# Digital politics in transition and the new logics of fluid visibility on social media: The Ocasio-Cortez case

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ABSTRACT: In the context of the growing centrality of digital platforms in contemporary political communication, the role of social media in shaping the identity and consensus of political leaders appears increasingly crucial. The online activity of a prominent figure like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez offers valuable insights into the ongoing transformations in communication strategies and modes of interaction. The rise in engagement on platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook—contrasted with a decline in followers on X (formerly Twitter), despite increased interaction—raises essential questions about user disaffection, the role of algorithmic dynamics, and the impact of platform ownership decisions in reshaping the media ecosystem. The analysis of the data, as processed from specialized sources, contributes to a broader understanding of the shift toward a post-platform-centric communication environment, where political visibility increasingly depends on leaders' ability to adapt to technological and cultural change.

KEYWORDS: digital politics, social media engagement, platform dynamics, political communication, post-platform society

## INTRODUCTION

In the frenetic flow of digital technologies, human beings are constantly called upon to redesign their mental and experiential frameworks, engaging in a continuous process of adaptation and assimilation. This scenario echoes Piaget's (1971) thought, who argued that individuals, when faced with new stimuli, are compelled to undertake on-

going cognitive reworking to integrate the novelties imposed by the inexorable path of change. Similarly, the perspective of Activity Theory (Vygotsky, 1978) posits that cultural and communicative artifacts are not mere tools, but rather catalysts that shape and direct the ways individuals interact with their environment, engaging in a dynamic and transformative dialogue. Within this framework, it becomes clear that the internet, in all its facets, plays a predominant role in political participation (Sorice, 2020). Indeed, various digital devices serve as influential mechanisms that facilitate interaction among individuals within the complex political landscape, enabling them to actively participate in discussions, exchange information, and engage in political mobilization (Theocharis et al., 2023). Their capacity to transcend spatial and temporal boundaries and engage a wide array of actors underscores their significant role in shaping contemporary political engagement. While not entirely novel, this concept has expanded significantly in light of the ongoing process of digital and cultural convergence (Jenkins & Deuze, 2008). This digital conjugation has profoundly transformed communicative dynamics, enabling the integration of diverse channels and media into a single, versatile, and subjectively experienced communication space. The interactive nature of digital media has also opened new avenues for public activism, fostering more participatory and fluid forms of engagement (Battista, 2024a). In this context, this connection assumes central significance, referring to the process by which once-separate content forms converge into a unified digital entity. This implies interaction and interchange among various types of media—texts, images, sounds, and visual representations—within integrated platforms capable of triggering identity and relational processes inherent to the social structure in a digitally interconnected environment (Comunello, 2010). Interactivity—understood as the audience's ability to actively engage with and influence media content—represents a cornerstone of this transformation. Through comments, shares, "likes," and other forms of social exchange, the public can express opinions, emotions, and thoughts, thus contributing to a more inclusive and diverse media narrative (Hall, 2018). However, it is not limited to the mere ability of users to respond to content; rather, it refers to a set of technological and social properties that enable the active negotiation of meaning between producers and consumers (Sundar, 2020). This marks a shift from the traditional unidirectional model of communication to a more bidirectional and collaborative framework (Falkheimer & Heide, 2014). Prior to the rise of telematic networks, the constituent traits of social identity and the structure of social networks were inherently bounded by the geo-spatial and temporal constraints that defined an individual's social context (Ragnedda & Muschert, 2013). Interpersonal dynamics were primarily confined to local settings, relying heavily on physical presence and geographical proximity. In this earlier framework, social flows found expression within limited environmental contexts and were grounded in face-to-face interactions. The social network was closely interwoven with communities of belonging, including family, friends, neighborhoods, or professional circles. These ties were deeply rooted in geographic context, as opportunities for interaction were regulated by physical closeness. Thus, social networks were organized around physically accessible

relational nodes, with their scope largely determined by geographic proximity and the frequency of in-person encounters (Salzano et al., 2023). The rise and proliferation of the global network, theorized by Castells (2002), fundamentally transformed social, economic, and cultural structures, reshaping how interactions occur and how information is produced. This transition toward a society organized according to networked logic has overturned traditional paradigms of communication and power, establishing a model based on informational fluidity and the decentralization of resources. Consequently, this shift represents not merely a technological evolution but a structural transformation affecting economic, cultural, and, crucially, political processes—prompting critical reflection on the power dynamics underpinning the information age. The emergence of digital connectivity has thus opened up unprecedented horizons for configuring social networks. In recent years, a new paradigm of participation in cyberspace has emerged, as evidenced by the rise of social media, which has sparked a broad societal transformation (Lambach, 2020). Against this backdrop, it is essential to underscore how this phenomenon has served as a driving force, bringing about a radical reshaping of the social landscape and significantly expanding the scope of collective participation. Today's social structure is deeply marked by the centrality of digital media, which have become the primary locus of socialization, offering a space where individuals can engage in processes of interaction, communication, and the weaving of virtual bonds (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2014). This substantial transformation has also required individuals to adapt to a new online scenario, necessitating the acquisition of key skills to navigate this ever-evolving digital ecosystem (Gros & García-Peñalvo, 2023). This evolution has profoundly altered political communication, facilitating a shift from traditional media to digital platforms— now the primary vehicles for shaping public identity, mobilizing voters, and managing consensus, increasingly through direct engagement with online audiences (Chadwick, 2013). Born on October 13, 1989, in the Bronx, New York, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez is a prominent figure in U.S. politics, elected to the House of Representatives in 2018 as the representative of New York's 14th congressional district for the Democratic Party. Young and coming from a working-class background, AOC quickly gained notoriety not only for her political activity, focused on issues such as social justice, climate change, and economic reform, but also for her skilful use of social media as a tool for direct communication with the public.

Symbolically, AOC represents a new generation of political leaders who challenge traditional institutional and media logics, promoting an inclusive and participatory approach to politics. Her figure also embodies the mediation between politics and digital culture, serving as a reference point for analyzing visibility, engagement, and the construction of authenticity in the online public sphere. In this intricate scenario, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (AOC) has emerged as one of the most noteworthy case studies in contemporary politics, thanks to a communication strategy that is radically aligned with the languages, aesthetics, and logics of social platforms. The present study aims to analyze, through the lens of elaborated data, not only growth metrics but also the political and

cultural implications associated with specific trends. The aim is to contribute to the on-going debate on the role of digital infrastructures in shaping online consensus-building processes, where social platforms function not merely as spaces for dissemination but as genuine arenas for constructing political legitimacy (Lewandowsky, 2019). In such spaces, user participation becomes essential for the visibility and growth of political figures, while simultaneously generating new modes of political practice that influence electoral choices and shape public opinion (Valenzuela et al., 2012). This must be understood within a historical context in which traditional unidirectional communication methods have, for several years now, given way to an unstable and highly fluid communicative framework (Battista & Petrone, 2025). Analyzing the dynamics of social media interaction thus offers critical insights into how new digital tools are reshaping the relationship between politics and citizenship in a context increasingly defined by digital centrality. Understanding these phenomena is key to grasping the challenges and opportunities of the post-broadcast era.

## FORMS OF COMMUNICATION AND NEW PARADIGMS OF REPRESENTATION

For some time now, within the vast telematic web, the political universe has relied on a new and direct channel of correspondence with the electorate, allowing those who govern public affairs to reinforce their image through a more rapid and direct discourse (Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013). The days when newspapers or public rallies represented the primary tools for conveying political ideas to a given faction are now over. The political figure is now seen as a familiar, every day, approachable figure in whom the people can see themselves and identify (Marshall, 2024). The vast realm of the internet is not merely a receptacle for amplifying the fame and resonance of one's musings but emerges as an entity of far broader significance. It forges a sphere equipped with mechanisms and capacities aimed at generating meaning and disseminating value, going beyond mere unidirectional communication tools.

Modern communication means have become ubiquitous and fuel a constant metamorphosis of the media, weaving a continuum of changes that envelop not only social reality but also language and society at large. In addition to this premise, it is useful to acknowledge a fundamental assumption: the complete awareness that we are, due to this deep interweaving, immersed in a true and ongoing electoral campaign (Blumenthal, 1982). It is increasingly undeniable that politics, as traditionally understood, is tied to the transposition of media into their digital form, governed by different principles. Social media increasingly offers an indispensable space for debate, serving as an essential added value utilized by political actors. Following logics also drawn from commercial marketing, they manage the achievement of predefined programmatic goals through carefully designed strategic approaches (Abid et al., 2025). Leaders and professionals use the internet to bypass traditional media and spread their message more rapidly. In

most cases, the goal is to increase media exposure through the political process of disintermediation, enabling politicians to establish a direct and referential relationship with their electorate, bypassing traditional media narratives (Bimber & Copeland, 2013). In the current political context, analyzing the communication strategies employed by politicians in the virtual sphere presents a delicate challenge arising from the constant diversification of the political communication landscape. In an era where digital media increasingly dominate the scene, it becomes ever more urgent and necessary to assess their effects. The indispensable use of social media, combined with the recent rise of TikTok, has radically reshaped how politicians communicate with citizens (Cervi et al., 2021). This phenomenon reveals a growing field of study, as political communication is becoming increasingly influenced by algorithms, data analytics, and digital communication strategies. Furthermore, the pandemic highlighted the need better to understand the role of digital media in democratic participation, as most political activities shifted to virtual formats. This led to a major adaptation to online technologies, which have, in fact, transformed both the media and the public within the context of contemporary media ecology (Napoli, 2019). Yet, today there still exists a continuity between the offline and digital dimensions in which citizens move and act to express opinions and share their feelings in a social climate of increasing media personalization, in line with a multidimensional way of life that unfolds between online and offline (Boccia Artieri, 2012). In this context, the political figure examined here fully embodies the characteristics of the platform politician (Enli, 2017)—a key player on the political scene who not only circulates through social media but also explores and exploits the performative and rhetorical potentials of their platform. These affordances are utilized to diversify messages, amplify emotional engagement, and foster loyalty among a heterogeneous audience, thereby establishing a dense and wide-reaching communication network. Their communication style aligns with what has been defined as "relatable" (Abidin, 2021), as it draws on the codes of influencer culture, narrowing institutional distance and constructing a narrative of authenticity that resonates especially with younger segments of the electorate (Highfield, 2016). Unsurprisingly, their online visibility recalls the very features of micro-celebrity language (Senft, 2013), where authenticity, accessibility, and everyday presence become capital with significant symbolic value. Nevertheless, while existing literature has extensively documented the centrality of figures like AOC within the framework of so-called "networked populism" (Gerbaudo, 2018), there remains limited investigation into how the technical-political atmosphere of individual platforms influences public perception and communication effectiveness. This trend refers to political strategies that utilize digital networks to establish a direct connection with the public, thereby bypassing traditional institutional channels (Engesser et al., 2017). These approaches rely on direct engagement and participatory mobilization, often accentuating inclusion/exclusion dynamics mediated by the platforms. The case study highlighted here, based on the analysis of the New York congresswoman's digital performance between November 2024 and March 2025, shows sustained and cross-platform growth on all major plat-

forms (TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube), except for X (formerly Twitter), where a massive unfollowing is recorded despite increased engagement. This paradox opens a critical field of inquiry into the relationship between political actors, platforms, and the public. The platform's ownership by Elon Musk—a polarizing figure aligned with the American right—may have altered the perception of the communicative environment itself, implicitly redefining the platform's political identity, and influenced liberal and progressive audiences to unsubscribe. In this sense, the crisis between X and AOC can be interpreted as a case of algorithmic disaffection, in which it is not the political actor but the technological infrastructure that loses legitimacy. This study, therefore, does not limit itself to exploring mere growth metrics—such as follower count, engagement level, or publication frequency—but aims to delve into the functioning of digital relationships and communicative practices within online channels that contribute to the realization of political and cultural values. Far from being neutral or purely instrumental, these operations act as mechanisms capable of reshaping the forms of civic participation and rearticulating the codes of representation (Couldry & Hepp, 2017). In particular, the growing centrality of platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook—spaces that favor visual, ephemeral, and affective communication—reflects a substantial shift in contemporary political strategies, where performativity and emotional user engagement become fundamental to the communicative and symbolic success of a leader. The mediatized politics of the 21st century no longer unfold solely through programmatic speeches or official statements, but through the daily presence of a public figure, following the codes of the accessible politician (Battista, 2023a). In this sense, digital platforms do not merely serve as broadcasting channels but emerge as true worlds of discursive production and identity negotiation, capable of fostering new forms of mobilization and reinforcing—or sometimes transforming—the democratic fabric. Amid this communicative maelstrom, the politician increasingly symbolizes a hybrid between institutional representative and content creator. As such, understanding and analyzing these dynamics is essential to grasping the ongoing transformations within the labyrinthine contemporary public sphere.

Before introducing the adopted methodology, it is essential to clarify the meaning of the key concepts on which this study is based, starting with the concept of "visibility." In this context, visibility should not be understood as mere numerical exposure or online presence, but as the ability of a political actor to be perceived, recognized, and interpreted by the public through various communicative practices and media representations (Snyder, 2014). It therefore involves not only counting followers or interactions, but also understanding how content is received, shared, and reinterpreted by users, which influences perceptions, credibility, and political legitimacy (Johnson & Kaye, 2014). The term "visual journey," on the other hand, refers to the visual and communicative path that a political subject undertakes through digital media, observable not only in quantitative terms but primarily through the visual, stylistic, and discursive strategies adopted on each platform (Pearce et al., 2020). This journey allows the identification of trends, recurring patterns, and transformations in the use of digital resources, providing a richer

understanding than mere statistical analysis. The data collected in this study, although quantitative, do not have value in isolation: they allow the identification of audience growth patterns, engagement levels, and interaction modalities, which, when interpreted in the light of visual studies and digital media studies, help to understand how digital presence contributes to the construction of political visibility, perceived authenticity, and user participation (Luebke, 2021). In this way, the study aims to provide an integrated analysis of communicative phenomena and to bridge the interpretive gap between numbers and the political and cultural significance of the published content.

## METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

The choice to adopt a mixed-methods approach in studying Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's (AOC) political communication on social media stems from the need to go beyond mere quantification of interactions to explore the discursive and symbolic meanings of the published content and the observed communicative practices. This methodology enables an in-depth analysis of the processes involved in constructing visibility, perceived authenticity, and connection with voters—key aspects that cannot be fully understood through numerical data alone. Within this framework, the research employed a case study designed to interpret the communicative behaviour of a political figure representative of the hybridization between traditional politics and digital culture. For data collection, the Fanpage Karma tool was used, a software for social media analytics that enables the monitoring and comparison of account performance across different platforms. This tool allows the extraction of indicators related to engagement rates, audience growth, and interaction frequency, providing an empirical foundation for subsequent qualitative interpretation. The integrated approach adopted—combining descriptive data analysis with qualitative interpretation of communicative phenomena—therefore aims to understand how and through which visual and linguistic strategies AOC constructs her digital media presence, not merely in terms of numerical performance but by questioning the cultural and political meaning of her communicative practices. The study is therefore based on a quantitative-descriptive methodological framework aimed at examining the communication performance of the political figure Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (AOC) on social media over the period from November 6, 2024, to March 24, 2025. However, without the integration of qualitative analyses of content or comments, the collected data allow for a description of the observed phenomena but do not enable an in-depth interpretation. Therefore, the study should be considered exploratory and descriptive, providing an empirical basis for future, more detailed investigations. The investigation primarily focuses on five major digital platforms in the digital landscape—Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, and X (formerly Twitter)—which were selected based on their eclectic nature in terms of functionalities, audiences, and communication procedures. The central objective of this study is to compare the different rates of audience growth, levels of engagement, and average interactions recorded for each individual piece

of content published, to identify recurring patterns, cross-cutting trends, and differences in the representational use of each resource. These observations, interpreted through an integrative lens, allow for the capture not only of the significance of the communicative actions expressed through numbers but also of the emergence of specific declinations of the mediatization of political discourse (Lilleker et al., 2011). The investigation is part of the broader body of research on the platformization of politics, contributing to mapping the role of social media metrics as indicators not only of popularity but also of the ability to generate meaning, activate public opinion, and stratify a value-based relationship with the electorate (Van Dijck, 2013). The data used comes from a report prepared with the aid of Fanpage Karma, a social listening and social analytics tool that aggregates official platform metrics with real-time updates. This professional tool is widely used in research and digital marketing, with high reliability in detecting organic data related to followers, engagement, and content performance. The observation period spans five months, selected strategically as it follows the 2024 U.S. presidential elections and the installation of the new mandate. November 6, 2024, the starting date of the data collection, marks the day after Donald Trump's electoral victory. This event reignited political debate and intensified social media communication from a broad and diverse range of public figures, including AOC. In the context of the quantitative analysis conducted, a series of key indicators were tracked to measure Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's virtual journey across the major platforms. For each social space, the following were measured: (1) the number of new followers, calculated both in absolute and percentage terms, to assess the growth of the fan base during the considered period; (2) the engagement rate, understood as the ratio between interactions generated by published content (likes, comments, shares) and the total number of followers, following a logic now established in studies on online influence measurement (Khamis et al., 2017); (3) the average interactions per post, used as an indicator of content effectiveness, i.e., the ability of each piece of content to generate a meaningful response from the audience. Additionally, with regard specifically to the X platform, the net follower balance was also included, with particular attention to the phenomenon of unfollowing, considered an important signal of disaffection or ideological misalignment (Freelon, 2014). These variables enable a more precise delineation not only of the dynamics of digital visibility growth but also of the actual level of user interaction and engagement—critical dimensions in defining a political presence online. Of course, the data were normalized to allow for comparability between platforms with significantly different follower bases. Percentage changes were calculated in comparison to the previous homologous period (June–October 2024), to highlight trends of growth or decline. However, it is essential to consider that, although this study provides an up-to-date and analytically detailed overview of digital performance, it presents some structural limitations that should be explicitly acknowledged. First, the absence of qualitative data—such as content analysis, reading of comments, or study of visual and discursive rhetoric prevents a deeper understanding of the narrative strategies adopted and the meaning attributed by the public to the messages conveyed. Second, the decision to fo-

cus exclusively on five major platforms (Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, and X) results in the exclusion of secondary or emerging digital spaces, such as LinkedIn, Threads, and other niche participatory platforms, which could provide relevant insights for specific segments of the electorate or for sectoral communication practices (Boulianne, 2020). Despite these limitations, the quantitative framework adopted represents a significant strength, as it enables the empirical mapping of audience growth dynamics, engagement levels, and forms of interaction generated in various digital environments. Comparative analysis between platforms also enables the identification of recurring behavioral patterns among the audience and the development of interpretive hypotheses regarding the communicative effectiveness of the published content. In an era characterized by the growing platformization of public discourse (Van Dijck et al., 2018), this approach proves particularly useful for investigating how political figures adapt to the logic of media infrastructures, renegotiating their role within the digital public sphere.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

What emerges presents a particularly incisive overview of the current state of digital political communication. In parallel with the launch of the "Fight Oligarchy" tour, shared with Senator Bernie Sanders, Democratic Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (AOC) experienced a clear acceleration in audience growth and intensified engagement. However, this surge was notably absent on the X platform, owned by Elon Musk, where a net unfollowing of 435,862 users was observed.

| Platform | Followers | Engagement | Post Interaction | New Followers |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Instagram | 8.9M (+10%) | 0.39% (+17%) | 4.5% (+135%) | 814K (+3.9%) |
| Facebook | 1.9M (+3.6%) | 0.16% (+282%) | 0.63% (+504%) | 66K (+1.1K%) |
| TikTok | 4.0M (+1.3K%) | 9.7% (+276%) | 25% (+95%) | 3.7M (+2.1K%) |
| YouTube | 287K (+141%) | — | 15% (+167%) | 168K (+500%) |
| X (formerly Twitter) | 12.8M (−3.3%) | 0.43% (+267%) | 0.38% (+174%) | −436K (−783%) |

Figure 1. Author scan with the Fanpage Karma tool

The other platforms, on the other hand, showed expansive trends, with TikTok leading the way, registering a growth of 3,721,300 new followers, followed by Instagram (+814,024), YouTube (+168,000), and Facebook (+65,865). Particularly relevant are the data related to engagement and average interactions per post, which represent two crucial dimensions for measuring online communicative effectiveness (Bruns & Highfield, 2015; Khamis et al., 2017). AOC's TikTok account achieved an engagement rate of 9.7%, with a 276% increase compared to the previous period, while the average interaction per post reached 25%, marking a 95% increase. Even more significant gains were observed on Facebook (+504%) and Instagram (+135%) in terms of interactions per post. Even on X, despite the follower loss, there was an improvement in metrics: engagement grew by 267%, while the average interaction per post increased by 174%. These data show a trend

consistent with what Enli (2017) observed, namely that in recent years, the centrality of performance and the specific affordances of each platform have played a crucial role in building digital political presence. However, it is important to note that the quantitative analysis provided highlights some dynamics influenced by external factors: for example, the decline in followers on X (Twitter) during the period considered is correlated with Musk's activity, while the increase recorded on other platforms reflects a general trend of audience growth rather than the direct effect of AOC's strategies (Nelson & Lei, 2018). Moreover, the currently available data does not allow for the identification of the specific content or themes that drove these variations. For this reason, any interpretation of communicative strategies or political impact must be considered preliminary and supplemented with further qualitative analyses, such as the study of post content or user comments (Riffe et al., 2023). Adopting this perspective, the study can nonetheless contribute to mapping general patterns of engagement and fanbase growth, highlighting trends that are comparable across platforms, while acknowledging that a complete understanding of communicative phenomena would require more detailed data and content analysis. In this way, the research maintains methodological rigor without drawing unsupported conclusions. At times, this leads to a phenomenon known as dual screening (Gil de Zúñiga & Liu, 2017), which refers to the habit of users simultaneously using multiple devices or platforms to follow different or related content. This phenomenon extends beyond simple information sharing, evolving into a complex process of information exchange among various actors and the creation of new modes of interaction with content.

Dual screening is closely linked to the concept of media hybridization, understood as the fusion of traditional media (newspapers, television, radio) and digital platforms (social networks, mobile applications), along with the multiplication and recombination of content production, distribution, and consumption processes. In practice, cross-platform simultaneous consumption amplifies communicative complexity: content is no longer consumed linearly or in isolation, but within interconnected contexts where different media influence each other, generating multiple interactions and interpretations. However, this combination of dual screening and hybridization also contributes to information overload (Belabbes et al., 2023), as users are simultaneously exposed to continuous flows of messages from different sources. Understanding this relationship is crucial for analyzing how digital audiences navigate between media and platforms, constructing meaning and interactions in an increasingly integrated and complex communicative landscape. Moreover, this case illustrates how the ability to adapt to digital languages and cultures (Leaver et al., 2020) is a crucial factor in enhancing visibility, solidifying perceived authenticity, and engaging the audience. Although the data collected through Fanpage Karma provides aggregated information on interactions and engagement levels, these observations can be contextualized with evidence from the literature. Previous studies indicate that, among the analyzed platforms, TikTok records higher participation, particularly among younger demographic groups (Cervi, 2021). Based on this evidence, it is reasonable to hypothesize that the observed engagement is strongly influenced by

younger users, without assigning precise values, but identifying a trend consistent with external data and known platform behaviors. In this way, the case enables an analysis of how AOC's digital strategies intersect with the general characteristics of a younger audience, offering interpretive insights into the relationship between digital languages, political visibility, and online mobilization. This particular focus is also reinforced by the fact that the main factor not to be underestimated is the exponential growth of the fanbase on TikTok, which should be considered the true central driving force. Indeed, the Chinese platform remains a driving force behind AOC's fan base expansion, with an increase of 3,721,300 new followers, equating to a growth of +2,100% compared to the previous period. Instagram follows with +814,024 followers (+3.9%), while YouTube (+168,000) and Facebook (+65,865) show more moderate but still growth. These numbers reflect a trend already highlighted by other studies, namely that visual-centric platforms, particularly TikTok, foster a more performative and personalized form of political communication, suited to building immediate and emotional narratives (Zulli & Zulli, 2022; Battista, 2023b). In this specific case, American politics, with its direct and participatory communication style, perfectly mirrors the „political micro-celebrity" paradigm (Marwick & Boyd, 2011). From the perspective of engagement, the ratio between interactions and the follower base is also telling. TikTok records an engagement rate of 9.7% (+276%) and an average interaction per post of 25% (+95%), Instagram shows an average interaction of 4.5% (+135%), while Facebook, traditionally less dynamic, surprises with a +504% increase in interactions, and YouTube grows by +167% in interactions per post. In contrast, X shows a net loss of 435,862 followers (-3.3%) but simultaneously shows signs of vitality in qualitative data: engagement grew by +267%, and average interaction per post increased by +174%. This apparent contradiction — growth in participatory intensity but a decline in user base — suggests a possible „algorithmic polarization" (Barberá, 2020), in which only the most loyal and ideologically aligned users remain. The loss of followers could be interpreted as a form of digital exit (Hirschman, 1970), motivated by the platform's political perception following its acquisition by Elon Musk. As Gillespie (2018) pointed out, platform governance increasingly affects the quality of public discourse and the perceived credibility of the digital environment. These numbers suggest a differentiated communication strategy for each platform, in line with what Klinger and Svensson (2015) theorized regarding "media logic hybridity." In this context, media logic refers to the inherent rules, norms, and practices of each platform that shape how content is produced, distributed, and received. Different platforms favor different types of content, interaction patterns, and visibility mechanisms. For instance, TikTok emphasizes short, creative, and viral videos, while X/Twitter prioritizes brevity and timeliness, and Instagram values curated visual aesthetics. Politicians engaging in media logic hybridity must therefore adapt their communication strategies to the specific affordances of each platform, integrating diverse languages and practices within an increasingly sophisticated cross-media logic.

Overall, this evidence suggests that communicative effectiveness cannot be measured

solely in quantitative terms (e.g., number of followers), but instead requires a qualitative analysis of engagement and the ability to activate genuine participatory dynamics. In such a diversified environment, digital political communication is increasingly performative, where authenticity, immediacy, and adaptability become crucial for capturing and maintaining audience attention (Papacharissi, 2010). The case under examination also highlights the prominent role of algorithmic listening and the interpretation of weak signals emerging from social media, which are crucial for understanding shifts within the support base (Highfield, 2017). This process enables the detection of emerging trends, preferences, and shifts in audience perception, even when they are not immediately apparent from aggregated metrics such as the number of followers or overall interactions (Dodds et al., 2023). The exceptional growth on TikTok, for example, is not merely a numerical outcome, but signals the rise of new communication paradigms that favor short-form, personalized, and emotionally engaging content (Burgess & Green, 2018). The high interaction rate, in this sense, becomes a sign of a highly involved public actively participating in the construction of political discourse. The algorithmic logics that regulate content visibility and virality require political leaders to develop cross-media communicative competence, capable of adapting to the specific codes and formats of each platform (Chadwick, 2017). Consequently, digital success is no longer tied solely to exposure but depends on the ability to construct narratives that transcend platforms, generate identity recognition, and foster mobilization—especially in a historical phase marked by disintermediation and fragmented attention (Karppi & Crawford, 2016). Ultimately, the data analyzed confirms that digital political presence can no longer ignore platform-specific strategies that integrate performance and a deep understanding of algorithmic logics. Only in this way will it be possible to build meaningful and lasting relationships with connected communities.

## CONCLUSION

The digital case of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez between November 2024 and March 2025 represents a particularly significant case for observing the evolution of political communication in the post-platform-centric era, due to her intense digital presence and innovative use of social media, which allows for the analysis of visibility, engagement, and the construction of political legitimacy from a critical media studies perspective. On one hand, the Democratic congresswoman confirms herself as a leader capable of strategically using social networks to strengthen her symbolic and relational capital; on the other hand, the fracture that emerged with X (formerly Twitter) signals that it is no longer enough to simply "inhabit" platforms: today, it is also necessary to choose them based on the coherence between one's political identity and the infrastructural identity of digital environments. However, it is necessary to interpret the observed decline in followers on X with caution, as this decrease may not reflect ideological disaffection among the public but could primarily result from the mass removal of inactive or fake accounts following

Elon Musk's acquisition of the platform in 2023. Beyond this, the numbers speak clearly: AOC has been able to expand her following and amplify the reach of her messages, particularly on platforms that favor a more intimate, participatory, and relational narrative aesthetic—especially TikTok and Instagram. At the same time, the loss of followers on X highlights a growing politicization of the platforms themselves, which have shifted from being neutral spaces for communication to becoming actual actors in the democratic game, capable of influencing—and sometimes diverting—flows of legitimacy and trust. In this scenario, it becomes essential to adopt an ecosystemic view of political communication, where the choice of platforms, content production, and the ability to activate networks of meaning and mobilization must be integrated within a strategic and modular logic (Chadwick, 2017). The AOC case demonstrates that the most effective political figures today are those who can manage multi-platform environments, where message personalization, audience segmentation, and careful consideration of technological governance dynamics are central. Her strength lies in her ability to embody a media leadership model that we can define as hybrid and post-bureaucratic: capable of simultaneously speaking the languages of activism, institutionality, and digital marketing (Vaccari & Valeriani, 2021). In this context, political communication transforms into an adaptive practice that requires narrative, technical, and relational skills, developing in an environment where technological affordances, algorithmic rules, and visibility dynamics are continuously negotiated (Yasseri et al., 2016). AOC's ability to build trust, community, and mobilization through short, visual, and performative formats represents an effective response to the attention crisis and hypercompetition characterizing the current media environment. However, conclusions regarding effectiveness and strategic impact should be interpreted with caution: the data allow us to observe correlations between the formats used, follower growth, and interactions, but do not permit direct causal inferences. This awareness, therefore, remains an important indicator, but should be understood as a trend rather than proof of a definite effect. In this context, digital leadership does not merely consist of maintaining an online presence, but rather in the continuous ability to negotiate with the material and symbolic conditions of platforms, recognizing their limits, opportunities, and democratic implications.

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