the affective meaning of which could also be considered a marker of signal-like attitude (see Chapter 10). However, I decided not to code it twice but only as a marker of judgement: it can clearly be considered as thematised judgement but the signal-like aspect of swear words is more hypothetical, since people can use swear words in their everyday language, without these being signs of the consequences of the situation in their discourses. When I coded signal-like attitude, I limited myself to coding word order rearrangements, word deletions, exclamative words, exclamation marks and expletive interjections, like "oops" and "oh well" in example 2. This example also relates to supported attitude, insofar as it focuses on the negative consequences of Brexit. Lastly, in example 3, "pointless" and "catastrophe" relate to thematised judgements while the fact that it "can still be stopped" relates to supported attitude and to the criteria of

agency and responsibility, as well as control of the situation. As this example illustrates, supported attitude does not rely on evaluative terms, but is often present in combination with thematised judgements.

I also looked at how these patterns of attitude combined together. The combinations of patterns in Table 12.2 account for 73% of the corpus. Other associations are possible, such as thematised emotion coupled with

Table 12.2 Twenty combinations of patterns of attitude, in the Flickr corpus

<i>Twenty combinations of patterns of attitude</i>	<i>% of the Flickr corpus</i>
No attitude patterns in pictures or verbal elements	4
No attitude in pictures + thematised emotions in verbal elements	13
No attitude in pictures + thematised judgements in verbal elements	4
No attitude in pictures + supported attitude in verbal elements	13
No attitude in pictures + thematised emotions, judgements and supported attitude in verbal elements	1
Thematised emotions in pictures only	1
Thematised emotions in pictures + thematised emotions in verbal elements	5
Thematised emotions in pictures + thematised judgements in verbal elements	1
Thematised emotions in pictures + supported attitude in verbal elements	1
Thematised emotions in pictures + thematised emotions, judgements and supported attitude in verbal elements	1
Thematised judgements in pictures only	1
Thematised judgements in pictures + thematised emotions in verbal elements	3
Thematised judgements in pictures + thematised judgements in verbal elements	1
Thematised judgements in pictures + supported attitude in verbal elements	6
Thematised judgements in pictures + thematised emotions, judgements and supported attitude in verbal elements	4
Supported attitude in pictures only	2
Supported attitude in pictures + thematised emotions in verbal elements	1
Supported attitude in pictures + thematised judgements in verbal elements	1
Supported attitude in pictures + supported attitude in verbal elements	8
Supported attitude in pictures + thematised emotions, judgements and supported attitude in verbal elements	1
Total	73%

thematized judgement without supported attitude, etc. For reasons of readability of the results, however, I do not present all the possible combinations.

The 4% of Flickr posts that contain no attitude markers in pictures or text are mostly cases like the “I voted Remain” post mentioned earlier, combined with non-attitudinal visual content. Two combinations of patterns account for more than 13% of the corpus each: “no attitude in pictures” combined with “thematized emotions” or with “supported attitude” in verbal elements. Many pictures in these posts do not contain Brexit content and link the Brexit vote with intimate moments of everyday life, like pictures of flowers in the garden or pictures of consolation cakes versus pictures of, for example, Brexit political leaders. In fact, many Brexit-unrelated pictures are used to metaphorically refer to Brexit, too (see Chapter 13).

The prevalence of the other combinations is much lower than these two. This highlights the richness of the combinations of attitude patterns, especially considering that nearly 30% of the corpus is made up of combinations that are not presented in Table 12.2.

12.2 Five types of appraisers in the verbal elements

After analysing how attitude was expressed by means of ten patterns and twenty combination patterns (Section 12.1), I examined the types of appraisers. This grants insights into how citizens *engage* in the social media content they publish, how they open or close their social media posts in relation to alternative positions, that is, to what extent they share *heteroglossic* versus *monoglossic* content (Bakhtin 2006 [1981]; Martin and White 2005). Appraisers like in “I am so happy! #Brexit” are “dialogically expansive, as opening up the dialogic space for alternative positions” (Martin and White 2005, 103). In grounding the social media posts in the writer’s individual subjectivity (i.e. “I am”), these manifest realisations of attitude reveal that the position is but one of many possibilities. In doing so, they create dialogic space for alternative positions.

Following Martin and White, I interpret writers as the default source of attitude, unless alternative appraisers’ emotions and opinions are referred to in the social media posts. Consequently, sentences in which there is no marker of the source of attitude are considered as authorial attitude, such as in “Britain was stronger in Europe.” Statements of non-endorsement are very common on Twitter (generally at the profile level, not in every tweet), where citizens are used to retweeting and forwarding information without systematically endorsing it. Such markers are nearly absent from Flickr posts. This is unsurprising since sharing other people’s content is not technically possible on that social media platform; discussing other people’s attitudes is only possible by manually referring to them in the post. Consequently, I assume alignment between the writer’s and potential other appraisers’ attitudes, unless explicit clarification of non-endorsement is included in the post.

I distinguish between two types of appraisers that are distinct from the writer as well as three types in which attitude is considered authorial:

- When the writer is not the appraiser:
 - Universal appraisers: universal statements are formulated by a generic you (e.g. sometimes you just have to laugh or you will cry).
 - Specific external appraisers: specific individuals other than the writer, often referred to as the authors of quotes, for example (e.g. “The best argument against democracy is a five-minute conversation with the average voter.” Winston Churchill).
- When the writer is interpreted as the appraiser:
 - Present appraisers: the writer is explicitly present through pronouns (I, me, etc.), stand-alone adjectives (e.g. Brexit. Not amused) and/or verbs that refer to the appraiser as the subject of the clause, sometimes without a personal pronoun (e.g. waiting for the consequences of Brexit) as well as in some types of speech acts (e.g. good bye, congratulations, fuck you Cameron, thank you Boris).
 - Collective appraisers: the attitude is voiced through “we-our” pronouns, whether this is in a personal or generalising way, or through directive and expressive speech acts that can be interpreted as collective via context (e.g. good bye, congratulations, see example 3 in the next paragraph, in italics).
 - Absent appraisers: attitude is not voiced with markers of engagement of present appraisers (e.g. Rats abandon sinking ship/campaign of lies).

“We” personal deixis raises issues regarding the source of attitude. For example, the “we” in “UK, we will miss you!” may refer to a little social group (a couple, a family, a group of friends, etc.) that only voices their own, personal and subjective voice or, by contrast, to a larger group (specified or not, like the EU as a whole), through which writers generalise their own attitude and tend to normalise it. Co-text and context can sometimes help determine the referent of such personal deixis, but not always. For example, the “we” pronoun refers to “people” in general in the first example here, but the referent in the other two is impossible to determine:

- Example 1: Momentous times people, whichever way you voted *we are in a historic moment*. Time will tell if the change is for better or worse
- Example 2: Good. UK did the right thing. It will find its way. UK has been around a while. Now the Nannycrats will scream, and the press will spread ill rumours. But things shall turn out better because the people are in control. *We hope*
- Example 3: *Good bye Great Britain, we wish you well for a future behind guarded borders!* (+ picture of guards at Buckingham Palace)

In this respect, I coded the posts relying on a “we” attitude without referent, in the in-between category of collective appraisers. Lastly, I made the choice of coding posts including bare terms and expressions such as “Brexit blues” (+ picture of a broken chain, for example) as posts with absent appraisers, since there is no manifest marker of the appraiser’s presence in the verbal elements.

The coding of the posts based on these five patterns of appraisers delivered the following results (K ’s $\alpha = 1$; $N = 468$): universal appraisers concern only 1% of the dataset; collective and external appraisers both reach 3%; present appraisers account for 35% of the Flickr posts, while 58% of the posts do not contain any markers of the appraisers’ presence outlined earlier. The low salience of universal, external and collective appraisers is not surprising, since these are quite specific patterns. The large majority of external appraisers are actually animals, mostly pets but not always, on which Brexit-related attitude is projected. In this respect, Brexit-related attitude is voiced at the level of the personal sphere instead of relying on quotes by great men and women.

Crossing the types of appraisers and the types of attitude in the verbal elements allows to refine the results and outline how these discourse patterns are combined. As I have just argued, 35% of the appraisers are present.

When I cross this result with the ones in Section 12.1, it appears that 20% of the posts combine thematised emotions and a present appraiser and 23% do not, like in “I am sad” versus “sad day for my country,” respectively (i.e. overt vs. covert emotion). In the same vein, 12% of the posts are built on thematised judgement and a present appraiser, and 16% are not, as in “There’s always the sun. #brexit #inshock #sad #voting #sunrise #disappointed #landscape #in #out #inorout #neverexpectedthat” (in which, “always the sun” is a marker of judgement while “in shock,” “disappointed” and “never expected that” are markers of present appraisers) versus “a new dawn” + picture of sunset, respectively (thematised judgement was inferred in 28% of the posts, in total). Lastly, 19% of all of the posts comprise supported attitude and a present appraiser, while 34% do not (53% of the posts do contain supported attitude in total). For example, the appraiser is present in “Voting to leave was voting to hate. Please bear with me, but I’m just not doing today . . . #brexit” (appraisal criterion: norms and values) while they are not in “#Brexit #pop” + picture of a dart that is going to blow up a balloon (appraisal criterion = consequences).

These crossed results emphasise how thematised emotions are more often voiced in posts with a present appraiser than with other types of appraisers (mostly absent ones), compared to thematised judgements and supported attitude. This is not very surprising, since (1) emotions are commonly voiced more often as subjective attitude than thematised judgement and (2) supported attitude is even more often monoglossic since it does not rely on attitude markers as such but on frames, which can easily be presented and interpreted as objective.

More generally, these results also highlight how citizens do not indicate their personal engagement in the majority of posts, at least not through a present appraiser. This creates a monoglossic space with no alternative positions. A large body of discourse studies regarding polarity on social media has already addressed the issue of monoglossia (see e.g. Fersini, Messina, and Pozzi 2016). However, analysing engagement is not limited to the types of appraisers. As I will discuss in the next two sections, other types of discourse features allow to refine the analysis of the writer's engagement in attitudinal posts. The great advantage of types of appraisers is that they can be analysed in a quantitative way. This is also the case for the typology I present in the next section, but not for the rich and varied discourse features with which I will end this chapter, in Section 12.5, and for which a qualitative approach is more appropriate.

12.3 Eight types of verbal attitude in multimodal social media posts

Most research on multimodality pertains to (at least) three major issues (Bateman 2014, 2017). First, the empiric relevance of – sometimes very – abstract models is often questionable. Most researchers illustrate their models with one or two self-evident case studies; they seldom empirically *test* them on corpora.

Second, determining the unit of analysis in visual content remains a problem. Unlike models that are based on identifying all the visual message elements prior to specifying connections with texts or with other images (e.g. Royce 2007), going back and forth between text and image is considered necessary in order to identify the relevant participants in meaning-making (see Chapter 7). Third, most models take the form of classifications that allow the analyst to identify the broad range of text–image relations but say little about how these combinations *operate* to create meaning.

I address these three issues in the typology of attitudinal social media posts that I present in this section: it is empirical and seeks to be exhaustive; its categories emerged from the dataset during an exploratory analysis, and at least one of them can be applied to every post of the whole dataset. In doing so, I tested the typology using a specific corpus, by means of a quantitative research design, first doing a pilot study and then working with the whole corpus of Flickr posts that contain pictures. Again, I coded the entire corpus twice, to address intra-coding reliability, because it was not possible to measure inter-coder reliability for practical reasons. I went back and forth between text and image multiple times to code the posts. Lastly, I sought to outline how social media posts operate to voice attitude in combining verbal and visual content. To do so, meaning-making was not examined *in abstracto*, in broad ranges of text–image relations, but in the specific context of communicating attitude. Consequently, I decided not to draw on abstract models, the concrete use of which appears to be quite challenging. Indeed, I tried to apply Martinec and Salway's (2005) as well as Kong's (2006) frameworks of text–image relations

but that proved unsatisfactory. In Kong's model, text–image relations can consist of expansion, projection or decoration:

- Expansion
 - Elaboration (no new information)
 - Explanation (in other words)
 - Exemplification (for example)
 - Specification (to be precise) and identification (namely)
 - Extension (new information)
 - Enhancement (new information by specifying circumstances, such as spatio-temporal context, manner, justification, motivation, etc.)
- Projection:
 - Projected speech
 - Projected thought
- Decoration: new but omissible information makes the text more attractive, without any underlying purposes

His model draws on Martinec and Salway's close categories of elaboration, extension and enhancement, within expansion. They are themselves derived from Halliday's systemic functional linguistic notion of expansion, according to which a clause can enter into construction with another clause and thereby become an expansion of it (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004). Ultimately, the notion of expansion was developed to analyse the combination of verbal elements and, therefore, raises methodological issues when applied to text–image relations.

While they are very insightful when applied to selected case studies that serve as ideal examples, these models appeared very difficult to apply, in particular because the categories they provide could not be distinguished from each other in a rigorous empirical and systematic fashion. I therefore confined myself to illustrate Martinec and Salway's (2005) and Kong's (2006) models with clear cases in previous research (Bouko 2020).

An important note concerns the typology's internal organisation, which I present in this section. My framework consists of two parts, addressing verbal and visual elements, respectively. I decided to structure it based on the verbal elements, but that does not at all entail that text has priority over image. As a matter of fact, analysing the multimodal posts involves going back and forth between text and image, and the analysis could also start by coding the visual part. I only proceeded that way for the sake of clarity and to avoid lengthy descriptions of insights. In addition, it is possible to limit the analysis to the broader levels of each category, not least to avoid additional layers of analysis. In the following, the elements in *italics* indicate the section of the post that is related to the category in question.

These eight patterns are not mutually exclusive (except minimal attitudinal lexis, see Section 12.3.6). Therefore, the total percentage of the occurrences

reaches more than 100. Also, 72% of the Flickr posts contain only one pattern, though. Unsurprisingly, the category of general statements is the most prevalent one, inferred in 52% of the posts. Together, the four subtypes of anchorage (see Section 12.3.3) were inferred in 38% of the posts. The category of personal statements ranks third, with 20%.

12.3.1 *Attitude in common-sense sayings, statements or proverbs*

This first pattern concerns universal appraisers whose positions are voiced in common-sense sayings statements or proverbs, like in the examples here:

- Thematised emotions: Sometimes you just have to laugh or you’ll cry. #Brexit #EURef + picture of a foolish Boris Johnson
- Thematised judgements: You know when your mind is ruined when even your 3-year-old nursery rhymes spell out #Brexit #PostRefRacism + picture of the rhyme “Birds of a Feather” in a children’s book
- Supported attitude: When you have lost the cork and no longer have the bottle! You Can No Longer Put the Genii Back in the Bottle Post Referendum. The champagne of victory soon sours when the consequences begin to escalate and no one calls you Nigel any more . . . + picture of a champagne wire without the cork or the bottle (appraisal criteria: consequences, responsibility and agency)

“Nigel” in example 3 refers to the pro-Leave politician Nigel Farage.

Together, these three subtypes of attitude in universal sayings account for only 1% of the dataset (K ’s $\alpha = 1$).

12.3.2 *Indirect speech and endorsement of external voices*

Writers refer to specific people’s voices, mostly through quoting them:

- Thematised emotions: The Iron lady is smiling down tonight . . . Brexit + picture of Margaret Thatcher
- Thematised judgements: This is my little Morgan. She is *very old*, and therefore sadly she voted for #brexit, but I love her with all my heart anyway. She’s my favourite creature in all the world. + picture of little Morgan, a rat in the writer’s arms
- Supported attitude: Dis United Kingdom. “If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face – forever” George Orwell, 1984 + picture of UK flags (appraisal criteria: consequences and analogy)

In the second example, the writer projects his judgement of old British people, who voted in large proportions in favour of Brexit, onto his rat. Being old is interpreted as negative in this Flickr post, in line with broad post-Brexit flaming against the older generations on social media, in a context where the

EU referendum was often framed as a battle between young and old (see e.g. Liberini et al. 2017; Norris 2018).

Together, these three subtypes of attitude account for 3% of the corpus (K 's $\alpha = 1$).

12.3.3 *Anchorage of the visual content*

In the sixties, Barthes elaborated the notions of “anchorage” and “relay” (translated in English in 1977). According to Barthes, anchorage serves to fix the interpretation of the image in answering the question “What is it?” through verbal elements and thereby controls the meaning of the visual content. For Bateman (2014, 35), relay would consist in a more “equal” text–image relation, in which text and image “stand together as necessarily separate but inter-dependent parts of a single whole.”

Barthes’ approach has led to a large body of research which discusses these categories. Even today, they are referred to in many studies, often in a broad and flexible way, which raises methodological issues for at least two reasons. The first reason is that these functions of the verbal elements in text–image relations, in being quite broad, should be considered a “first suggestion” that requires further refinement, otherwise they do not have much to say about text–image relations (Bateman 2014, 36). The second reason lies in a common approach to the notion of relay, which I find problematic, also in Bateman’s review of Barthes’ concepts. Indeed, Barthes’ notion of relay is much more restrictive than the equal, multimodal relationships that Bateman discusses. As a matter of fact, it only concerns *diegesis* (a synonym for “story” in Barthes’ essay) in text–image relations, as the quote here emphasises. Usually, only the elements of this passage in italics are quoted, which skews Barthes’ meaning. To argue against this view, I insist on the sections I transcribed in bold, which address diegesis as a key issue and, in doing so, restrict the notion of relay:

The function of relay is less common (as far as the fixed image is concerned); it can be seen **particularly in cartoons and comic strips**. Here text (**most often a snatch of dialogue**) and image *stand in a complement relationship; the words, in the same way as the images, are fragments of a more general syntagm and the unity of the message is realized at a higher level, that of the story, the anecdote, the diegesis (which is ample confirmation that the diegesis must be treated as an autonomous system)*. While rare in the fixed image, this relay-text becomes very important in film, where **dialogue** functions not simply as elucidation but really does advance the action by setting out, in the **sequence of messages**, meanings that are not to be found in the image itself.

(Barthes 1977, 41)

Like Barthes argued in the aforementioned quote, and relying on de Saussure’s semiotics, verbal elements can be complementary to each other. In such

cases, they are combined in *syntagms*, as opposed to paradigms. For example, words in a sentence have a syntagmatic relation: together, they form a spoken or written chain. By contrast, words such as “skirt, dress, trousers” have a *paradigmatic* relation of *substitution*. Like Barthes (1970) illustrates, a skirt, a dress or trousers cannot conventionally be worn at the same time on the same part of the body; they can be substituted for each other. The same is true in sentences, where they act as fillers for syntactic slots.

The notions of complementary, chain, diegesis and sequence are key in Barthes’ concept of relay. A diegesis implies the organisation of relays in a “sequence, . . . [i.e.] a logical succession of nuclei bound together by a relation of solidarity: the sequence opens when one of its terms has no solidary antecedent and closes when another of its terms has no consequent” (Barthes 1977, 101). Barthes (1977, 101) illustrates it with the example of a “having a drink” sequence: “order a drink, obtain it, drink it, pay for it, constitute an obviously closed sequence, it being impossible to put anything before the order or after the payment without moving out of the homogeneous group ‘Having a drink.’”

The Flickr post here illustrates both the relay and anchorage functions of verbal elements, through “W@##!!T%^&F” and “A Young European Starling Comment on Brexit,” respectively:



Figure 12.1 Picture of a bird with open beak coupled with verbal elements that fulfil the anchorage and relay functions in a Flickr post

Surrounding text: “W@##!!T%^&F.” A Young European Starling Comment on Brexit.

Courtesy: Frank Vincentz (Creative Commons)

“W@##!!T%^&F” is part of a sequence that could be interpreted as “hearing the news of the EU referendum outcome – reacting to it.” These verbal elements allow the sequence to unfold and, in so doing, establish the progress of the diegesis.

In this respect, the studies that draw on a broad approach to relay that focuses on an equal status of image and text seem to oversimplify Barthes’ notions (e.g. the analysis of multimodal metaphors in Grange and Lian 2022). For the same reason, scholars who claim that the function of relay is much more common than Barthes claimed rely on an overly broad approach to this concept that overlooks Barthes’ focus on diegesis. Therefore, I only use of the notion of relay in the strict framework of diegesis.

Markers of anchorage are also manifest in some Flickr posts, like in “*This is my little Morgan . . .*,” or are implicit and could be added, for example in “[this [picture] is] Boris Johnson Street Art. [This [picture] is a] Patriotic tribute to an appalling fellow. Arabella Street, Roath, Cardiff.” + painting of Boris Johnson wearing only a Union Jack flag, by the local artist SPK.

I have outlined several patterns of anchorage based on the presence of attitude in the verbal elements and/or in the visual content. All these patterns adopt a restricted approach to anchorage, in which the verbal elements fix the meaning of the visual content that could not be inferred otherwise. In the aforementioned example featuring the starling, the anchorage is necessary to make the connection between that bird and the Brexit vote. By contrast, “building walls again,” coupled with a picture of walls, is not coded as anchorage but rather as minimal attitudinal lexis for the reason that the text and the image draw on the same figurative concept in two distinct modes (i.e. verbal and visual). In that kind of conventionally figurative artefact, text and image do not rely on each other to be interpreted; they get their meanings independent of each other. Images of walls can be interpreted metaphorically without the help of the text, and vice versa. I acknowledge that such images might not be *systematically* interpreted to convey such conventional meanings and also, that the text tends to steer interpretation among various possibilities, depending on the reader, since verbal elements are usually more precise than visual ones. Nevertheless, I opted for that restricted approach to anchorage to avoid using it in too general a way and risk coding the majority of posts as containing anchorage. This would result in losing specificity and not saying much about text–image relations, as Bateman pointed out.

I divided anchorage into four subtypes, which I will outline in the next subsections. Together, these patterns were coded in 37% of the posts.

12.3.3.1 *Attitude through anchorage, no attitude in the visual content*

This category concerns posts in which attitude is only visible in the verbal elements; the visual content in itself is not considered attitudinal. This pattern was inferred in 13% of the posts (K ’s $\alpha = .881$).

12.3.3.1.1 THEMATISED EMOTIONS THROUGH THE ANCHORAGE OF NON-ATTITUDINAL VISUAL CONTENT

Here, at least one emotion marker is present in the text that serves to anchor the visual content, whereas there is no marker of attitude in the visual content:

- Absent appraiser: Comfort eating for #PostBrexit ontological insecurity + picture of a cake
- Present appraiser: Post-Brexit therapeutic baking. cheese straws. I use a very easy recipe from my mother's old post WW2 cookbook. Sadly, it is not for vegans, but they are tasty and nicely crisp/crumblly + picture of cheese straws

The appraiser is absent in “comfort eating” if the latter is interpreted as a noun phrase. However, the appraiser is present if that phrase is considered a verb in the present continuous (i.e. I am/We are comfort eating).

12.3.3.1.2 THEMATISED JUDGEMENTS THROUGH THE ANCHORAGE OF NON-ATTITUDINAL VISUAL CONTENT

- Absent appraiser: The more conventional (and acceptable) way to Brexit + picture of an “International departures” sign of the Eurostar terminal
- Present appraiser: Escaping the Brexit bollocks conversations + family picture in a restaurant

12.3.3.1.3 SUPPORTED ATTITUDE THROUGH THE ANCHORAGE OF NON-ATTITUDINAL VISUAL CONTENT

- Absent appraiser: Stop blaming old folk. *This is how many of them protected your freedom to vote.* + picture of a military cemetery (appraisal criterion: norms and values)
- Present appraiser: *A Remain campaign leaflet left lying in the gutter on the morning England left Europe. Folded in half. Which in some slightly contrived way, feels a bit like a metaphor for Britain itself.* You know, ‘cos it’s like, divided? Whatever. I’m gutted. We should have stayed. This is a disaster. I’m really sorry Europe, please forgive us for this. + picture of a Remain campaign leaflet (appraisal criterion: consequences of the situation, i.e. a divided country)

12.3.3.2 *No attitude through anchorage, attitude in the visual content*

This category concerns the posts in which attitude is not voiced through the verbal elements but only by means of the visual content. This pattern was inferred in 6% of the posts (K 's $\alpha = .923$).

12.3.3.2.1 NO ATTITUDE THROUGH ANCHORAGE, EMOTIONS IN THE VISUAL CONTENT

- Absent appraiser: A Young European Starling Comment on Brexit, in Figure 12.1
- Present appraiser: Me right now + pictures of a person in tears

12.3.3.2.2 NO ATTITUDE THROUGH ANCHORAGE, JUDGEMENTS IN THE VISUAL CONTENT

- Absent appraiser: Here are some typical ordinary Kippers celebrating Brexit + picture of men with foolish faces
- Present appraiser: Here are some typical ordinary Kippers celebrating Brexit while I can't stop crying + picture of men with foolish faces*

*I did not observe any occurrence of the last pattern in my dataset; I invented it and distinguish it from the authentic examples with an asterisk.

12.3.3.2.3 NO ATTITUDE THROUGH ANCHORAGE, SUPPORTED ATTITUDE IN THE VISUAL CONTENT

- Absent appraiser: Advertisement Board. Brexit Day + picture of an advertisement board that falls apart (appraisal criterion: consequences)
- Present appraiser: Welcome to Little England 1 June 2016. *A re-worked image from a few years ago, but one that expresses my feelings.* On Thursday 23 June 2016, the UK held a referendum on whether we wished to remain part of the European Union (EU), or leave and go our own way. We chose to leave by the narrow margin of 52%–48%. I have always considered myself to be a European as well as a British citizen, so I have been deeply shocked and saddened by this result. The leaders of the “Leave” campaign believe that the UK will become stronger and more prosperous as a result of quitting the EU, but I just cannot see it. The government of Scotland, whose people voted overwhelmingly to remain in the EU, is already seeking another referendum on Scottish independence, less than two years after the one held in 2014 narrowly rejected it. I fear that this will lead to the break-up of the UK as it is today, so that we will have diminished from being Great Britain to “Little England.” Most of all, I am concerned for the young, who also predominantly voted to remain in the EU and who are going to have to live the longest with the consequences of a potentially disastrous decision that they did not choose. + picture of a flag entangled in barbed wire (appraisal criteria: consequences, norms and values)

12.3.3.3 *Attitude through both anchorage and in the visual content*

This category differs from Section 12.3.3.1 and 12.3.3.2 in that it combines attitude in the verbal elements (anchorage) with attitude in the visual content. This pattern was inferred in 12% of the posts (K 's $\alpha = .896$).

12.3.3.3.1 VERBALLY THEMATISED EMOTIONS AND ATTITUDINAL VISUAL CONTENT

- Absent appraiser: Tired People. A message of desperation on a hoarding just off London’s Oxford Street. A sign of the times a few weeks before the EU Brexit referendum in the UK + picture of a tag on a wall with the text “I am tired of seeing stupid people try to run the country.”
- Present appraiser: My post-Brexit tears + picture of a couple crying

12.3.3.3.2 VERBALLY THEMATISED JUDGEMENTS AND ATTITUDINAL VISUAL CONTENT

- Absent appraiser: Boris Johnson Street Art. Patriotic tribute to an *appalling fellow*. Arabella Street, Roath, Cardiff. + picture of a street painting featuring Boris Johnson in a foolish way
- Present appraiser: Quad Derby, 2016. What the oncoming Brexit feels like to me. Britain as a Gulag where the hangers and floggers have taken over for their selfish interests. (From the Leisure Land Mini-Golf installation by Doug Fishbone at QUAD, Derby) + picture of a closed gate

12.3.3.3.3 VERBALLY SUPPORTED ATTITUDE AND ATTITUDINAL VISUAL CONTENT

- Absent appraiser: Bubbles!. Macro Monday theme of bubbles with a rainbow of hope for our British future + picture of a soap bubble on which sun rays make a rainbow appear (appraisal criterion: consequences)
- Present appraiser: Gift Horse by Hans Haacke. Although taken back in May, it seems a fitting symbol for the Brexit results. + picture of the bronze cast of an equine skeleton (appraisal criterion: consequences)

The bronze cast “Gift Horse” symbolises “the connection between wealth, power, and history” (Haus Der Kunst 2017). In the same example, I assume that the author of the Flickr post refers to the month when he took this picture (i.e. May), which makes them a present appraiser.

12.3.3.4 *No attitude neither through anchorage nor in the visual content*

There are verbal anchorage-related elements in such posts but without attitude, and the visual content is not attitudinal either. Attitude lies in other categories. In both examples here, non-attitudinal anchorage is combined with thematised emotions in the verbal elements as well as with non-attitudinal visual content. Category 12.3.3.4 can be further split into the three types of attitude, for more granularity, which I did not do here though, to keep the typology as concise as possible. This pattern was inferred in 6% of the posts (K 's $\alpha = .796$).

- Absent appraiser: *The new mayor speaks*. Bristol remains European . . . and has a meeting to grieve and ponder the future + picture of the new mayor of Bristol
- Present appraiser: Ok I think we all need cheering up a bit so *here is a picture of my new Bengal kitten Dave!* #Brexit + picture of a kitten

12.3.4 *Diegetic relay of attitude*

As indicated earlier, “W@##!!T%^&F” in Figure 12.1 serves as a diegetic relay. This pattern was inferred in 2% of the posts (K’s $\alpha = 1$).

12.3.5 *Verbal alignment and disalignment with attitudinal visual content*

This category concerns posts in which verbal alignment or disalignment with the visual content is explicitly voiced. More finely grained markers, such as modality cues, are left for more detailed levels of analysis (see Section 12.5). (Dis)alignment can be literal or ironic, as in a post that sarcastically aligns with a leaflet for a book that provides a biblical perspective on the EU. This pattern was inferred in 2% of the posts (K’s $\alpha = 1$).

Most of the occurrences concern alignment with the verbal elements included in the visual content, as the examples illustrate.

12.3.5.1 *Verbal alignment or disalignment with thematised emotions in the visual content*

- Absent appraiser: So true, Brexit is shittttt!!!! + picture of a “Brexit is shit” placard
- Present appraiser: I feel like her + picture of a crying girl

12.3.5.2 *Verbal alignment or disalignment with thematised judgements in the visual content*

- Absent appraiser: You’re damn right it’s a mess it’s a right f@*#ing #eton-mess #brexit #momentum #protest #parliamentsquare + picture of an “Eton Mess” placard
- Present appraiser: I can appreciate the furious and profane sentiments of the chap but not quite sure if staying in the EU quite helped his English. #you’re not your #brexit #london + picture of a boy at a demonstration and his placard “Whoever voted out, you are a cunt. Watch this country turn to shit”

Eton Mess is the name of a dessert that is commonly believed to originate from Eton College, where much of the British political elite, including Cameron and Johnson, were pupils. After the Brexit vote, the name “Eton Mess”

has become a metaphor to qualify the post-EU referendum turmoil. With a touch of British humour, some anonymous people created a petition to rename the Eton Mess recipe “Brexit,” in arguing that “We, the undersigned, believe that a few grown-up Eton boys have whipped up a tide of xenophobia in this country like cream, before crumbling its meringue-like international unions to make a pudding that no one wanted anyway” (Scott 2016).

12.3.5.3 *Verbal alignment or disalignment with supported attitude in the visual content*

- Absent appraiser: It might be over top but there is some truth in it. If you are qualified enough and have the necessary skills no one can take your job. Unless. . . Ignorance and illiteracy won the vote on referendum nothing else. #Brexit versus #bremain #referendum + picture of a placard with the text “An immigrant with a degree is not coming over here to ‘steal your job’ . . . when ALL you have is a standard grade in P.E. and an S.T.I.” (appraisal criteria: responsibility, agency, norms and values)
- Present appraiser: From the FT [i.e. Financial Times]. The third tragedy scares me the most. It also reminds me of why I choose to be an educator. #Brexit + screenshot of an editorial by the Financial Times, which draws on supported attitude (appraisal criteria: consequences, norms and values)

12.3.6 *Minimal attitudinal lexis*

With the category of minimal attitudinal lexis, I outline how citizens voice their attitude with only a few words, or even only one, sometimes.

This pattern was inferred in 13% of the posts (K 's $\alpha = .955$).

12.3.6.1 *Minimal affect lexis*

- Absent appraiser: This is so sad #Brexit
- Present appraiser: I can't believe it. #Brexit so sad

12.3.6.2 *Minimal judgement lexis*

- Absent appraiser: *Little Britain*, alone
- Present appraiser: Brexit. Fuck this shit

12.3.6.3 *Minimal lexis of supported attitude*

- Absent appraiser: Little Britain, *alone* (appraisal criteria: consequences, norms and values)
- Present appraiser: Mind the gap (appraisal criterion: consequences)

Since being minimal is a matter of degree and there is no cut-off point to make it replicable, this category might be more challenging to code in a consistent way.

12.3.7 *Attitude in general statements*

The category “attitude in general statements” is defined as opposed to that of “attitude in personal narratives” (Section 12.3.8). Attitude is linked to elements of personal life in personal narratives (Section 12.3.8) but not in general statements (Section 12.3.7). The two are not mutually exclusive, though: a post can contain both general statements and personal narratives, like in the second example in Section 12.3.7.3.

General attitudinal statements were inferred in 52% of the posts (K’s $\alpha = .793$).

12.3.7.1 *Emotion-related general statements*

- Absent appraiser: *Maybe there is hope*, individuals are learning that decentralisation is conducive to a more free society. #Brexit #EU
- Present appraiser: Never felt prouder than this, we dit it #Brexit

12.3.7.2 *Judgement-related general statements*

- Absent appraiser: Britain was stronger in Europe. *Idiocracy arrived in UK before USA*.
- Present appraiser: Don’t worry. A huge rise in the market for *Union Jack emblazoned shite* will save us. #Brexit

12.3.7.3 *General statements of supported attitude*

- Absent appraiser: Maybe there is hope, *individuals are learning that decentralisation is conducive to a more free society*. #Brexit #EU (appraisal criterion: norms and values)
- Present appraiser: I said this morning that there was nothing left to be proud of in this country but I was wrong. I’m proud to still be part of the hugely progressive Bristol community and proud that I grew up in the South Lakes with a huge amount of decent people doing what they could at the polls to combat the increasing legitimacy of small minded and divisive politics. I’m still European :) and actually, we are still European! (appraisal criteria: agency and responsibility, norms and values)

12.3.8 *Attitude in personal narratives*

In personal narratives, citizens narrate their lived experiences (see also small stories in Chapter 9). These were inferred in 20% of the posts (K’s $\alpha = .858$).

12.3.8.1 *Thematised emotions in personal narratives*

- Absent appraiser: However depressing, there is always chicken curry #Brexit + picture of a chicken curry on a restaurant table.
- Present appraiser: I can sleep soundly tonight because my kids know this was #notmyvote but *I am heartbroken for them*. #brexitfail

In Example 1, the image is interpreted as the writer’s picture of his own “food selfie,” broadly defined as a picture of food that people like, cook and/or eat and that they publish on social media (Middha 2018). Consequently, the personal, narrative nature of the post is inferred rather than observed.

12.3.8.2 *Thematised judgements in personal narratives*

- Absent appraiser: Time to have a drink to forget all this mess + picture of someone drinking in a pub
- Present appraiser: It was a shock to wake and find that 51.9% of those who voted chose to vote for the UK to leave the European Union (17,410,742 votes for Leave, 16,141,241 for Remain). To be honest, *it doesn’t seem a big enough majority for such a major decision*. In our old church important/contentious decisions had to be at least a two-thirds majority. Anyway, we have to deal with life as it is, not as we’d like it to be. It was a sunny morning, so I had breakfast outside, then did some weeding. Just before lunch the rain started, and kept going for most of the day, but then giving way to a beautiful evening. It didn’t make me feel as happy as it normally does :-)

12.3.8.3 *Supported attitude in personal narratives*

- Absent appraiser: For once, homework helps forget how British people have just broken their country + picture of a desk and a computer (appraisal criterion: consequences)
- Present appraiser: There has been a race of different kinds today – the Remain or Leave race. To stay in or to leave the EU – the outcome – LEAVE. Let’s see how that impacts things!! Our village held a “duck race” the other week and instead of houses competing with a scarecrow, they chose to continue with the duck theme. Here the duck race is replicated. + picture of a race of rubber ducks in a garden (appraisal criterion: consequences)

Technically, there could be instances in which there is no connection between the author’s personal narrative and their attitude on Brexit, for example in an invented case like “Congratulations, UK! This afternoon, I went for a walk in my new neighbourhood with Dixie.” However, such disconnected narratives were absent from the corpus; narratives were always associated with Brexit.

12.4 Multimodal patterns and attitude in visual content

The categories of verbal attitude can be combined with the types of attitudinal and non-attitudinal visual content described here. As argued earlier, there is no hierarchy between text and image (except in anchorage); the visual content does not get its meaning after interpreting the verbal elements; they are interpreted by the means of going back and forth between the two modes. Besides, in my own research, I coded the verbal elements of images (e.g. the picture of a placard) as part of the visual content (see Section 12.1), but coding it as a separate category would also be a viable option.

12.4.1 *Convergence or divergence in the types of attitude*

- Convergent types of attitude: same type of attitude in text and image
 - Example 1: My post-Brexit tears + picture of a couple crying (i.e. thematised emotions in the verbal and the visual elements)
 - Example 2: There's a storm coming. Sums up how I'm feeling after the Brexit results this morning + picture of heavy clouds (i.e. judgements in both modes, through a conventional figurative concept)
- Divergent types of attitude: different types of attitude between text and image
 - Example 1: Brexit blues + picture of a sunset (i.e. thematised emotions in text + thematised judgements in image)
 - Example 2: Suddenly I know the names of British politicians! This is not usual as my tendencies are markedly #apolitical. It just seems suddenly as if we are DEFINITELY poised for major, global upheaval & #trump. The European immigration crisis & now this. #Brexit + picture of a couple kissing each other, one with the European flag painted on her face, the other with the British flag on his face (i.e. thematised supported attitude in text + thematised emotions in image)

12.4.2 *Literal or figurative nature of the verbal and visual content*

- Verbally literal – visually literal
 - Example 1: You've Done WHAT? – Brexit Disaster + picture of Kaws' sculpture of a clown-like figure with his face obscured by both hands
 - Example 2: I take their photo, then they are in big trouble. Boris Johnson and Jeremy Corbyn after Brexit vote + picture of both leaders
- Verbally literal – visually figurative
 - Example 1: Our future? + picture of a torn flag
 - Example 2: Brexit. Now what? + picture of a £1 coin and a €1 coin, the first one being framed much bigger than the second one, while their normal sizes are roughly the same in reality

- Verbally figurative – visually literal
 - Example 1: Brexit is brewing + picture of stock market prices decreasing*
 - Example 2: Is there a captain to run this country? + picture of a foolish Boris Johnson*
- Verbally figurative – visually figurative
 - Example 1: There’s a storm coming. Sums up how I’m feeling after the Brexit results this morning + picture of heavy clouds
 - Example 2: Sweeping Change. When I took this broom shot I thought it was an interesting piece of history. (After the Brexit vote, there appears to be the potential for a sweeping change worldwide. Hang on folks, this is uncharted territory.) + picture of a broom

I did not observe any occurrence of pattern 3; I invented them and distinguish them from the authentic examples with an asterisk. Their absence is not surprising since visual content is particularly suited for figurative meaning. Combining figurative verbal elements with literal visual content is therefore rather unconventional.

12.4.3 Attitude and types of visual participants and processes

I distinguish between four types of participants and processes regarding attitude:

- Literal pictures that refer to participants and processes which are not evaluated in the text: Some flowers of the garden to take away the Brexit pain + picture of flowers
- Literal pictures that refer to participants and processes which are evaluated in the text: Oops, #brexit oh well, cya #europeanfunding + picture of a sign that gives information regarding EU-funded works
- Figurative pictures that refer to participants and processes which are not evaluated in the text: I can’t imagine the economic consequences + picture of a torn UK flag
- Figurative pictures that refer to participants and processes which are evaluated in the text: sad day #brexit + picture of an exit sign

12.5 Contracting and expanding alternative voices: two patterns of engagement

As argued earlier, the writer’s engagement is not limited to the types of appraisers and patterns I provided in Section 12.3. In this respect, I will now briefly introduce Martin and White’s (2005) engagement system and illustrate it with examples from the corpus. Their patterns are finely grained; a qualitative discourse analysis is more suitable to study them than a quantitative research design.

In their model, writers can leave some space to potential alternative voices through heteroglossic patterns, which can be divided into two broad categories: contract and expand. “Contract” patterns entail that writers *challenge* alternative points of view, while they *make allowances* for alternative positions by the means of “expand” patterns. These two broad categories are both subdivided into more specific levels of analysis, as Table 12.3 illustrates.

The contract system comprises disclaim and proclaim patterns. When they disclaim, dialogic positions directly reject (“deny”) or supplant alternative ones, or they are framed as not applicable (“counter”). Both deny and counter involve a contrary position. In the case of proclaim, “rather than directly rejecting or overruling a contrary position, [proclaim formulations] act to limit the scope of dialogistic alternatives in the ongoing colloquy” (Martin and White 2005, 121). The proclaim system is divided into three subtypes: concur, endorse and pronounce. “Concur” formulations overtly announce that the writer agrees with the projected dialogic partner, or has the same knowledge as them. Claims are framed as obvious (“affirm”) or understandable (“concede”) by the means of “concur” patterns. “Endorsement” covers formulations that frame external sources as “correct, valid, undeniable or

Table 12.3 Martin and White’s engagement system

<i>Martin and White’s engagement system</i>			
<i>Level 1</i>	<i>Level 2</i>	<i>Level 3</i>	<i>Level 4</i>
Contract	Disclaim	Deny (no, didn’t, never) Counter (yet, although, amazingly)	
	Proclaim	Concur	Affirm (naturally, of course) Concede (admittedly [but], sure [however])
		Pronounce (I contend, the facts of the matter are . . . indeed) Endorse (the report demonstrates/proves that . . .)	
Expand	Entertain (perhaps, it is probable that . . ., apparently)		
	Attribute	Acknowledge (Many Australians believe that . . ., the report states) Distance (Chomsky claimed to have shown that . . .)	

Source: Martin and White (2005, 134)

otherwise maximally warrantable” whereas “pronounce” patterns “involve authorial emphases or explicit authorial interventions or interpolations” such as in “I content” or in “There can be no doubt that” (Martin and White 2005, 126, 127).

Let us now briefly outline the two “expand” categories. In the entertainment system, the writer’s position is framed as only one of a number of possibilities, while, through attribution, alternative positions are attributed to external voices. Attribution is split into two subtypes: “acknowledge” comprises the patterns in which there is no overt indication that the writers align with the alternative positions, and explicit distancing can be observed in “distance.” In most cases, it is context that allows to distinguish between “acknowledge” and “distance.”

The Flick posts here illustrate these patterns of engagement:

- Contract – disclaim – deny: Brexit IN or OUT: financial stocks are *not* toys to play with! + picture of a toy shop. (In this post, the writer denies a claim related to financial stocks.)
- Contract – disclaim – counter: Post #brexit most of uk #investments are moving abroad *but* #confidence is the key to pick up every single economic problem so #Brits shall not despair whether regretfully or firmly wanting to leave #eu Picking up + picture of a professional meeting. (The proposition that confidence is key is in a countering relationship with the proposition that most UK investments are moving overseas. Confidence is presented as defeating the normal expectation, that is, lack of confidence. It invokes a contrary position.)
- Contract – proclaim – concur: so it’s been a few days since brexit and I find people are talking about it more now than ever before and as much as i don’t want to leave the union i do think we need to get on with it now but *obviously* there’s so much xenophobia and dirty politics it’s just never going to go away. + a hand removing an EU sticker. (With the adverb “obviously,” the writer announces that they are agreeing with some projected dialogic partner.)
- Contract – proclaim – pronounce: It might be over top but *there is some truth in it*. If you are qualified enough and have the necessary skills no one can take your job. Unless. . . . Ignorance and illiteracy won the vote on referendum nothing else. #Brexit versus #bremain #referendum + picture of a placard with the text “An immigrant with a degree is not coming over here to ‘steal your job’ . . . when ALL you have is a standard grade in P.E. and an S.T.I.” (The formulation “there is some truth in it” is an overt intervention into the text by the authorial voice.)
- Contract – proclaim – endorse: *Daddy says* Brexit is happening. I’m not worried as my favourite food’s company has its headquarters in France + picture of a French bulldog. (In formulations like “Daddy says” and with the help of the co-text, propositions by external sources are regarded as endorsed by the authorial voice, i.e. construed as correct.)

- Expand – entertain: LibDems again. *Seems like* the LibDems *might be* on the rise again post-Brexit. @ the #MarchForEurope rally + picture of some Liberal Democrats, a liberal political party, present at the rally. (With “seems like” and “might be,” the writer frames their position as only one of a number of possibilities.)
- Expand – attribute – acknowledge: “*Look forward with hope not backward with regret*” (Anon). In light of Brexit, we can only hope that the people have made the right decision! Hope is all we do have it seems . . . + photograph of a woman looking skyward. (In the sentence in which they provide the quote, the writer does not indicate where they stand with regard to the proposition. This illustrates acknowledgement. It is only the rest of the text that allows inference of the authorial voice’s alignment with Anon.)
- Expand – attribute – distance: Leave they said . . . + picture of pigs. (With the formulation “leave they said . . .” and its reporting verb, the writer distances themselves from the attributed material and the idea of leaving the EU.)

Besides, the last occurrence illustrates *multimodal* distancing: the verbal elements cover the external voices’ position while the picture of pigs is an attitudinal one that indicates how leaving was not the right thing, according to the author of that Flickr post. I will also discuss this post in the next and final chapter, which addresses metaphorical creativity and political attitude.

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13 Metaphoric judgement and creativity in the Brexit context

Would the Brexit vote have taken place if the neologism “Brexit” had not existed? Charteris-Black (2019) raises this question when he points out the two strengths of the term, namely its easy-to-understand meaning, which combines “Britain” and “exit,” and its easy pronunciation, both in English and in many other languages, which facilitated popular use.

But beyond these two most prominent features, the author highlights the more insidious metaphoric power of the expression “Brexit.” Its power is twofold, carried by both negative and positive connotations. On the one hand, conventional negative connotations associated with “exit” refer to termination and death, as well as to danger. For example, frequent combinations with the term “exit” include “fire exit” and “emergency exit” in the British National Corpus, which consists of a collection of texts enabling quantitative corpus-driven analyses of English language usage. Moreover, the connotation of danger frames the exit as a necessary, life-saving one. On the other hand, some positive connotations rely on the “source-path-goal” frame and present end points as purposeful ones:

profiling the end stage of a series of activities by using the word “exit”, substitute the negative associations derived from its typical contexts with a clear sense of purpose, a clear and definitive outcome, as in the much-quoted phrase “Brexit means Brexit.”

(Charteris-Black 2019, 37)

Although the term “Brexit” was originally coined in a news article by *The Express* in 2012 in analogy with Grexit, that is, Greece’s potential withdrawal from the eurozone, its use only became popular in the context of the EU referendum four years later. It has been particularly appealing to the Leave camp but Remain supporters have been using the expression, too. While this powerful metaphoric expression is, therefore, relatively recent in the history of EU-UK relations, other metaphors have been used for at least a quarter of a century. In this respect, the most prevalent metaphor is probably that of Britain as being at the “heart” of Europe. While it was initially used in a positive way, this metaphoric comparison between the position of the UK

in the EU and a body organ has taken on an increasingly negative connotation over the years, to the point of it referring to a “diseased,” “dead,” “non-existent” or “rotten” body and, more broadly, to a narrative of a “dying EU,” which might ultimately have influenced the voters’ preferences on 23 June 2016 (Musolff 2017).

In Chapter 4 on creativity, I have already discussed the evocative power of metaphors, which can simplify often complex ideas by linking them to the familiar, sometimes triggering certain cognitive biases. In this chapter, I will focus on the metaphoric practices that citizens engage in to express their Brexit-related political views using visual content.

13.1 Inferring multimodal metaphors

I have just outlined that the term Brexit itself is built on the source-path-goal and container schemas both negatively with the idea of exiting a negative place, and positively in framing the Brexit process as a purposeful journey. The “journey” metaphor is a common metaphor people live by; many life events and situations are framed as journeys, in a multitude of different formulations (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). This metaphor is particularly rich insofar as a large body of journey-related elements can be selected for metaphoric mapping purposes: the various modes of transport have their own affordances which can be used in different framings, for example, a high-speed train versus a barque. In the same vein, types of trajectory, energy, potential problems during the journey or positive elements along the way, such as a shady tree in the blazing sun, can also be used for metaphoric purposes, either together or in isolation (Forceville 2016). These potentialities for metaphoric mappings are also well suited to visual or multimodal metaphors. In a visual metaphor, the two elements on which the metaphoric comparison is based, namely the source and the target domains, are both represented visually (Forceville 2006). Visual metaphors are particularly common in advertising, when a target domain is associated with a source domain. For example, a car can be metaphorically compared to a dolphin in a car ad, in which both the car and the dolphin are visually represented. Some characteristics of the dolphin are transferred to the car, like agility. The more characteristics are transferred, the richer the metaphor is. Of course, visually representing abstract and often complex situations or events like Brexit is much more challenging than visualising a car. Probably for this simple reason, all the metaphors in which Brexit is the target domain that I identified in the corpus are built on visuals *as well as* on text. They are all *multimodal*. Unlike visual metaphors, multimodal metaphors are constructed by means of at least two modes, that is, text and still visual content. The “journey” metaphor that the UK and the EU are going in two opposite directions, as represented in Figure 13.1, does not require text: the two flags are visual metonymies, and the road signs clearly indicate the opposite directions.



Figure 13.1 Multimodal metaphor of the UK and the EU going in opposite directions after the Brexit vote

Courtesy: Tusimu

This metaphor is strictly visual but does not refer to Brexit per se; the connection to Brexit as the cause of these divergent directions is only possible through verbal elements or background knowledge.

Figure 13.2 illustrates the possibility that the Brexit vote is the first movement in an EU-wide domino effect. In this “the EU is a set of dominoes” metaphor, the dominoes are the source domain and the EU is the target domain. All dominoes except the British one are represented without metonymies. The EU is represented both through the outline of the countries (no metonymy) and the metonymy of the blue and gold stars. Like in Figure 13.1, the connection to Brexit is made possible via a written word. Visual metaphors are often built on metonymy. In Figures 13.1 and 13.2, the flags are visual metonymies for the UK and the EU.

I only considered the posts composed of a photograph with surrounding text; I did not analyse the metaphoric memes and political cartoons that also circulated on Flickr, since a large body of research offers insights into these



Figure 13.2 “The domino effect of Brexit” multimodal metaphor

Courtesy: Daniel Diaz Bardillo

visual genres. I did not analyse purely verbal metaphors either, as the visual content plays no role in them. For example, one post comprises an image of the British flag and the text “Have the events of the past 24 hours added the final nail in the coffin for the British Empire? #Brexit.” This sentence contains a death-related metaphor (“nail in the coffin”) that is strictly verbal; the visual content does not fulfil any role in this metaphor.

To infer metaphors in these posts, I examined the relations between the represented content in the image and the verbal elements. If I could consider them as a relation between a source and a target, I sought to identify whether at least one property or one broad scenario is transferred from the source to the target. Identifying visual or multimodal metaphors is particularly challenging, since it relies on interpreting visual resources, whose meaning, as we know, is often more open than that of their written counterparts (Yus 2009). Some metaphoric mappings can remain invisible during the interpretative analysis (Forceville 2006). It is, therefore, possible that I did not infer all the metaphors that make up the corpus or that identification would slightly differ between researchers. However, the results of the two independent codings reveal absolute intra-coder reliability agreement (C’s $k = 1$). In total, I inferred 140 visual or multimodal metaphors in 138 Flickr posts (i.e. over 6% of the corpus of 2,229 Flickr posts, see Chapter 12). Two posts contained two metaphors each.

13.2 Emotion-related metaphors

Among the 140 metaphors I inferred, four of them inscribe emotions and 136 judgement. Expressing emotions in visual or multimodal metaphors,

therefore, seems to be a very limited practice in my dataset. The visual and verbal elements of these four metaphors on Flickr are presented in Table 13.1.

It is impossible to offer significant insights into how citizens express themselves on the Brexit vote based on four text–image metaphors. Nevertheless, they illustrate several key principles in metaphor theory. The first theoretical point concerns the classification of metaphors into three main types, namely orientational, ontological and conceptual (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). Orientational metaphors draw on the human experience of spatial orientation: up-down, in-out, front-back, on-off, deep-shallow, central-peripheral, etc. In orientational metaphors, a concept is associated with a spatial organisation. For example, the concepts of “health,” “life,” “control of force,” being “happy” or “more” are associated with upward orientation, while the concepts of “sickness,” “death,” “bad” or being “sad” are associated with downward orientations. Foreseeable future events are also up, like in formulations such as “what’s coming up tomorrow?” (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 16). This orientational approach is grounded in the human experience of perspective: when we stand up and walk towards an object or a person that we are looking at, they get bigger and bigger the closer we are. The upper

Table 13.1 Visual and verbal elements of four emotion-related multimodal metaphors

<i>Visual elements of the emotion-related metaphoric Flickr posts</i>	<i>Verbal elements of these Flickr posts (in the title and description zones)</i>
Black and white bird’s eye view of a woman smiling and looking upwards	Title: “Look forward with hope not backward with regret” (Anon) Description: In light of Brexit, we can only hope that the people have made the right decision! Hope is all we do have it seems . . .
Close-up photograph of an on-off switch (see Figure 13.3)	Title: #currentmood #brexit Description: none
Black and white bird’s eye photograph of a torn sheet of paper	Title: Shattered Description: Is how I feel about the UK “Brexit” I’m not sure how anyone could think this could be a good thing. Everyone I’ve spoken to today is shell shocked about the referendum which seems to have been fought on false hopes, preying on people’s fears and riffing on prejudice. I fear for the break-up of Britain (Scotland and Ireland have seen sense but are dragged in regardless) and also how Europe will respond. A shit image but it sums up how I feel.
Low angle photograph of a bird flying in the sky	Title: Sadness will fly away on the wings of time. Description: none

part of the object or person being observed (e.g. the face) then appears to be higher and higher in our field of vision; our gaze is directed upwards in order to observe it. In general, elements for which the gaze is directed upwards are considered powerful (but not necessarily positive, e.g. “face up to your fears”), and conversely, those for which the gaze is directed downwards are considered powerless and negative. This perspective-based interpretation echoes the differences in information value between top and bottom that I discussed in Chapter 7 on Systemic Functional Linguistics.

The first two Flickr posts listed in Table 13.1 illustrate this orientational division between up and down elements. In the first photograph, the smiling face of the woman facing upwards visually represents the metaphors “good is up” and/or “the future is up.” The verbal elements refer to “looking forward with hope.” Therefore, this post contains two different but close spatial metaphors: hope is up and future is ahead.

On the switch in Figure 13.3, the “on” option of the switch is placed in the upper position, the “off” option in the lower position. The orientational



Figure 13.3 Orientational visual metaphor and ontological multimodal metaphor in a Flickr post

Surrounding text: #currentmood #brexit

metaphor inferred in this image is very basic; it can be formulated as “off is down.” The metaphoric spatial connotations associated with “on” and “off” are organised visually, in accordance with the conventional up versus down meanings.

Apart from the orientational metaphor, an ontological one can be inferred in this post as well. Ontological metaphors frame concepts as entities which can be distinguished from each other:

Understanding our experiences in terms of objects and substances allows us to pick out parts of our experience and treat them as discrete entities or substances of a uniform kind. Once we can identify our experiences as entities or substances, we can refer to them, categorize them, group them, and quantify them – and, by this means, reason about them.

(Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 25)

Having the possibility to switch off means that humans are considered objects or entities, which is an ontological metaphor (an *entity* which is *off* for the world and *on* for music). This metaphor is not visual but multimodal; the verbal elements play a role in the construction of the metaphor.

The purpose of orientational and ontological metaphors is often limited to that of categorisation, which is why they often go unnoticed when used. They are “metaphors we live by” but whose metaphorical dimension is rarely perceived (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). Their metaphoric richness is also relatively limited and the interpretations of the world they represent remain rather basic. That said, by fleshing out (sometimes) complex concepts, ontological metaphors help us make sense of them and relate them to familiar situations. This is particularly relevant in the case of emotional discourses. Indeed, as discussed in Chapter 10, emotions are often intense, subjective and complex experiences that metaphors help rationalise by associating them with familiar concepts (Kövecses 2000). In this respect, emotion-related ontological metaphors play a role in helping us conceptualise emotions as entities, making them more familiar and, potentially, more controllable.

Conceptual metaphors are structural in that they draw on a clearly delineated concept (i.e. the source) to structure another (i.e. the target). The third and fourth Flickr posts listed in Table 13.1 comprise a conceptual metaphor, that is, in relation to people being shattered and to flying objects or animals. In both cases, the metaphor is mentioned in the verbal elements and visualised in the photographs. The conceptual metaphor of emotion (sadness) as a “flying object/animal” is illustrated in case 4.

The verbal elements in case 3 make the metaphor and its connection with Brexit very explicit, and offers a straightforward meaning to the picture, which is unusual in the corpus. Indeed, like in many cases, the fourth case is more open to interpretation: the text, which is a quote from *The Young*

Window by the French fabulist Jean de la Fontaine (17th century), is only indirectly connected to Brexit; its author used the tag “Brexit” but did not mention it in the post itself. As I outlined in Chapter 9, Flickr users can tag their posts; these tags are listed on the right of each post. Furthermore, the sadness referred to in the quote is not attributed to anyone in particular. In Bednarek’s terms, this post exemplifies “unemoted affect” in which there is no emoter (i.e. the person who experiences the emotion) but where emotion is an abstract entity (Bednarek 2008, 72).

The metaphors I have inferred in these posts all show how they are part of a whole conceptual system that conventionally helps humans make sense of their experiences. In the same vein and with a focus on the metaphoric patterns of emotions, Kövecses (2000) emphasised how most source domains are not specific to emotion concepts; they are often used to frame various types of experiences inside the conceptual system. He also distinguishes between source domains that apply to all emotions (e.g. emotion as presence or as living organism), those that apply to most emotions (e.g. emotion as container or natural force) and the source domains that apply only to some emotions. According to the author, the “physical damage” metaphors that I inferred in the corpus fall within this third category. The “physical damage” metaphor is related to a broader metaphor, namely the master metaphor that “emotion is force.”

Lastly, the metaphor of the “flying object/animal” is broadly related to the “journey” metaphor, which I will discuss in relation to judgement in the next section.

13.3 Judgement-related metaphors in multimodal content

13.3.1 *Quantitative findings: the prevalence of four metaphors*

I inferred 136 judgement-related metaphors, 19 of which are purely *visual*; the text plays no role in these metaphors. Their designs systematically draw on a metonymic visual content (mostly flags). The large majority of them frame the UK as broken, as upside down or as in a bubble. I did not analyse them further, since they are quite basic conventional visual metaphors which require little further explanation.

I first conducted a pilot study on a sample of the corpus of the 117 *multimodal* judgement-related metaphors in order to identify the types of represented content and classify them in a code book. I found out that nearly all the photographs represent the source domain; the verbal elements either refer to both the source and the target domains, or, most frequently, only to the target domain. I subsequently coded all the metaphors to know more about their frequency. After coding the visual content, I coded the types of targets in the verbal elements, based on a pilot study that had earlier allowed to identify the relevant variables of target domains.

Table 13.2 Source and target domains in multimodal Brexit-related metaphors, in descending order

<i>Source and target domains in multimodal Brexit-related metaphors</i> (<i>N</i> = 117; <i>C</i> 's <i>k</i> = 1)			
<i>Sources in represented content/photographs</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Targets in verbal elements</i>	<i>%</i>
Storms, clouds	15	Brexit	38
Barbed wire, fences, walls, closed doors	14	The future	20
Other	12	UK	9
Broken and damaged objects, opposition in objects	11	The Leave camp	8
Exit signs and (creative) exits	6	UK–EU relationship	7
Sunrises	6	EU	4
Animals	5	Post-Brexit day	4
Flying items	4	Finance and business	3
Termination-related elements (dark, dead, on the ground)	4	The world	2
Movements (roads, running people, etc.)	4	Other camp (undetermined)	1
Downwards movements (walking down, downstairs, jumps, dives)	3	Scotland	1
Burning elements	3	Politics in general	1
Upside down elements	3	Unity	1
Building-related elements (scaffoldings, facades)	3	Polysemous target domains	1
Sunsets	3		
Floating items	2		
Cleaning items (brooms, shovels)	2		
Total	100	Total	100

After coding the manifest content that represents the source and the target domains, I coded the types of metaphors. Current research on Brexit-related visual and multimodal metaphors emphasises the rich and varied adaptations of the “journey” and “family”/“marriage” metaphors in political cartoons (Cortes de los Rios and Hernandez Aparicio 2020; Đurović and Silaški 2018; Negro Alousque 2020; Silaški and Đurović 2019). The “journey” and “family” metaphors also occur frequently in other types of Brexit-related corpora. Charteris-Black (2019) analysed Brexit-related political speeches and texts, news articles, and tweets published from 2016 to 2018 inclusive. In addition to the “journey” and “family” metaphoric frames, he also studied metaphors related to war, containment, play, the body, politics as a club and animal-related metaphors. Musolff (2006) identified 12 domains that frame debates about the European Union in a collection of articles published in British and German newspapers and magazines

Table 13.3 Types of Brexit-related metaphors

<i>Types of Brexit-related metaphors</i> (<i>N</i> = 117; <i>C</i> 's <i>k</i> = 1)	
<i>Brexit is . . .</i>	%
Containment	26
Journey	14
Nature – storms, clouds and waves	14
Nature – sun and light	11
Nature – termination (wilted flowers)	2
Animals	5
Broken elements	5
Relation	4
Buildings	2
War	<1
Play	<1
Other	16
Total	100

between 1989 and 2001. These 12 discourse-based domains are building, club-(social) class, economy-business, games-sports, geometry-geography, life-health-strength, love-marriage-family, nature-weather, performance-show, school-discipline, war-fortress-battle and way-movement-speed. The hyphens indicate overlaps between domains. I based my coding scheme on the domains inferred by these two authors. As my results reveal, most metaphors analysed by Charteris-Black were also inferred in the present corpus; only body metaphors and the “politics as a club” metaphor were not used by Flickr members, at least not in posts with photographs. (They are present in memes and political cartoons.) Ten of Musolff’s large domains were inferred (see Table 13.3).

As the results suggest, four metaphors are prevalent in the corpus, accounting for 65% of all metaphors used. Nature-related metaphors in the corpus are not specific to Brexit; they are conventionally used in uncertain situations, in which the future can be a synonym for new beginnings (sunrise metaphor) or, conversely, turbulence (storm/cloud metaphor) or decline (sunset metaphor), which are more common in my corpus than the positive sunrise metaphor. Unlike these general metaphors that can be applied to many contexts, the containment and journey metaphors are more specifically Brexit-related.

13.3.2 *Scenarios and moral foundations in metaphors*

Analysing these metaphors further can provide insights into the Leave and Remain supporters’ moral intuitions and reasonings (Charteris-Black 2019). To do so, metaphors need to be regarded as starting points that have to be

further analysed in connection to scenarios and allegories. A metaphor scenario can be defined as a

set of assumptions made by competent members of a discourse community about “typical” aspects of a source situation, for example, its participants and their roles, the “dramatic” storylines and outcomes, and conventional evaluations of whether they count as successful, normal or abnormal, permissible or illegitimate, etc.

(Musolff 2006, 28)

These are normative source-based assumptions that map several elements, instead of isolated attributes. For example, a cooking scenario can entail relations between the metaphoric cooker, the dishes, the ingredients and the cooking equipment. As I discussed for the journey metaphor in Section 13.1, all these elements can be selected for metaphoric mapping purposes, for example in political cartoons in which government is metaphorically compared to chaotic cooking (e.g. Schilperoord and Maes 2009). However, not all metaphors rely on a scenario and schematic characteristics of selected domains; some are more categorical, taxonomic metaphors. For example, many animal metaphors, like in framing someone as a chameleon or a wise owl, are taxonomic metaphors. Schematic and taxonomic aspects can be combined in the same metaphor: its focus can lie on the value of the domain properties in terms of “connectivity,” that is, how elements in a scenario are connected, or in terms of “diagnosticity,” that is, what isolated characteristics are present (Shen 1999, 1635). For example, Remainers used the metaphor “a wolf in sheep clothing” in tweets to express their feelings of political actors’ deception and disloyalty (Charteris-Black 2019). This metaphor draws on isolated and antagonistic characteristics of wolves versus sheep, as well as on conventional assumptions regarding the relation (i.e. the scenario) between these animals and its potential outcome, quite a dramatic one for the sheep. The differences between the two types of metaphoric interpretations are summarised in Table 13.4.

The schematic versus taxonomic metaphoric interpretation is close to Kress and van Leeuwen’s narrative versus conceptual modes in images, which I discussed in Chapter 7.

Many scenarios rely on allegories. An allegory is a covert comment on a moral question, in the form of a story, which suggests to the reader how to behave. It is a “cautionary tale” (Charteris-Black 2019, 7). For example, a common allegory is that of the *Titanic*: the unfortunate fate of this Ocean liner in 1912 due to human pride and hubris has become a symbol of self-inflicted disaster (see e.g. Howells 1999). It has been used to frame many contexts, including UK–EU relations. Interestingly, the same general allegory led to two divergent scenarios in the Brexit context: on the Leave side, the *Titanic* evokes the dying EU and the UK is framed as the lifeboat that safely escapes the sinking ship, while the two roles are

Table 13.4 Schematic and taxonomic metaphoric interpretation

<i>Schematic interpretation in metaphors</i>	<i>Taxonomic interpretation in metaphors</i>
Source-as-schema	Source-as-taxonomy
Mapping of the relations between the elements	Mapping of isolated features
Part-whole	Set-member
Connectivity principle	Diagnosticity principle
Narrative	Conceptual
Examples: Brexit is a dance	Examples: a dying EU

Informed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006); Musolff (2006); Shen (1999)

reversed in the scenario supported by Remain partisans (Charteris-Black 2019). In other words, a general and abstract allegory can be applied to the same context in opposite scenarios, depending on the moral reasoning of each camp.

Since metaphors manage to simplify complex ideas by offering stable frames derived from (familiar) experience and convey ideological views that are often taken for granted, metaphors are heuristics that particularly trigger moral *intuitions*, rather than moral *reasonings*. Moral intuitions and reasonings correspond to two different paths along which information is cognitively processed: an automatic and a deliberative path, respectively. When humans process information through deliberative thinking, they consciously think about the information, they pay attention to it, and they consider a broad set of factors in order to make a well-informed, rational decision. When they process information through automatic thinking, decision-making is not based on rational considerations. Instead, humans rely on their intuition, on associations and automatic processes. Rational considerations come afterwards. In this respect, Haidt (2012, 46) draws on the metaphor that “the mind is divided, like a rider on an elephant, and the rider’s job is to serve the elephant” to claim that automatic information-processing – the elephant – runs the human mind, and not the opposite: “The rider is skilled at fabricating post hoc explanations for whatever the elephant wants to do next.”

For Haidt (2012, 123), moral judgements, led by moral intuitions, are influenced by six broad moral “taste receptors,” that are the products of “long-standing threats and opportunities in social life.” The author compared the US Democrats’ and Republicans’ moral foundations and claims that, in relying on all the six moral foundations, the Republicans are likely to connect with US voters more easily than the Democrat party, which only draws on a three-foundation morality. In a similar vein, Charteris-Black applied Haidt’s framework to the Brexit context and observed that Remain supporters relied on metaphoric language related to two moral foundations while the Leave camp communicated metaphorically in addressing all six foundations (see Table 13.5).

Table 13.5 Charteris-Black's summary and adaptation of Haidt's six moral foundations

<i>Moral foundations</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Camps where the moral foundations were inferred (US and UK contexts)</i>
Care/harm	Desire to protect others – especially vulnerable groups, such as children or the elderly, cute animals or endangered species	US Democrats, Remain supporters, US Republicans, Leave supporters
Fairness/cheating	Grounded in (a lack of) altruistic feelings towards unknown others, for example insisting on their right to free education and healthcare with expectations of reciprocal altruism	US Democrats, Remain supporters, US Republicans, Leave supporters
Loyalty/betrayal	Tribal loyalty towards a social group or team with which individuals identify	US Republicans, Leave supporters
Authority/subversion	View that a society requires hierarchies so that those who do not follow the rules are reprimanded by those responsible for enforcing these rules.	US Republicans, Leave supporters
Sanctity/degradation	Based on emotions such as disgust towards dead or decaying matters or towards behaviours such as incest that seem to challenge basic rules of morality.	US Republicans, Leave supporters
Liberty/oppresion	The Liberty foundation prevents attempts by one group to dominate another and as such is at variance with the Authority foundation.	US Democrats, US Republicans, Leave supporters

Source: Charteris-Black (2019, 59)

These divisions need to be a bit nuanced, though. Indeed, for Haidt, sanctity would be closely linked to Republicans, especially if seen from a Conservative point of view, where tradition for tradition's sake has a certain sanctity. However, since its definition is so broad, as related to basic rules of morality, there is no inherent reason why this could not to also apply to Democrats and Remain supporters. In this respect, I will discuss later how metaphors from the Remain side address sanctity too, in the Flickr corpus. This is equally true for liberty/oppresion, which could similarly be applied to Remain supporters, especially the idea of solidarity for one group to another, for example in

campaign cases where Gove, Johnson or Farage are framed as bullies, who dominate by scapegoating migrants.

These moral foundations can also provide insights into the Brexit-related citizens' metaphors I encountered in the Flickr corpus. I argue that, unlike in the Charteris-Black corpus, the six moral foundations that are visible in Flickr pro-Remain posts are present to a much lesser degree in the posts written by Leave supporters. My results and those of Charteris-Black are not at odds with each other insofar as the two corpora are not the same, particularly in terms of the types of discourse and the periods considered. The results of the two studies converge in the larger diversity of moral foundations in discourses by individuals who disagree with the situation on which they comment. In the case of my corpus of post-referendum Flickr posts, it comes as no surprise, therefore, that judgements against Brexit are more frequent since pro-Remain supporters take issue with the outcome of the vote. Being more common, it is to be expected that more moral foundations can be inferred in pro-Remain metaphors, although other explanations cannot be ruled out.

Furthermore, the six moral foundations are often interrelated and it is not always easy, or possible, to differentiate between them. As I will discuss, my findings often concern more than one moral foundation, similar to Charteris-Black's results. Lastly, not all judgement-related metaphors are related to moral foundations, as I will briefly discuss in the next section.

13.3.2.1 Judgement-related metaphors without markers of moral foundations

Some metaphors relate only to vague attitude and do not contain markers of moral foundations. The most common example is the "Brexit is a wall" metaphor, which is constructed by means of pictures of walls, fences, closed doors or barbed wire and text that is limited to "Brexit" or to statements like "This is how I feel today." In these cases of minimalistic verbal judgement, no specific moral foundation can be inferred from the verbal elements; these metaphors can equally be related – albeit indirectly – to liberty and oppression, to care about the country, to fear of potential harm, etc.

Interestingly, metaphors representing a non-specific attitude are much more common on the side of Remain supporters than on the side of Leavers, who tend to explicitly express the moral foundations of their joy, such as the end of perceived oppression by the EU endured by the UK. This illustrates the evocative power of metaphors, which allow relatively simple words –or images –to convey complex events, whose judgement rests on several moral foundations that may still be unclear at the time of sharing the post (and perhaps even afterwards). These posts are holistic in the sense that they make it possible to approach a complex event as a whole, without having to delineate its different aspects, the various opinions the posts may elicit or the moral foundations they rely on.

13.3.2.2 *Judgement-related metaphors with markers of moral foundations*

Other metaphors in the corpus do indicate specific moral foundations. As I will outline, many of these metaphors are containment metaphors. This can be explained by the way humans divide society into different groups in order to structure their environment and, consciously or unconsciously, decide for themselves to which categories they belong. Indeed, there are two important processes in forming a social identity: self-categorisation and social comparison. Self-categorisation refers to one's perceived membership in particular social groups. It makes up an important part of one's self-concept and identity and the way humans see themselves. Social comparison means that individuals define and evaluate themselves in comparison to others (see e.g. Stets and Burke 2000). That means that it is not only the ingroup that plays a role in forming one's identity, but outgroup(s) also do as well. These two processes in social identity formation, namely self-categorisation and social comparison, lie at the basis of two cognitive biases: ingroup favouritism and outgroup derogation. Humans naturally tend to favour members of their ingroup by attributing more value to them or by coming to their aid more easily in minor incidents (see e.g. Stets and Burke 2000; Levine et al. 2005, respectively). Containment metaphors draw on ingroup–outgroup divisions. This partly explains why they are prevalent and used in relation to the six moral foundations. Let us start with containment metaphors related to the care/harm moral foundation.

13.3.2.2.1 CARE/HARM

Containment metaphors are often used to express that people care about the UK. Although of different length, the two posts in Table 13.6 both illustrate how citizens express how they care about a united country.

In Example 1 (see Table 13.6), the country is a breakable object and the park is a metonymy for the country. These examples illustrate unwished borders inside the UK and worries about potential harm for the unity of the UK. Care is also expressed through journey metaphors. For example, one post includes the photograph of a staircase to get on a plane, except that there is no aircraft. The title of this Flickr post reads “Stairway to where? This is a reflection of my feelings about a lot of things. Where to next?” Other posts express similar concerns by means of photographs of planes in the sky. Pictures of storms, as well as sunsets and sunrises (i.e. nature metaphors), are also very common to evoke concern and care about the future.

Boat-related metaphors are also used to express care for the country. Already used by Plato (4th century BC), the “nation is a ship” metaphor has become an obsession in the Brexit debates (Charteris-Black 2019, 145). The long naval history of a country that is constituted of an archipelago certainly plays a role in this tendency to use water-related metaphors. The “UK is a ship” metaphor is present several times in the corpus, by means

Table 13.6 Realisations of the “country is a bounded container” metaphor to express caring about the UK and its unity on Flickr

<i>Types of photographs</i>	<i>Text in the title and description zones of the Flickr post</i>
Closed gates of a park	Title: Haverstowe Park. Closed for fun. Description: Broken Britain. No bacon butties post Brexit for me – damn you Farage . . .
Flag rolled up in barbed wire	Title: Welcome to Little England Description: A re-worked image from a few years ago, but one that expresses my feelings. On Thursday 23 June 2016, the UK held a referendum on whether we wished to remain a part of the European Union (EU), or leave and go our own way. We chose to leave by the narrow margin of 52%–48%. I have always considered myself to be a European as well as a British citizen, so I have been deeply shocked and saddened by this result. The leaders of the “Leave” campaign believe that the UK will become stronger and more prosperous as a result of quitting the EU, but I just cannot see it. The government of Scotland, whose people voted overwhelmingly to remain in the EU, is already seeking another referendum on Scottish independence, less than two years after the one held in 2014 narrowly rejected it. I fear that this will lead to the break-up of the UK as it is today, so that we will have diminished from being Great Britain to “Little England.” Most of all, I am concerned for the young, who also predominantly voted to remain in the EU and who are going to have to live the longest with the consequences of a potentially disastrous decision that they did not choose.

of conventional metonymy through boats carrying the British flag. The vast majority of these metaphors are journey metaphors that frame the UK as a boat with no captain and/or no direction, alone at sea. Such metaphors are close to “the nation is a sinking ship” metaphor. Like Charteris-Black argues, metaphors that illustrate the moral foundation of care/harm are often related to the human primal instinct of desire for survival, for example, of avoiding sinking or breaking. The emotions linked to one’s survival instinct make them particularly powerful heuristics.

13.3.2.2.2 FAIRNESS/CHEATING

Framing Brexit as a game is one of the most common metaphors. There are now even Brexit board games or chess sets for sale. For Charteris-Black, the Brexit-related game metaphors are based on the same characteristics as “war and invasion” metaphors, namely a competition with stakes, rules and outcomes

that will entail losers and winners. Game metaphors differ from war metaphors in that they emphasise the strategies and tactics used to win and have a playful dimension (see e.g. Koller 2004). The rhetorical choice between these two types of metaphor during the EU referendum campaign would have depended notably on the target audience: war and invasion metaphors would have likely appealed to an older electorate, who is more receptive to the idea of an invaded country, while younger voters would be attracted by the playfulness of Brexit (Charteris-Black 2019).

Both war and game metaphors oversimplify Brexit as a binary choice between losing and winning, as in this “Brexit poker” metaphor:

In this, we’re playing a high-stakes game with the EU in which secrecy and bluff are the keys to victory. Theresa May told us time and time again that she would not “reveal her hand” ahead of negotiations, as if the EU27 were a bunch of gamblers in a smoky casino. But this metaphor is hogwash. Poker is a zero sum game where everyone starts on a level field and one person walks away with it all. Brexit is not a zero-sum game. All the sides have the potential to lose something.

(Thrower 2017)

“Politics is a game” metaphors draw on the moral foundation of fairness/cheating when they refer to deceptive or manipulative strategies to achieve victory or, conversely, to the ethical conduct and fair play of adversaries.

The metaphor of Brexit as a game is almost absent in my corpus. It appears explicitly only once, in a post containing the picture of a race of four plastic ducks on a lawn:

There has been a race of different kinds today – the Remain or Leave race. To stay in or to leave the EU – the outcome – LEAVE. Let’s see how that impacts things!! Our village held a “duck race” the other week and instead of houses competing with a scarecrow, they chose to continue with the duck theme. Here the duck race is replicated.

This post exemplifies how Flickr users frequently combine national news with more personal information and experiences in using a local event that they attended and a picture of it as a source domain for a Brexit metaphor.

Family metaphors, and especially divorce metaphors, are related to moral foundations:

Family metaphors in general are potentially coercive because of their potential to arouse explosive emotions by ideas of betrayal, which is probably why there has been a shift over to the less emotionally intense metaphors of European “friends” and “partners” as the withdrawal period has progressed.

(Charteris-Black 2019, 211)

In UK press articles between January 2015 and September 2016, the “EU-UK divorce” metaphor appeared as one of the most recurrent ones (Musolff 2017). This prevalence can be attributed to at least two reasons (Charteris-Black 2019): on the one hand, using the divorce metaphor connects Brexit to a familiar and emotional experience in the lives of many Britons. On the other hand, a divorce entails a “divorce script” that comprises an expected sequence of events, such as the identification and discussion of the causes of the disagreement according to both parties, potential attempts to find an alternative solution and discussion about a fair financial settlement (see the metaphoric expression of the “divorce bill,” which was frequently used in Brexit discourse). All these events have potential for metaphoric mappings. While the divorce metaphor is key in Musolff’s and Charteris-Black’s corpora, it is absent from my corpus: the EU-UK relationship is never framed as a love relationship. In the same vein, in my dataset, the EU is never framed as a family and both the UK and the EU are hardly ever framed as persons. Only one post comprises the metaphor of friendship. Some posts do express a link between the two but never through family–marriage–love metaphors.

13.3.2.2.3 LOYALTY/BETRAYAL

The unwished containment I outlined in Section 13.3.2.1 can also relate to loyalty insofar as the UK is sometimes positively framed as a container that should not be shattered by internal ingroup–outgroup divisions. Boats can also be used to express the moral foundation of loyalty. In the multimodal corpus I analyse here, the “nation is a ship” metaphor only occurred once, in a post that comprises a sports metaphors which features a rowing team rowing a boat, with “Brexit” as title of the post and “Unity is strength” as description. Historically, the motto “unity is strength” has been used to trigger ingroup identity in contexts of conflicts with outgroups, for example in a patriotic Chinese anti-Japanese song written in 1943, and in the national motto of Belgium in 1831, which initially addressed the union of Catholics and liberals to protect the still fragile country, created one year earlier, from the troops of William I of the Netherlands.

Like in many other posts in the corpus, this metaphor remains quite vague in this boat-related post, since the safe space can be either the EU or the UK, which are both in danger due to internal divisions. Such concerns about unity are also related to the moral foundation of care/harm, either for the EU or the UK.

13.3.2.2.4 SANCTITY/DEGRADATION

Some building-related metaphors express the moral foundation of sanctity and degradation, in at least two scenarios: one post illustrates the negative development that Brexit represents for the UK, according to its author, with a picture of a dilapidated barn and “post-brexit blues #3 Rebuilding Old England” as title. Another post questions the future sanctity of the EU through a picture of scaffoldings in front of a building carrying the EU flag and “EU on

the Scaffold?” as title. Both posts illustrate concerns about the degradation of the UK and the EU, respectively. In doing so, they also relate to the care/harm moral foundation.

Many other metaphors draw on broken or damaged objects to express judgements regarding the degradation of the country due to the Brexit vote. As I will discuss in Section 13.3.2.5, sanctity can be associated with authority, especially through animal metaphors.

13.3.2.2.5 AUTHORITY/SUBVERSION

In my corpus, metaphors drawing on authority/subversion are connected to the moral foundation of sanctity, in two divergent scenarios by Leave and Remain supporters. On the one hand, the pro-Leave posts that celebrate Brexit and the UK’s independence welcome the end of the EU’s external authority that impedes the sanctity of the country. Brexit is framed as a liberating exit. These pro-Leave posts draw on the moral foundation of authority, sanctity and oppression.

On the other hand, the pro-Remain posts that address sanctity/subversion are all related to the sanctity of the role of politicians, which in their view has been damaged by some political actors. One post comprises the picture of a pooper scooper and carries “pooper-scooper politics” as text. Two other posts rely on animal metaphors to express their negative judgement of political actors: the first post comprises the picture of pigs with “Leave they said . . .” as text, and the second post features a monkey driving a car and “Wanted. A new captain to take the country in a new direction #brexit” as text. Pigs are often culturally associated with negative traits. A large-scale corpus analysis of the BNC database (British National Corpus) revealed how figurative expressions about pigs are much more frequent than for any other animals, and the large majority of them are negative (Stibbe 2003). The negative connotations of pigs are not denoted in this Flickr post, even in figurative language; they are only inferred from the context and are not associated with specific traits commonly (if wrongly) attributed to pigs, like being dirty or greedy. Again, the visual element of this multimodal metaphor allows a judgement that remains vague and, therefore, easier to conceptualise and express. Monkey metaphors seem to be mostly negative, too. An analysis of British newspapers revealed the use of seven idiomatic expressions referring to “human behaviour is monkey behaviour” and all of them are negative, framing monkeys as either foolish, incompetent or mischievous (Fiedler 2016). Such negative animal metaphors contrast with the “big beast” metaphor (related to lions, etc.) that is sometimes used to positively frame political actors’ supposedly instinctive nature, high assuredness and natural authority. This metaphor was used in the Brexit debates to designate Boris Johnson but is absent from my corpus.

The Flickr post containing the monkey metaphor also includes a verbal “captain” metaphor. The captain metaphor can resonate in many ways and is used in a large variety of contexts (Janke et al. 2022). Captains manage

diverse responsibilities that lead to many potentialities for metaphoric mappings, especially since the type of metaphoric captain is not specified in the post and might refer to the captain of a ship, a senior pilot, a military captain, or other types of leaders. In the Brexit context, the captain metaphor is a positive appraisal of the role of political leader, which can be related to the moral value of authority.

13.3.2.2.6 LIBERTY/OPPRESSION

Containment metaphors are often used to express a negative judgement of oppression. Interestingly, the container metaphor is used by both the Remain and Leave camps and thus gives rise to two distinct metaphor scenarios, as in the two examples in Table 13.7.

Table 13.7 Two metaphor scenarios based on the container metaphor, by a pro-Remain and a pro-Leave supporter, respectively, on Flickr

<i>Types of photographs</i>	<i>Title and description of the Flickr post</i>
Closed gates	Title: Quad Derby, 2016 Description: What the oncoming Brexit feels like to me. Britain as a Gulag where the hangers and floggers have taken over for their selfish interests (from the Leisure Land Mini-Golf installation by Doug Fishbone at QUAD, Derby).
Closed fenced door, probably of Agra Fort	Title: Illusory Brexit: There isn't a Door Ahead Description: Theresa May made it clear that UK won't invoke Article 50 within the year. Imagine the turmoil the British pound and British properties and equities have to undergo within the period, and whether the British voters could withstand the sharp shocks that are anything but short. Other than economic punishments, they now say "the referendum was not binding," but "was only advisory" and that it's something which only the Parliament can decide on. . . . The odds are, they are not going to make it, so long as the matter is muddling on. Agra Fort, India, a UNESCO World Heritage site. The fort also was the site of the battle of the 1857 Indian Mutiny witnessing the end of the rule of the East Indian Company and the beginning of direct British rule in India. Now that India is independent and British Raj no more, the Britons come and go here only as visitors. . . . The Fort is a walled city which has been in the location since the 11th century having changed hands a number of times. It was during the reign of Akbar's grandson that the site took on its current state using a lot of white marble. He built Taj Mahal 2.5 km away in the memory of his wife. At the end of his life, he was deposed and restrained by his son in the fort. He died in a tower therein with a view of the Taj Mahal.

In the pro-Remain post, the UK is framed as a gulag while the judgement of oppression in the pro-Leave post lies in the title that evokes the absence of an exit door. In that second case, it is the EU that is a bounded space. Besides using the same metaphor, these two posts also express a judgement of disloyalty, against the Leave side and Theresa May, respectively. Furthermore, the second post illustrates a mixture of personal and political interests. Like in the post framing the EU referendum as a duck race (see Section 13.3.2.2.2), the picture of the closed fenced door serves as a source domain for the Brexit-related metaphor of the EU as a closed container. In all likelihood, this photo was taken during a tourist trip by the author, who mixes their judgement of the Brexit aftermath with tourist information about the place visited.

Most pro-Leave posts value the end of EU containment for the UK. In these cases, the EU is still a container, but one which can be exited. Pictures of planes or parachutes are used as source domains to visualise the “end of containment” metaphor, which is combined with a “Brexit is a (liberating) journey” metaphor. Surprisingly, flight metaphors are absent in Charteris-Black’s study while they are quite common in mine.

13.4 Metaphoric creativity in image-based social media posts

In Section 13.3, I outlined how conventional metaphors are used to express emotions and judgements about Brexit, and how these can be coupled with one or more moral foundations. In Section 13.4, I will focus on the creative dimension of metaphorically expressed judgements. The analysis of creative metaphors is all the more relevant as these metaphors generally contain more markers of appraisal than conventional metaphors, at least according to a study of 94 film reviews (Fuoli, Littlemore, and Turner 2022). In the case of serious situations, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, creative metaphors can be a novel way of informing citizens, especially in (audio-)visual prevention campaigns (Pérez-Sobrino et al. 2022).

Like general studies on multimodal or visual metaphors, specific research on creativity in these types of metaphors draws almost exclusively on cartoons or ads (Domínguez 2020; Hidalgo-Downing, Mujic, and Nuñez-Perucha 2013; Marín-Arrese 2020; Pérez-Sobrino and Littlemore 2020; Pérez-Sobrino et al. 2022). What the datasets of these studies have in common is that they are made up of images generated by humans or computers. In contrast, as specified earlier, the present dataset centres on Flickr posts comprising *photographs*. Therefore, metaphoric creativity is not visual in the way it is often in cartoons or ads; rather, it generally lies in the ways the photographed elements become source domains for metaphors. To my knowledge, my analysis is the first to focus on metaphor in a corpus made up of such photographs.

In their study of metaphoric (verbal) creativity, Lakoff and Turner (1989) further explore an issue that was already addressed in Lakoff and Johnson’s seminal book *Metaphors we live by* (1980). My analysis of metaphoric Flickr

posts is largely based on their insights. The first insight, which is the keystone of conceptual metaphor theory, is that metaphoric creativity is essentially elaborated within metaphoric conceptual systems. In other words, producers of creative metaphors are individuals like any others in conceptualising the world according to basic metaphors, whether they are renowned poets, like in Lakoff and Turner's case studies, or people without any artistic claims. Importantly, besides such cognitive mechanisms, discourse theories have since emphasised how communicative purposes and discourse contexts deeply influence the use of metaphors, too (see Chapter 4).

The fact that creative metaphors are based on basic everyday metaphors is a necessary prerequisite for readers/listeners to understand and enjoy their poetic dimension, since basic metaphors are cultural frames shared by members of a community. In this context, the vast majority of creative metaphors are actually "extensions" of basic metaphors (Lakoff 1993). Extending a metaphor consists in exploiting parts of the source domain that have not been conventionally used yet. For example, in Hamlet's soliloquy, Shakespeare extends the basic metaphor "death is sleep" by framing death as dreaming: "To sleep? Perhaps to dream! Ay, there's the rub; For in that sleep of death what dreams may come?" (Shakespeare 1601, 79). The novel metaphor of death as dreaming relies on the conceptual system in which death is commonly interpreted as sleeping; "dreaming" is the usually unused part of the source domain "sleep." That said, the difference between basic and non-basic metaphors is a matter of degree, as Lakoff and Turner acknowledge, and it can be particularly challenging to classify metaphors at that level. In this respect, datasets of metaphors are very helpful, like the MetaNet Metaphor Wiki, a very large repository of conceptual metaphors, housed by the Computer Science Institute in Berkeley (California) on https://metaphor.icsi.berkeley.edu/pub/en/index.php/MetaNet_Metaphor_Wiki

Creative metaphors may also lie outside cultural conceptual systems and not rest on basic metaphors, in which case they are *idiosyncratic*. Technically, it is possible to associate any source domain with any target domain. For example, the metaphor "death is a banana" would be idiosyncratic in the sense that it is based on a "random" association between a source and a target by its author (Lakoff and Turner 1989, 50). However, without shared cultural references, the understanding of this metaphor by readers/listeners is greatly compromised. That said, the artistic richness of idiosyncratic metaphors, whose lack of conventionality is precisely the aim of many artistic orientations, including surrealism, should not be overlooked, even though they are admittedly excluded from the conceptual systems underlying conceptual metaphor theory.

While Lakoff only focuses on extension in his article *The Contemporary Theory of Metaphor* (Lakoff 1993), his 1989 book published with Turner outlined four types of metaphoric creativity within conceptual systems, namely extension, elaboration, questioning and composition. For the two authors, extension consists in "adding slots" to an existing metaphor (e.g. adding dreaming to sleeping) while elaboration entails "filling slots in

unusual ways” (Lakoff and Turner 1989, 67). They quote the example of death as the “eternal exile of the raft” and emphasise how Horace (bk. 2, *Carmen* 2.25–28) makes the “death as departure” metaphor much more specific in referring to exile, and, in doing so, “adds considerable conceptual content to the metaphor of death as departure” (Lakoff and Turner 1989, 68). As a matter of fact, the difference between extension and elaboration can often be more a matter of degree than of nature.

The third type, questioning, suggests that “poets go beyond the normal use of conventional metaphor to point out, and call into question, the boundaries of our everyday metaphorical understandings of important concepts” (Lakoff and Turner 1989, 69). This type rather focuses on some *reasons* for creative metaphoricity, instead of discourse patterns in their own rights. Consequently, I will not consider this type.

The fourth and last type is “composition,” also defined as “poetic compression” (Lakoff and Turner 1989, 54). It refers to using two or more metaphors in the same clause or phrase for the same target domain, for example when life is both metaphorically framed as a day and as a precious possession. This fourth type differs from extension and elaboration in that creativity takes place at the level of linguistic formulation and not at the conceptual level. As in the example of life as a day and a precious possession, combining two existing metaphors builds on existing metaphoric representations. It does not offer new ways of seeing the world through novel metaphors but the combination is novel, allowing for new perspectives.

Besides *conceptual* creativity, Lakoff and Turner emphasise the importance of *image* and *image-schemas* for metaphoric creativity. Image metaphors are mappings between two conventional mental images; two concrete types of physical entities are metaphorically related. An example is a woman’s waist being metaphorically compared to an hourglass (Lakoff and Turner 1989, 89). Visual mappings between an Indian woman’s slow and sinuous walk and the slow and sinuous flow of a river are of the same kind. In such cases, the metaphors map physical and visual patterns. Metaphoric creativity here does not lie in conceptual mappings but in visual ones. As such, these mappings create mental images. *Image-schematic* metaphors differ from *image* metaphors in being “very general structures, like bounded regions, paths, centres (as opposed to peripheries), and so on” (Lakoff and Turner 1989, 96). Like the female waist/hourglass image metaphor illustrates, image mappings are indeed very specific; hence, “one-shot” metaphors, while the visual schemas of paths, etc., can be applied to many different physical entities (Lakoff and Turner 1989, 91). Paths are part of an image schema that has become a salient image-schematic metaphor in Brexit-related journey metaphors.

The two authors’ insights relate to written poetry in which images can only be mental. Metaphoric creativity in multimodal content obviously differs in terms of offering image and image-schema mappings that can be visually inscribed or invoked. Before I discuss such possibilities in analysing Flickr posts, I outline a methodological research design in Table 13.8. This model

Table 13.8 Research design to analyse metaphoric creativity in multimodal content

Research design to analyse metaphoric creativity in multimodal content

1. Metaphoric creativity at the conceptual level

Basic metaphor? Yes: extension (or elaboration) of basic metaphor; *death is dreaming*
 Yes: no extension (or elaboration), no conceptual creativity (instead: conceptually conventional); *UK as a broken object*
 No: idiosyncratic metaphor (not related to any basic metaphor); *death is a banana*
 No: no conceptual metaphoric creativity and no basic metaphor

2. Metaphoric creativity at the image or image-schema level

Mapping of two visual resemblances? Yes: specific one-shot image metaphor; *a female waist and an hourglass*
 Yes: broad image-schematic metaphor; *woman's walk and the flow of a river*
 No: no image-related metaphoric creativity (conceptual or absent)

3. Metaphoric creativity at the formulation level

Novel metaphoric expressions? Yes: metaphoric compression; *the EU countries are 27 parachutes*
 Yes: established extension of a basic metaphor; *Brexit is a dance*
 No: no metaphoric creativity at the formulation level

4. Non-metaphoric creativity at the formulation level

Non-metaphoric creative patterns? Yes: stylistic patterns (rhymes, play on the pronunciation, etc.)
 Yes: visual and multimodal patterns: play on photographic codes
 No

Informed by Lakoff and Turner (1989)

is not linear; each step can generate new perspectives that invite renewed analysis of the previous steps.

Let us now flesh out this framework and illustrate it with four types of metaphor-related creativity that I identified in the Flickr posts. I will present them in a cline of creativity, which starts from level zero (no creativity) to metaphoric creativity at the conceptual level coupled with image-schema creativity.

13.4.1 Level zero: no metaphoric creativity at the conceptual, image or formulation level

The first case comprises the picture of the two halves of a broken glass and the verbal elements consist of “Post Brexit blues. Can we stick it back together?”. This Flickr post is an illustration of the “relationships are objects” basic metaphor, similar to verbal occurrences such as “our relation is rock solid” or, by

contrast, “a fragile relationship.” The basic metaphor is not extended in this post, so there is no creativity at the conceptual level. No metaphoric creativity can be inferred at the image or image-schema level either, since there is no mapping of two visual resemblances. The formulation of this basic metaphor is not novel either, insofar as framing EU–UK relationships or relationships inside the UK nations as broken objects has quickly become common. Lastly, there is no particular non-metaphoric creativity: both the verbal and visual representations are conventional. Besides, this example shares a characteristic with all the other cases I will discuss, except in Section 13.4.4: the visual content systematically represents the source in a literal way (here an actual broken object).

13.4.2 *Level one: non-metaphoric creativity at the formulation level*

The post is composed of the text “United Kingdom’s withdrawal of the EU leaves a big hole” and the photograph of a loaf of bread cut in half, in which an air bubble has created a hole during the baking process (Figure 13.4). For copyright reasons, I do not publish the original photograph.

This post relies on two related basic metaphors, namely “groups/wholes are containers” as well as “relationships are objects,” like in Section 13.4.1. There is no extension of these metaphors in the metaphoric frame that the UK leaves a big hole in the EU. As a matter of fact, the “hole” metaphor



Figure 13.4 Literal visual representation of the “hole” metaphor in the Brexit context
Courtesy: Wikipedia

is often used to conceptualise sometimes complex abstract ideas, such as human relationships or scientific concepts, like the black hole (Rising 2019). Image or image-schema metaphors are absent from this Flickr post. Creativity is realised at the formulation level, in that it represents a literal version of a hole which is not conventionally associated with metaphorical holes in relationships. The playful incongruity is grounded in the connection between human relationships and holes in bread.

13.4.3 Level two: metaphoric creativity at the formulation level

A post that illustrates the conventional extension of a basic metaphor comprises the text “Brexit dance” and the picture of a figurine of a dancer. In this case, the basic metaphor “changes/actions are movements” is extended by the addition of dancing to movements in general. This example highlights how challenging it can be to consider extensions as creative or as already established extended metaphors that are, therefore, no longer creative at the conceptual level. Indeed, the source “dance” is commonly used to refer to changes, actions and events. Dancing with data, dancing with the law or dancing clouds are but a few of the many dance metaphors that have been documented (see e.g. Reed 2020; Mulcahy 2021; Ropo and Sauer 2008; Larson 2000; Rutter et al. 2012; Koller 2004).

The general “changes are dances” metaphor is an established extension; creativity in this post rather lies in its formulation, that is, in mapping dance and Brexit. The “Brexit dance” or the “EU Parliament dance” metaphors have already been used in the media, sometimes coupled with closely related metaphors such as “careful choreography” to frame political strategies (e.g. in Peck 2017). The “Brexit dance” example also illustrates the difficulty of determining whether such metaphoric formulation (of an extended metaphor) is still creative or whether it has become conventional. It is a question of degree that is difficult to measure. Large-scale analyses of discourse corpora or experiments of evaluations of the usualness and appropriateness of metaphors by individuals would enlighten us at two levels, on the one hand about the uses and, on the other hand, about the perceptions of such metaphors (see e.g. Rutter et al. 2012). To my knowledge, there are no such analyses for the “Brexit dance” metaphor, for example.

13.4.4 Level three: double metaphoric creativity at the formulation level

As argued earlier, nearly all visually represented contents are literal versions of the source domains (like a dancer for the Brexit dance). The example I will now analyse is an exception. Indeed, the text reads (only) “Twenty-seven parachutes” and the photograph represents a dandelion with its achenes having been blown away.

The metaphor “the EU countries are twenty-seven parachutes” in this Flickr post is based on two basic metaphors whose specific Brexit-related formulations



Figure 13.5 The 27 parachutes metaphor

Courtesy: Walter A. Aue

have become established too: “Brexit is a journey” and “the EU is a bounded space” (see Section 13.4.3). In this specific case, the picture does not literally represent the source domain (parachutes) but, instead, maps the visual resemblance of parachutes and the achenes of dandelions. By using this imagery, the author of the Flickr post adds another metaphor, in which parachutes are dandelions. Therefore, this post illustrates “poetic compression,” in Lakoff and Turner’s terms, through which two metaphors are combined. The dandelion is not a mere visual representation of the verbal source domain but is a source in its own right. Additionally, the poetic dimension of this post also lies in the poetic interpretation of dandelions, which is also visible in many quotes, such as “When you look at a field of dandelions, you can either see a hundred weeds or a hundred wishes” (anonymous quote circulated on the Internet). Poetic compression remains an exception in the corpus; nearly all of the multimodal metaphors only build on one metaphor; simplicity prevails over complexity.

13.4.5 *Level four: metaphoric creativity at the conceptual level and image-schema creativity*

Creativity in the example in Section 13.4.3 relies on the metaphoric formulation that maps a specific target (“Brexit”) with an established source (“dance”). This formulation has become rather common, to the point that its creative dimension is questionable, as I discussed in Section 13.4.3. By contrast, the



Figure 13.6 The “gentle curve” Brexit metaphor

Courtesy: Cosimo Matteini

Flickr post shown in Figure 13.6 illustrates the extension of a basic metaphor that is not as established as the “dance” metaphor, although distinguishing between creativity and conventionality is challenging in this case as well.

The Flickr post in question comprises the title “gentle curve” and the following description:

I have not been able to post any photos in the past few days, feeling very upset and worried about the results of the referendum on leaving the European Union in the country I love and where I decided to live. It is now time to start going back to normal hoping that Brexit will only be a gentle curve from the current situation and harmony will come back.

Figure 13.6 is the visual element of this Flickr post.

This post relies on the basic metaphors according to which “decisions are buildings” and, more broadly, that “decisions are objects” in framing Brexit as a potential “gentle curve.” This mapping can be considered as an extension insofar as curves are usually unused parts of the source domain “building.” This conceptual creativity entails a new metaphor to frame Brexit as a decision without extreme consequences, hopefully. This conceptual creativity is coupled with image-schema creativity, in mapping two visual resemblances, namely that

of a gentle curve and that of a curve of windows created in the photograph. Unlike image-schema metaphors in Lakoff and Turner, this mapping builds on a mental image (through the verbal elements) and a visually represented image.

Additionally, creativity is also present non-metaphorically, in the artistic choices and techniques in photographing this façade (angle, etc.).

Ultimately, the richer and more complex the patterns, the less frequent they are: in our five-level cline of complexity, the number of occurrences decreases as one moves to higher levels. Importantly, analysing metaphoric creativity can only be done from a collective point of view, in relation to the metaphors shared by a community. It is in no way a value judgement estimating creativity at the individual level. Metaphoric posts can be very creative for the individuals who created them, especially if they are not (consciously) familiar with established metaphors.

13.5 Creativity in mundane experiences

When I analysed our Flickr corpus, and in particular the metaphoric patterns, it was striking how many photographs represented elements that often go unnoticed or receive little attention. These can be everyday objects and/or very small elements, like tiny animals in the garden. For example, a Brexit-related Flickr post carries “The Downward U-Turn” as title and the following text as description: “Do you see the tiny snail on top of the wood, she wears a relatively long thin house ?! Whether the ‘Red Slug’ (*Arion rufus*) is afraid of her and therefore turns around, have snails at all anxiety . . . Fear is always a bad counselor.” + a picture of a slug and other tiny animals in a garden.

The slug’s U-turn, which is the main object of the photograph and which is instigated by fear of a much smaller snail, can be interpreted as a symbolic representation of Leave voters, without the author of the post explicitly referring to them. It is interesting to see how common animals, one of which is no bigger than a fingernail and mostly goes unnoticed, can be associated with an event like Brexit. In this way, the authors of such posts explore endless creative possibilities. As a matter of fact, if a target domain is dominant enough in a context (as Brexit was in the UK between 2016 and 2019), practically anything can become a source domain.

These creative associations between politics and the mundane are part of a general context in which the mundane has become central to image-based social media like Flickr or Instagram. Murray (2008) observed

a shift in the engagement with the everyday image that has to do with a move towards transience and the development of a communal aesthetic. . . . Photography has become less about the special or rarefied moments of domestic/family life (for such things as holidays, gatherings, baby photos) and more about an immediate, rather fleeting display of one’s discovery of the small and mundane (such as bottles, cupcakes, trees, debris, and architectural elements.

(Murray 2008)

The moss between two paving stones on the pavement is interpreted as the separation between the UK and the EU; ducklings in a pond forming a circle of yellow dots around their mother are framed as a metaphor for the EU flag, etc. There are numerous creative examples of this type. Invariably, they are based on visual elements that people usually do not look at twice and that are part of people's everyday environment. It was also striking that the photographs were often taken weeks, months or even years before Brexit (the date of the photograph is indicated on Flickr); it is only in retrospect that their authors recontextualise them to give them a Brexit-related interpretation.

Two authors offer interesting insights into the place of the mundane in creativity. On the one hand, Hidalgo-Downing (2020) puts forward the concept of "flow" to emphasise the metaphoric creativity that often emerges unintentionally, in everyday experience, and not in deliberate artistic choices and performances. The creativity of many of these Flickr posts can be seen as emerging from the flow of everyday life, where any event or object, however insignificant, can be photographed (by smartphone) and be given creative interpretations of the world around the author of such posts. On the other hand, Kövecses (2010) insists on the importance of the context of the metaphoric conceptualisation. As I have already noted, conceptual metaphor theory is based on the assumption that the metaphors we live by are the results of metaphoric conceptualisations of the world, and in particular on the basis of one's bodily experiences. The metaphor head of the company' is a typical example. (The influence of context is also present in the work of Lakoff and Johnson, but to a lesser extent.) In this perspective, Kövecses insists on the importance of context, and in particular of the immediate physical environment. Kövecses emphasises "the pressure of coherence" that individuals face, namely

the pressure of their bodily experiences and the pressure of context that surrounds them. . . . When we speak and think metaphorically, we are influenced by these two factors and the effect of context on metaphorical conceptualization is just as pervasive, if not more so, as that of the body. I claim that poets work under the same cognitive pressures and that the effect of context may in part be responsible for the creative use of metaphor in poetry.

(Kövecses 2010, 658)

There is no reason why this assumption should not also apply to creativity based on photography, as a creative way to express judgement. Indeed, the immediate environment seems to be an inexhaustible source of mappings, metaphorical or otherwise, between the mundane and a situation that affects citizens, such as Brexit.

Ultimately, communicating citizens' political views through visual content is achieved in relying on both large and small, even insignificant, situation, and can be inscribed or invoked, literal or figurative. The creative richness of some of the posts is such that they allow us to see both the source and the target differently, both the mundane and a major event like Brexit.

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