

Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's 2020 re-election campaign on Twitter: A discourse analytic study

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Roosa-Mari Salonen

University of Jyväskylä
Department of Language and Communication Studies
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Tiivistelmä – Abstract <p>Pro Gradu –tutkielma tarkastelee yhdysvaltalaisen edustajanhuoneen jäsenen Alexandria Ocasio-Cortezin poliittista viestintää ja viestintästrategioita sosiaalisessa mediassa. Sosiaalisen median kasvattaessa suosiotaan myös sen rooli poliittisen viestinnän kanavana on muuttunut yhä tärkeämmäksi. Sosiaalisen median kanavista erityisesti Twitter on noussut suosituksi poliittisen kommunikaation välineeksi. Twitter tarjoaa niin poliitikoille kuin kansalaisille uudenlaisia interaktiivisia mahdollisuuksia viestiä poliittisesti ja moni poliitikko hyödyntää Twitteriä osana vaalikampanjointiaan.</p> <p>Ocasio-Cortez tuli tunnetuksi vuonna 2018, kun hänestä tuli Yhdysvaltojen historian nuorin kongressiin valittu nainen. Ocasio-Cortez tunnetaan myös aktiivisesta sosiaalisen median käytöstään sekä suurista sosiaalisen median seuraajamäärästään. Tämän myötä hänestä on tullut lyhyessä ajassa yksi yhdysvaltalaisen politiikan tunnetuimmista nimistä.</p> <p>Tutkielma keskittyy Ocasio-Cortezin poliittiseen viestintään Twitterissä vuoden 2020 demokraattisen puoleen esivaaleja edeltävänä aikana. Tutkimuksessa analysoitiin 111 Ocasio-Cortezin kesäkuussa 2020 julkaisemaa tviittiä hyödyntäen laadullista diskurssianalyysia. Tutkielma pyrki selvittämään millaisia diskursiivisia strategioita Ocasio-Cortez käyttää viestiessään Twitterissä ja millä keinoin hän toteuttaa näitä strategioita. Tutkimustulokset osoittivat Ocasio-Cortezin hyödyntäneen tviiteissään erityisesti solidaarisuus- ja personointistrategioita. Hän pyrki ilmaisemaan solidaarisuutta pronomiivalinnoilla, ilmaisemalla kiitollisuutta sekä osoittamalla tukensa muille ehdokkaille. Personointistrategiaa hän puolestaan toteutti julkaisemalla henkilökohtaisia ja tunnepitoisia tviittejä sekä käyttämällä koodinvaihtoa. Analyysissa nousi myös esiin Ocasio-Cortezin viestinnän vuorovaikutteisuus ja hänen havaittiin hyödyntävän Twitterin tarjoamia interaktiivisia mahdollisuuksia keskimääräistä enemmän.</p>	
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1. INTRODUCTION

The rise of social media has created fundamental changes in how people communicate and how information is accessed. Social media provide individual people an opportunity to reach a mass audience making it highly effective for political communication. As online social media platforms continue to grow in their popularity they have become powerful political tools and communication channels for politicians. They present a new forum for political campaigning and communication where messages can be shared without the gatekeeping of traditional media (Gainous and Wagner 2011: 123). This creates a shift in the very foundation of the political process (Gainous and Wagner 2014: 1). The political role social media plays can only be seen to grow in the future. Creating and sustaining an online presence is thus becoming increasingly important in today's political landscape.

One of the most popular channels politicians use for online communication is Twitter. Twitter is a popular microblogging and social networking service with millions of users. It is particularly popular in the US where it has over 69 million users (Statista 2021). Characterised by short, concise messages, user-to-user interactivity, collaboration, self-regulation in producing messages and dialogue, it provides people new opportunities to engage politically and allows politicians to reach directly out to large audiences. The approach and use of social media among politicians vary, and some are embracing the platform more than others (Jungherr 2016: 76). As political communication continues to be shaped by social media and Twitter's popularity continues to grow, questions about the ways in which it is being used to communicate in politics become more accentuated. This also means that scholarly attention given to social media's role in politics is increasing, and several studies have been conducted on politicians' use of social media, particularly within the US political scene (Jungherr 2016: 72).

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, popularly known as AOC, is a US democratic representative for New York's 14th congressional district. Elected at the age of 29 in 2018, AOC became the youngest woman in American history to be elected in

Congress, and simultaneously a permanent figure in the American political scene. She is known for her substantial social media presence; and this also played a major part in her election campaign. She has continued to use social media platforms actively after being elected, mostly relying on Twitter and Instagram to share her political views, reach out to people and discuss a wide range of topics. While doing so, she has built a following of 12.7 million on Twitter and 8.8 million on Instagram, as of June 2021, setting her apart from most of her colleagues in Congress. Her skilled use of social media has made her a global digital media phenomenon and one of the fastest rising names in contemporary American politics.

The present study aims to analyse AOC's use of social media during her re-election campaign in 2020 and to explore the discursive strategies she uses when communicating with her online audience. The social media platform under analysis is Twitter as it is where most of her online communications take place. Tweets posted in June 2020, the month of the democratic primary election which took place on June 23rd were analysed using qualitative discourse analysis. This study examines her political discourse strategies on social media and explores the ways in which she employs these strategies. Thus, the present study examines political communication and strategy related to online presence as well as the role of social media as a vital and powerful tool in political campaigning in contemporary American politics.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1. Power of social media in the US politics

The current era of social networking has changed the ways in which politicians communicate and how people engage politically. While traditional mass media still plays a vital role in politics (Gainous and Wagner 2011: 88), the political landscape adapts to societal and technological shifts and the role of social media is growing rapidly (Jungherr 2016: 72). Social media create a shift in who controls and uses information and how information is shared (Gainous and Wagner 2014: 1). They have the ability to broadcast news in real-time, which has transformed the way we access information. Information moves faster and people are able to comment on issues as they are happening. Everyone with an Internet connection now has the opportunity to participate in political discourse and get their voice heard.

Social media also present new opportunities for interactive two-way communication and engagement between politicians and their constituents (Gainous and Wagner 2014: 5). Constituents are able to message their representatives directly which has the potential to bridge the gap between politicians and citizens. They also allow politicians to engage with their audiences on a more personal, even quasi-intimate level. In addition to sharing their policy views, candidates can humanise themselves through their social media accounts by sharing aspects of their personal lives, which can make voters feel more connected to them. Nowadays, virtually every member of the Congress has some kind of social media presence (Gainous and Wagner 2011: 107) and having an online presence has become crucial in order to sustain relevance in today's political landscape. Creating an image and establishing a political identity is essential for politicians in order to stay relevant and now a lot of it happens online.

Social media are cost-effective, which can be especially beneficial for young people and newcomers campaigning who may lack the financial resources and connections of their older competitors. Social media could thus potentially level the playing field where money and connections have historically played a major role in who gets elected (Gainous and Wagner 2014: 7). It also allows candidates to address the public directly,

bypassing traditional media gatekeepers, and gain control of the messages they send out (Gainous and Wagner 2014: 11). This can be especially beneficial to marginalized groups, since it eliminates the bias from the media and allows candidates to choose which issues they wish to address allowing them to control the content they choose to publish. Social media can thus be seen to democratise power by helping to remove barriers that favour some groups and individuals (Gainous and Wagner 2014: 7).

While women's presence in politics has steadily increased over the past decade, men continue to dominate decision-making settings, and the world of politics is far from reaching gender parity. Women's underrepresentation in political settings has been a widely researched topic, and the gender gap has often been attributed to structural barriers such as gender stereotypes, sexism and biased or sexist representations in the media (Evans and Clark 2016: 328). Previous research on the representation of female candidates in the media have found that women receive less media coverage than male candidates, and when they are represented, their representation tends to be stereotypical and it is more likely to emphasise appearance or personality over credentials, experience or leadership skills (Evans and Clark 2016: 327). Social media present an opportunity to circumvent these barriers women candidates traditionally face and to allow them to shape and dictate their own content (Fountaine 2017: 221; Gainous and Wagner 2014: 11).

Furthermore, the intersection of race and gender plays a major role in American politics. This is because this domain has historically been controlled by white men, whereas women of colour continue to be underrepresented. The congressional elections in 2018 were the most diverse elections in US history and the 116th Congress saw a new record of more than 100 women sworn into the House of Representatives, many of whom were also making history in terms of their race and sexuality (Dittmar 2019: 3). The 116th Congress had the largest black caucus and the largest Hispanic caucus that the Congress has ever had. The first Native American women and Muslim women in US history were elected and four states elected their first women of colour representatives to Congress (Dittmar 2019: 9). Overall, this meant that the demographic composition of the 116th congress became the youngest, most female and most racially diverse in history. In addition, Nancy Pelosi was voted as speaker by the House Democrats, making her the only woman to ever have held the position.

Although several records were broken during the 2018 election, the US is still far from reaching gender parity in electoral politics. A record number of women ran for office, but out of all the candidates, women remained less than 25% (Dittmar 2019: 3). The historic firsts women of colour made in the 2018 election also reveal the persistence of underrepresentation that is still very much a reality and demonstrates that in order to achieve gender parity in political leadership there is still more work that needs to be done (Dittmar 2019: 3).

2.2. Twitter use in election campaigns in the US

During the last decade, the use of social media in election campaigns has grown steadily, and Twitter has become a popular platform for political communication activities (Jungherr 2016: 72). Simultaneously, the scholarly attention given to the use of Twitter as a tool for political communication has increased, and Twitter's role in election campaigns has been widely studied by researchers from different fields who have approached the topic from different angles (Jungherr 2016: 72).

Social media have the ability to reach large audiences in a powerful low-cost way, making them effective campaigning tools. Many politicians are now taking their election campaigns online and using various social media platforms as a part of their campaign strategy. The social media platform increasingly at the forefront is Twitter which has become an important channel for political communication activities due to its versatility and reach (Gainous and Wagner 2014: 77). On Twitter, users are able to share and receive information quickly and effortlessly as messages are usually short and concise. It presents a new alternative environment where politicians and citizens can engage with each other in a multidimensional way (Gainous and Wagner 2014: 3). From Barack Obama's presidential election campaign in 2008, which was one of the first campaigns to fully utilise social media, to Donald Trump's controversial tweets that eventually got him his Twitter account permanently suspended in 2021, social media are reshaping political communication.

Studies conducted on the use of Twitter in election campaigning have found that candidates and members of opposing parties are more likely to use Twitter as a

political communication tool than members of governing parties (Jungherr 2016: 74). In addition, young politicians with urban constituencies are more likely to use Twitter compared to older politicians or those with rural constituencies (Jungherr 2016: 74). The impact of gender on the use of social media platforms and the connection between Twitter use and electoral wins have also been studied but no clear patterns have emerged (Jungherr 2016: 74).

According to previous studies (Evans et al. 2014, Golbeck et al. 2010), parties and candidates use Twitter mostly to share information on campaign activities and links to their websites whereas mentions or discussion of policy appear less frequently (Jungherr 2016: 76). Golbeck et al. (2010) found that most US Congress members use Twitter to communicate similar information as their offices by posting links to news articles, blog posts or upcoming activities which Golbeck et al. (2010) described as “mini press releases”. Congress members were also found to post tweets about their everyday life and activities such as meetings, dinners and workouts (Evans et al. 2014, Golbeck et al. 2010). Twitter use is, according to Jungherr (2016: 77), “a symbol of being in step with the times and being approachable” for candidates and parties.

Candidates tend to favour a “broadcasting” style on social media, and interactions with other users are a second priority (Jungherr 2016: 76). The interactions that do happen are mostly with other politicians, primarily between candidates in the same party, or journalists. Thus, there is not much evidence of Twitter enabling dialogue between the average candidate and citizens. Many studies, however, emphasise that Twitter use varies between candidates and some candidates do embrace the interactive possibilities that Twitter provides more than others (Jungherr 2016: 76). Jungherr (2016: 77) also notes that Twitter use among candidates is often associated with attempts to increase transparency, which is needed in order to obtain accountability. However, Golbeck et al. (2010) discovered that Congress members are primarily using Twitter for outreach, instead of transparency.

As social media continues to grow its popularity, understanding what kind of effects these new networks have on political information and communication is becoming increasingly relevant. It presents a new alternative environment that has the power to

profoundly change the conduct, performance, and coverage of today's politics (Gainous and Wagner 2014: 3).

2.3. Political discourse strategies on social media

In their discourse politicians make various linguistic choices when conveying their messages to the public, other politicians and the media. Van Dijk (1997: 12) defines political discourse as a set of discursive practices identified by its actors, including the recipients. While communicating their messages and ideologies to the public, in an attempt to appeal to voters and create positive electoral outcomes, politicians use various discursive strategies. Among these positive politeness strategies and performing solidarity in language are some of the important ways to establish sociability and cooperation with others (Kampf 2016: 48). Therefore, they also play an important role in political discourse (Kampf 2016: 48). Kampf (2016: 58) identifies seven speech acts that can be used to express solidarity: congratulating, welcoming, thanking, supporting, praising and blessing. These speech acts are ritualised gestures in political discourse and serve as tools for building and maintaining relationships and trust in political systems as well as acquiring power (Kampf 2016: 48).

Strategies of solidarity can be linguistically produced, for example, through the use of pronouns. Pronominal choices are not just grammatical, but they also convey meanings and can be used strategically in political discourse (De Fina 1995: 380). Pronouns can, for example, be used to direct attention away from oneself or to signal responsibility and personal commitment and involvement (De Fina 1995: 384). They can also be used to signal various group memberships. 'We' and 'us' place the speaker into the same group as their intended audience whereas 'they' and 'them' can be used to distance oneself from an opposing group with opposing views (Van Dijk 1997: 34; Wilson 2015: 779). Making a distinction between 'us' and 'them' also allows the speaker to realise a strategy of positive self-representation and negative other representation. The speaker can portray themselves and the group they are a part of in a positive light and the opposing group in a negative light.

Social media are inherently personally oriented networks allowing politicians to share more individualised messages. Political personalisation is a frequently used communication strategy online (Metz et al. 2019: 1482) as politicians are able create and choose content themselves, allowing them to create a more personalised environment. Politicians are able to position themselves as ordinary people with individual qualities and share more personal and emotional narratives (Bene 2017, cited in Metz et al. 2019: 1482; Graham et al. 2018). Social media are being used to not only share political ideologies, but also to connect and create relationships (Graham et al. 2018). Scholars have discovered an increase in individualised campaign patterns, and more attention has been given to the extent to which politicians use self-personalisation online and what kind of consequences it has (McGregor 2018, cited in Metz et al. 2019: 1481).

Politicians' public status relies on how they are perceived, and their image portrayed online has an inevitable effect on it. Social media are spaces where politicians are able to have control over the messages they send out and thus more direct influence over their own public image. For example, Metz et al. (2019) conducted a content analysis on the personalisation of politicians' Facebook posts and discovered that emotional and private communication style is beneficial for impression management and invites positive audience engagement. Previous studies have also shown that emotional, humorous and enthusiastic content can trigger audience engagement (Metz et al. 2019: 1485).

Some studies have focused specifically on women politicians' communication strategies on social media. Evans and Clark (2016) studied female candidates' communication strategies on social media during their campaigns. They analysed their Twitter activity in the 2012 U.S. House elections and looked for differences in the tone and content of male and female candidates. They found that gender has a direct and contextual effect on the way candidates communicate. Women were found to discuss policy and women's issues more frequently than men and they were also more likely to send attack-style messages and confront their political opponents during their campaigns (Evans and Clark 2016: 327). Fountaine (2017), on the other hand, explored the ways in which young women politicians use Twitter to frame themselves

during their election campaigns in New Zealand's 2014 general election. The study identified likability as a dominant frame in their messaging. This was characterized by humour, flattery, acknowledgment of others, references to family and friends (and animals), expressions of empathy and sympathy, and low levels of negativity and conflict (Fontaine 2017: 226). It was discovered that by balancing personal and political content, women politicians were able to create an overall impression of relatable personality and approachability. This was identified as the root for the meta-frame of likability (Fontaine 2017: 226).

2.4. Previous research on AOC's Twitter use

Although being a relatively new name in the field of politics, studies have already been conducted on AOC's political discourse on Twitter. Sandbakk (2020) performed a discourse analytic study that aimed to discover how AOC realised the strategies of solidarity and indirectness on Twitter during her campaign in 2018. The study found that AOC used personal pronouns strategically to signal solidarity and to position herself in different groups. AOC also used pronouns to create an 'us' vs 'them' division between herself and her opponent Joe Crowley as well as between herself and other democrats. In addition, she expressed solidarity by tweeting endorsements from organisations, other candidates and citizens. Indirectness, on the other hand, was realised by frequently criticising her opponent Joe Crowley using indirect speech acts. AOC also promoted her own campaign indirectly by sharing endorsements from citizens and asked for donations and volunteers indirectly.

Another study that aimed to discover which linguistic strategies AOC used during her campaign in 2018 was conducted by Jaruseviciute (2019, cited in Sandbakk 2020). The analysis focused on how AOC uses Twitter to connect with her audience and how she constructs her identity during her election campaign. Combining corpus linguistics and critical discourse analysis, the study found that AOC emphasised certain aspects of her personality, such as her Puerto Rican roots, being a Bronx native and being a woman to create common ground with her Twitter audience. It was discovered that AOC often talked on a collective level and that she used inclusive plural pronouns to connect with her audience and create a sense of solidarity.

Jacuinde (2019) had similar findings in her study which focused on the strategies AOC used to frame her messages and appeal to her audience on Twitter and Instagram three months pre-election and three months post-election. Using pre-determined frames, she performed a framing analysis that found that during her election campaign AOC sought to create a relatable image by sharing her own experiences as a working-class Latina from the Bronx. After being elected her focus was placed on responding to critics and redirecting messages. It was also discovered that AOC used her social media platforms to make political systems more transparent and understandable to the average American voter.

Lewinstein (2019) approached the data from a slightly different angle and focused on AOC's use of Twitter as an agenda setting tool. The analysis sought to discover which issues AOC tweets about more often: district or national. The analysis utilised both qualitative and quantitative elements and Tweets were categorised into district-oriented tweets, tweets on national issues, and tweets that did not fall into either of the categories. The analysis revealed that pre-election, AOC tweeted more about district issues whereas post-election national issues were more dominant. Lewinstein (2019) also had similar findings as Sandbakk (2020), Jaruseviciute (2019) and Jacuinde (2019) and found that AOC frequently referenced her Puerto Rican roots and expressed solidarity towards other women of colour.

While all of these studies focused on AOC's political discourse on Twitter, they all approached the data from different angles. A common finding among these studies was that AOC used Twitter to connect and create common ground with her audience and that she frequently emphasised certain aspects of her personality in order to appear relatable. The studies also discovered that AOC's use of Twitter differs from other politicians. AOC's approach to Twitter is interactive, multimodal and her tweets frequently include content from other users. All of these studies focused on her 2018 campaign communications and had partly overlapping data sets, whereas the present study aims to provide an in depth analysis of AOC's 2020 re-election campaign. This not only provides a new angle to the topic but also allows comparisons between her 2018 campaign and 2020 campaign communications.

3. SET-UP OF THE STUDY

3.1. Aims and research questions

The present study aims to analyse AOC's use of social media during her first re-election campaign in 2020. It explores the discursive strategies she uses when sharing messages online and the ways in which she realises these strategies. The social media platform under analysis is Twitter since it is where most of AOC's online communications take place and also where she has the largest audience. Twitter is rapidly growing its popularity as an important political communication tool and AOC is actively using the opportunities Twitter provides for various campaign activities and political identity construction.

The research questions are the following:

1. What kind of discursive strategies does AOC employ most frequently on Twitter during her re-election campaign in 2020?
2. How does she realise these strategies?

The study focuses on two discursive strategies that were identified as the most prominent in the data set: solidarity and personalisation. It takes a closer look at these two strategies and examines them in depth while determining what kind of discursive means AOC uses in order to realise them. The study aims to provide insight into what kind of linguistic choices AOC makes when conveying messages and appealing to her audience in the most effective way as possible. In this way, conclusions can be drawn about how AOC communicates with her online audience on social media during her campaign and what makes her communications as successful as they are. The following sections discuss data selection and collection as well as method of analysis in more detail.

3.2. Data selection and collection

AOC became a permanent figure in the American political scene in 2018 when she made history as the youngest woman elected to Congress in US history. She is a representative for New York's 14th (NY-14) congressional district and, along with Rashida Tlaib from Detroit, Ilhan Omar from Minnesota and Ayanna Pressley from Boston, she is known for representing a new emerging group of young, progressive members of Congress.

In addition to her progressive ideology, AOC is known for her substantial social media presence. With over 12M followers on Twitter she is surpassing most of her colleagues in Congress, making her social media presence one of the most powerful ones in modern day US politics. While most of her communications take place on Twitter, she is embracing other social media platforms as well. She is active on Instagram, where she is known to go live to discuss policy while cooking dinner or hosting Q&As on various topics in her Instagram stories. During her 2020 campaign, she also used Twitch, a popular live streaming service, to stream her playing the multiplayer game "Among Us" while urging viewers to vote. This did not only allow AOC to connect with young people on 'their own turf' and on their own terms, but it also allowed her to land her message, to get out the vote, in a candid yet effective way. Her stream peaked at 436 000 viewers, making her one of the platform's biggest broadcasters (TwitchTracker 2021).

AOC's fluent and innovative approach to using social media as a political communication tool has made her a global digital media phenomenon. Her social media presence is prominent and powerful and she has managed to build a large following using the tools social media offers for political engagement in a relatively short period of time. In addition, AOC represents several minority groups in the world of politics: she is a young woman of colour with a working class background. All of this makes her tweets interesting and relevant data for studying political communication strategies in modern day US politics.

The social media platform under analysis is Twitter as it is where most of her online communications take place and also where she has the largest audience. The selected data set consists of tweets posted in June 2020, the month of the democratic primary election of NY-14 congressional district which took place on June 23rd. NY-14 is a district with a clear democratic majority, which makes the primary election more significant than the general election. Because of this, the present study focused on the campaign for the democratic primary election. By limiting the analysis to the month of June, it was possible to ensure that the size of the data set was manageable, considering the limitations of the present study.

Since the focus of the study is AOC's communication and the messages she sends out herself, retweets from other accounts will not be included in the study. However, quote tweets by AOC are included, since it is a feature AOC frequently uses to participate in ongoing conversation, comment on current issues and engage in dialogue with other users. In these cases the original tweet AOC comments on is not under analysis, however, it is taken into account and may be commented on in cases where it provides context for AOC's comment. Due to the limitations of the study, photos and videos will not be subject to analysis. The emphasis in the analysis is thus placed on written communication. However, photos and videos may be commented on if they provide context for AOC's tweet.

The data for the study were collected by performing an advanced search on Twitter. This feature allows one to tailor search results to specific time periods and accounts. The advanced search was used to search tweets from the user @aoc during the time period June 1st and June 30th 2020. The search resulted in 111 tweets and these formed the data set of the present study. While conducting the analysis, some problems were encountered. There were instances where the tweet AOC had responded to or quoted was no longer available. The user to whom AOC had responded had either deleted the tweet or the tweet was removed by Twitter. In these cases, the full context of the tweet was left for interpretation.

The data used in the present study are publicly available and were collected on AOC's public Twitter account. Twitter can be considered as an open public space since content shared on Twitter is publicly accessible to everyone. In addition to her account being public, AOC is a public figure and the content shared on her Twitter account is intended to reach as wide an audience as possible. Therefore, there is no risk of harm and the data can be used for research purposes.

3.3. Methods of analysis

The data of the present study were analysed using qualitative discourse analysis. Discourse analysis (DA) is not a single method, but a broad field of study and it encompasses a number of different approaches. It is interested in how language functions and how meaning is created in different contexts. It is a qualitative method that aims to produce a detailed in-depth analysis of the data at hand and seeks to discover the underlying patterns and structures of meaning-making in either written or spoken discourse (Olbertz-Siitonen 2019: 7). The scope of analysis, typical data in focus or the approach taken in analysis often vary, but what different studies have in common is their concern with the way language produces and constrains meaning (Olbertz-Siitonen 2019: 5-6).

When analysing political discourse, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a commonly used approach of DA. It views language as social practise and investigates the construction and reproduction of power through discourse. It often takes a political stance and aims to examine critically social inequalities manifested in language (Van Dijk 1997: 11). While CDA is a common approach used in research on political discourse, the present study approaches the data from a linguistic point of view and aims to offer an in depth descriptive analysis of the discursive strategies AOC uses and the means she uses to do so. The focus is placed on discovering and identifying recurring discourse strategies and linguistic patterns in the data set, instead of exposing underlying power imbalances or social inequalities, which is what CDA is often used for. Therefore, the present study does not make use of CDA, instead the analysis is solely descriptive.

Previous studies conducted on AOC's discursive practises used various methods of analysis. Jaruseviciute (2019) used a combined approach of discourse analysis and corpus linguistics which allowed a larger data set and, thus, more generalised implications based on the findings. Lewinstein (2019) and Sandbakk (2020), on the other hand, chose a qualitative discourse analytic approach which allowed a more in depth analysis. Both studies also included some quantitative aspects. A qualitative discourse analytic approach was also chosen for the present study since the aim is to provide a detailed in depth analysis of the selected data set.

The analysis process of the present study was qualitative, inductive and data-driven. The analysis process started with a familiarisation with the data. The data set consisting of 111 tweets was studied systematically while searching for frequently appearing strategies. This stage of the analysis identified several recurring discursive strategies out of which the most prominent ones were solidarity and personalisation. These were chosen to be the target of the present study. Once these strategies were identified, the data were studied and analysed more thoroughly, this time placing the focus on these two strategies. The aim of this stage was to find out how AOC realises these strategies and which discursive and linguistic means she uses to do so. The present study thus aims to offer an in depth linguistic analysis of the discursive strategies AOC employs when communicating with her Twitter audience.

4. ANALYSIS

The analysis focused on the strategies of solidarity and personalisation which were identified as the most prominent strategies in the data set. Both strategies were analysed systematically while determining which discursive means were used to realise them. The results are described in the following sections. The first section presents the analysis of tweets where the strategy of solidarity is realised and the second section focuses on the strategy of personalisation.

4.1. Solidarity

Performing solidarity in language allows politicians to establish sociability and cooperation with others (Kampf 2016: 48). It signals involvement and concern and it is needed for maintaining and affirming good relationships (Kampf 2016: 49). Strategies of solidarity can be linguistically produced through various discursive means. The following sections focus on the solidarity strategies AOC employed in her Twitter campaign. Section 4.1.1. presents the analysis of tweets where AOC expresses solidarity through the use of inclusive pronouns and section 4.1.2. focuses on the speech acts of thanking and endorsing.

4.1.1 Use of inclusive pronouns

The analysis revealed that AOC frequently uses inclusive pronouns as a linguistic tool to create a sense of solidarity with various groups of people and to realise a strategy of collective alignment. By using the personal pronouns 'we' and 'us' she is able to portray herself as a member of the intended audience and she frequently uses these pronouns to align herself with her campaign team, supporters, colleagues or with the people of New York.



Figure 1



Figure 2

As can be seen in Figure 1, when referring to her campaign AOC mixes plural and singular pronouns. She refers to her win in 2018 as “our victory” and “our win” but uses first person pronouns when saying “I won”, refers to her opponent as “my opponent” and says that the race is “important to me”. By using plural personal pronouns when referring to her campaign she aligns herself with her campaign team and supporters and signals solidarity towards them. Plural pronouns allow her to invoke a sense of collectivity and fellowship among her supporters, share responsibility and emphasise that she is part of a team and that she does not act alone. It creates a sense of group solidarity and highlights that she is a member of a collective united by shared interests and goals. In Figure 2 she uses the hashtag #TeamAOC to further emphasise that while also thanking her supporters and the volunteers of her campaign team. She expresses personal gratitude and appreciation by saying “I cannot thank you enough” recognising the work and effort the volunteers of her team put into the campaign (Figure 2).

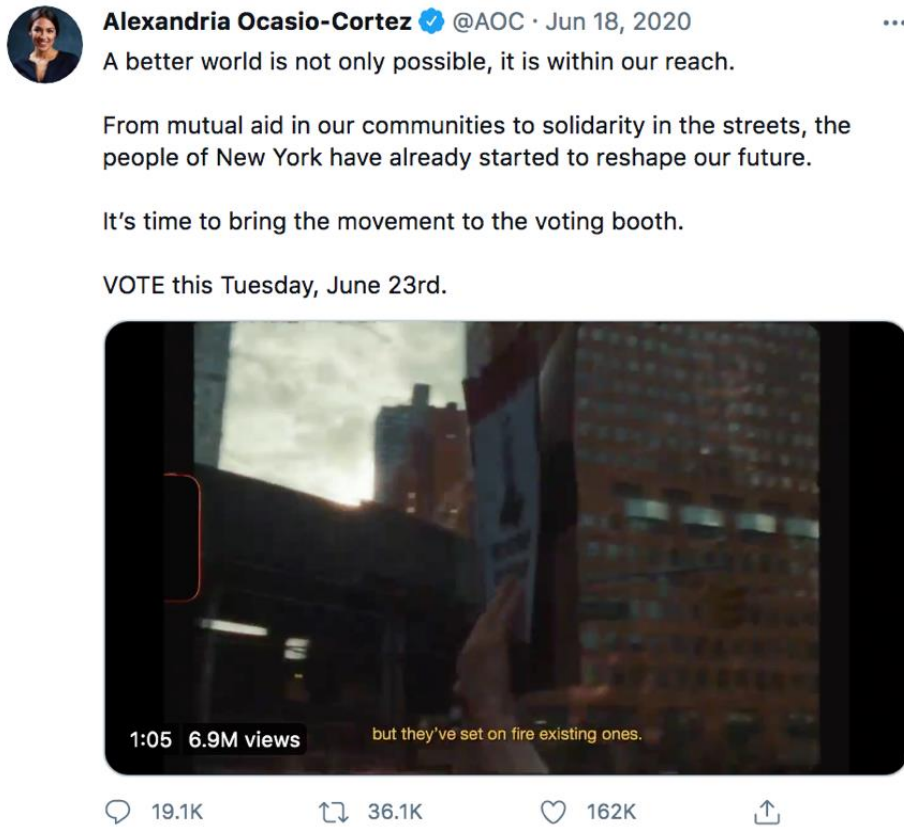


Figure 3

Another example of AOC's use of inclusive plural personal pronouns can be seen in Figure 3 where she shares her campaign video and encourages people to vote. She tweets that "a better world is not only possible, it is within our reach" and that "the people of New York have already started to reshape our future" (Figure 3). This allows her to acknowledge the agency of the people of New York and indicate that her campaign is part of a larger movement. She refers to this movement as "people's movement" run by the people of New York (Figures 1 and 3). She tweets about "mutual aid in our communities" and "solidarity in the streets" which illustrates a sense of group solidarity and collectivity among the people of New York (Figure 3). She uses plural pronouns when talking about "our communities" and "our future" (Figure 3) which allows her to align herself with the people of New York and show that she is part of the NY-14 community which she represents. It places her in the same group as her constituents and creates a sense of group solidarity and collectivity among her constituents and herself. By emphasising that she is also a member of the NY-14 community she bridges the gap between herself and her constituents. It shows that

she has personal ties to the district she represents which allows her to show personal involvement and concern towards the community.



Figure 4

In Figure 4 AOC shares a donation link to her campaign which she captioned by saying that people have made her candidacy a possibility and that she has always worked for the people and will continue to do so. This allows AOC to position herself 'on the people's side'. She illustrates a mutual relationship between her and the people she represents where both parties support and benefit from each other. Power relations between politicians and the public are inherently asymmetrical, since elected politicians are in the possession of power not accessible to the general public. However, through various discursive choices AOC is able to present the relationship as symmetrical. By aligning herself with the people of NY-14, positioning herself as a member of the community she represents, emphasising that she is on the people's side and saying that she works for the people, AOC establishes a more symmetrical power relationship between herself and the people she represents. By presenting the

relationship as symmetrical AOC bridges the gap between her and the citizens and, therefore, it was interpreted as a solidarity strategy.

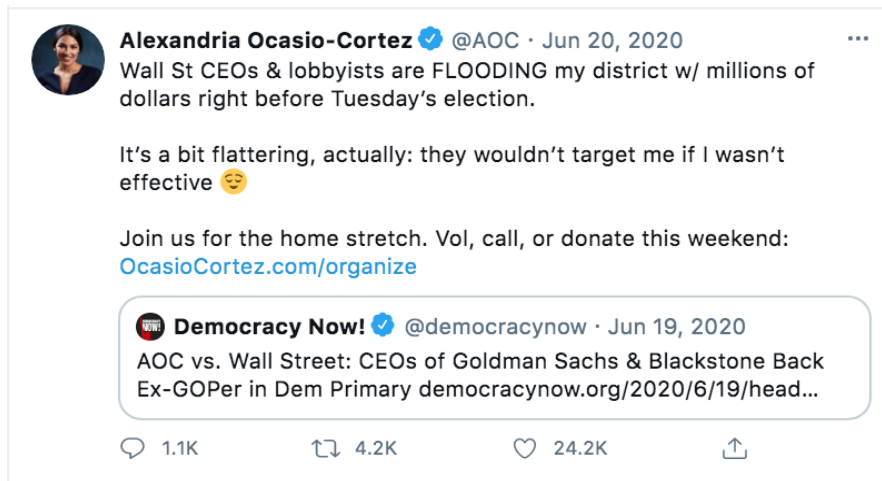


Figure 5

In addition to plural personal pronouns AOC also uses singular personal pronouns when talking about her campaign. She refers to her campaign as “my campaign” (Figure 4) and the district she represents as “my district” (Figure 5). The use of first person singular personal pronouns signals personal commitment and involvement and allows her to emphasise her active role in the campaign. She is able to take responsibility of her own campaign and show that she is personally invested and committed to the campaign. AOC also uses first person pronouns when expressing her feelings or emotions. Examples can be seen in Figure 1 where she says that the race is important to her and Figure 2 where she thanks her campaign team by saying “I cannot thank you enough”. Although the choice of singular personal pronouns when referring to oneself and expressing one’s emotions is a natural one, they also allow AOC to construct an image of a politician with a great deal of personal involvement. They can, therefore, be used strategically to signal AOC’s high level of personal concern towards the NY-14 community and the ‘people’s movement’ her campaign is also part of.



Figure 6

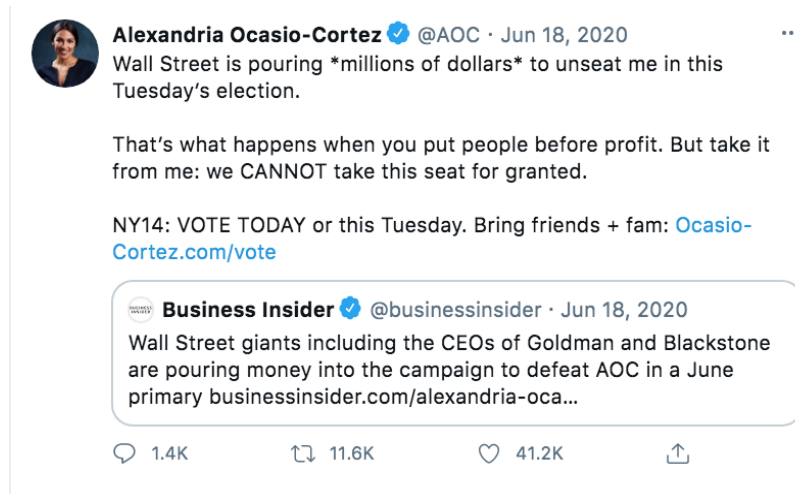


Figure 7

As shown in Figures 5, 6 and 7, AOC also uses inclusive pronouns to create an 'us vs them' dichotomy between her campaign and Wall Street CEOs. She positions herself

and her campaign as a “people’s campaign”, opposed to rich billionaires (Figure 7). By referring to her campaign as “our grassroots campaign” (Figure 6) she creates a sense of collectivity among her supporters and highlights that her campaign is a group-effort of the people in NY-14, a group in which she herself also belongs to. She encourages people to “join us for the home stretch” (Figure 5) inviting other people to come together and join her side. This further contributes to positioning AOC as a member of the NY-14 community. Billionaires and Wall St CEOs are portrayed as outsiders, as ‘them’ who are, according to AOC, targeting her and trying to defeat her and her campaign (Figures 5, 6 and 7). This way AOC is able to create a division between the group she herself belongs to and the opposing ‘other’ group which she portrays in a distant and negative light.

The dichotomy between her campaign and Wall Street CEOs is also portrayed as a dichotomy between people and money. In Figure 6 AOC tweets that “their money couldn’t buy a movement” referring to Wall Street CEOs and thanks the people who “pitched in for tonight’s victory” illustrating that her win was made possible by the people in NY-14. In Figures 6 and 7 she tweets that the billionaires have “poured in millions” trying to defeat her campaign and unseat her. This allows her to portray the billionaires as the opposing side, as ‘them’. In Figure 4 she tweets that “these billionaires are just mad they’ve found something they can’t buy” referring to her campaign and her decision to reject corporate PAC money. She also tweets that her campaign puts “people before profit” and tweets that that is why Wall Street is working so hard to unseat her (Figure 7). She uses the phrase “speaking truth to power” (Figure 6), an expression for confronting those in power, standing up for what one believes in and commanding change. This allows her to emphasise that she is not beholden to corporate interests, and further position herself on the ‘people’s side’. By creating this division, she creates negative other representation by portraying the billionaires as the enemy who are trying to unseat her, and positive self-presentation by creating a sense of solidarity and community among her supporters. It also allows her to further emphasise that she is on the people’s side and a member of the community she represents.

4.1.2. Thanking and endorsing

Thanking and endorsing are both speech acts of solidarity (Kampf 2016: 50). They are important tools in political discourse since they allow politicians to show gratitude and support towards others, which is needed in order to establish and maintain good relationships. AOC frequently uses these speech acts to express her gratitude towards her supporters and colleagues and to show her support to other candidates. Her approach to Twitter is interactive and she frequently replies to tweets from other users or comments on tweets using the quote tweet feature. Out of the 111 tweets that formed the data for the study, 67 were interactions with other users: 17 direct replies to other users and 50 quote tweets where AOC engaged in dialogue by commenting on tweets from other users.



Figure 8



Figure 9



Figure 10

Figures 8, 9 and 10 show examples of AOC responding to tweets from her colleagues and fellow candidates and expressing gratitude towards them. In Figure 8, AOC responds to congressional representative Ayanna Pressley and expresses gratitude for their friendship. She tweets “love you” and uses the word ‘sis’ accompanied with a heart emoji to reinforce the sentiment, implying that their friendship is closer than merely colleagues. Figure 9 shows her replying to congressional representative Barbara Lee who congratulates AOC for winning the election. AOC tweets “thank you for paving the way” which allows her to reciprocate the compliment and show mutual support, appreciation and admiration towards Lee. Figure 10 shows AOC expressing solidarity to former congressional representative, current Secretary of Interior Deb Haaland. AOC tweets that “it’s an honor to serve alongside you” which allows AOC to show that she thinks highly of Haaland and has a lot of respect for her. Establishing and maintaining good relationships is crucial in politics and AOC uses the interactive opportunities Twitter provides for engaging with other users to express her gratitude and show her support to her colleagues and fellow candidates publicly. Expressing gratitude allows AOC to provide feelings of warmth and solidarity towards others as well as express mutual support towards other politicians, which is essential for establishing social links. AOC mainly expresses gratitude towards her democratic colleagues, other people of colour and women. This allows her to connect with members of the same party and express solidarity towards colleagues who also represent minority groups in political settings.



Figure 11



Figure 12

In addition to expressing gratitude towards colleagues and fellow candidates, AOC also thanks her supporters and campaign team. She thanks the volunteers of her campaign team as well as her district and the people who voted for her (Figures 2 and 6). In addition to general expressions of gratitude targeted at groups of people, she also directly responds to individual citizens thanking them for their support (Figures 11 and 12). In both examples, AOC again uses heart emojis to reinforce the sentiment. Thanking and expressing gratitude can be used as a strategic device as they allow AOC to balance power and politeness relations between her and her supporters. By responding to citizens and engaging in two-way communication with her constituents, AOC further bridges the gap between herself and citizens contributing to a more symmetrical relationship. This allows her to appear approachable and show that she is open to interacting with people. In addition, establishing a dialogue with her audience may reinforce the impression of a more personal relationship between her and the voters. This, in turn, may have positive effects on how she is perceived by the public thus potentially creating positive electoral outcomes.



Figure 13

In addition to replying to people who are expressing their support, AOC also responded to criticism sent by a user regarding a tweet AOC had sent (Figure 13). The user expressed that a tweet AOC had previously responded to and expressed agreement to was ableist and hurtful. AOC apologised for the harm her tweet caused and thanked the person for “stepping up to point it out” (Figure 13). She continued by saying that

she will remove the tweet and that she is open to engaging further. Owning up to one's mistakes, taking accountability and apologising shows a human side and contributes to creating an authentic and sincere image. It signals empathy, sensitivity and taking responsibility for one's actions. It also signals that AOC values the opinions of her audience and is open to engaging with her followers, including those who express criticism towards her, thus serving as a solidarity strategy.

AOC's interactive approach to Twitter is in contrast with other politicians who tend to be more likely to release statements than to interact with other users (Golbeck et al. 2010 and Jungherr 2016). AOC, unlike many other politicians, frequently engages in direct interactions with other users, including citizens. She makes use of the interactive opportunities Twitter provides for increasing communication with constituents setting her apart from her colleagues.



Figure 14



Figure 15

In addition to thanking and interacting with colleagues and supporters AOC expresses solidarity by tweeting out endorsements. Tweeting endorsements allows AOC to express support to like-minded democratic candidates, which is why it was interpreted as a solidarity strategy. Supporting other candidates signals cooperation and allows AOC to express political agreement. Figures 14 and 15 show examples of AOC endorsing other candidates. In Figure 14 she shows support to Mondaire James and she tweets “he’s a people’s champ rejecting corporate money”. She continues with a personal fact about herself and shares that he is from the same district where AOC went to public school making the endorsement feel more personal. Figure 15 shows AOC endorsing Ed Markey who in his tweet advocates for restructuring budgets away from incarceration and militarisation. AOC tweets that he’s “the real deal in the Senate” and that people are “lucky to have him as a Senator” signaling that AOC agrees with Markey’s political views. By endorsing other candidates with similar views as herself she is able to signal solidarity as well as promote her own views in an indirect way. This allows AOC reinforce the message of her own campaign as well as create social links, establish new relationships or maintain existing ones with other politicians who share her political views.

This section has focused on how AOC realised the strategy of solidarity through the use of inclusive personal pronouns and speech acts of thanking and endorsing. The

analysis shows that AOC uses plural personal pronouns to realise a strategy of collective alignment and to position herself in various groups. In addition, AOC uses speech acts of thanking and endorsing to express gratitude and support towards colleagues and supporters. This allows her to establish and maintain relationships with her colleagues as well as appear approachable to voters and bridge the gap between her and her constituents. The following section focuses on the strategy of personalisation.

4.2. Personalisation

Politics in the US has become increasingly personalised and personality-driven. Emphasis is shifting away from political parties to individual politicians and their personal attributes, which has resulted in politicians sharing personal aspects of their lives online (Van Aelst et al. 2017, cited in Graham et al. 2018). Politicians use various strategies to construct their political identity which their audience can connect with and personalisation is one of them. The following sections present the analysis of tweets where AOC realises the strategy of personalisation. Section 4.2.1. presents the analysis of tweets where personalisation is realised by sharing personal and emotive content and section 4.2.2. focuses on code-switching.

4.2.1. Personal and emotive content

Social media blurs the line between public and private roles and allows politicians to shift between them more or less strategically. In addition to promoting her campaign and talking about politically relevant topics, AOC uses her Twitter account to share personal stories about her current life as a modern-day politician, her past experiences as a member of the working class and her personal life. This allows her to present herself as a multidimensional person with a private and personal side in addition to the public persona.

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez @AOC · Jun 26, 2020

Two years ago today, I went from waitress and organizer to winning a Congressional primary while outspent 10-1.

Every day since I've tried to do right by working families & the movement that made it happen. Corrupt interests haven't had a good night's sleep since 😊

Thank you 💜



6.7K 37.6K 356.8K

Figure 16

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez @AOC · Jun 10, 2020

Politics & media is rife w people who got to where they are w/ help from big money + family connections, & it deeply bothers some to experience others who have accomplished similar or big things without those advantages.

They know they don't have the range, so they belittle it.

andrew kaczynski @KFILE · Jun 10, 2020

conspiracy aside here – what is with the constant digs at AOC for having a working people's job?

twitter.com/laralogan/stat...

[Show this thread](#)

931 4.3K 25.5K

Figure 17

AOC is known to be open about her background as a member of the working class. In Figure 16 she references her previous job as a waitress and organiser and says that

every day since being elected she has “tried to do right by working families”. In Figure 17 she replies to a tweet about “the constant digs” at her for having “a working people’s job”. She tweets that she got to where she is without financial help or family connections and says that it bothers some that other people, including her, have achieved “similar or big things without those advantages” (Figure 17). By referencing her working-class background and emphasising that she has worked her way up she is able to remind people that, although she now has a career in politics, she is still a member of the community she represents and that she has first-hand experience of what it is like being a member of the working class. She is able to show that her life prior being elected closely resembles that of many of her constituents. This further contributes to creating a symmetrical power relationship between her and her constituents and also allows her to appear more relatable to the voters. Sharing personal aspects of her background serves as a personalisation strategy since it allows the audience to get to know her behind her political image. It provides insight into who she is as a person and how she got to where she is now. Being open about her background and challenges she has faced also allows her to appear transparent and humane and portray an image that feels authentic.

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez @AOC · Jun 9, 2020

Any New Yorker can tell you that this group does not look representative of the NYPD at all.

Most NYPD patrol officers are Black, Latino, or Asian American - and the overall force is about 1/5 women.

So what's going on here? 🗨️ ⬇️

August Takala @AugustTakala · Jun 9, 2020

WATCH 📺 New York police boss Mike O'Meara went off on the media today:

"Stop treating us like animals and thugs and start treating us with some respect ... Our legislators abandoned us. The press is vilifying us. It's disgusting."

[Show this thread](#)



4.3K 19.3K 87.8K

Figure 18

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez @AOC · Jun 3, 2020

What? No. This is dangerous.

I'm heading there now.

Sophie Ellman-Golan @EgSophie · Jun 3, 2020

Protestors are currently trapped on the Manhattan Bridge. NYPD will not let them off on either end.

We have seen how violent the police are willing to be with protestors, without provocation. All eyes on this bridge.
pscp.tv/w/caWzwTEzODY5...

[Show this thread](#)

4.5K 30.3K 204.5K

Figure 19



Figure 20

AOC frequently positions herself as a New Yorker. She comments on current local issues regarding her district, such as the NYPD (Figure 18) and Black Lives Matter protests that were taking place in New York in June 2020 (Figure 19). In Figure 18 she quotes a tweet about the NYPD's media appearance and tweets that "any New Yorker can tell you that this group does not look representative of the NYPD at all" and continues by sharing information about the demographic of the NYPD. In Figure 19 she reacts to news of protestors being trapped on the Manhattan bridge and tweets that she will be heading there immediately. By commenting on local topics AOC shows that she is aware of what is happening in her district and that she is invested in local issues. In addition to talking about current issues related to New York, she also shares information about her districts history (Figure 20). This again allows her to demonstrate that she knows the district she represents closely and that she is familiar with its history. She shares a personal anecdote from her childhood and tweets "social and economic justice isn't a game to us", 'us' referring to Bronx natives (Figure 20). Emphasising that she is a local New Yorker and that she grew up there was interpreted

as a personalisation strategy since it allows AOC to remind people that her ties to NY-14 are more than just political. It shows that she cares about her district and that being a New Yorker is a part of her personal identity. In addition to being a personalisation strategy, it contributes to positioning her as a member of the community she represents, thus, also serving as a solidarity strategy.

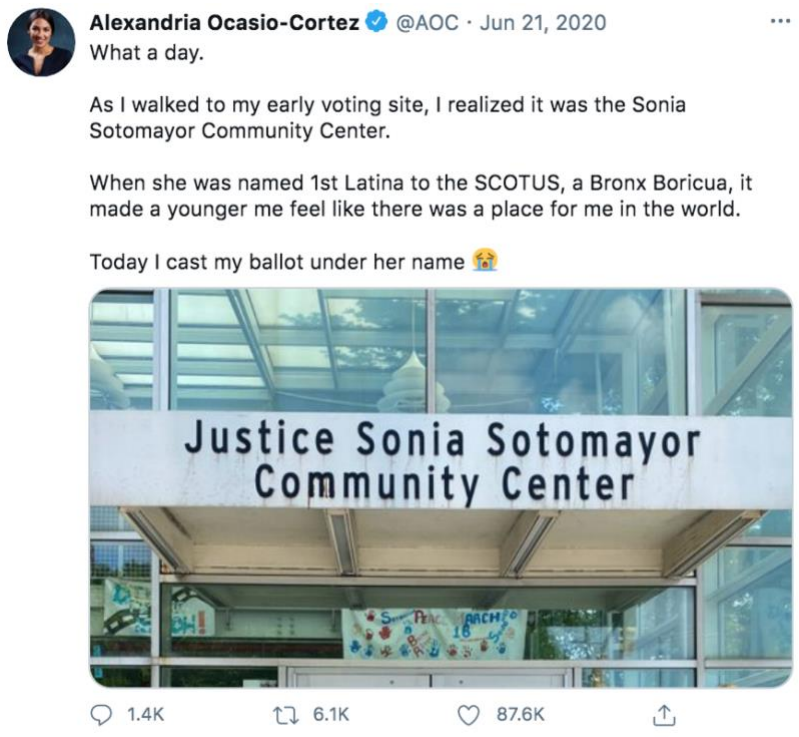


Figure 21

Women of colour continue to be underrepresented in political settings and AOC is known to be vocal about her personal experiences as a young Latina in the world of politics. In Figure 21 she talks about Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor, a fellow Bronx-born Latina, and shares a personal and emotive anecdote about how she relates to her and how Sotomayor was an important role model to her growing up. AOC tweets that she “made a younger me feel like there was a place for me in the world” (Figure 21). Referencing her younger self and sharing a personal and emotive story from her past allows AOC to show her audience a more humane and personal side. In addition, it allows her to demonstrate how important representation in political settings is and emphasise that young people of colour need role models in political settings and leadership positions they can see themselves in.



Figure 22

Figure 22 shows AOC sharing an illustrated image of a young woman of colour facing a board of white men in their suits. She quote tweeted the image and added the caption “Oh look, someone took a photo of what my life is like debating Republicans in committee each week”. Although the tone of the tweet may not be entirely serious, it highlights a very real issue of how young women of colour still remain a minority in political settings. By sharing the tweet AOC is able to demonstrate how there is not many women like her in Congress and how she feels outnumbered by men. The tweet allows her to highlight two marginalised aspects of her identity: being a woman and being a person of colour. By emphasising marginalised aspects of her identity, she realises the strategy of personalisation as it allows people to get to know her behind her political identity and image. It provides insight into her personal experiences as a young woman of colour in political settings and allows her to highlight the challenges she has faced and continues to face while working in Congress. Furthermore, it allows other young women of colour relate to her, to see themselves reflected in the face of leadership.



Figure 23



Figure 24

AOC also uses Twitter to combat criticism from her opponents and call out discrimination she has experienced. Examples can be seen in Figures 23 and 24. In Figure 23 she replies to a tweet quoting the White House press secretary who had called her “Biden’s adviser”. AOC uses the opportunity to talk about the discrimination women of colour have faced and continue to face in leadership positions and the world of politics. She tweets that the comment is “steeped in a long, hurtful & horrendous history of stripping women of colour of titles and diminishing them to “the help”” (Figure 23). She continues by saying that mistaking a woman of colour for having a lower position or title than she actually has is “mired in racist history” and that she is expecting

an apology (Figure 23). Figure 24, on the other hand, shows AOC replying to a tweet quoting Donald Trump who had “taken aim” at AOC by saying “she’s got no sense, no credentials... a little charisma, not much.” AOC’s response is sarcastic and she tweets that if she was all those things surely the President would not spend so much time talking about her. By replying to these tweets publicly she is both able to take control of the narrative and regain the power of the situation but also highlight that while more women of colour are being elected than ever before, discrimination still exists in political settings and there is more work to be done to ensure that equality is realised.



Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez  @AOC · Jun 21, 2020

To all dads + father figures,
past, present, and future -

Your love, attention, and care moves mountains and changes the world.
Thank you!

My papá believed in me, coached me, and challenged me. I wouldn't be
me without having had the gift of his love.

Happy Father's Day 



 1.2K

 1.9K

 37.4K



Figure 25



Figure 26

AOC also uses Twitter to share a more private side to her. She talks about her family and childhood, especially her father who she says had an important impact on her life growing up (Figure 25). In Figure 25, she wishes everyone happy Father's Day and shares an old photo of her and her father. The tweet is emotive and personal and AOC refers to her father as 'papá' emphasising her Puerto Rican roots. AOC tweets "your love, attention, and care moves mountains and changes the world" addressing all fathers in a heartfelt way. In Figure 26 she responds to a tweet where a young woman talks about her father's role in her life and says that she relates to her and felt the same way about her own father. She tweets that the testimony moved her and thanks the reporter for "sharing the humanity of this moment" (Figure 26). The tweet demonstrates emotional intelligence and empathy and gives AOC the opportunity to share a personal aspect of her own life. By sharing personal stories and memories about her father and expressing her emotions she blurs the line between her personal and political identity and creates a multi-dimensional image that feels humane. This was interpreted as a personalisation strategy as it contributes to creating an authentic and sincere image and allows the audience to see a more personal side to her.

4.2.2. Code-switching

Most of AOC's tweets are in English but there are also instances where she incorporates Spanish words and phrases into her tweets. Examples of code-switching can be seen in Figures 27, 28 and 29.



Figure 27



Figure 28



Figure 29

The examples show that AOC mixes English and Spanish within a sentence. She uses Spanish words and phrases when commenting on political topics as well as non-political topics. In figure 27 she replies to Bernie Sanders and tweets “thanks tío” and in Figure 28 she uses a Spanish phrase “échate pa’ lante” when replying to a tweet regarding immigration policies. Figure 29 shows her replying to a tweet about her using the word ‘dacamentado’ on television. AOC replies jokingly “en esta casa hablamos

legislative Spanglish” which implies that codeswitching between English and Spanish is a habit of hers, even in political contexts.

By using Spanish words and phrases AOC is able to emphasise her Puerto Rican roots and signal that it is an important part of her personal and political identity. The use of Spanish could also be seen to be a reflection of the demographic of NY-14, which is one of the nation’s most diverse districts and has a large immigrant population. Roughly half of the district’s population is Hispanic or Latino (United States Census Bureau 2019) and by using Spanish words in her tweets AOC is able to remind people of her own Puerto Rican background. Therefore, code-switching was interpreted as a personalisation strategy. In addition, it allows her to appear relatable to the voters, who may come from a similar background, and further contributes to positioning AOC as a member of the NY-14 community.



Figure 30

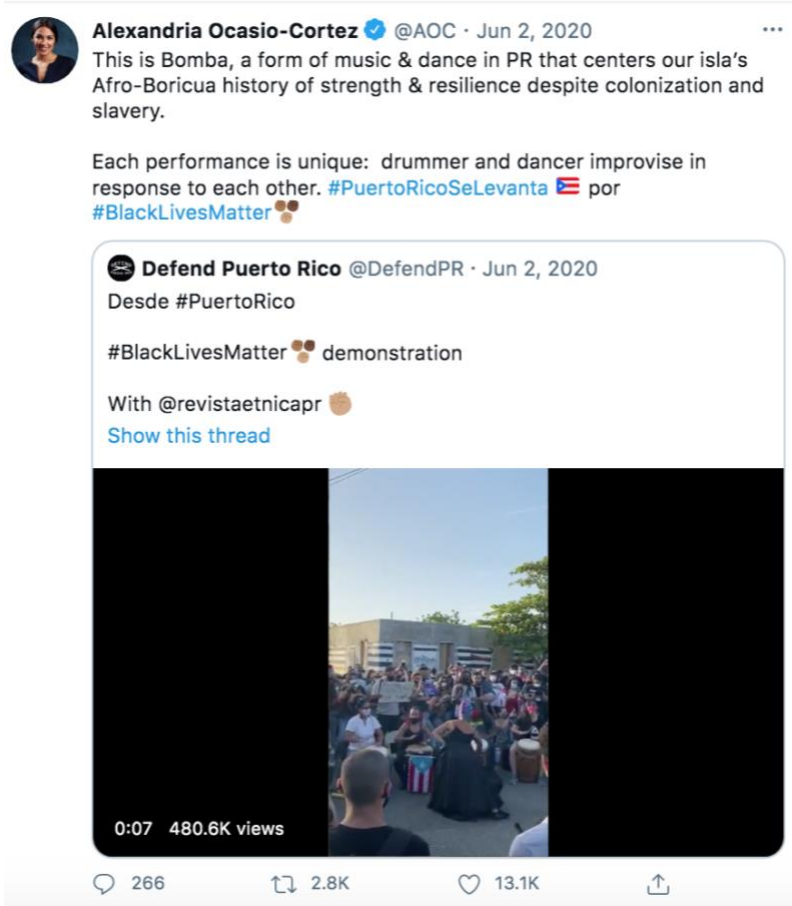


Figure 31

AOC also uses Spanish words when discussing topics related to Puerto Rico and Puerto Rican culture. In Figure 30 she replies to a video of Bomba, a Puerto Rican form of dance and music, with “¡Esooooo!” and an emoji of the Puerto Rican flag and a dancing emoji. In Figure 31 she further explains what Bomba is. She refers to Puerto Rico as “our isla” and uses the hashtags #PuertoRicoSeLevanta por #Blacklivesmatter accompanied by a Puerto Rican flag emoji (Figure 31). By sharing videos and information about Bomba she demonstrates knowledge of Puerto Rico and further emphasises that Puerto Rican culture is important to her. It allows her to show that being of Puerto Rican descent is an important a part of her identity and that she is proud of her Puerto Rican roots.

By using Spanish words and phrases in her tweets AOC simultaneously includes and excludes an audience. The Spanish she uses is simple and the phrases short and often familiar to also those who do not speak Spanish but they may still not be accessible to some non-Spanish speaking people. On the other hand, by using

Spanish words and phrases she expresses solidarity to Spanish speaking people in the US and highlights her own identity as a young Latina living in the US.

This section has focused the strategy of personalisation. The analysis found that AOC realised the strategy of personalisation by sharing personal and emotive content and code-switching. She shared personal aspects of her family and background as well as her current life as a modern-day politician. In addition, her tweets included some Spanish words and phrases which allowed her to emphasise her Puerto Rican roots and show that being a Puerto Rican is an important part of her identity. The findings of the analysis are discussed in the following chapter.

5. DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to identify which discursive strategies AOC employs in her tweets most frequently during her re-election campaign and how she realises these strategies. A total of 111 tweets posted on AOC's official Twitter account during the month of June 2020 were analysed using qualitative discourse analysis. The analysis found that the most prevalent discursive strategies AOC used to communicate were strategies of solidarity and personalisation. These strategies were then studied more closely while determining which means she used to realise them.

The analysis discovered that AOC realised the strategy of solidarity through the use of inclusive pronouns and speech acts of thanking and endorsing. Inclusive pronouns were used to signal various group memberships and to invoke a sense of collectiveness among her supporters. Aligning herself with various groups of people allowed her to address a number of different audiences and appear relatable to voters. She referred to her campaign as 'people's campaign' and positioned herself as a member of the NY-14 community. In addition, she used inclusive pronouns to create an 'us vs them' dichotomy between her campaign and Wall Street billionaires who were portrayed as outsiders. Creating this distinction allowed her to create positive self representation and negative other representation. It also allowed her to further position herself on the 'people's side' and emphasise that she is a member of the community she represents.

In addition to inclusive pronouns, AOC expressed solidarity through speech acts of thanking and endorsing. She thanked colleagues and citizens for their support and expressed support towards other candidates with similar views as herself by tweeting endorsements. AOC frequently interacted with other users, including citizens, and out of the 111 tweets that formed the data for the study, 67 were either direct replies to other users or quote tweets. These findings are in contrast with previous studies on the subject which have found that politicians are more likely to release statements than to interact with other users (Golbeck et al. 2010 and Jungherr 2016). The present study found that AOC's approach to social media is interactive and multimodal. She used

Twitter to establish a direct dialogue with her colleagues and citizens thus utilising the potential social media provide for increasing interactivity between representatives and constituents. This also allowed her to bridge the gap between her and her constituents and create a more symmetrical power relationship. It allowed her to build an interactive political community where she is able to discuss political issues in a way that is accessible to the average citizen.

Studies that focused on AOC's discursive practises during her 2018 campaign also identified solidarity as a prevalent discursive strategy (Sandbakk 2020 and Lewinstein 2019). In these studies, it was found that during her 2018 campaign AOC used inclusive plural pronouns and endorsements to realise the strategy of solidarity; this was also the case with her 2020 campaign. During both campaigns, she positioned herself as a member of the NY-14 community and using solidarity strategies created common ground with the electorate.

Sandbakk (2020) identified indirectness as a prevalent discursive strategy in AOC's 2018 campaign. According to Sandbakk (2020), AOC frequently criticised her opponent Joe Crowley using indirect speech acts without mentioning his name and also promoted her own campaign in an indirect way (Sandbakk 2020). In contrast, the analysis of the present study revealed that in her 2020 re-election campaign on Twitter, she did not mention her opponent once, directly or indirectly. Instead of positioning herself against her opponent, she positioned herself as a member of the NY-14 community, opposed to Wallstreet billionaires. This can be seen to signal that she did not find her opponent important. Instead, she focused on promoting her own campaign, endorsing other candidates and encouraging people to vote by sharing information on voting.

Social media provide politicians with opportunities for more personalised campaigning. Accordingly, the present analysis identified personalisation as the second prevalent strategy that AOC employed most frequently in her tweets. The analysis revealed that AOC realised this strategy by sharing personal and emotive content and code-switching. She referenced her background as a member of the working class, talked

about her experiences as a young woman of colour in the world of politics, mentioned her family and Puerto Rico and used Spanish words and phrases in her tweets. Including personal content in addition to political content allowed her to create an image that is multifaceted, relatable and approachable. She tweeted regularly about current political topics and promoted her campaign, but also conveyed a softer more personable side by sharing anecdotes from her personal life. By sharing personal content, she was able to humanise her role as a modern-day politician.

Studies conducted on AOC's 2018 campaign communications also identified that AOC emphasised certain aspects of her personal identity, such as her Puerto Rican roots, being a Bronx native and being a woman, to connect and appear relatable to the voters (Jacuinde 2019; Jaruseviciute 2019, cited in Sandbakk 2020). This was also the case with her 2020 campaign where AOC let her audience to get to know her behind her political identity. This allowed her to appear authentic and genuine. Candidates who manage to appear 'authentic' are known to have high engagement on social media (Kreiss et al 2018: 13). Social media audiences tend to seek a personal lens that gives an 'unfiltered' look into candidates' lives (Kreiss et al 2018: 21-22). However, Kreiss et al (2018: 15) also note that authenticity as a concept is problematic since it is performative. Politicians are motivated to appeal to audiences and the choices they make when communicating their messages serve this purpose. While defining authenticity and what it means in political communications is difficult, by sharing personal and emotive content AOC manages to portray an image that does not seem manufactured or calculated. She creates a multi-dimensional image combining political with personal, all of which humanises her. Authenticity matters and being open about one's story and sharing personal and emotive anecdotes help in portraying an authentic image and inviting positive engagement (Graham et al. 2018).

While the present study presented the strategies of solidarity and personalisation separately, it should be noted that in some cases they can be realised simultaneously. By positioning herself as a member of the NY-14 community and sharing personal aspects of her life as a young woman of colour in the US AOC both realises the strategy of personalisation but also signals solidarity to the people of NY-14 and those who

come from a similar background. She simultaneously provides insight into who she is as a person and what makes her who she is while emphasising that she is a member of the community she represents and appearing relatable to the voters.

Due to the limitations of the present study, the analysis focused only on two strategies that AOC used in her tweets: solidarity and personalisation. However, some other strategies were also identified. These included the use of informal language, confrontational messaging style, sarcasm and humour, as well as the use of 'internet slang' and emojis. These could provide an interesting topic for further research. In addition, the data set was a narrow one, and the time-period they represented was limited to the month of June 2020, which is why some other discursive strategies AOC employed during her campaign may have gone unnoticed. Undoubtedly, by extending the period of time under study, more general observations could be made. Furthermore, as many of AOC's tweets in the data set were multimodal and included either photos or videos – in future studies, these could be examined as well. In the present study, the focus was placed on written communications, but a multimodal approach could certainly provide additional insight into AOC's discursive practises.

6. CONCLUSION

The present study aimed to offer insights into the discursive practises of Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez on Twitter during her re-election campaign in 2020. Twitter, among other social media platforms, has become a powerful and efficient political communication tool as it allows politicians to share their messages cost-efficiently and without the gatekeeping of traditional media. This has resulted in politicians taking their election campaigns online. Many of them are using Twitter to reach out to people and to promote their campaigns. In addition to promoting their campaigns, Twitter also allows politicians to share more personal aspects of their lives and interact with their constituents.

The present study adds to the research on political discourse online. It examines strategies related to online presence during political campaigns and highlights the power social media hold in today's politics. AOC has built a large following using the tools social media offer for political engagement. The analysis showed that her approach to social media is engaging, interactive and multimodal making her social media communications highly effective. She uses social media not only to share her political views and promote her campaign but also to connect and create common ground with her audience and to show a more personal and private side to her.

The power of social media is evident and their role can only be seen to grow in the future. As social media platforms continue to develop and increase their popularity, understanding what kind of effects these new networks have on political information and communication is becoming increasingly relevant. They provide new and innovative ways for politicians to connect with citizens and they are altering the ways in which people engage politically. Furthermore, they present a new, alternative environment that has the power to shape political discourse and create fundamental shifts in the conduct and coverage of today's politics (Gainous and Wagner 2014: 3).

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