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GENDER DIFFERENCES IN PERSONAL BRANDING PRACTICES OF UKRAINIAN
POLITICIANS ON INSTAGRAM

Bachelor Thesis

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I have written this Bachelor Thesis independently. Any ideas or data taken from other authors or other sources have been fully referenced.

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Introduction

Digital platforms currently play an essential role in daily life. In many democratic societies, citizens increasingly rely on social media for political information, which influences their attitudes and decisions (Chan & Yi, 2024). These platforms provide politicians with the perfect opportunity to shape how they present themselves through various textual and visual features (Enli & Skogerbø, 2013). This is especially clear on visual platforms such as Instagram, where politicians combine images with short text (Ekman & Widholm, 2017) and emotional cues to communicate (Yasa, 2024). As a result, politicians more frequently depict themselves as individuals rather than solely as party representatives (Pich et al., 2020).

Personal branding has become increasingly important in contemporary political marketing and is a key analytical concept in political communication research (Shavit & Konrádová, 2025). It is commonly defined as a strategic and ongoing process through which individuals construct, manage, and communicate a distinctive public identity in order to influence audience perceptions (Gorbatov et al., 2018; Shepherd, 2005). While general political communication focuses on party platforms and policy (Enli & Skogerbø, 2013), personal branding is analytically distinct in placing the individual politician's constructed identity at the centre of political communication (Speed et al., 2015). In political contexts, personal branding combines visual storytelling and stylistic consistency to build recognizability while allowing politicians to showcase both their professional skills and personal lives, thereby creating voter identification (Ekman & Widholm, 2017). Social media provides the tools politicians need to build their personal brands by allowing constant self-presentation and direct engagement with the audience (Larsson, 2021). Given that over 5.4 billion people were using social media worldwide in 2025 (Statista, 2026), political personal branding on these platforms carries substantial societal relevance.

At the same time, political communication and self-presentation are shaped by gendered social expectations. Research in social psychology shows that women are more often associated with warmth and communality, whereas men are associated with competence and authority (Fiske et al., 2002; Tschla et al., 2023). Gender stereotypes shape different evaluative standards for women and men in politics, constraining acceptable communication styles, which politicians then reproduce in both the content and style of their public communication (Atia & Balmas, 2023; Beltran et al., 2021; Rheault et al., 2019). Some studies demonstrate that female politicians receive more attention to their appearance and personal lives, while leadership is still culturally tied to masculine traits (Brugnoli et al.,

2022; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Van der Pas & Aaldering, 2020). This puts women politicians in a double-bind situation as they face criticism both for being assertive leaders and for displaying traditionally feminine traits (Meeks, 2017).

Gendered expectations significantly affect political personal branding on social media. Although these platforms offer more control over self-presentation, they also expose politicians to continuous public scrutiny and involve reduced message control and a greater risk of strategic errors (Enli, 2017). Male and female politicians adopt different strategies in visual style, emotion, personalization, and authenticity to manage these expectations (Luebke, 2020; Speed et al., 2015), meaning gender fundamentally shapes online political branding.

Despite these insights, important gaps remain. The primary gap concerns the limited integration of research on gender differences in political communication with the literature on political personal branding on social media. While both personal branding (Pich et al., 2020; Shavit & Konrádová, 2025; Speed et al., 2015; Yasa, 2024) and gender differences in political communication (Rahmat et al., 2022; Rheault et al., 2019; Tschla et al., 2023; Van der Pas & Aaldering, 2020) have been widely studied, these literatures have often developed separately. As McGregor et al. (2017) note, the relationship between gender and personalized politics on social media remains largely unexplored. More recent studies have increasingly examined gendered political communication and branding-related self-presentation practices on social media (Atia & Balmas, 2023; Beltran et al., 2021; Luebke & Steffan, 2025; McGregor et al., 2017; Meeks, 2017; Tschla et al., 2023; Valmori et al., 2021; Zulli & Towner, 2021). However, research integrating these perspectives within an Instagram-based empirical framework in a non-Western wartime context remains limited.

Building on this primary gap, two contextual gaps further motivate this study. First, existing research has concentrated mainly on Western democracies, leaving Eastern European contexts comparatively underexamined (Surowiec & Štětka, 2018). Second, although recent research has begun to examine Ukrainian wartime political communication (Damann et al., 2024; Pavliuc, 2025a; Pavliuc, 2025b), no study has explicitly examined how wartime conditions shape gendered personal branding practices on Instagram. This leaves open the question of whether crisis contexts modify the patterns documented in peacetime research.

This thesis addresses these gaps by examining gender differences in the personal branding practices of Ukrainian politicians on social media. Ukraine represents a relevant case due to the increasing importance of social media in political communication and the limited existing research on political personal branding in Eastern European contexts.

The aim of this thesis is to determine gender differences in the personal branding practices of Ukrainian politicians on Instagram and how these differences shape audience engagement and evaluations.

To achieve this aim, the following research tasks are addressed:

- Define and synthesise the key concepts of personal branding and gender differences in political communication on social media.
- Review and synthesise previous empirical studies on political personal branding and gendered self-presentation in digital environments.
- Analyse the personal branding practices of Ukrainian politicians on Instagram across textual, visual, and tonal dimensions of self-presentation, including audience engagement indicators.
- Examine audience perceptions of politician gender and branding style through a survey experiment.
- Interpret and discuss the findings in relation to previous empirical research and the theoretical framework.

This thesis consists of theoretical and empirical parts. The theoretical part provides an overview of personal branding in political communication and gender differences in social media self-presentation, drawing on previous empirical studies in this field. The empirical part presents the research methodology, sample, and data collection procedure, followed by the examination of personal branding practices of Ukrainian politicians on Instagram, audience engagement indicators from the content analysis, and audience evaluations from the survey experiment.

Keywords: personal branding, political communication, gender differences, Instagram, Ukrainian politics

1. Personal branding and gender differences in political communication on social media

1.1. From personal branding to political personal branding in social media contexts

This subchapter introduces the core theoretical concepts for analysing political personal branding on social media. It clarifies the relationship between personal branding and the related concept of self-branding, addresses terminological ambiguity, and outlines the key dimensions of the practice: marketing orientation, strategic process, and self-presentation. These foundations provide the basis for examining gendered variations in the following subchapters.

Personal brands exist for every individual, regardless of whether they are recognized or deliberately managed (Jacobson, 2020). Several related terms appear in the literature to describe strategic identity construction, including self-branding, human brand, and personal marketing (Gandini, 2016; Gorbatov et al., 2018; Khedher, 2015; Liu & Suh, 2017; Omojola, 2008; Peters, 1997; Shepherd, 2005; Vallas & Cummins, 2015; Whitmer, 2019). Among these, personal branding and self-branding are the most extensively debated and conceptually overlapping and therefore warrant closer comparison. These terms are frequently used without explicit clarification of their conceptual boundaries, and some scholars treat personal branding and self-branding as largely synonymous (Gorbatov et al., 2018; Whitmer, 2019). This terminological inconsistency is a recognized challenge in digital media research (Scheidt et al., 2020).

As illustrated in Figure 1 on the next page, self-branding emphasizes digital persona construction and the self as product (Hearn, 2008; Khamis et al., 2017) and is particularly common among influencers and content creators (Liu & Suh, 2017) on visual platforms such as Instagram and TikTok (Khamis et al., 2017; Wang & Feng, 2022). Personal branding maintains a clearer professional orientation (Cullen et al., 2024; Gorbatov et al., 2018), focusing on how individuals communicate their professional value and expertise to relevant audiences (Johnson, 2017; Labrecque et al., 2011; Shepherd, 2005) and manage their reputation across both online and offline contexts (Harris & Rae, 2011; Parmentier & Fischer, 2012).

Because politicians function as professional public figures whose reputations carry real-world consequences, personal branding is adopted as the primary concept for this thesis. It is defined here as the strategic management of an individual's professional reputation through the communication of skills, expertise, and a credible public identity to influence specific audiences (Gorbatov et al., 2018; Jacobson, 2020; Shepherd, 2005).

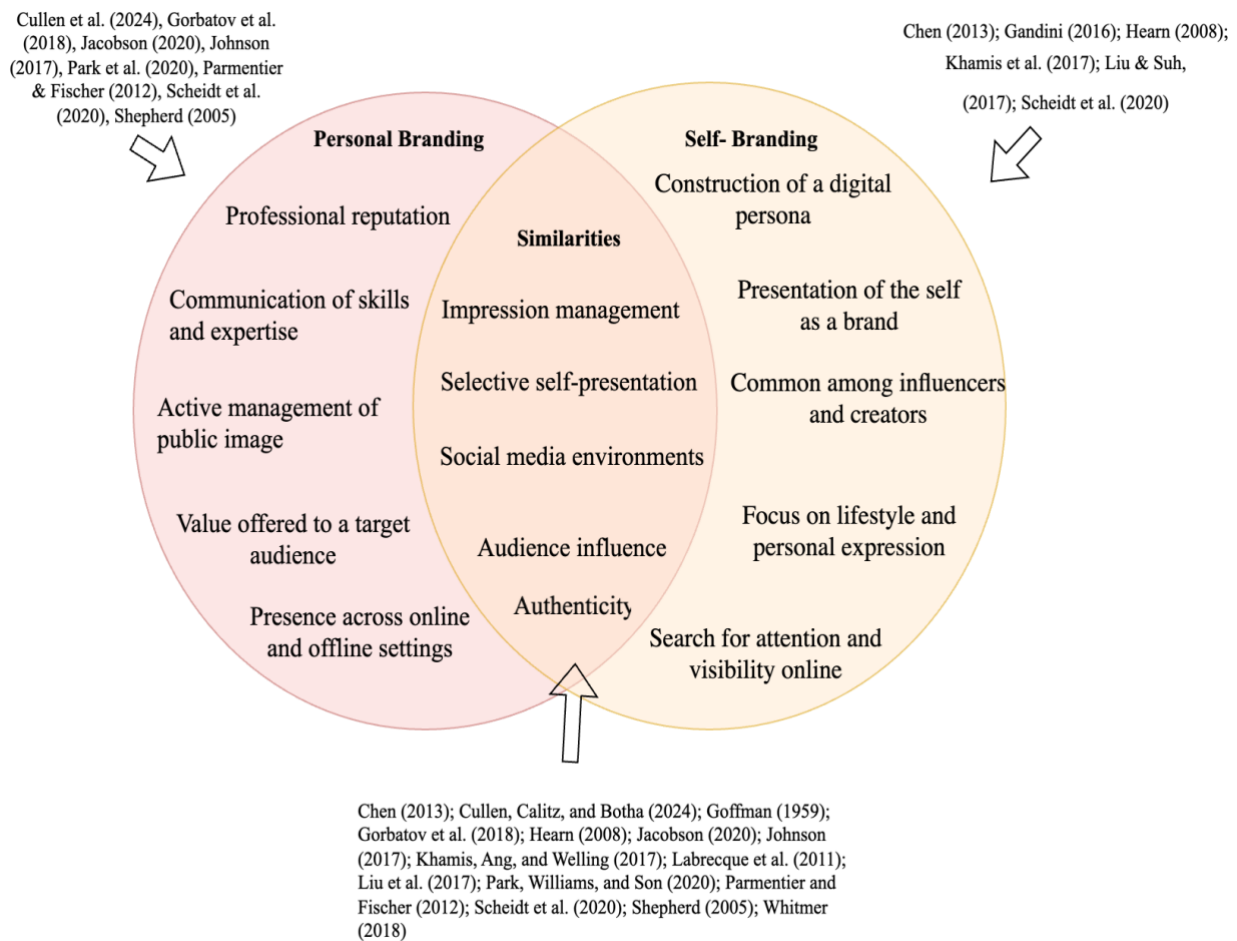


Figure 1. Differences and similarities in the usage of personal branding and self-branding

Source: Compiled by the author in Draw.io on the sources presented in the figure

Often viewed as a modern phenomenon (Scheidt et al., 2020), personal branding stems from Goffman's (1959) theory of impression management, which frames self-presentation as the strategic management of how one appears to others. After Peters' (1997) popularization of the "Brand Called You" concept, the practice has migrated to social media, where platform-specific designs now mediate interaction and visibility (Jacobson, 2020; Labrecque et al., 2011).

Personal branding is consistently described in the literature as a market-oriented practice, in which individuals are positioned within competitive professional environments (Gorbatov et al., 2018; Khedher, 2015; Lair et al., 2004; Shepherd, 2005; Whitmer, 2019; Zarkada, 2012). Authors define personal branding in relation to external pressures and objectives, such as communicating "strengths and uniqueness ... to a targeted market"

(Shepherd, 2005, p. 602) and operating within the “labor market” (Lair et al., 2004, p. 309). This orientation frames personal branding as a “marketing phenomenon” (Khedher, 2015, p. 19) and a “marketing concept” (Zarkada, 2012, p. 1), through which social and professional life becomes increasingly shaped by “market logic” (Whitmer, 2019, p. 7).

Building on this market orientation, personal branding is further conceptualized as an active and ongoing strategic process. This process is described as “creating, positioning, and maintaining” a desired public image (Gorbatov et al., 2018, p. 6), utilizing techniques such as “product development and promotion” (Lair et al., 2004, p. 309), and adopting an “inside-out process” that aligns individual strengths with audience expectations (Shepherd, 2005, p. 602). Scholars further characterise personal branding as an “ongoing process” (Whitmer, 2019, p. 7) and a “process of defining and promoting” one’s identity (Cullen et al., 2024, p. 2), which requires individuals to “manage others’ impressions” of their skills, abilities, and experiences (Johnson, 2017, p. 21) and to strategically “differentiate a personal brand” (Chen, 2013, p. 334).

Following these strategic processes, the self-presentation dimension becomes central, as it determines the content and expression of the brand. Personal branding requires defining and projecting the individual's “strengths and uniqueness” (Shepherd, 2005, p. 602) and “major personal characteristics” (Zarkada, 2012, p. 1). The goal is to manage others’ impressions of these qualities, signalling a certain “promise to the target audience through a differentiated narrative and imagery” (Gorbatov et al., 2018, p. 6), defining “what you stand for” (Cullen et al., 2024, p. 2), and actively managing one’s “skills, abilities and experiences” (Johnson, 2017, p. 21). This includes demonstrating “self-performances” and presenting a sense of “individuality” (Chen, 2013, p. 334).

Based on an analysis of these definitions, the author identified three recurring aspects that structure how scholars conceptualise personal branding: marketing orientation, strategic process, and self-presentation. These three theoretical dimensions anchor this study. Marketing orientation explains why politicians position their public identity as a competitive product in the electoral marketplace. Strategic process demonstrates that branding is intentional and continuous rather than spontaneous. Self-presentation focuses on the narratives and visuals that politicians deploy for differentiation. These dimensions provide an analytical framework for analysing how gendered expectations shape brand construction in Ukraine's political sphere. The diversity of the different definitions, synthesized in Table 1, further illustrates that personal branding is perceived not as a singular task but as a multifaceted practice encompassing the three dimensions identified in the table.

Table 1

Aspects of different definitions of “personal branding”

Definitions	Marketing Orientation	Strategic Process	Self-presentation
“Personal branding is essentially an inside-out process that encapsulates the current strengths and uniqueness of the individual in relation to a targeted market.” (Shepherd, 2005, p.602)	+	+	+
“Personal branding is a strategic process of creating, positioning, and maintaining a positive impression of oneself, based on a unique combination of individual characteristics, which signal a certain promise to the target audience through a differentiated narrative and imagery.” (Gorbatov et al., 2018, p.6)		+	+
“Personal branding is a new marketing phenomenon related to the marketing effort that a person adopts in order to promote oneself in the market.” (Khedher, 2015, p.19)	+	+	
“In personal branding, the concepts of product development and promotion are used to market persons for entry into or transition within the labor market.” (Lair et al., 2004, p.309)	+	+	
“Personal branding is a new marketing concept related to the marketing strategies that a person adopts in order to promote his or her major personal characteristics.” (Zarkada, 2012, p. 1)	+	+	+
“Personal branding is the process of defining and promoting yourself and what you stand for as an individual” (Cullen et al., 2024, p.2)		+	+
“Personal branding is the process by which an individual actively tries to manage others’ impressions of their skills, abilities and experiences” (Johnson, 2017, p.21)		+	+
“Personal branding becomes a very important business concept because it demonstrates self-performances and presents a sense of individuality that can help to differentiate a personal brand from its competitors” (Chen, 2013, p.334)	+	+	+
“Personal branding is reflective of an ongoing process by which social life is subsumed under market logic - and markets become embedded with emotional meanings” (Whitmer, 2019, p. 7)	+	+	

Note: “+” means that the specific aspect is highlighted in the definition

Source: Compiled by the author based on the sources presented in the table

Personal branding is not static but evolves as circumstances and technologies change (Gorbatov et al., 2018). The emergence of Web 2.0 created the necessary technological conditions for personal branding to migrate online (Harris & Rae, 2011; Marin & Nilă, 2021; Gehl, 2011). Social media, built on Web 2.0 principles, enabled the generation and circulation of user-created content, making personal branding a dynamic digital practice (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2009).

Advances in digital technologies have enabled the emergence of social platforms that allow users to interact, exchange content, and collaborate, fundamentally transforming personal branding into a dynamic, cross-platform process taking place through social media, blogs, and websites (Poepelman & Blacksmith, 2014; Steenkamp, 2020). As scholars consistently note, the rise of social media significantly increased the visibility and relevance of personal branding by embedding it within everyday practices of social interaction, networking, and consumption (Achmad & Ruhaena, 2021; Khedher, 2015; Park et al., 2020).

Consequently, social media platforms have become the primary spaces for building and sustaining personal brands (Labrecque et al., 2011; Marin & Nilă, 2021). Each platform serves different purposes and offers distinct features. Facebook and Twitter are traditionally used for sharing news and shaping public conversations (Enli & Skogerbø, 2013; Larsson, 2021). YouTube enables longer narratives that build emotional connections (Sashittal & Jassawalla, 2021), while Telegram enables public broadcasting to large audiences (Rogers, 2020). Among these, Instagram focuses on visual storytelling and personalized content, making it particularly suited to studying personal branding through images and emotional self-presentation (Ekman & Widholm, 2017; Yasa, 2024). These environments allow users to "package, perform, and sell" themselves (Khamis et al., 2017, p. 195), evolving personal branding from a niche marketing tool into a dominant social and cultural phenomenon.

In political contexts, personal branding has been extended to politicians, who "may present themselves as individual, personal brands" (Pich et al., 2020, p. 414), strategically shaping their brand and public images (Guzman et al., 2014; Marland, 2013) and applying personal branding processes to political communication (Lilleker, 2006; Yasa, 2024). As Omojola (2008) points out "basing personal branding on the correct assessment of audience mindset is one thing but communicating it appropriately to the target audience is another" (p. 133). Furthermore, an important component of political personal branding is the construction of an authentic and relatable leader persona (Luebke, 2020; Luebke & Steffan, 2025; Speed et al., 2015; Yasa, 2024). Successful political personal branding combines heroism with

ordinariness (Shavit & Konrádová, 2025) and depends on an authentic personality, where authenticity means appearing and remaining true to oneself (Luebke, 2020; Omojola, 2008).

These insights show that political personal branding is fundamentally about shaping a leader's public identity in ways that feel credible and relatable to people. Although authenticity has been examined as a strategic element of political personal branding, its significance depends on audience perception and evaluation. Existing research demonstrates that perceived authenticity affects credibility, trust, and audience response, functioning as an important branding outcome (Luebke & Steffan, 2025; Speed et al., 2015). In current social media contexts, this evaluative aspect appears in engagement metrics such as likes, shares, and comments, which can signal audience response to branding efforts rather than simple popularity (Arriagada & Ibáñez, 2020).

Social media has become a vital tool regularly used in political activities for self-projection (Bennett, 2012; Farkas & Bene, 2020; Gandini et al., 2020; Mazzoni & Mincigrucci, 2022; Yasa, 2024). Moreover, the growth of social media marks a major turning point in political communication (Dimitrova & Matthes, 2018; Gandini et al., 2020; McGregor et al., 2017). While Facebook and Twitter remain widely used for political communication and direct engagement with voters (Enli & Skogerbø, 2013; Larsson, 2021; Luebke & Steffan, 2025), Instagram stands out as a platform that enables strong visual and multimodal self-presentation, including photos, videos, stories, and live content (Ekman & Widholm, 2017; Luebke & Steffan, 2025; Yasa, 2024). This visual format allows politicians to humanize themselves and present both personal and professional identities (Mazzoni & Mincigrucci, 2022), making Instagram particularly relevant for studying political personal branding practices.

Volodymyr Zelensky, the President of Ukraine, exemplifies a political leader who effectively uses social media to support his political goal (Plazas-Olmedo & López-Rabadán, 2023). This strategy began with his 2019 presidential campaign during his transition from entertainment to politics (Ryabinska, 2020), with Instagram playing a central role due to its younger, less polarized audience (Liubchenko et al., 2021). The war intensified this approach, with Zelensky using emotionally expressive video messages to build strong international support (Plazas-Olmedo & López-Rabadán, 2023). While Zelensky represents an exceptional case, his example illustrates how platform-specific branding is foundational to Ukrainian political communication, though it should not serve as an empirical basis for generalization.

Successful political branding on social media depends on balancing professional authority with personal relatability. For Ukrainian politicians, this balance is complicated by

both the ongoing war and traditional gender norms, which may reshape which branding strategies are available or effective for male and female politicians in ways that peacetime research has not addressed. While gender differences in political communication persist during wartime (Damann et al., 2024; Pavliuc, 2025a; Pavliuc, 2025b), whether these patterns extend to the visual and personalized personal branding practices on Instagram remains an open empirical question. Drawing on the reviewed literature, these branding elements are not gender-neutral (Gorbatov et al., 2018; Jacobson, 2020; Khamis et al., 2017; Labrecque et al., 2011; Shepherd, 2005). The following subchapter examines how gendered expectations shape these branding practices differently for male and female politicians in digital political communication.

1.2. Gender differences in political communication

This subchapter presents the main theoretical perspectives on gender differences in political communication and reviews empirical research illustrating how these differences manifest in politicians' personal branding dimensions on social media.

Gender has become increasingly important in shaping how political communication differs across various public arenas (Rahmat et al., 2022). Gender differences matter in personalized political communication because voters do not just judge politicians on ideology or performance, but also through gendered expectations (Atia & Balmas, 2023; Rheault et al., 2019). In this context, gender differences are understood as variations in how politicians strategically build and maintain their personal brands. Politicians engage in gendered personal branding largely as a strategic response to persistent stereotypes, which create different standards for how male and female politicians are evaluated online (Beltran et al., 2021; Brugnoli et al., 2022; Rheault et al., 2019; Tschla et al., 2023). These gender stereotypes therefore shape the expectations that inform politicians' personal branding choices and public presentation. While initially rooted in the study of broader social roles (Eagly & Steffen, 1984), the following theoretical frameworks have been extensively adopted in political communication scholarship to explain differential evaluation standards for male and female politicians.

Central to these expectations is Social Role Theory, which distinguishes between communal and agentic characteristics (Eagly, Wood & Diekmann, 2000). Women are stereotypically associated with communal qualities like affection, sensitivity, and nurturance, while men are believed to possess agentic traits such as dominance, ambition, and independence (Atia & Balmas, 2023; Kray et al., 2014; Van der Pas & Aaldering, 2020). Because of these expectations, people judge female politicians on warmth and private matters

but evaluate male politicians on competence and professional leadership (Brugnoli et al., 2022; Tschla et al., 2021). This places female politicians in a double-bind situation: being feminine makes them look like weak leaders, while being strong leaders makes them look unfeminine (Brugnoli et al., 2022; Eagly & Steffen, 1984; Rheault et al., 2019). According to Role Congruity Theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002), this disconnect between expected gender roles and leadership roles leads people to undervalue women leaders, a dynamic further intensified by how the media historically presents politics as a masculine domain (Bauer, 2014; Campus, 2013).

These two theories reveal that political leadership gets evaluated through gender norms that favour masculine, agentic qualities, and disadvantage women regardless of their presentation style. While these dynamics are well-documented in Western democracies, empirical research on political branding in Eastern European contexts remains limited. Yet Damann et al. (2024) find that conflict onset deepens gender-stereotypical behaviour among Ukrainian politicians, with women becoming more communal and men more dominant in masculine domains. This pattern is also confirmed by Pavliuc (2025a) in Ukrainian wartime social media communication. Whether wartime conditions override or instead moderate these gendered patterns remains an empirical question addressed in the current study.

Social media acts as a "double-edged sword" for gendered branding among women politicians (Di Meco, 2019, p.2). On the one hand, social media are often described as a great equalizer (Xenos et al., 2014), as they may allow women politicians to bypass traditional media environments where their representation has often been biased (Yarchi & Samuel-Azran, 2018). On the other hand, politicians often reproduce gender stereotypes in their digital content and style (Beltran et al., 2021). McGregor et al. (2017) and Atia and Balmas (2023) indicate that male and female candidates use different social media campaign strategies. On social media, these gendered expectations are translated into distinct branding strategies and communication styles (Beltran et al., 2021).

While research has historically focused on text, contemporary scholars emphasize the critical role of the visual dimension in digital self-presentation (Jungblut & Haim, 2023; Luebke & Steffan, 2025; Tschla et al., 2023; Zulli & Towner, 2021). Politicians strategically use visual content to personalize their political communication on social media (Farkas & Bene, 2020). Women are typically associated with compassion issues such as education and healthcare, while men are linked to tough issues such as the economy and foreign policy (Tschla et al., 2023; Van der Pas & Aaldering, 2020).

These differences extend to the nature of their personalization. Female politicians often face disproportionate focus on their personal lives, with their brand being judged more on physical appearance, family roles, and private matters (Brugnoli et al., 2022; Coffé & Bolzendahl, 2010; McGregor et al., 2017; Van der Pas & Aaldering, 2020). Hence, women often employ warmer, more social language and expressive emoticons to signal communal approachability (Beltran et al., 2021; Tschla et al., 2023). Visually, this is reinforced by expectations for women to display happiness and smile more frequently than their male counterparts (Jungblut & Haim, 2023). In contrast, male candidates focus on professional achievements and moral character rather than personal details (Brugnoli et al., 2022). Their branding relies on formal tone and “tough” visuals associated with authority (Jungblut & Haim, 2023).

However, politicians strategically manage these roles as they navigate the risks of being visible online. While women may limit personalization to avoid being relegated to the private sphere (McGregor et al., 2017), men can incorporate warmth and care into their self-presentation without losing leadership credibility, allowing them to enjoy the “best of both worlds” (Meeks, 2017, p. 8). In contrast, visibility for women remains unstable as they often face lines of sexist invective and attacks on their competence that intensify as they gain status (Rheault et al., 2019). To manage this, candidates combine stereotypes by projecting toughness on policy issues to seem strong while still appearing warm and approachable (Tschla et al., 2023). Female candidates must appear strong enough to be taken seriously but warm enough to avoid backlash for being perceived as too assertive (McGregor et al., 2017; Okimoto & Brescoll, 2010). These findings suggest that gendered personal branding involves navigating a complex set of competing expectations that create unequal conditions for female politicians in digital political communication.

Research on gendered political personal branding is characterized by theoretical diversity and varied methodological approaches, resulting in mixed and sometimes contested findings regarding whether female and male politicians actively conform to gendered expectations or strategically negotiate them (Atia & Balmas, 2023; Rahmat et al., 2022). Social Role Theory and Role Congruity Theory show that political personal branding is fundamentally gendered rather than neutral and shaping not only how politicians present themselves, but how audiences evaluate them.

The following review examines eight empirical studies that have investigated gendered political branding across different platforms and political contexts. Table 2 provides an overview of their methods, samples, and platforms.

Table 2
Overview of Selected Previous Empirical Studies

Author	Methods	Sample	Platform
Atia & Balmas (2023)	Quantitative content analysis; regression analysis	Israel: N = 58 politicians; 1,392 posts	Facebook
Beltran et al. (2021)	Computational text analysis; Lasso logistic regression; machine learning classification	Spain: N = 1,221 MPs; 121,316 tweets; 207,574 reply tweets	Twitter
Luebke & Steffan (2025)	2 × 3 online survey experiment; P-PA Scale; GRSS; 5-point Likert evaluations; ANOVA	Germany: N = 1,485	Twitter (simulated posts)
McGregor et al. (2017)	Computerized content analysis (machine learning) and qualitative textual analysis	US: N = 18 gubernatorial candidates; 34,328 posts	Facebook and Twitter
Meeks (2017)	2×2 online experiment; posttest Likert-scale measures; t-tests; ANCOVA	US: N = 843 adult participants	Twitter (simulated feed)
Tsichla et al. (2023)	Quantitative content analysis (manual coding)	Greece: N = 425 candidates; 5,694 posts	Facebook
Valmori et al. (2021)	Visual content analysis; face-ism index measurement; nonverbal political self-presentation	Finland: N = 9,560 candidates; Italy: N = 7,998 candidates	Facebook
Zulli & Towner (2021)	5×2 factorial online experiment; 5-point Likert scales; OLS regression; exploratory content analysis	US: N = 1,008 adults	Instagram

Note: GRSS = Gender Role Stereotype Scale. P-PA = Perceived Political Authenticity. N = number of respondents. US = United States. OLS = Ordinary Least Squares; MPs = Members of Parliament

Source: Compiled by the author based on the sources presented in the table

As Table 2 shows, most studies rely on Facebook or Twitter data from Western European or North American contexts. Only Zulli and Towner (2021) use Instagram but with authentic images presented without captions or engagement metrics to isolate the visual effects. Methodologically, studies fall into three categories: quantitative content analysis of authentic posts (Atia & Balmas, 2023; Tsichla et al., 2023; Valmori et al., 2021), computational text analysis (Beltran et al., 2021; McGregor et al., 2017), and online

experimental designs (Luebke & Steffan, 2025; Meeks, 2017; Zulli & Towner, 2021).

Content analysis allows direct observation of politicians' actual communication strategies but cannot capture audience interpretation. Experimental designs can support stronger causal interpretation, but often rely on controlled stimuli. This study addresses this limitation by combining content analysis with a survey experiment using authentic Instagram posts. To further map these gaps, Table 3 summarizes the key dimensions examined across the eight the most relevant to this thesis studies.

Table 3

Comparison of Gendered Branding Dimensions in Selected Previous Empirical Studies

Dimension	Luebke							
	Atia & Balmas (2023)	Beltran et al. (2021)	& Steffan (2025)	McGreg or et al. (2017)	Meeks (2017)	Tsichla et al. (2023)	Valmori et al. (2021)	Zulli & Towner (2021)
Gender differences	+	+	0	+	+	+	+	+
Linguistic cues	+	+	n/a	+	+	+	n/a	n/a
Visual cues	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	+	+	+
Authenticity	n/a	n/a	+	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	+
Personalisation/ privatisation	+	n/a	n/a	+	+	+	n/a	+
Engagement/ Perception/ Evaluation	+	+	+	n/a	+	+	n/a	+
Campaign or Routine	+	+	n/a	+	+	+	+	+
Gendered expectations	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+

Note: “+” dimension examined and present in the study; “0” examined but no relevant gender effect found; “n/a” not a central focus of the study

Source: Compiled by the author based on the sources in the table

Gender differences are the most consistently addressed dimension, appearing in seven out of eight studies, while gendered expectations are present across all eight studies. Textual or linguistic cues are examined in five studies, and personalization or privatization shows moderate coverage across four studies. Visual presentation and authenticity are less frequently examined, with only three studies addressing visual cues and two focusing directly on authenticity. Audience response and evaluation show more mixed patterns: Atia and

Balmas (2023) find that female politicians' personalized discourse attracts higher user involvement, whereas Tschla et al. (2023) report higher engagement for male politicians. Experimental studies further suggest that the effects of personalization and visual self-presentation differ depending on candidate gender and evaluation outcome (Meeks, 2017; Zulli & Towner, 2021). Most studies focus on campaign contexts, leaving routine political communication comparatively less examined. Notably, Luebke and Steffan (2025) is the only study in the table to report no overall gender effect, which is connected to its specific focus on perceived authenticity when self-presentation is held constant.

The studies summarized in Table 2 and Table 3 mainly examine gendered political communication and branding dimensions in mostly Western peacetime contexts, leaving visual branding under crisis conditions less examined. Ukrainian wartime political communication provides important contextual evidence for this gap. Damann et al. (2024), Pavliuc (2025a), and Pavliuc (2025b) examine Ukrainian politicians during the 2022 invasion, but focus on narrative and behavioural patterns rather than personal branding practices. For this reason, they are discussed separately rather than included in the comparative tables. Despite their methodological differences, these three studies suggest that wartime conditions do not eliminate gender differences in political communication but may reshape them. Men are more strongly associated with security related communication, while women more often use humanizing frames. Damann et al. (2024) further show that public reactions increasingly favoured male politicians after the invasion. Together, these studies support examining whether similar gendered patterns appear in Instagram branding and audience evaluations, while also showing that platform, political context, and method limit direct generalization across settings.



Figure 2. Conceptual framework of gendered political personal branding

Source: Compiled by the author in Draw.io

Building on both the theoretical frameworks and the empirical literature reviewed above, Figure 2 presents the conceptual framework of this study, illustrating how Social Role Theory and Role Congruity Theory connect politician gender, personal branding, and audience evaluation within the Ukrainian wartime context. The figure maps theoretical relationships between the main constructs and treats the Ukrainian wartime context not as passive background but as an active moderating condition that may compress or redirect these predicted patterns.

Concluding the theoretical background, the literature reviewed in this chapter shows that views on the factors shaping politicians' personal branding on social media remain diverse. What is clear, however, is that gender operates as a consistent structural force by shaping not only how politicians present themselves, but how audiences evaluate them. At the same time, this overview has revealed a significant research gap: empirical studies on gendered political branding remain concentrated in Western Europe and North America, leaving the Eastern European context, and Ukraine in particular, largely unexplored. The Ukrainian wartime context adds a layer of complexity that existing theoretical frameworks have not addressed. This study therefore proposes that wartime conditions may function as a boundary condition for Social Role Theory and Role Congruity Theory, compressing or redirecting the gendered patterns these frameworks predict. This proposition is examined empirically through content analysis of politicians' Instagram posts and a survey experiment measuring audience evaluations, both described in Chapter 2.

2. Empirical study of Ukrainian politicians' personal branding on Instagram

2.1. Methodology of the empirical study

In this subchapter, the methodology used for the empirical analysis of gender differences in Ukrainian politicians' personal branding on Instagram will be discussed. An overview of the methods, samples, and platforms used in the most relevant previous studies is provided in Table 2 in Chapter 1.

The current study combines quantitative content analysis with a survey experiment in a two-part sequential design. Part 1 employs a quantitative content analysis to systematically convert the visual and textual elements of Instagram posts into a numerical format. This approach ensures that the data is collected systematically and can be analysed through statistical testing to identify significant patterns in political branding (Neuendorf, 2017). It is used to systematically examine what Ukrainian politicians post and whether gendered patterns exist in their branding strategies. Content analysis allows direct observation of the strategic self-presentation choices that personal branding theory describes.

Part 2 proposes a survey experiment that addresses the central limitation of content analysis: its inability to capture how audiences perceive and evaluate the content politicians produce. Moreover, unlike prior experimental designs that rely on artificially constructed stimuli, this study uses authentic posts from the Part 1 corpus as experimental material, thereby preserving ecological validity. This two-part structure, where the same corpus serves both the content analysis and the experiment, connects what politicians produce with how audiences perceive it. The overview of methodology steps is presented in Figure 3.

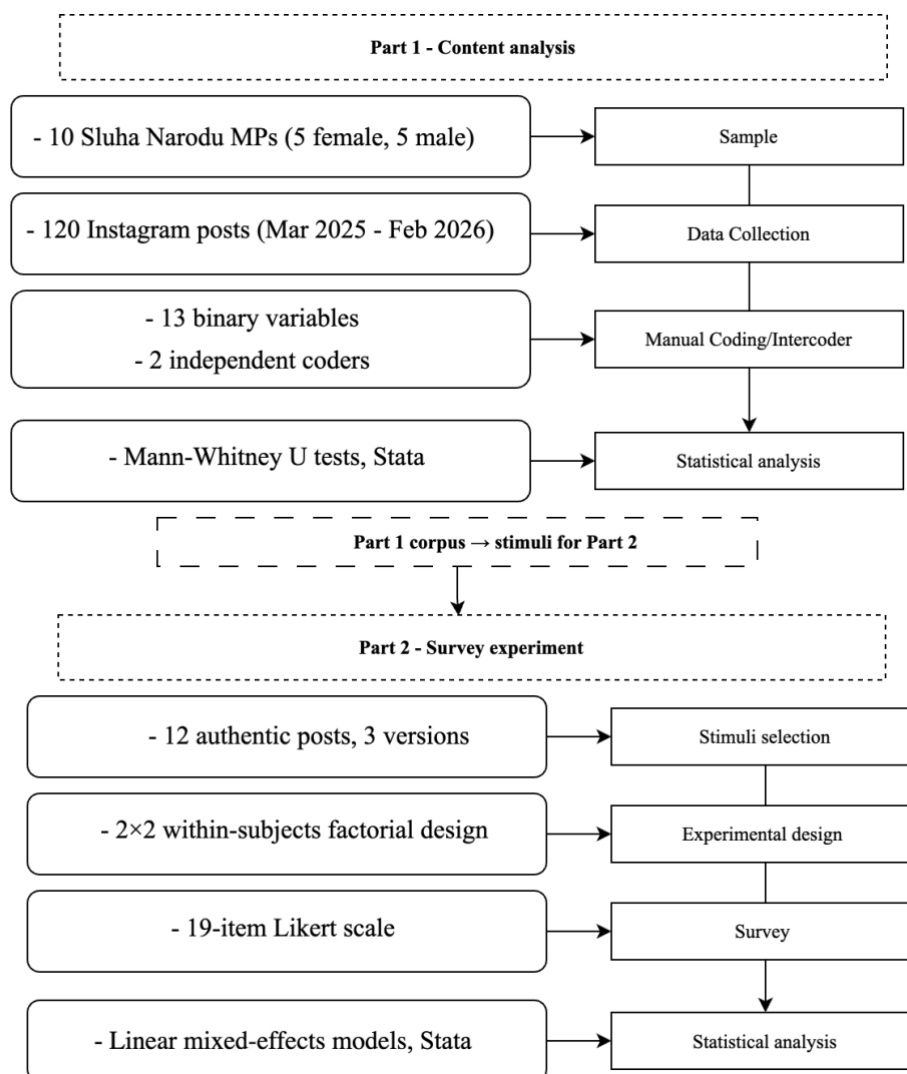


Figure 3. Methodological flowchart of the two-part sequential design

Source: Compiled by the author in Draw.io

The platform selected for both parts is Instagram. Although Facebook has a larger user base in Ukraine (DataReportal, 2025), Instagram was chosen because its visual-first format makes it particularly suited to studying personal branding through images and

emotional cues (Ekman & Widholm, 2017; Jungblut & Haim, 2023). Instagram is well established in Ukrainian political communication, with Zelensky's digital communication style shaping broader norms of self-presentation (Plazas-Olmedo & López-Rabadán, 2023). With 12.0 million users and a reach of 38% of Ukrainian internet users as of early 2025 (DataReportal, 2025), the platform also represents a sufficiently large audience to justify the choice on empirical grounds.

The sample for Part I consists of ten Sluha Narodu Members of Parliament (MPs): five females and five males. Ekman and Widholm (2017) show that Instagram self-presentation varies by party affiliation independently of gender, and Van der Pas and Aaldering (2020) argue that gender effects can only be isolated when politicians are comparable on all other factors. Thus, all politicians are drawn from the same party to control for party-level differences in communication style. Selection criteria required that each politician was an active member of Sluha Narodu, maintained a publicly accessible personal Instagram account, and demonstrated consistent posting activity throughout the full study period of March 2025 to February 2026. To enable gender comparison, an equal number of female and male politicians meeting these criteria were selected. The five female politicians are Juliia Gryshyna, Oksana Dmitrieva, Olga Saladukha, Halyna Yanchenko, and Olena Moshenets. The five male politicians are Pavlo Sushko, Mykhailo Ananchenko, Oleksandr Kachura, Volodymyr Vatras, and Oleksandr Fediienko. Data collection followed systematic sampling: the first post of each calendar month was selected for each politician, yielding twelve posts per politician and a total corpus of 120 posts. While this rule does not account for all major events, it eliminates researcher bias and ensures comparability across politicians and time points.

The coding scheme comprises 13 binary variables capturing post characteristics, content, visual cues, tone, and language framing. These variables were developed based on the empirical studies and branding dimensions reviewed in subchapter 1.2 and adapted to the Ukrainian Instagram context. Each variable was coded according to whether a specific feature was absent (0) or present (1) in the post, as detailed in Appendix A.

Several variables required particular conceptual clarification because they capture interpretive aspects of political personal branding rather than directly observable post features. Emotional Language and Positive Tone were included to capture the affective dimension of self-presentation. Emotional Language refers to expressive or personal wording that conveys feelings, empathy, gratitude, pride, grief, or solidarity, while Positive Tone captures achievement-oriented, hopeful, or celebratory framing. Agentic and Communal traits

were operationalized based on Social Role Theory, which associates agency with strength, decisiveness, leadership, and achievement, and communality with care, warmth, relationality, and support (Eagly et al., 2000). Since a single post could communicate both leadership strength and care for others, Agentic and Communal were not treated as mutually exclusive and could both be coded as present in the same post. Wartime Reference was strictly defined by explicit mentions of war, military, soldiers, defence, or national security to preserve analytical variation. Personalized Content was distinguished from general emotional language by requiring direct references to the politician's private life, family, or non-political personal identity. Engagement metrics were recorded for each post, with the engagement rate calculated as $(\text{Likes} + \text{Comments}) / \text{Followers} \times 100$. Five posts were excluded from the engagement-rate analysis because comments were disabled or like counts were hidden.

Intercoder reliability was assessed by recruiting two independent Ukrainian-speaking coders who coded a randomly selected subsample of 15 posts (12.5% of the corpus) without access to the author's codes. Cohen's Kappa (κ) was calculated for each researcher-coder pair to ensure consistency. Mean kappa ranged from $\kappa = 0.89$ to $\kappa = 0.95$ across the two pairs, substantially exceeding the minimum threshold of $\kappa = 0.80$ recommended by Landis and Koch (1977), and Krippendorff (2019). Four variables: Emotional Language ($\kappa = 0.55$), Positive Tone ($\kappa = 0.73$), Agentic ($\kappa = 0.72$), and Communal ($\kappa = 0.70$) initially fell below threshold for Coder 1. The main sources of ambiguity were that Positive Tone and Emotional Language were occasionally confused with neutral informational content, Agentic coding was unclear in posts expressing solidarity rather than explicit self-positioning, and Communal was conflated with collective national framing. Following consensus discussion, decision rules were clarified and all four variables were resolved through consensus coding, as documented in Appendix B.

Statistical analysis was conducted in Stata using Mann-Whitney U tests. Because the content variables were binary-coded indicators that violate parametric normality assumptions, a non-parametric test was selected to compare male and female politicians. Engagement rate was analysed separately as a continuous outcome metric measuring audience response rather than self-presentation strategy, using a consistent non-parametric approach, as the small number of politicians per group does not support parametric normality assumptions.

Part 1 documents gendered branding strategies but cannot explain how audiences perceive them, as engagement metrics alone cannot capture evaluations of competence, warmth, or leadership suitability. Part 2 was therefore planned alongside Part 1 as a complementary experimental component to address this limitation. Part 2 adopts a 2×2

within-subjects factorial experiment with politician gender (male vs. female) and branding style (professional vs. personalized) as factors. Since each participant evaluates all four conditions, the analysis accounts for the repeated measures structure within respondents. It is illustrated in Figure 4. Detecting this gender-by-branding-style interaction effect allows assessment of whether self-presentation style shapes the evaluation of female politicians differently, as suggested by the role congruity logic of gendered leadership evaluation (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

		Branding style	
		Professional branding	Personalized branding
Politician gender	Male politician	Condition 1 Male + professional post	Condition 2 Male + personalized post
	Female politician	Condition 3 Female + professional post	Condition 4 Female + personalized post

Figure 4. Experimental design matrix for the survey experiment

Source: Compiled by the author in Draw.io

Professional stimuli were defined as posts coded `professional_content = 1` and `personalized_content = 0`, while personalized stimuli were defined as `personalized_content = 1` and `professional_content = 0`, ensuring that each stimulus clearly represented one branding condition. Three survey versions were created, each containing four posts representing the four experimental conditions. Each post was selected from a different politician to ensure no politician appeared more than once within a version, resulting in twelve stimulus posts in total. Selection additionally required that the politician be clearly identifiable in the image, that the post be a static photograph, and that caption length be broadly comparable across conditions. Post order was rotated across versions so that each condition appeared in each ordinal position exactly once. The full stimulus list is provided in Appendix C.

As with the coding scheme in Part 1, the survey instrument for Part 2 was constructed through theoretical synthesis across multiple studies, as no single validated scale captures all relevant dimensions of gendered political branding perception in this context. This approach

is consistent with prior experimental research in this field (Luebke & Steffan, 2025; Zulli & Towner, 2021; Tschla et al., 2023).

The survey comprises seven blocks, each corresponding to a construct developed in the theoretical framework in Chapter 1. Each participant evaluated all four posts using a standardized 19-item block on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Post perception was measured by two items (Atia & Balmas, 2023; McGregor et al., 2017; Meeks, 2017; Tschla et al., 2023): this post focuses on the politician's professional role, and this post gives a glimpse into the politician's personal life. Competence was measured by four items operationalizing agentic traits (Eagly & Steffen, 1984; Eagly, Wood & Diekmann, 2000; Eagly & Karau, 2002): competent, intelligent, qualified, and decisive. Warmth was measured by five items operationalizing communal traits (Eagly & Steffen, 1984; Eagly, Wood & Diekmann, 2000; Eagly & Karau, 2002): warm, caring, kind, approachable, and relatable to ordinary people. Leadership suitability was measured by four items operationalizing Role Congruity Theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002): strong leader, senior political role, qualities needed for high office, and post appropriate for a political leader. Authenticity was treated as perceived authenticity and measured through three items drawing on the Perceived Political Authenticity Scale (Luebke & Engelmann, 2023; Luebke & Steffan, 2025): genuine, authentic, and true reflection. Overall impression was measured by a single item (Meeks, 2017; Zulli & Towner, 2021). Gender attitudes were measured by three items as a control variable, adapted from the Gender Role Stereotypes Scale (Luebke & Steffan, 2025; Eagly & Karau, 2002). A complete overview of all survey items and their theoretical basis is provided in Appendix D.

The survey was administered via LimeSurvey, which automatically assigned participants to one of three versions through a single link, resulting in the following distribution: V1 (n = 45), V2 (n = 48), and V3 (n = 58). Participation was restricted to adults aged 18 to 35. According to Statista (2025), the 18–24 and 25–34 age groups are the two largest segments of Instagram's global user base, accounting for 29.7% and 33.3% of all users respectively and together constituting 63% of the platform's total adult audience worldwide, making this the most numerically dominant and platform-engaged demographic for a study of Instagram-based political content.

Participants were recruited through convenience sampling via the researcher's social networks and Ukrainian online communities. Participation was voluntary and all responses were collected anonymously. Participants who reported not using Instagram were excluded (n = 10), as were those aged 35 or older (n = 22), resulting in a final analytical sample of 151

eligible participants. Of these, 79 were aged 18-24 (52.3%) and 72 were aged 25-34 (47.7%). In terms of gender, 83 participants identified as female (55.0%), 66 as male (43.7%), and 2 preferred not to disclose their gender (1.3%). Control variables included Instagram usage frequency, political familiarity, politician recognition (asked after stimulus evaluation to prevent priming), respondent gender, and gender attitudes toward political leadership. Gender attitudes were included as a theoretically motivated covariate, given evidence that individual differences in gender role beliefs moderate how audiences evaluate politicians (Zulli & Towner, 2021; Meeks, 2017).

Analysis was conducted using linear mixed-effects models to examine the main effects of politician gender, branding style, and their interaction. Because each participant evaluated four posts, respondent ID was included as a random intercept to account for repeated measures within individuals. As Field (2018) notes, this approach is preferable to traditional repeated-measures ANOVA as it handles unequal group sizes and correlated observations within respondents. Survey version was included as a fixed effect to control for differences between the three stimulus sets.

Drawing on the theoretical framework developed in Chapter 1 and the empirical patterns documented in previous studies, eight hypotheses were formulated prior to data collection to guide the analysis of both parts of the study. Part 1 focuses on politicians' self-presentation and examines whether male and female politicians differ in their use of professional and personalized content, visual cues, agentic and communal framing, emotional language, wartime references, and audience engagement. Part 2 shifts the focus from what politicians communicate to how audiences evaluate selected examples of this communication. It examines whether politician gender and branding style interact in shaping perceptions of competence, warmth, leadership suitability, authenticity, and overall impression (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Luebke & Steffan, 2025). While Social Role Theory suggests gendered expectations for communal and agentic traits, the Ukrainian wartime context may reshape these patterns by increasing the importance of institutional competence and national relevance for all politicians.

The full overview of hypotheses is presented in Table 4 on the next page. These hypotheses also provide the analytical structure for the results and discussion in subchapter 2.2, where each hypothesis is addressed in turn and interpreted in relation to the theoretical framework and previous empirical research.

Table 4
Overview of Hypotheses

Hypothesis	Based on the source
Part 1: Content analysis	
H1 Female politicians will display higher levels of personalized content and lower levels of professional content than male politicians on Instagram.	Atia & Balmas (2023); McGregor et al. (2017)
H2 Female politicians will more frequently display warm and approachable visual cues, including smiling, than male politicians.	Jungblut & Haim (2023)
H3 Male politicians will present themselves in a more agentic manner, while female politicians will present themselves in a more communal manner.	Eagly & Steffen (1984); Eagly, Wood & Diekman (2000); Eagly & Karau (2002); Tsichla et al. (2023)
H4 Female politicians will use more emotional language and first-person framing than male politicians.	Beltran et al. (2021); Atia & Balmas (2023)
H5 Male politicians will reference wartime and conflict more frequently than female politicians.	Adapted by the author based on Damann et al. (2024); Pavliuc (2025a), Pavliuc (2025b)
H6 Posts by female politicians will generate higher audience engagement than posts by male politicians.	Atia & Balmas (2023); Yarchi & Samuel-Azran (2018)
Part 2: Survey experiment	
H7 Female politicians will receive higher warmth ratings and lower leadership suitability ratings than male politicians presenting the same branding style.	Eagly, Wood & Diekman (2000); Eagly & Karau (2002); Meeks (2017); Zulli & Towner (2021)
H8 Personalized content will generate higher warmth ratings but lower leadership suitability ratings for female politicians compared to male politicians.	Eagly & Karau (2002); Meeks (2017)

Note: H = hypothesis number

Source: Compiled by the author based on sources presented in the table

H1 through H6 address gendered patterns in politician self-presentation and engagement, while H7 and H8 address audience perceptions of gendered branding in the experimental setting. Together, the eight hypotheses connect the content analysis and the survey experiment into a single coherent analytical framework, allowing the study to examine both what politicians produce and how audiences evaluate it.

2.2. Analysis and results

This subchapter presents the results of the quantitative content analysis of 120 Instagram posts by ten Sluha Narodu MPs and the survey experiment with 151 Ukrainian Instagram users. The findings are discussed in relation to the eight hypotheses derived from the theoretical framework. Statistical comparisons were conducted using Mann-Whitney U tests for all 13 binary coding variables and for the engagement rate. Because the dataset includes repeated posts from the same politicians, these tests are interpreted as exploratory post-pattern comparisons. Table 5 presents the full descriptive statistics and test results.

Table 5

Mann-Whitney U Test Results with Descriptive Statistics by Gender

	Variable	Male Mean	Female Mean	z	p
Post characteristics	Post Format	.73	.80	-0.86	.390
	Politician Visible	.80	.87	-0.98	.329
Content	Professional Content	.85	.73	1.57	.117
	Personalized Content	.18	.28	-1.29	.197
	Wartime Reference	.70	.50	2.23	.026*
Visual	Formal Setting	.35	.40	-0.56	.573
	Smiling	.23	.38	-1.77	.077
Tone	Positive Tone	.63	.62	0.19	.851
	Emotional Language	.77	.87	-1.41	.159
Language & framing	First Person	.65	.53	1.30	.195
	Collective Language	.63	.63	0.00	1.000
	Agentic	.77	.53	2.67	.008*
	Communal	.80	.67	1.65	.100
Engagement	Engagement Rate	2.77%	2.74%	-0.26	.797

Note: Positive z values indicate higher scores for male politicians; negative z values indicate higher scores for female politicians; * $p < .05$.

Source: Compiled by the author based on Stata output

Before presenting the hypothesis testing results, several descriptive patterns are worth noting. Politician visibility was similar across both groups. Formal institutional settings were used at comparable rates by male and female politicians, suggesting no gender difference in the use of professional visual backdrops.

H1 predicted that female politicians would display higher levels of personalized content and lower levels of professional content than male politicians. The descriptive results are consistent with this direction. Male politicians produced professional content more frequently ($M = .85$ vs. $M = .73$) while female politicians personalized more ($M = .28$ vs. $M = .18$). However, neither difference reached statistical significance (Professional Content: $z = 1.57$, $p = .117$; Personalized Content: $z = -1.29$, $p = .197$). H1 is not supported.

Contrary to prior content analysis findings showing a significant female personalization advantage (Atia & Balmas, 2023; McGregor et al., 2017), no significant gender difference was found in the present study. Prior studies documenting this advantage were conducted in peacetime Western European contexts. In the Ukrainian wartime context, all politicians face pressure to focus on their official roles, which may create a ceiling effect and weaken the gender differences predicted by theory. The low levels of personalized content across both groups, 18% for males and 28% for females, contrast with Western European findings. This pattern aligns with Zelensky's wartime prioritization of professional over personal self-presentation on Instagram (Plazas-Olmedo & López-Rabadán, 2023). This suggests that gendered personal branding patterns documented in prior research may not hold universally outside peacetime Western contexts.

H2 predicted that female politicians would more frequently display warm and approachable visual cues, including smiling, than male politicians. Female politicians smiled in 38% of posts compared to 23% for male politicians, however the difference did not reach conventional statistical significance ($z = -1.77, p = .077$). H2 is not supported, though the direction of the effect is consistent with the prediction.

The trend is consistent in direction with prior empirical findings showing that female politicians on social media display significantly more happiness than male politicians (Jungblut & Haim, 2023) and aligns with Social Role Theory, which associates women with communal and warmth-related expectations. This finding should be interpreted with caution, as the lack of significance may reflect the small sample size or suggest that gendered differences in visual self-presentation are less pronounced in the Ukrainian wartime context.

H3 predicted that male politicians would present themselves more agentially and female politicians more communally. The agentic dimension is supported: male politicians were coded as agentic in 77% of posts compared to 53% for female politicians, representing the strongest significant difference in the content analysis ($z = 2.67, p = .008$). The communal dimension showed an unexpected descriptive pattern, with male politicians coded as communal in 80% of posts compared to 67% for female politicians, contrary to the predicted direction. However, this difference did not reach conventional statistical significance ($z = 1.65, p = .100$). H3 is therefore partially supported, based on the significant agentic difference, while the communal pattern should be interpreted as exploratory rather than conclusive.

The agentic finding is consistent with prior content analysis research documenting that male politicians present themselves more agentially than female politicians across

multiple national contexts (Atia & Balmas, 2023; McGregor et al., 2017; Tsihla et al., 2023). The communal reversal, however, contradicts prior research which consistently finds female politicians using more communal language than male politicians (Atia & Balmas, 2023; Tsihla et al., 2023). Notably, this also diverges from recent wartime studies by Damann et al. (2024) and Pavliuc (2025b), who find that women maintain a communal focus on platforms like Facebook and Twitter. This divergence suggests a significant platform effect, where Instagram's visual nature may encourage male politicians to adopt communal language differently. In wartime Ukraine, communal language appears to be redefined as an expression of patriotic solidarity rather than traditional feminine warmth, explaining this unexpected pattern. This may suggest that role congruity pressures can shift when the definition of effective leadership changes, as it has under wartime conditions.

H4 predicted that female politicians would use more emotional language and first-person framing. Neither prediction is supported. Female politicians use emotional language more frequently ($M = .87$ vs. $M = .77$) but not significantly ($z = -1.41$, $p = .159$). Male politicians use first-person language more ($M = .65$ vs. $M = .53$), opposite to the predicted direction and also not significant ($z = 1.30$, $p = .195$). Collective language is identical across groups ($M = .63$). H4 is not supported.

Contrary to prior research finding that female politicians used significantly more emotional language than male politicians (Beltrán et al., 2021), no significant gender difference was found in the present study. One possible explanation is that the wartime context may have increased emotional language among male politicians through appeals to national solidarity and grief, reducing the gender difference documented in prior research. The higher male use of first-person language and the absence of a gender difference in collective language both contradict prior findings showing female politicians using more first-person singular and plural framing (Atia & Balmas, 2023). Male politicians may use first-person language to highlight their own achievements, while collective language appears to reflect national solidarity equally across both genders in the wartime context. This suggests that the link between first-person language and personalization may be more complex than Western peacetime frameworks predict.

H5 predicted that male politicians would reference wartime content more frequently. This hypothesis is supported. Male politicians referenced war, military, or national security in 70% of posts compared to 50% for female politicians ($z = 2.23$, $p = .026$).

This finding is consistent with literature showing that men are more strongly associated with security and defence issues (Meeks, 2017; Tsihla et al., 2023) and is

directly supported by wartime studies of Ukrainian politicians specifically. Damann et al. (2024) find that male Ukrainian politicians posted significantly more security-related content than female politicians during the invasion, a pattern confirmed by both Pavliuc (2025a) and Pavliuc (2025b), who find men dominated military narratives while women focused on civilian and diplomatic topics. The high base rate of wartime references among female politicians (50%) indicates that war was a highly salient frame even among female politicians in this sample. This may reflect a gendered division of political labour in which security framing remains a predominantly male domain, even in a context where conflict is experienced by all.

H6 predicted that posts by female politicians would generate higher audience engagement than posts by male politicians. This hypothesis is not supported. Mean engagement rates were nearly identical, 2.77% for male and 2.74% for female politicians, with no significant difference ($z = -0.26, p = .797$).

Contrary to prior research finding a significant female engagement advantage (Atia & Balmas, 2023; Yarchi & Samuel-Azran, 2018), no gender difference was found. The high within-group variance suggests that individual post characteristics drive engagement more powerfully than any systematic gender pattern. The wartime context may shift audience priorities toward male leaders, reducing the female engagement advantage found in peacetime studies. This is consistent with Damann et al. (2024), who find that Ukrainian women politicians received significantly fewer public reactions than men after the invasion began.

To summarize, the findings reveal a complex picture of gendered political branding in the Ukrainian wartime context. While the significant differences in agentic framing and wartime-related communication indicate that some gendered patterns predicted by Social Role Theory persist, several expected differences either did not reach significance or emerged in unexpected directions.

This suggests that political crisis conditions may alter how gendered branding strategies are expressed and perceived on social media. Rather than functioning as fixed patterns, gendered branding practices appear to depend partly on the broader political environment in which communication occurs. These findings highlight the importance of accounting for contextual conditions when examining gender dynamics in political communication. Table 6 summarizes the results across six hypotheses of Part 1.

Table 6
Overview of Hypothesis Testing Results for Part 1

H	Hypothesis	Result
H1	Female politicians will display higher levels of personalized content and lower levels of professional content than male politicians on Instagram.	Not supported
H2	Female politicians will more frequently display warm and approachable visual cues, including smiling, than male politicians.	Not supported
H3	Male politicians will present themselves in a more agentic manner, while female politicians will present themselves in a more communal manner.	Partially supported
H4	Female politicians will use more emotional language and first-person framing than male politicians.	Not supported
H5	Male politicians will reference wartime and conflict more frequently than female politicians.	Supported
H6	Posts by female politicians will generate higher audience engagement than posts by male politicians.	Not supported

Note: H = hypothesis number

Source: Compiled by the author based on content analysis results

Continuing the analysis, Part 2 of an experimental survey was conducted with 151 Ukrainian Instagram users aged 18 to 34. The analysis addresses H7 and H8, with warmth and leadership suitability as the primary hypothesized outcomes. Competence, authenticity, and overall impression were included as exploratory outcomes following prior experimental studies in gendered political evaluation (Meeks, 2017; Zulli & Towner, 2021). A linear mixed-effects model examined the effects of politician gender and branding style on five audience evaluation outcomes, following the 2×2 within-subjects factorial design described in the methodology. Survey version was not significant across any outcome, confirming that the counterbalancing was successful. Before presenting the main findings, preliminary analyses were conducted to assess scale reliability and confirm that the experimental manipulation worked as intended.

Initial reliability analysis of the gender attitudes scale produced a low Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = .47$). The item asking whether female politicians face higher evaluative standards than male politicians showed weak correlations with the two items measuring beliefs about gender equality in political leadership and was therefore removed. After removing this item, reliability improved to $\alpha = .77$. The final composite was calculated from the remaining two items: "Men and women are equally suited for political leadership" and "A woman can be just as effective

a political leader as a man.” All remaining scales demonstrated acceptable to excellent reliability across the twelve stimulus posts, as presented in Table 7.

Table 7

Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficients by Construct

Construct	No Items	α range
Competence	4	.89 - .97
Warmth	5	.85 - .98
Leadership suitability	4	.88 - .97
Authenticity	3	.70 - .91
Gender attitudes	2	.77

Note: The minimum threshold of $\alpha = .70$; No - number of items per construct

Source: Compiled by the author using Stata output

The manipulation check confirmed that participants perceived the stimuli as intended. Professional posts received significantly higher scores on professional role perception ($b = 2.17$, $z = 23.13$, $p < .001$), while personalized posts received significantly higher scores on personal life perception ($b = -1.21$, $z = -12.13$, $p < .001$). This confirms that the branding style manipulation was successful. These results indicate that participants clearly distinguished between professional and personalized branding cues. Therefore, the following hypothesis tests can be interpreted as responses to the intended branding conditions rather than as artefacts of unclear or unsuccessful stimulus construction. Table 8 presents the mean scores across the four experimental conditions.

Table 8

Estimated Mean Scores by Experimental Condition

Condition	Competence	Warmth	Leadership	Authenticity	Impression
Male + Personalized	3.11	3.34	3.10	3.29	3.39
Male + Professional	3.73	3.25	3.42	3.28	3.58
Female + Personalized	2.59	3.14	2.59	3.27	3.08
Female + Professional	3.65	3.35	3.53	3.35	3.67

Note: Means estimated from mixed-effects models on a 1 to 5 scale

Source: Compiled by the author using Stata results

Table 9 presents the results of the linear mixed-effects regression analysis for all five outcome variables. In this model, gender (Female vs. Male) and branding style (Professional vs. Personalized) are treated as predictors, while the interaction term (Female \times Professional) captures the specific effect of professional branding for female politicians. Male politicians using a personalized branding style serve as the reference category for all comparisons.

Table 9

Linear Mixed-Effects Model Results

Outcome	b (Gender)	p	b (Branding)	p	b (Interaction)	p
Competence	-0.52	<.001	+0.61	<.001	+0.45	<.001
Warmth	-0.20	.029	-0.09	.321	+0.29	.024
Leadership	-0.51	<.001	+0.32	<.001	+0.62	<.001
Authenticity	-0.02	.827	-0.01	.884	+0.06	.619
Overall impression	-0.31	.002	+0.19	.062	+0.40	.004

Note: b = unstandardized coefficient. Reference category: Male politician, Personalized branding style.

Source: Compiled by the author based on survey data and Stata regression results

H7 predicted that female politicians would receive higher warmth ratings and lower leadership suitability ratings than male politicians presenting the same branding style. Female politicians received significantly lower ratings on competence ($b = -0.52$, $p < .001$), leadership ($b = -0.51$, $p < .001$), and overall impression ($b = -0.31$, $p = .002$). Contrary to the prediction, female politicians also received lower warmth ratings than male politicians ($b = -0.20$, $p = .029$). No significant gender difference was found for authenticity ($p = .827$). H7 is partially supported.

The lower leadership and competence ratings are consistent with Role Congruity Theory, which predicts that female politicians face a leadership credibility deficit because of the perceived incongruity between female gender roles and leadership roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002). They are also consistent with experimental findings showing asymmetric gender effects in political evaluation (Zulli & Towner, 2021; Meeks, 2017). However, as shown by the interaction results, this disadvantage was not fixed across branding styles. The warmth reversal contradicts Social Role Theory's prediction that women are stereotypically associated with communal traits (Eagly, Wood & Diekmann, 2000) and differs from recent gendered political communication research linking female politicians to more communal, expressive, and warmth-related self-presentation cues (Tsichla et al., 2023; Jungblut & Haim, 2023). This

unexpected finding may reflect the Ukrainian wartime context, where all politicians face pressure to project institutional competence, reducing the typical gender difference in warmth perception. This is consistent with Damann et al. (2024), who find that conflict onset deepened gender-stereotypical patterns in Ukrainian political communication, a dynamic that may extend to warmth perception alongside leadership credibility. The result is also conceptually related to the communal language reversal documented in Part 1, suggesting that wartime conditions reshape gendered associations with warmth more broadly. The absence of a gender difference in authenticity perception is consistent with Luebke and Steffan's (2025) finding that politician gender alone does not determine perceived political authenticity.

H8 predicted that personalized content would generate higher warmth but lower leadership suitability ratings for female politicians compared to male politicians. The interaction between politician gender and branding style is significant for competence ($b = +0.45, p < .001$), warmth ($b = +0.29, p = .024$), leadership ($b = +0.62, p < .001$), and overall impression ($b = +0.40, p = .004$), but not for authenticity ($p = .619$). The positive interaction coefficients indicate that professional branding benefited female politicians more than male politicians across all significant outcomes. H8 is therefore partially supported only in the sense that the predicted gender-by-branding-style interaction was observed. However, the direction of the effect differed from the original expectation: personalized branding did not produce higher warmth ratings for female politicians, while professional rather than personalized content drove the asymmetric benefit for female politicians.

Although the asymmetric effect operated through professional rather than personalized branding, contrary to the original prediction, the direction of the interaction is theoretically meaningful. These findings are compatible with Role Congruity Theory, but only in a conditional sense. While the theory predicts that female politicians face a leadership credibility disadvantage because of perceived incongruity between female gender roles and leadership roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002), the present findings indicate that professional branding may reduce this incongruity by making competence and leadership-role fit more salient to audiences. Specifically, the interaction effect reported above ($b = +0.62$) shows that professional branding produced substantially larger leadership suitability gains for female politicians than for male politicians.

Figure 5 illustrates how branding style influenced leadership suitability ratings differently for male and female politicians across the four gender-by-branding-style conditions. For clarity of presentation, the y-axis begins at 3.0, and the full scale range is 1 to 5.

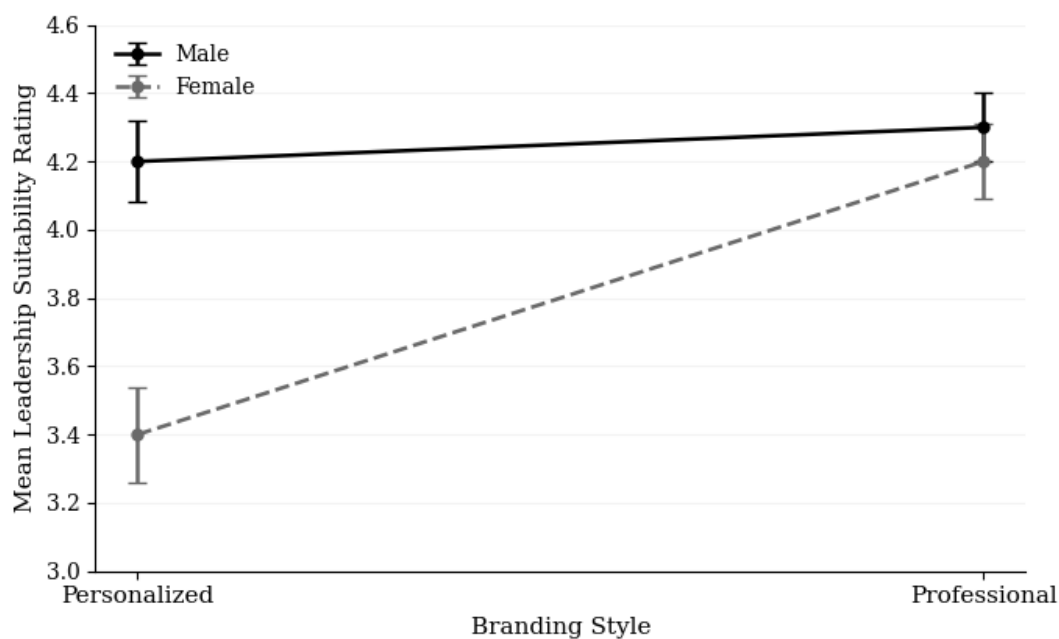


Figure 5. Interaction Effect of Politician Gender and Branding Style on Leadership Suitability Ratings

Source: Compiled by the author using Google Colab based on mixed-effects model estimates

To examine which specific conditions differed significantly, Bonferroni-corrected pairwise comparisons were conducted (Field, 2018). Notably, professional branding substantially reduced the gender gap, as Female + Professional did not differ significantly from Male + Professional in competence (contrast = -0.08 , 95% CI [-0.29 , 0.14]), leadership (contrast = $+0.11$, 95% CI [-0.12 , 0.34]), or overall impression (contrast = $+0.09$, 95% CI [-0.17 , 0.35]). Professional branding improved female politicians' leadership ratings by nearly a full point compared to their personalized posts (contrast = $+0.94$, 95% CI [0.71 , 1.17]).

These pairwise results further support the interpretation outlined above, confirming that the interaction effect reflected a substantially stronger benefit of professional branding for female politicians than for male politicians.

To assess robustness, control variables were entered as additional covariates into the mixed-effects models. As Field (2018) notes, incorporating covariates into a mixed-effects model produces results equivalent to ANCOVA, making this approach consistent with the analytical plan described in the methodology. All key experimental effects remained unchanged in direction, magnitude, and significance, confirming that the results are robust. Three control variables showed significant effects. Respondents who recognized at least one politician ($n = 47$, 31.1%) rated them significantly lower across all outcomes, suggesting prior knowledge leads to more critical evaluation. Respondents with more gender-egalitarian attitudes gave higher ratings across all outcomes. Male respondents gave significantly lower

leadership and overall impression ratings than female respondents (leadership: $b = -0.24$, $p = .038$; impression: $b = -0.24$, $p = .045$). Full model results are presented in Appendix E.

Table 10 summarizes the hypothesis testing results for Part 2.

Table 10
Overview of Hypothesis Testing Results for Part 2

H	Hypothesis	Result
H7	Female politicians will receive higher warmth ratings and lower leadership suitability ratings than male politicians presenting the same branding style.	Partially supported
H8	Personalized content will generate higher warmth ratings but lower leadership suitability ratings for female politicians compared to male politicians.	Partially supported

Note: H = hypothesis number

Source: Compiled by the author

The strongest and most consistent finding in Part 2 is that the observed gender evaluation disadvantage for female politicians was substantially narrower under professional branding than under personalized branding in this stimulus set. This pattern appears across competence, leadership, and overall impression, and remains even after controlling for individual differences. An unexpected result was the warmth reversal, where female politicians received lower warmth ratings than male politicians, as well as the lack of significant authenticity effects.

Overall, the results reveal that gendered branding patterns persist in the Ukrainian wartime context, though in modified forms. Male politicians demonstrate more agentic and security-focused communication, which aligns with traditional leadership expectations and produces higher competence ratings from audiences. Female politicians face an evaluation disadvantage, particularly under personalized branding conditions. However, the most significant finding is that professional branding substantially reduces this gap. When female politicians adopt a professional branding style, their leadership and competence ratings become comparable to those of male politicians. This suggests that while audience evaluations remain gendered, professional self-presentation may represent an effective strategy for female politicians to build credibility during a crisis.

Conclusion

This thesis examined gender differences in personal branding practices of Ukrainian politicians on Instagram through a two-part sequential design combining content analysis and a survey experiment. The findings reveal that gender shapes personal branding on Instagram in the Ukrainian wartime context, though in a more selective and contextually modified form than existing theory predicts.

The most substantive finding of content analysis is not any single significant result but the overall pattern. Gender differentiation in personal branding is selective rather than pervasive under wartime conditions. Of the six predicted gender differences, two reached statistical significance. Male politicians demonstrated significantly more agentic self-presentation and referenced wartime and national security content more frequently than their female counterparts. The remaining predicted differences in personalized content, emotional language, smiling, first-person framing, and audience engagement did not reach significance. When national survival and institutional competence become dominant frames of political communication, several gendered differences documented in prior research appear to compress or shift under wartime conditions.

In the survey experiment, gender continued to shape audience evaluations in theoretically meaningful ways. Female politicians received lower ratings on competence, leadership suitability, and overall impression, while professional branding substantially narrowed these gaps. This pattern is consistent with Role Congruity Theory, which predicts a leadership credibility deficit for women due to perceived incongruity between female gender roles and leadership roles. Contrary to expectations derived from Social Role Theory, however, female politicians also received lower warmth ratings than male politicians, representing the most theoretically unexpected finding of the study. At the same time, the experiment revealed an important asymmetry with practical implications for political communication strategy. Specifically, female politicians operating in wartime contexts may benefit from prioritizing professional content emphasizing institutional role, policy work, and official activities over personalized lifestyle content when building digital credibility. This strategic choice appears to improve leadership and competence evaluations without reducing perceived authenticity.

These findings make three contributions to the literature on gendered political communication. First, they offer preliminary evidence consistent with the proposition that wartime conditions may function as a boundary condition for Social Role Theory and Role

Congruity Theory. Both frameworks were developed primarily in Western peacetime contexts and predict systematic communal and agentic differentiation between female and male politicians. The present findings suggest that this differentiation becomes partially compressed under conditions of armed conflict, where institutional competence and security relevance may become salient evaluation criteria for politicians regardless of gender. The non-significant findings for personalization, emotional language, and engagement therefore suggest that crisis conditions modify some of the gendered dynamics these frameworks predict.

Second, the communal language reversal documented in the content analysis, where male politicians were coded as communal at a higher rate than female politicians contrary to theoretical expectations, suggests that wartime conditions may redefine the meaning of communal communication itself. In the Ukrainian context, communal language appears to function more as an expression of collective patriotic solidarity and national unity than as a marker of traditionally feminine warmth and care. This suggests that operationalizations of Social Role Theory may require contextual adaptation outside Western peacetime settings.

Third, the warmth reversal documented in the survey experiment suggests that crisis conditions may reshape gendered audience perceptions more broadly than prior research has recognized. The findings indicate that wartime context may suppress the communal warmth advantage female politicians typically receive. This challenges the assumption within Social Role Theory that communal warmth is a stable cross-contextual advantage for female politicians, suggesting instead that warmth perceptions may be reorganized around crisis-relevant qualities such as resolve and institutional steadiness.

Together, these findings point toward a more context-sensitive understanding of gendered political branding, one that treats crisis conditions as an active moderating force rather than background context.

The study also contributes methodologically by combining content analysis and a survey experiment using the same corpus of authentic Instagram posts. This two-part sequential design connects politician self-presentation directly to audience evaluation of that same content, addressing a limitation present in both prior content analytic and experimental studies in this field. The use of authentic posts as experimental stimuli preserves the visual style, caption length, and communicative register of real political Instagram communication, strengthening the external validity of the findings relative to studies relying on artificially constructed stimuli. This design may provide a useful approach for future research on gendered political communication.

Several limitations should be acknowledged when interpreting the findings. The content analysis sample is drawn from a single political party, which controls for party-level variation but limits generalizability across the broader Ukrainian political landscape. Because multiple posts were analysed from the same politicians, observations are nested within individual accounts. Therefore, the Part 1 results should be interpreted as exploratory post-level patterns rather than independent politician-level effects. The survey relied on a convenience sample of young adults, meaning that the results may not fully represent older or more politically diverse voter groups. The study period of March 2025 to February 2026 captures a specific phase of the conflict and may not generalize to earlier or later stages of the war. Additionally, while the use of authentic posts as experimental stimuli strengthens ecological validity, it reduces experimental control. Although stimuli were selected to represent professional and personalized branding styles, they also differed in politician identity, visual quality, topic, and caption details. Therefore, the experimental findings should be interpreted as effects observed within this selected stimulus set rather than as isolated effects of branding style alone.

Future research should build on the theoretical propositions advanced in this thesis. A longitudinal study could examine whether the wartime narrowing of gendered branding differences persists, intensifies, or reverses as the conflict evolves or ends. This would help clarify whether crisis conditions act as a temporary moderator or produce more lasting shifts in gendered political communication. Extending the design to politicians from multiple parties and to other conflict-affected democracies would also show whether the patterns identified here reflect a broader dynamic of crisis communication or are specific to the Ukrainian wartime context. Future experiments could further test this mechanism by systematically varying contextual framing, allowing researchers to examine whether and how crisis conditions weaken the communal advantage typically associated with female politicians.

Overall, the findings of this thesis demonstrate that gender continues to shape both political self-presentation and audience evaluations in the Ukrainian wartime context, though in more contextually specific and theoretically nuanced ways than prior research has documented. The agentic framing advantage of male politicians and their dominance of security-related communication confirm that core gendered patterns persist even under extraordinary political conditions. At the same time, wartime context reshapes several gender dynamics documented in prior research. Most practically, the finding that professional branding substantially reduces the leadership evaluation disadvantage faced by female

politicians suggests that strategic self-presentation may partially mitigate gendered evaluation biases within the conditions examined in this study. More broadly, the study suggests that gendered political branding cannot be fully understood without accounting for the political context in which it operates.

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APPENDIX A

Coding Scheme

Coding Scheme for Content Analysis of Ukrainian Politicians' Instagram Posts

Category	Variable	Operationalization	Coding Rule	Source
<i>Post character istics</i>	Post_Format	Format of the post	1 = photo or carousel; 0 = video or reel	Tsichla et al. (2023)
	Politician_Visible	Politician appears in the image	1 = visible; 0 = absent	Valmori et al. (2021)
<i>Content variables</i>	Professional_Content	Post references political role, policy work, or official duties	1 = present; 0 = absent	Tsichla et al. (2023); McGregor et al. (2017);
	Personalized_Content	Post references private life, family, or non-political personal identity	1 = present; 0 = absent. Emotional language alone does not qualify.	Tsichla et al. (2023); Meeks (2017); McGregor et al. (2017)
	Wartime_Reference	Explicit mention of war, military, soldiers, defense, or national security conflict	1 = present; 0 = absent. General patriotic language or flag emoji alone = 0.	Adapted by the author for the Ukrainian wartime context
<i>Visual variables</i>	Formal_Setting	Institutional backdrop (parliament, podium, official venue)	1 = present; 0 = absent or informal. Only coded if Politician_Visible = 1.	Tsichla et al. (2023)
	Smiling	Politician is visibly smiling	1 = smiling; 0 = not smiling or not visible. Only coded if Politician_Visible = 1.	Jungblut & Haim (2023); Zulli & Towner (2021)
<i>Tone variables</i>	Positive_Tone	Overall tone is celebratory, hopeful, or achievement-focused	1 = present; 0 = neutral, critical, or problem-focused	Adapted by the author from Tsichla et al. (2023)
	Emotional_Language	Caption uses expressive, emotive, or personal language	1 = present; 0 = neutral or institutional. A critical post can use emotional language.	Adapted by the author, informed by Beltran et al. (2021); Atia & Balmas (2023)
<i>Language / framing</i>	First_Person	Caption uses I / my / me (Ukrainian: я / мій / мене)	1 = present; 0 = absent	Atia & Balmas (2023)
	Collective_Language	Caption uses we / our (Ukrainian: ми / наш)	1 = present; 0 = absent	Atia & Balmas (2023)
	Agentic	Politician positions themselves as strong, achieving, leading, or decisive	1 = present; 0 = absent. Measures self-presentation, not descriptions of others. Can be coded 1 simultaneously with Communal.	Eagly & Steffen (1984); Eagly, Wood & Diekmann (2000); Eagly & Karau (2002); Meeks (2017);

Category	Variable	Operationalization	Coding Rule	Source
	Communal	Politician positions themselves as caring, warm, team-oriented, or relational	1 = present; 0 = absent. Can be coded 1 simultaneously with Agentic.	Eagly & Steffen (1984); Eagly, Wood & Diekmann (2000); Eagly & Karau (2002); Meeks (2017);
Engagement	Engagement_Rate	Audience response to each post	(Likes + Comments) / Followers × 100	Standard Instagram engagement metric; Tschila et al. (2023); Atia & Balmas (2023)

Note: All coding variables were coded as 1 (present) or 0 (absent), with the exception of engagement rate which was recorded as a continuous percentage

Source: Compiled by the author based on sources presented in the table

APPENDIX B

Intercoder Reliability Results

Cohen's Kappa Coefficients by Variable and Coder

Variable	Pair 1 κ (Res.-Coder 1)	Coder 1 Interpretati on	Pair 2 κ (Res.-Coder 2)	Coder 2 Interpretation	Mean κ
Post_Format	1.00	Strong	1.00	Strong	1.00
Politician_Visible	1.00	Strong	1.00	Strong	1.00
Professional_Content	1.00	Strong	1.00	Strong	1.00
Personalized_Content	1.00	Strong	1.00	Strong	1.00
Wartime_Reference	1.00	Strong	1.00	Strong	1.00
Formal_Setting	0.87	Strong	1.00	Strong	0.94
Smiling	1.00	Strong	1.00	Strong	1.00
Positive_Tone	0.73	Substantial	0.86	Strong	0.79
Emotional_Language	0.55	Moderate	0.81	Strong	0.68
First_Person	1.00	Strong	1.00	Strong	1.00
Collective_Language	1.00	Strong	1.00	Strong	1.00
Agentic	0.72	Substantial	0.86	Strong	0.79
Communal	0.70	Substantial	0.84	Strong	0.77
Mean Kappa	0.89	Strong overall	0.95	Strong overall	0.92

Note: Minimum threshold of $\kappa = 0.80$

Source: Compiled by the author in Excel

APPENDIX C

Survey Experiment Stimuli and Counterbalancing Design

Stimulus Posts, Branding Type, and Presentation Order by Survey Version

	Position 1	Position 2	Position 3	Position 4
V1	Ananchenko - Professional (November)	Gryshyna - Personalized (April)	Yanchenko - Professional (September)	Kachura - Personalized (March)
V2	Gryshyna - Professional (December)	Sushko - Personalized (March)	Kachura - Professional (May)	Saladukha - Personalized (January)
V3	Yanchenko - Personalized (November)	Sushko - Professional (May)	Fediienko - Personalized (September)	Dmitrieva - Professional (August)

Source: Compiled by the author based on the selected Instagram stimulus posts

APPENDIX D

Survey Instrument: Measurement Items

Survey Items

Block	Item	Theoretical basis
Block 0 : Post Perception		
Post Perception	This post focuses on the politician's professional role	Atia & Balmas (2023); McGregor et al. (2017); Tsichla et al. (2023)
	This post gives a glimpse into the politician's personal life	Atia & Balmas (2023); Meeks (2017); McGregor et al. (2017)
Block 1 : Competence		
Competence	This politician appears competent	Fiske et al. (2002)
	This politician appears intelligent	Fiske et al. (2002)
	This politician appears qualified	Zulli & Towner (2021)
	This politician appears decisive	Meeks (2017)
Block 2 : Warmth		
Warmth	This politician appears warm	Fiske et al. (2002)
	This politician appears caring	Tsichla et al. (2023)
	This politician appears kind	Eagly, Wood & Diekman (2000)
	This politician appears approachable	Luebke & Steffan (2025)
	This politician seems relatable to ordinary people	Luebke & Steffan (2025); Meeks (2017); Atia & Balmas (2023)
Block 3 : Leadership Suitability		
Leadership Suitability	This politician appears to be a strong leader	Eagly & Karau (2002)
	I could imagine this politician in a senior political role	Eagly & Karau (2002)
	This politician has the qualities needed to hold high office	Eagly & Karau (2002)
	This post is appropriate for a political leader	Eagly & Karau (2002)
Block 4 : Authenticity		
Authenticity	This post feels genuine	Luebke & Engelmann (2023); Luebke & Steffan (2025)

Block	Item	Theoretical basis
	This politician comes across as authentic	Luebke & Engelmann (2023); Luebke & Steffan (2025)
	This post feels like a true reflection of who this politician is	Luebke & Engelmann (2023); Luebke & Steffan (2025)
Block 5 : Overall Impression		
Overall Impression	Overall, I have a positive impression of this politician based on this post	Meeks (2017); Zulli & Towner (2021)
Block 6 : Gender Attitudes (control variable)		
Gender Attitudes	Men and women are equally suited for political leadership	Eagly & Karau (2002); Luebke & Steffan (2025)
	Female politicians are judged by higher standards than male politicians	Eagly & Karau (2002); Luebke & Steffan (2025)
	A woman can be just as effective a political leader as a man	Eagly & Karau (2002); Luebke & Steffan (2025)

Note: All items measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). Items were adapted from cited studies and related theoretical constructs.

Source: Compiled by the author based on sources presented in the table

APPENDIX E

Robustness Check Results

Control Variable Coefficients from Linear Mixed-Effects Models

Predictor	Competence b (p)	Warmth b (p)	Leadership b (p)	Authenticity b (p)	Impression b (p)
Gender (Male respondent)	-0.20 (.087)	-0.17 (.119)	-0.24 (.038)	-0.16 (.162)	-0.24 (.045)
Political Interest					
Somewhat interested	-0.004 (.981)	+0.02 (.878)	-0.03 (.822)	+0.07 (.653)	+0.09 (.558)
Not very interested	-0.15 (.479)	-0.12 (.544)	-0.05 (.812)	+0.03 (.868)	+0.08 (.717)
Not interested at all	+0.58 (.262)	+0.49 (.322)	+0.43 (.417)	+0.18 (.733)	+0.08 (.875)
Political Recognition					
Recognized politician	-0.38 (.002)	-0.39 (.001)	-0.53 (<.001)	-0.49 (<.001)	-0.37 (.004)
Social Media Use					
Several times a week	+0.32 (.032)	+0.28 (.048)	+0.37 (.016)	+0.29 (.051)	+0.16 (.306)
Once a week or less	-0.22 (.243)	-0.22 (.218)	-0.32 (.095)	-0.26 (.179)	-0.52 (.008)
Gender Attitudes	+0.30 (<.001)	+0.30 (<.001)	+0.26 (<.001)	+0.22 (.002)	+0.32 (<.001)

Note: b = unstandardized coefficient; p-value in parentheses. Reference categories: female respondent, very interested in politics, no politician recognized, and daily Instagram use. Higher gender attitudes scores indicate stronger support for gender equality in political leadership.

Source: Compiled by the author based on the data from Stata

Resümee

UKRAINA POLIITIKUTE ISIKLIKU BRÄNDI KUJUNDAMISE SOOLISED ERINEVUSED INSTAGRAMIS

Yaryna Pryveda

Käesoleva bakalaureusetöö eesmärk on määrata kindlaks Ukraina poliitikute isikliku brändi kujundamise praktikate soolised erinevused Instagramis ning kuidas need erinevused kujundavad publiku kaasatust ja hinnanguid. Töö käsitleb olulist uurimislünka, kuna soolise poliitilise brändi kujundamist Ida-Euroopa ja eelkõige Ukraina kontekstis on seni vähe uuritud ning sõjaaja tingimused lisavad keerukust, mida olemasolevad teoreetilised raamistikud pole käsitlenud.

Teoreetilises osas määratletakse isiklik bränding kui strateegiline ja pidev identiteedi kujundamise protsess. Soolisi erinevusi poliitilises kommunikatsioonis analüüsitakse sotsiaalse rolli teooria ja rolli kongruentsuse teooria kaudu, mis selgitavad, kuidas soolised stereotüübid kujundavad poliitikute enesepresentatsiooni strateegiaid ning publiku hinnanguid. Varasemate uuringute ülevaade näitab, et suurem osa teaduskirjandusest keskendub Lääne-Euroopale ja Põhja-Ameerikale ning sisuanalüüsi ja eksperimentaalseid meetodeid on harva ühendatud.

Empiiriline osa koosneb kahest järjestikusest osast. Esimeses osas analüüsitakse kvantitatiivselt 120 Instagrami postitust kümnel Sluha Narodu parlamendiliikmelt, mis koguti ajavahemikus märts 2025 kuni veebruar 2026. Teises osas viiakse läbi küsitluseksperiment 151 Ukraina Instagrami kasutajaga, kasutades stiimulitena autentseid postitusi sisuanalüüsi korpusest.

Tulemused näitavad, et soolised mustrid poliitilises kommunikatsioonis püsivad sõjaaja kontekstis, kuid ilmnevad selektiivsemalt kui olemasolev kirjandus ennustab. Meespoliitikud rõhutasid agentseid omadusi ja viitasid sõjateemadele oluliselt sagedamini kui naispoliitikud. Samas ei olnud mitmed eeldatavad erinevused, nagu personaliseeritud sisu ja emotsionaalne keel, statistiliselt olulised, mis viitab sellele, et sõjaaja surve vähendab soolisi kommunikatiivseid erinevusi. Küsitluseksperimentis said naispoliitikud madalamaid hinnanguid pädevusele ja juhtimisvõimele, kinnitades rolli kongruentsuse teooria ennustatud juhtimisusaldusväärse puudujääki. Olulisim leid oli, et professionaalne bränding tõi naispoliitikutele märkimisväärselt suurema hinnangulise kasu ning professionaalse sisu korral ei jäänud soolist erinevust pädevuse ega juhtimise hinnangutes.

Töö panustab soolise poliitilise brändi kujundamise uurimisse Ida-Euroopa kontekstis ning näitab, et sõjaaja tingimused kujundavad soolisi kommunikatsioonimustreid selektiivselt

ümber, mitte ei kõrvalda neid. Kaheosaline uurimisülesehitus, mis ühendab sisuanalüüsi ja eksperimendi sama postituste korpuse põhjal, võimaldab otsest seost täheldatud enesepresentatsiooni ja publiku taju vahel. Tulemused viitavad sellele, et professionaalne bränding võib olla tõhus vahend naispoliitikutele juhtimisusaldusväärsuse puudujäägi vähendamiseks, kuigi see järeldus on piiratud uuringu konkreetse valimi ja kontekstiga.

Uuringu peamised piirangud seisnevad fookuses ühele erakonnale ja ühele platvormile ning mugavusvalimi kasutamises noorte täiskasvanute seas. Tulevased uuringud võiksid laiendada analüüsi mitme erakonna ja platvormi võrdluste ning pikisuunaliste uuringute kaudu, mis käsitlevad soolisi brändimustreid sõjaaja ja sõjajärgse perioodi jooksul.

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