

Family Imagery as Strategy: Sharenting Practices in Danish Politicians' Use of Instagram

Maja Sonne Damkjaer, Aarhus University
Janne Nielsen, Aarhus University

Family imagery has become an increasingly salient element of contemporary political communication, particularly on visually oriented platforms such as Instagram. While research has examined personalization, privatization, and authenticity as communicative strategies online (Enli, 2015; Enli & Rosenberg, 2018; Atia & Balmas, 2025; Pedersen, 2024), the specific use of children and family life—political sharenting—remains comparatively underexplored. This gap is especially relevant in Nordic political contexts, where high trust, egalitarian norms, and strong media literacy shape expectations of political transparency and intimacy (Kalsnes, Larsson, & Enli, 2017; Ekman & Widholm, 2014). Instagram's lifestyle aesthetics and conventions of mediated intimacy further provide fertile conditions for family imagery to be mobilized as political capital (Leaver, Highfield, & Abidin, 2020; Marquart, 2023).

This paper investigates how Danish politicians mobilize family imagery on Instagram as part of their political branding and communicative repertoire. It asks: what types of family content do Danish politicians share, and what strategic purposes do these practices serve in terms of personalization, value signalling, and political positioning?

The conceptual framework brings together research on digital political communication—which highlights how images shape identity construction, relatability, and affective engagement (Veneti et al., 2019; Farkas & Bene, 2020; Farkas, 2024)—with scholarship on sharenting, concerned with intimacy, care, and children's visibility in digital environments (Autenrieth, 2018; Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017; Damkjær, 2018; Holiday et al. 2022; Lazard et al., 2019; Leaver et al., 2020).

The study draws on qualitative visual analysis of Instagram posts from six Danish millennial MPs (born 1982–1992), comprising more than 2,000 images posted between 2020 and 2025. The analysis proceeds through mapping family content, conducting close readings of selected posts, and interpreting the political functions of this imagery along a continuum from self-presentation (authenticity, ordinariness) to political argumentation (value signalling, issue advocacy, mobilization).

The findings indicate that political sharenting performs multiple communicative and strategic functions. We conceptualize political sharenting as a continuum comprising three ideal types: (1) *everyday-life sharenting*, where domestic scenes construct ordinariness and relatability; (2) *strategic sharenting*, where family imagery is explicitly linked to policy issues or political values; and (3) *negotiated sharenting*, where the partial concealment of children functions as ethical signalling and boundary work.

Taken together, the analysis demonstrates how everyday domesticity is intertwined with strategic political expression and how politicians' sharenting connects politics to broader cultural scripts of authenticity, parenthood, and moral leadership, revealing how affective and relational capital is mobilized and negotiated in digital political branding. These practices further exhibit varying degrees of reflexivity regarding children's visibility and privacy, situating political sharenting within wider debates about children's mediated visibility.

References

- Atia, N., & Balmas, M. (2025). *Personalization and privatization of politics*. Routledge.
- Autenrieth, U. (2018). Family photography in a networked age: Anti-sharenting as a reaction to risk assessment and behaviour adaptation. In G. Mascheroni, C. Ponte, & A. Jorge (Eds.), *Digital parenting: The challenges for families in the digital age* (pp. 219–231). Nordicom.
<https://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:norden:org:diva-12034>
- Blum-Ross, A., & Livingstone, S. (2017). “Sharenting,” parent blogging, and the boundaries of the digital self. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 61(3), 399–414.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/08838151.2017.1343376>
- Damkjær, M. S. (2018). Sharenting = good parenting? Four parental approaches to sharenting on Facebook. In G. Mascheroni, C. Ponte, & A. Jorge (Eds.), *Digital parenting: The challenges for families in the digital age* (pp. 209–218). Nordicom.
<https://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:norden:org:diva-12033>
- Ekman, M., & Widholm, A. (2014). Twitter and the celebritisation of politics. *Celebrity Studies*, 5(4), 518–520. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19392397.2014.982867>
- Enli, G. (2015). *Mediated authenticity: How the media constructs reality*. Peter Lang.
- Enli, G., & Rosenberg, L. T. (2018). Trust in the age of social media: Populist politicians seem more authentic. *Communication & Society*, 31(1), 131–141. <https://doi.org/10.15581/003.31.1.131-141>
- Farkas, X. (2024). Visual political communication research: A literature review from 2012 to 2022. *Journal of Visual Political Communication*, 10(2), 95–126. https://doi.org/10.1386/jvpc_00027_1
- Farkas, X., & Bene, M. (2020). Images, politicians, and social media: Patterns and effects of politicians’ image-based political communication on Facebook. *Information, Communication & Society*, 23(11), 1655–1675. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2019.1637444>
- Holiday, S., Norman, M. S., & Densley, R. L. (2022). Sharenting and the extended self: self-representation in parents’ Instagram presentations of their children. *Popular Communication*, 20(1), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15405702.2020.1744610>
- Kalsnes, B., Larsson, A. O., & Enli, G. (2017). The social media logic of political interaction: Exploring citizens’ and politicians’ relationship on Facebook and Twitter. *First Monday*, 22(2). <https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v22i2.6348>
- Lazard, L., Capdevila, R., Dann, C., Locke, A., & Roper, S. (2019). Sharenting: Pride, affect and the day-to-day politics of digital mothering. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 13(12), e12443. <https://doi.org/10.1111/spc3.12443>
- Leaver, T., Highfield, T., & Abidin, C. (2020). *Instagram: Visual social media cultures*. Polity.

Marquart, F. (2023). Video killed the Instagram star: The future of political communication is audio-visual. *Journal of Visual Political Communication*, 10(1), 49–57. https://doi.org/10.1386/jvpc_00024_1

Pedersen, R. T. (2024). Party soldiers on personal platforms: Politicians' personalised use of social media. *Political Communication*, 41(2), 123–145. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2022.2145678>

Veneti, A., Jackson, D., & Lilleker, D. G. (Eds.). (2019). *Visual political communication*. Springer.

Author bios

Maja Sonne Damkjaer is Associate Professor of Media Studies at Aarhus University. Her research examines how digital media reshape intimacy, parenthood, and children's visibility in platformed environments. She specialises in the mediatization of life transitions, family life, and the cultural politics of sharenting, analysing their communicative, affective, and ethical implications. Her current work investigates how family imagery operates as strategic and affective capital in public, commercial, and political communication.

Janne Nielsen is Associate Professor of Media Studies at Aarhus University. She is on the board of the Centre for Internet Studies (AU), and a member of The Centre for Digital Methods and Media (AU) and the Center for Digital History Aarhus (AU). Research interests include internet studies, privacy and consent online, media history and historiography, digital archives and methods. Current projects focus on political communication on social media and media coverage and digital archives.