

A proper Statesman: Viktor Orbán and the use of pictures on Facebook



Sophie Schmalenberger

2016. december

A proper Statesman: Viktor Orbán and the use of pictures on Facebook

Social Media have become an indispensable aspect of political communication, so that even for Orbán who's party FIDESZ exerts direct and indirect influence on Hungarian media, they constitute an important channel to more informally connect with audiences and mobilize support. Here, Facebook is an attractive medium to directly connect with the public; or more precisely with a certain share of the public, namely the currently ca. 537.000 Hungarian (and international) Facebook users who "follow" Orbán on Facebook – most of them probably to be categorized as supporters or sympathizers.

This short analysis focuses on the pictures of Viktor Orbán employed in course of the communication via his Facebook account. Especially in the online realm pictures are important means of conveying (nonverbal) messages, signifying a meaning that would be much harder to put in words and thereby (co)-shaping his public image as a political leader – or at least revealing the image Orbán strategically attempts to convey of himself.

Between 1st April and 31st July 2016, around 150 pictures of Orbán were posted on his Facebook page, the majority of them in samples of pictures, so called albums. The photos look very professional (in terms of quality) but not staged and rather aim offer a "behind the scene" impression of Orbán in his everyday life as political leader. Most of the photos show him on travels abroad, attending international summits, visiting other states and meeting leading politicians. Fewer pictures portray Orbán on events in Hungary, a hybrid category is the pictures of Orbán visiting regions in Serbia and Romania where high percentages of ethnic Hungarians live. Another category shows Orbán as football fan, visiting local Clubs or posing with Hungarian fans on occasion of the National Team's matches during the European Championships: Here children seem to be a desired picture element.

Over all Orbán appears rather serious, concentrated and purposeful in his actions. Most of the times he is surrounded by high rank political leaders - among them the US President, German and Austrian Chancellors or Egyptian Prime Minister - or other officials, mostly in prestigious surroundings. A frequent picture is Orbán standing on a stage or speakers lectern – sometimes alone, sometimes sided by other officials or speakers, talking seriously and engaged, listened to by the audience and fellow politicians. Moreover, he is often portrayed walking in a statesman-like habitus and talking to high-rank politicians away from stages and microphones, mostly with a serious and lesser with a cordial or friendly face expression. The Hungarian flag is often a background element in the picture, reminding the viewer on whose behalf Orbán is acting.

In a few pictures he directly interacts with audiences, interestedly listening to their questions or comments or friendly shaking hands of single civilians who clearly appreciate his presence. The pictures

related to his passion, football, seem to show a personal side of him and especially by engaging with the youngest members of Hungarian football clubs and fans he seems to deeply care about Hungary's future and prosperity not only in world politics but also in more trivial fields.

To sum it up the analysis suggests that pictures portraying Orbán are used for a strategic purpose: They aim to evoke or reaffirm among his followers the feeling of having a quality insight into the everyday life of a purposeful, dedicated statesman who proficiently encounters other political leaders on a frequent basis, who is valued and listened to by international audiences, politicians and other negotiation partners and dedicated to representing his Hungarian nation's interest on a national and international, with concentration and dedication working on pushing them through.