

Facebook vs. Instagram: Which Social Network Can Help One Become President?

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Received: April, 2024
1st Revision: May, 2024
Accepted: June, 2024

ABSTRACT. Background: The influence of social media on the effectiveness of political campaigns has grown substantially over the past few years. The candidates exhibit differences in performance, a factor that has a direct impact on their ultimate outcome. **Aims:** The purpose of this research is to provide a comparative analysis of the social media campaigns carried out by Ivan Korčok and Peter Pellegrini, both of whom were candidates for the president of Slovakia. **Methods:** Primarily employing quantitative approaches, the study assesses advertising expenditure, follower growth, post frequency, and interaction rates. The study examines the official Facebook and Instagram accounts of both candidates, along with data extracted from the Meta Ads Library. **Results:** The outcomes demonstrate differences in the effectiveness of social media strategies, in which Ivan Korčok showed notable growth in both follower count and engagement rates. **Conclusions:** As a result of the importance of consistent publishing and advertising in contemporary political campaigns, the need for an efficient social media strategy is emphasized in the conclusion. **Implications:** Additional research could be conducted to determine the optimal publishing frequency and content strategies for increasing campaign effectiveness and voter engagement.

Keywords: Political marketing, Social media, Facebook, Instagram, Presidential elections, Campaign

JEL Classification: example D02, O17, P31

DOI: 10.54933/jmbrp-2024-16-1-3

Kamenský, J., Laudárová, L. & Mikulášová, Z. (2024). Facebook vs. Instagram: Which Social Network Can Help One Become President?. Journal of Management and Business: Research and Practice, 16(1). doi: 10.54933/jmbrp-2024-16-1-3

Introduction

Political campaigns in Slovakia, like in the rest of the globe, have experienced a transformation. Politicians and their strategists are seeking to exploit this potential to sway voters in their favor, and they are prepared to commit substantial amounts to social media platforms.

Despite the Act on Election Campaigns (2014) setting the financial cap for the presidential election in Slovakia at 500,000 euros, campaign teams are enthusiastic about allocating a major portion of their money to social media advertising, as explained in this article. The allocation of funds to the social media teams is not within the scope of this study.

According to the official election control authority in Slovakia, Štatistický úrad (2024), the candidates Peter Pellegrini and Ivan Korčok received the majority of votes in the first round. Ivan Korčok received 42.51% of the votes, which is equivalent to 958,393 votes, while Peter Pellegrini received 37.05% of the votes, totaling 834,718 votes. Peter Pellegrini became victorious in the second round, garnering 53.12% of the votes, which amounted to 1,409,255 votes. In contrast, Ivan Korčok received 46.87% of the votes, totaling 1,243,709 votes. As stated in the methodology chapter, this research centers on the social media presence of these two candidates.

Theoretical background

In political marketing, marketing principles are applied to the promotion of candidates and parties to the voters. It involves understanding voter behavior, voter segmentation, targeting voter groups, and crafting messages with the potential to get voter attention, effectively utilizing various communication channels (Johnson et al., 2023).

Political marketing can change public opinion and voter behavior using tools and strategies like those used in commercial marketing (Woolley and Howard, 2016). The goal is to persuade voters and make them feel like part of the political process, creating a connection and commitment to the political candidate or party (Kreiss, 2016).

The topic of political marketing in Slovakia was elaborated by Štarchoň and Smolková (2019), where the study found that results from research agencies often failed to accurately predict election outcomes, highlighting the need to improve marketing communication strategies to deeply understand voter behaviour and preferences. Jánošová and Bundzíková (2020) conducted a study comparing the use of marketing communication tools by conservative and liberal parties during election campaigns. They found that the effectiveness of these campaigns is largely dependent on the communication style of the parties and their continued outreach to the electorate after the election. Other researchers who have addressed this topic include Krivý and Mesežnikov (2020), Fico and Kohut (2019), Vrabc (2018), and Havlík (2017).

Choi and Thoeni (2023) suggest that it is essential that voters subjected to political marketing have trust in the politician or influencer supporting them. However, Jánošová, D., and Bundzíková, R. (2020) postulate that during the election cycle, the pressure on voters is too strong, and less can be more, meaning political marketers must be careful not to overdo it.

When analysing the 2019 presidential elections, it is remarkable that Zuzana Čaputová, despite her almost complete lack of political experience, achieved a triumph in the second round over the experienced diplomat Maroš Šefčovič. A study by Svidroňová, Kaščáková, and Bambuseková (2019) finds that Zuzana Čaputová's high Facebook activity contributed significantly to her voter engagement, which likely played a key role in her success in the second round of the election. Although Zuzana Čaputová posted only 7 posts more than Maroš Šefčovič, she achieved a significantly higher number of shares and comments. Zuzana Čaputová's posts received 118,792 shares and 869,462 comments, while Maroš Šefčovič received 19,851 shares and 45,874 comments.

Social media strategies use platforms like Facebook and Instagram to communicate with voters, share political messages, and mobilize supporters. Strategic planning in social media marketing is essential for maximizing engagement and reach (Dwivedi et al., 2023). Tailored content and targeted advertising resonate more with specific voter demographics, leading to higher engagement rates (Kizgin et al., 2023).

In Slovakia, the topic of social media was the focus of Jenčová, S., and Miškufová, M. (2023) and Vozár M., Kajanová, J., and Barteková, N. (2023). Smolková, E., and Smolka, S. (2021) suggest that the role of digital marketing will be increasingly important in future political campaigns.

The frequency of posting has a significant impact on voter engagement, which is crucial for gaining the vote in elections. Consistent posting on social media helps maintain interest and engagement, with 5 – 7 posts per week being the ideal frequency (Lee, Hosanagar, and Nair, 2018).

In the **methodological part** of this research, we will focus on the strategies of Ivan Korčok and Petr Pellegrini on the social networks Facebook and Instagram. It describes the process of collecting data from official social media accounts and the Meta Ads Library and analyses the increase in followers, frequency of posts, interactions, and ad spending.

In the **results section**, we will examine two selected social networks: Facebook and Instagram. The first part of our analysis focuses on Facebook, covering several key aspects: trends in Facebook fans, an overview of candidates' activities on Facebook, the frequency of posts on Facebook, and interactions on Facebook. The same methodological approach was applied to Instagram. The chapter concludes with an overview of advertising on both Facebook and Instagram.

The **conclusion and discussion** section summarizes the role of social media in the Slovak presidential elections and compares the success of Ivan Korčok and Petr Pellegrini on social media platforms. It discusses implications for future political campaigns and offers recommendations for further research. It also considers external factors and other social media platforms for future analysis.

Methodology

The aim of this study is to analyze the social media strategies used by Slovak presidential candidates Ivan Korčok and Peter Pellegrini on Facebook and Instagram in the observation period from January 2024 to April 2024. The methodology involves tools for collecting, processing, and analyzing data to assess the growth of followers, the frequency of posts, interactions, and spending on advertisements.

The growth in followers represents an increase in the number of followers on the candidates' social networks. This indicator is measured by recording the number of followers at the beginning and at the end of the reporting period (January 2024 to April 2024). The growth in the number of followers indicates the reach and popularity of the candidates' social media presence.

The frequency of posts represents the number of posts that candidates posted on their social networks during the reporting period. The frequency of posts helps to understand the candidates' engagement strategy and their consistency in keeping voters interested.

Interactions represent the total number of engagements (likes, comments, shares) on candidates' posts. Interactions reflect the level of engagement and interaction that candidates receive from their followers.

Ad spend represents the amount of money spent on Facebook and Instagram ads. This metric is measured using data from the Meta Ads Library. Ad spend indicates a candidate's investment in social media advertising and its potential impact on reach and engagement with followers.

The candidates Ivan Korčok and Peter Pellegrini were selected for this research based on the official election results provided by the Štatistický úrad (2024), which showed that only three candidates received more than 5 percent of the votes in the first round. Štefan Harabin, the third candidate, was excluded from our research due to not having an official Facebook account during the campaign.

The data were obtained from the official Facebook and Instagram accounts of both candidates, as well as from the Meta Ads Library for advertisement data. The follower numbers were monitored schedule, and the number of postings, classified by their respective types (status updates, photographs, videos, carousels, and reels), were documented. The overall interaction was measured by aggregating engagement data, such as likes, comments, and shares. Data pertaining to advertisements, such as the quantity of advertising, overall expenditure, and impressions, were retrieved from the Meta advertising Library.

The collection of time series data began on January 9, 2024, representing the official initiation of the presidential campaign as documented in the Collection of Laws (2024).

Descriptive statistics provided an overview of the overall counts and changes over time, whereas growth rates for followers and interactions were calculated as percentages. Time-series graphs illustrate the trends in the growth of followers, frequency of posts, and interactions, highlighting patterns and sudden increases that align with important campaign events. The comparison tables provided an overview of the data for both candidates, while the correlation analysis investigated the connection

between advertisement spending and interaction rates. The study included qualitative content analysis to interpret the influence of various types of posts on user engagement.

The data were obtained from publicly accessible sources, with strict adherence to privacy regulations, and in accordance with ethical norms for online research.

The study's dependence on data that is accessible to the public restricts the level of detail in the findings, especially when it comes to information about the characteristics of the followers. Moreover, the accuracy of metrics could be influenced by platform-specific algorithms and data reporting procedures.

The study presents a thorough assessment of the social media tactics employed by Ivan Korčok and Peter Pellegrini, combining quantitative and qualitative analysis to provide in-depth insights into the efficacy of their campaigns during the Slovak presidential election.

Results

On Facebook, Peter Pellegrini was at a large advantage as the starting position of fans was significantly higher compared to Ivan Korčok. Pellegrini began the campaign with 326,755 followers, whereas Korčok started with 41,699 followers. This substantial initial gap provided Pellegrini with a strong boost from the start.

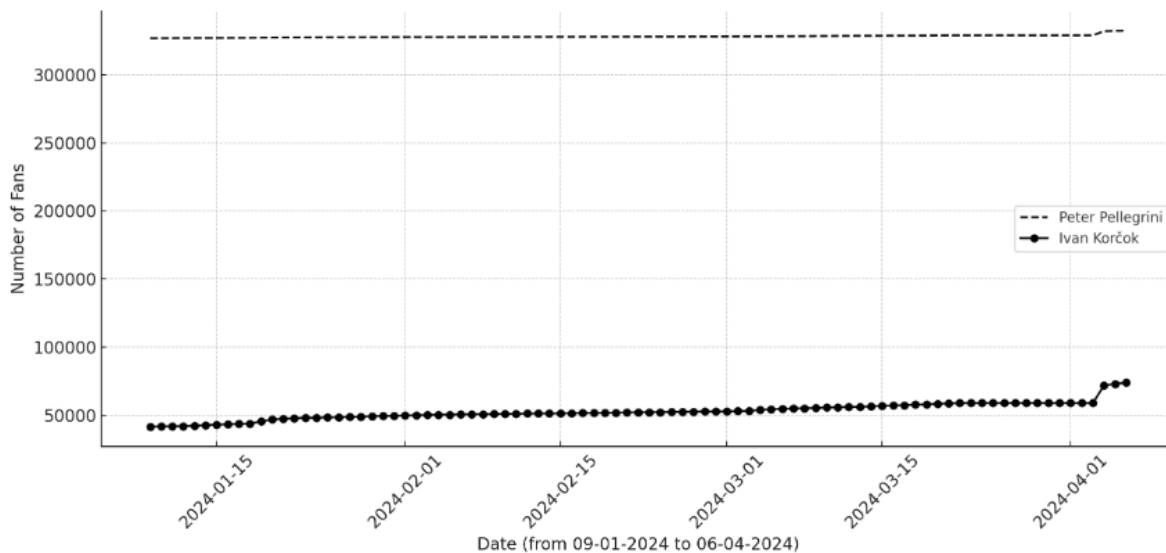


Figure 1. Fans Trend on Facebook

Source: Facebook

Peter Pellegrini maintained a consistently high number of followers throughout the campaign period, with his initial follower count of 326,755 increasing only slightly by 1.68% to reach 332,246 by April 2024. In contrast, Ivan Korčok experienced a significant increase in followers, starting with 41,699 and growing by 77.28% to reach 73,975 by the end of the campaign (see Table 1 and Figure 1). The rapid growth of Korčok's followers, while notable, resulted in a follower count that is still only slightly over one-fifth of Pellegrini's total due to Pellegrini's already high baseline from his previous political engagements.

Table 1. Summary of candidates' activity on Facebook

	Ivan Korčok	Peter Pellegrini
Initial Fans	41699	326755
Fan's change	32,276 (77.28%)	5,491 (1.68%)
Total Interactions	1,655,506	1,338,794
Admin Posts	Total: 445 (statuses: 21, videos: 164, photos: 259, carousels: 1)	Total: 285 (statuses: 5, links: 1, videos: 145, photos: 124, reels: 10)

Source: Own processing from Facebook

Both candidates heavily focused on photos and videos. Ivan Korčok posted 259 photos and 164 videos, while Peter Pellegrini posted 124 photos and 145 videos (Table 1). Additionally, Pellegrini experimented with reels, posting 10 of them, whereas Korčok did not utilize this new format on Facebook. The posting trend graph shows periods of heightened activity corresponding to crucial campaign milestones (see Figure 2).

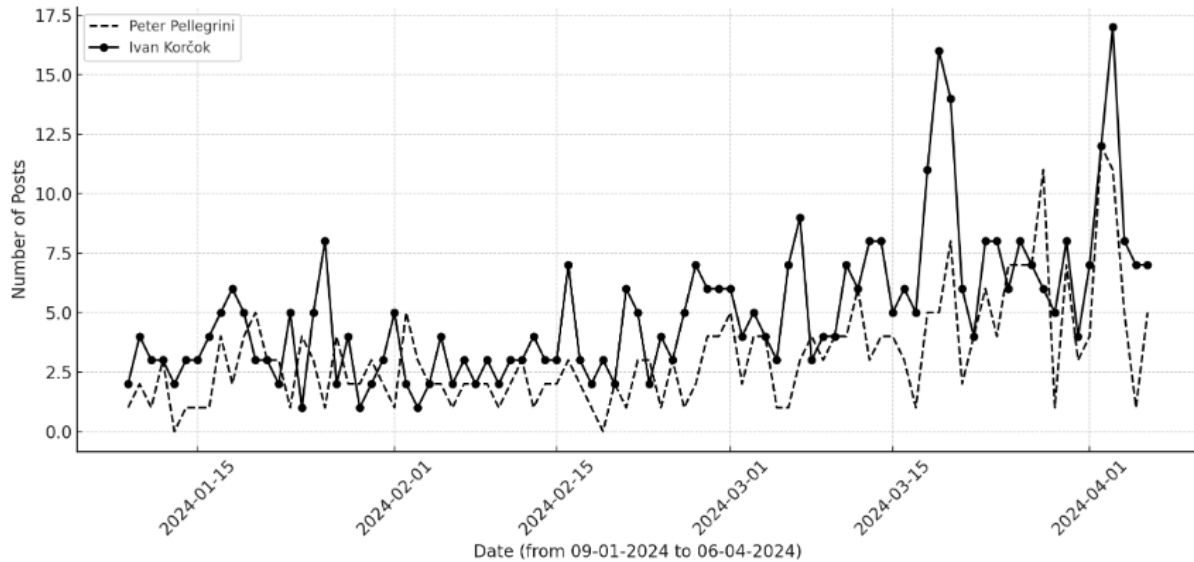


Figure 2. Frequency of Posts on Facebook

Source: Facebook

In terms of interactions, Ivan Korčok outperformed Peter Pellegrini with a total of 1,655,506 interactions compared to Pellegrini's 1,338,794 (Table 1). This higher engagement rate for Korčok indicates a more active and possibly more engaged follower base. The interaction spikes for both candidates demonstrate the dynamic nature of social media engagement during the campaign period. Notably, interactions increased significantly towards the end of the campaign, likely due to heightened voter attention and increased ad spending (see Figure 3 and Figure 7)

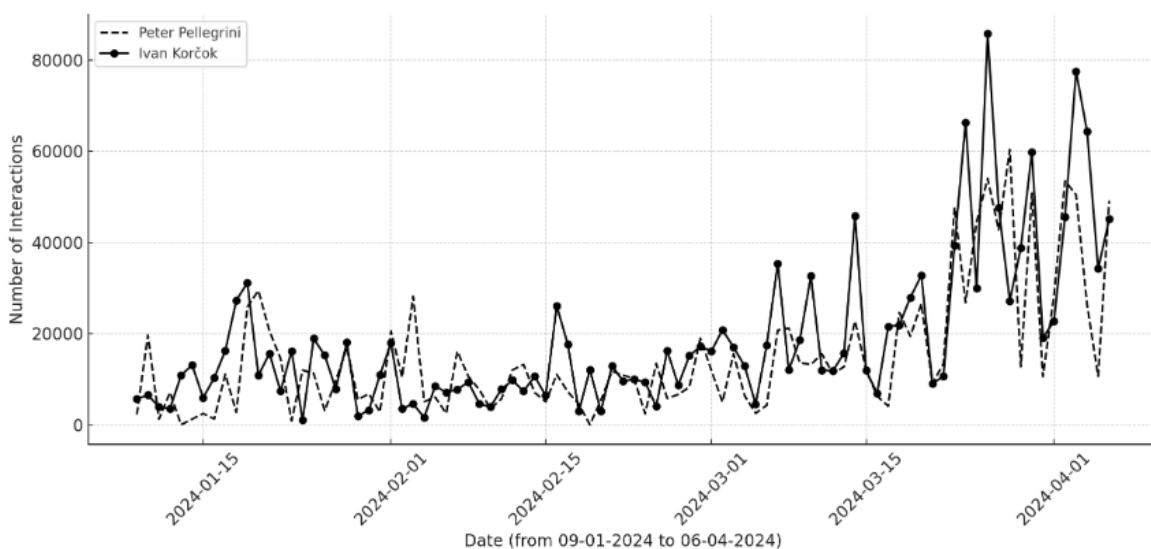


Figure 3. Interactions on Facebook

Source: Facebook

On Instagram, both candidates demonstrated significant efforts to increase their follower base and engagement, albeit starting from different initial positions.

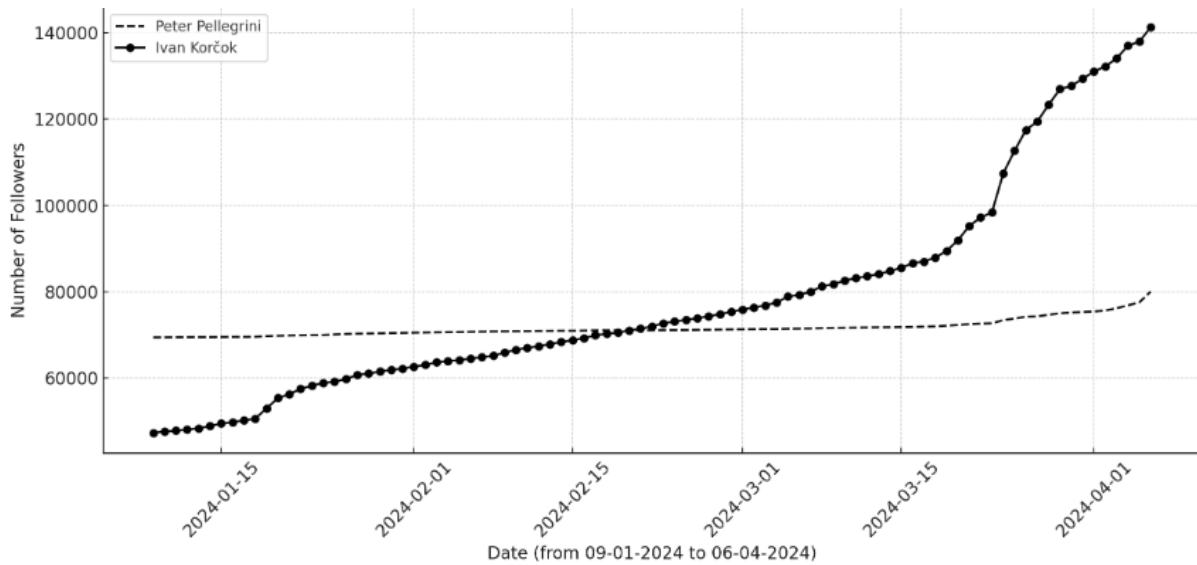


Figure 4. Followers Trend on Instagram
 Source: Instagram

Ivan Korčok started with 47,268 followers and experienced substantial growth, increasing his follower count by 199.04% to reach 141,288 by the end of the campaign. Peter Pellegrini began with 69,400 followers and saw a growth of 15.29%, reaching 80,014 followers (see Figure 4 and Table 2). This notable growth for Korčok on Instagram mirrors his success on Facebook, and on Instagram, he rapidly overcame Pellegrini in terms of total followers.

Table 2. Summary of candidate's activity on Instagram

	Ivan Korčok	Peter Pellegrini
Initial Followers	47,268	69,400
Follower Change	+94,020 (199.04%)	+10,614 (15.29%)
Total Interactions	1,655,506	372,220
Total Posts	445 (statuses: 21, videos: 164, photos: 259, carousels: 1)	217 (carousel: 37, photos: 63, reels: 117)

Source: Own processing from Instagram

Both candidates were active in posting content on Instagram. Ivan Korčok posted a total of 445 times compared to Peter Pellegrini's 217 posts (Table 2). Korčok's posts were a mix of carousels, photos, and videos, whereas Pellegrini also utilized the reel format extensively, posting 117 reels. The heightened activity in posts, particularly close to critical campaign milestones, contributed to the increased engagement observed (see Figure 5).

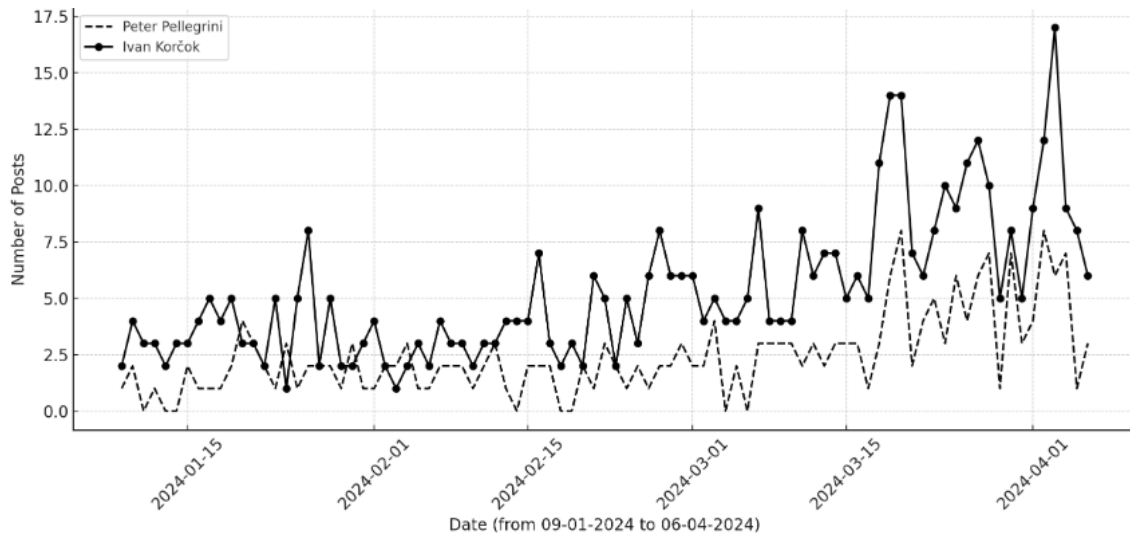


Figure 5. Frequency of Posts on Instagram
 Source: Instagram

Interactions on Instagram also highlighted a strong performance by Ivan Korčok, who accumulated a total of 1,655,506 interactions compared to Peter Pellegrini's 372,220 interactions (Table 2). The engagement rates for both candidates increased significantly as the campaign progressed, with notable spikes towards the end, especially for Korčok. This suggests increased voter attention and strategic ad spending, even though the spending was similar for both candidates (see Figure 6 and Figure 7).

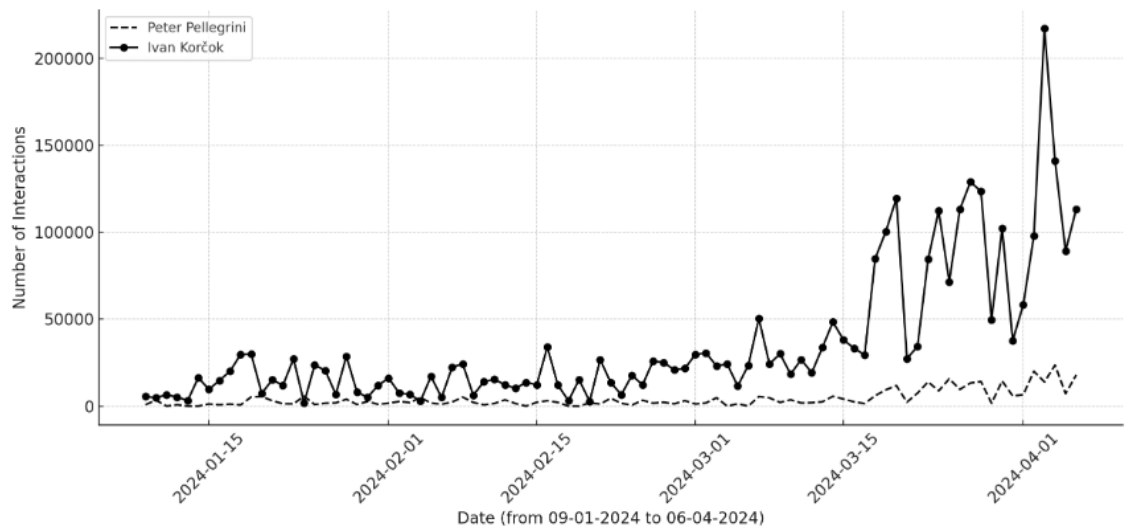


Figure 6. Interactions on Instagram
 Source: Instagram

The advertisement data indicates that both candidates invested significantly in Facebook and Instagram ads.

Table 3. Advertisement on Facebook

	Ivan Korčok	Peter Pellegrini
Number of ads (total)	183	277
Total spend (as a range)	€39,800 - €61,517	€18,700 - €46,923
Total impressions	15,252,000 - 17,999,817	14,194,000 - 15,762,724

Source: Own processing from Meta Ads Library

Ivan Korčok ran fewer ads on Facebook but spent significantly more overall, resulting in a higher number of impressions. Conversely, Peter Pellegrini ran more ads but with a lower total spend, achieving fewer impressions in comparison (Table 3).

Table 4. Advertisement on Instagram

	Ivan Korčok	Peter Pellegrini
Number of ads (total)	117	232
Total spend (as a range)	€23,900 - €37,083	€14,400 - €38,168
Total impressions	6,886,000 - 8,191,883	6,238,000 - 6,294,769

Source: Own processing from Meta Ads Library

On Instagram, Ivan Korčok ran fewer ads but spent more overall, resulting in a higher number of impressions. Peter Pellegrini ran more ads but with a lower total spend, achieving fewer impressions in comparison (Table 4).

Conclusion and discussion

Social media played a crucial role in the outcome of the Slovak presidential election in 2024. Given the substantial number of impressions totaling in tens of millions, it is logical to assume that the majority of the public was impacted by diverse social media campaigns. Both Peter Pellegrini and Ivan Korčok dedicated substantial portions of their campaign budgets to social media advertising, while simultaneously continuing to put money in traditional political marketing techniques.

Despite initially being a somewhat unknown contender (compared to ex-prime minister Pellegrini) with a far smaller following, Ivan Korčok managed to surpass Peter Pellegrini on Facebook and particularly on Instagram, where he outperformed him by almost an order of magnitude. These findings indicate that Ivan Korčok's voter base consists primarily of a younger demographic who are more active on Instagram, aligning with general expectations.

Ivan Korčok exceeded the predictions indicated by the poll figures and emerged victorious in the first round with a substantial margin. This can be due to a substantial advantage on Instagram, however, additional research is necessary to validate the causality.

The findings indicate that upcoming political efforts will increasingly utilize both Facebook and Instagram. However, there is still potential to extend our analysis to other social media platforms such as X (formerly known as Twitter), Threads, TikTok, and others. We should also note that indicators such as follower growth and interaction rates can be influenced by specific social networking algorithms and the number of influencers who have endorsed individual candidates in campaigns. The reach of influencers and their engagement with their own followers can affect the visibility and perceived popularity of candidates, thus introducing variability that is beyond the direct control of the campaign strategies themselves.

Our research does not account for the influence of external factors that could affect social media interaction and campaign effectiveness, such as current political events, media coverage, or the mood of the community. It is recommended that future research should investigate the optimal number of daily posts that candidates should produce. This is because the highest number of posts published per day was more than 10, which is significantly different from the indicated average of roughly 1 post per day by Lee, Hosanagar, and Nair (2018), this being a specific aspect of political marketing.

Moreover, numerous significant research questions arise. Future studies might prioritize conducting keyword analysis on the most successful posts and ads, targeting voter demographics that are segmented based on certain criteria, and completing comparison analysis to determine the effectiveness of online campaign spending compared to traditional methods.

Acknowledgement

This paper is the output of the scientific grant VEGA 1/0109/23 Framework for systematisation of digital transformation in organisations with a focus on marketing and business processes.

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