The making of a captain: The production and projection of a political image on the Tony Abbott Facebook page

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Abstract

Literature on politicians' use of social media tends to concentrate on election campaigns rather than on their everyday use. In examining the construction of 'Facebook Tony Abbott' (an Australian conservative federal politician and ex-Prime Minister), this paper examines how his image uploads, with five main themes: military, heterosexual family, statesmanship, athleticism and activeness, assembled a broader political persona. These images serve to promote such mythic campaign image categories as the Ideal Leader and Popular Candidate, revealing the page's permanent political campaign focus. Thus any insight the page could provide into the everyday political life of Tony Abbott was severely limited.

Keywords: social media, political image, Tony Abbott, permanent campaign, Facebook

Introduction: Digital politicians

Many politicians now attempt to engage their electorates through social media. When he was Australian Prime Minister (2013-2015), Tony Abbott[1] participated in this trend, by utilising Facebook to establish new communication channels in more interactive online spaces. With a more personalised flair, the Abbott Facebook page[2] documented through images Abbott's personal and political everyday life to its followers (461,000 and counting, as of May 2016). This article analyses the characteristic qualities of these images by examining how this social media platform was used to construct a broader political image, saturated with particular themes.

Current literature has already examined the use of social media in campaigns to engage with and mobilise voters, focussing for instance on the 2008 and 2012 US presidential campaigns. Monica Ancu (2015) studied the demographics of Americans consuming campaign content on social media, and Rahaf Harfoush studied the use of social media in constructing an Obama 'brand' (2009). Bruce Bimber discussed the personalised political communication environment in the Obama campaigns of 2008 and 2012 (2014), while

Daniela Dimitrova analysed how the perception of accessibility associated with digital platforms may be a legitimising mechanism in contemporary American political campaigns (2015). In addition, Natalie Penington, Kelly L. Winfrey, Benjamin R. Warner and Michael W. Kearney studied the effects of candidate communication through Facebook on the engagement and efficacy of potential voters (2015), and still other authors have also given the campaign use of social media platforms and other digital technologies scholarly attention (Painter, Fernandes, Mahone& Al Nashmi, 2015, Hendricks & Schill, 2015).

Nevertheless, the everyday use of social media by politicians, and the manner in which the user-citizen interacts with the Facebook pages of politicians has received rather less attention. There has been some initial work published, but studies to date have overwhelmingly focused on US politics, these include Elizabeth Losh's 2012 study of the contrast between the image of a youthful and digitally-savvy Obama, mobilised during the campaign on platforms such as YouTube and Flickr, and the more restrained image of him during his presidency. Losh also examined Obama's use of YouTube questionnaires both during and after the campaign (2012). In addition, James E. Katz, Michael Barris and Anshul Jain have provided a study on the uses of social media during the Obama administration, arguing that the latter has not lived up to the hopes of a 'participatory' presidency (2013).

I use the term 'everyday use' to refer to the ways in which politicians interact with users, and vice versa, in *non-campaign periods*. Everyday use was found, typically, to involve carefully selected image uploads, broadcast to hundreds of thousands of Facebook users through statuses, purporting to produce 'insights' into the daily life of a politician.

The Abbott Facebook page became a social media communication channel constructed between an electorate and their federal representative. The forms this took demand examination. Importantly, what takes place is a 'reconstruction' because while existing alongside older communication channels, such as television and print journalism, emerging technologies like Facebook seem to promise to challenge those older channels by allowing a supposedly more 'intimate' relation with public figures.

The architecture of a Facebook page privileges forms of personalised communication, through the construction of a profile that 'personally' addresses its followers (Marichal, 2012, p. 11). Hence this paper pays close attention to Tony Abbott as a (digital) persona, and to the construction on and through Facebook of a political image tied to this persona. However the extent to which the page's followers may form part of a pre-existing population of political supporters cannot be explored here[3]. Extensive journalistic attention has been given to Abbott, both as a political personality and to his performance in electoral campaigns. For

example, Susan Mitchell characterised Abbott as a "man's man" and critically elaborated on his relationships with women (2011). Russell Marks collected various humorous and controversial quotes from Abbott (2014), David Marr wrote a short biography (2012), and Waleed Aly investigated his "mind" (2013). Mango MacCallum covered Abbott's campaign skills in the 2010 federal election (2010).

Yet, Abbott as a politician and Abbott as a (digital) personality have received less attention from academic scholars. Although Todd Donovan (2014) and Kate Gleeson (2011) have both studied the role of Abbott's Catholicism during his time in parliament, there remains substantial room for more scholarly work on this political figure. By contrast, there has been rather more analysis of how his predecessor, Kevin Rudd, engaged with the media landscape, including social media. Geoffrey Craig studied how Rudd's political subjectivity was framed and expressed through television interviews (2013), and Craig also studied Rudd's media performances in the context of "political celebrity" (2014). Jason Wilson similarly studied Rudd's engagement with celebrity culture in the context of an Australian "post-broadcast democracy" (2013). In addition, Glenn Kefford studied Rudd's leadership of the Australian Labor Party in relation to the theme of presidentialisation (2013).

In extending work of this type this present paper offers an empirical analysis of how the Abbott Facebook page constructed Abbott's political image. Individual image uploads constructed a broader image suitable for the personalised and informal Facebook environment. Through the use of the mythic image categories of the 'Ideal' and the 'Popular Candidate', developed by Maria Grabe and Erik Bucy (2009), this analysis critically focuses on how the page's political image emphasised qualities of statesmanship, compassion, ordinariness and mass appeal. It also shows that, through utilising an 'informal' aesthetic, these images implied the absence of political image handlers, thereby contriving to suggest a more 'personal' relationship between the (now former) Prime Minister and his user-citizens. This visible emphasis on producing and projecting a political image is best understood as an instance of what Sidney Blumenthal has described as a permanent campaign (1980).

It is necessary to analyse the construction of an 'authentic' person who is also a politician. Politicians are typically under pressure to project a recognisable authenticity, especially when appearing in news media (Street, 2004, Wilson, 2013). As Gunn Enli (2015) has argued, these authentic portrayals tap into themes of trustworthiness, originality, and spontaneity. The term authenticity is therefore used in this paper to refer to *both* the desire for a genuine, even personal, form of engagement between a politician and the electorate, *and* also to a particular style of political presentation. For the former, authenticity is understood to

mean the desire (and the expectation) for politicians to both 'mean what they say' and 'show who they are'. For the latter, authenticity is understood to mean a performance, in which politicians communicate and present themselves to the electorate in a way designed to elicit trust and confidence in a supposedly knowable persona. Through the use of what Jose Marichal describes as Facebook's architecture of disclosure, I show how the Abbott page produced and projected a particular, authentic, political image (2013).

Constructing an Image: Political imagery on the Abbott page

Facebook pages for organisations and public identities resemble personal profiles, but instead of users 'friending' these pages, they can only be 'liked' and 'followed'. Following pages allows users to receive updates about, for example, a band's upcoming gig, or a politician's most recent policy proposal. These pages can also be 'liked' by users in order to express personal tastes and, in the case of politicians, to display political allegiance.

Facebook describes pages as being able to "build a closer relationship with your audience and customers" (2015). This "closer relationship" is established through the more interactive elements of pages: the ability to post or link information on a page wall, and the ability to reply to comments posted onto the page. Some pages are more interactive than others: some respond to comments while others do not, and some prevent users from posting on the page wall. Considering the promotional use of many of these pages, it is thus unsurprising that pages are frequently managed by customer service or public relations teams, even for the (official) personal pages of politicians. For example, the official Barack Obama Facebook page (2015) is actually run by Organising for Action, a non-profit organisation and successor to Obama's 2012 campaign group Organising for America (2015).

As with a Facebook personal profile, corporate and politician pages use images, text and video to construct a social media presence. This is what David Brunskill described as the making of a "composite online image", and a kind of personal manifestation in the virtual realm of social media (2015). Within such a framework, some pages, for example those of screen stars or politicians, engage more deeply and explicitly than others with personalised forms of image construction. However, even the Facebook pages of collective entities, such as commercial organisations, seek to produce and maintain an image – even if simply one of benevolent customer service. For instance, the Facebook page of the Australian Coles supermarket chain (https://www.facebook.com/coles) replies to enquiries from users, creating the impression of being in touch with its customers (2015).

Facebook's architecture of disclosure – the structural features of Facebook that enable image-construction, that through the profile encourage personal disclosures, and emphasise the performance and management of an online identity – can help us understand the kinds of image production and performance visible on not only user profiles, but also on pages (Marichal, 2012, p. 61-63).

Politicians and Authenticity

For over a century authenticity has been a political issue in broadcast media (Craig, 2014, p. 26). The development of mass media enabled politicians to present a particular mode of subjectivity and establish new relationships with the public, ones that "privileged notions of individuality, authenticity, and familiarity". Journalistic genres developed accordingly: the personal interview or the profile piece were the early forms through which these notions were privileged, and they seemed to offer the possibility of a more intimate relationship with distant and powerful public figures. Photographs, increasingly used by the press during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, were particularly important in establishing these more personal relations. In addition, familiar political strategies of self-promotion emphasising an authentic identity rooted in a harmonious private life can be traced back to the latter half of the nineteenth century, when they were in use most visibly by American politicians. This kind of political emphasis on a 'normal' and 'successful' family life continued on the Tony Abbott Facebook page.

Recent notable Australian examples of such strategies of personal political promotion have included, in the mid-2000s, regular appearances by Kevin Rudd and Joe Hockey on the popular morning television programme *Sunrise*[4]. These appearances showcased the more personal sides of these opposing politicians. Casual banter and discussion, and the relatively informal atmosphere of breakfast television, worked in concert to present two knowable personalities (Craig, 2014 p. 31). In another example of a performance of authenticity, the incumbent Prime Minister Julia Gillard campaigned as the 'real Julia' during the 2010 Australian general election, after she had been subjected to criticism in the press for a perceived stiffness. That her strategy failed, primarily due to it (rather ironically) being received as too contrived, only made more apparent the public's desire for sincere self-presentations from their parliamentary representatives (Jamieson, 2010). Thus it is not surprising that strategies by Australian politicians that attempt to fulfil this desire for authenticity have been visible in the realm of social media.

A Close Analysis of Imagery on the Tony Abbott Facebook Page

I now turn to an examination of the ways in which the visual strategies on the Tony Abbott Facebook page constructed an authentic political image and how such an image was constructed as knowable. This draws upon the work of Trischa Goodnow (2013) and Grabe and Bucy (2009), in its analysis of political imagery, in particular the semiotic frameworks of the Ideal Candidate and the Populist Candidate utilised in both these studies.

Being largely dependent on visual self-presentation, mediatised political personae are tied to images: not only to actual photographs, but also to a broader political image. The latter's complex meaning combines appearance with those personal characteristics, projected by a politician and deemed relevant to political performance, for example, being 'honest' and appearing 'able' (Kaid and Chanslor, 1995, p. 84). These portrayals have the potential to produce enduring images that affect electoral support, and frequently tap into culturally resonant themes (Grabe and Bucy, 2009, p. 85-87). It is true that the success of a politician's presentation largely depends on how these images are received by citizens (Kendall and Paine 1995, p. 26). However, this paper is more concerned with the 'front stage' persona (Goffman, 1959), i.e. the production of political images by politicians, and in particular with how such images are framed. Framing is understood here as how elements of perceived reality are assembled into a "narrative that highlights connections among them to promote a particular interpretation" (Entman, 2007, p. 164).

Images posted on the Abbott page between the start of March 2015 and end of June 2015 were analysed. As images were uploaded to the page almost every second day, it was convenient to limit data collection to this four-month period to make image analysis more manageable for an initial small-scale study. This period happened to include the 100th anniversary of the World War I Gallipoli campaign; thus it is likely that there was a higher amount of military-themed imagery than in another, perhaps more normal, period. Nevertheless, this image sample arguably presents a representative illustration of the types and forms of imagery normally posted on the page.[2] In addition, the captions accompanying the images were analysed: not only because these captions provided context for the images, but also to assess the way in which the Abbott Facebook page introduced images to its followers.

There were 167 images posted during this 20-week period. Using a grounded theory approach, in which concepts are generated through the discovery of relationships amongst

data (Urquhart, 2013, pp. 4-5), the following image categories were devised, each of which correspond to the content of the images analysed.

Table 1 Images by theme (Tony Abbott Facebook page) 1 March - 30 June 2015

Image Theme	Number
Military or serviceman These images depicted Abbott attending war memorial events or were photographs of servicemen at state events.	55
Activeness, actively in touch Images depicted Abbott being 'out and about' at worksites, fundraising events, supermarkets, and meeting 'ordinary' citizens, presenting Abbott as a Prime Minister actively in touch with Australian citizens.	43
Statesmanship (international) Images of Abbott meeting foreign dignitaries, in and out of Australia. Six of these images overlap with the military theme category, and one overlaps with the graphic statesmanship category.	27
Statesmanship (graphic images, with political messages and/or information) These were explicitly promotional images, posted to announce and celebrate what were depicted as the achievements of Abbott's government. Two of these graphic images celebrated ANZAC Day[5] but are counted here rather than in the military-theme above.	17
Athleticism These images depict Abbott being physically active or in sporting wear, or attending sporting events.	15
Family Images of Abbott with his family, or just his family. Note that while this was a low count, the photographic presence of Abbott's family was made greater by way of cover images. Cover images are banner-like images displayed at the top of a Facebook profile or page, accompanying the profile picture. A photograph of Abbott and his wife (Margie) was the cover photo of the page since 29 April 2015[a]. Before this there was briefly an ANZAC graphic (24-28 April 2015) and before that there had been another cover photograph of Abbott and his wife (since 27 January 2015).	7
Statesmanship (in an office, at work) Images depicting Abbott in a meeting with other government ministers, or diligently reading or writing.	3
	167

a. as of 1 July 2015, the end of the study period.

Table 1 reveals a fairly diverse range of imagery present on the Abbott page. The image themes detailed above have found to be consistent both before and after the image sample period, even if the relative number of particular themed images change from month to month. For example, in January 2015, eight military images had been uploaded, and military themed images continued to be uploaded even in July 2015, when 14 were posted to the page. These uploads had both been made considerably before and after the official April 17-25 ANZAC Day celebrations.

The images can be further grouped into two broader mythic image types: those of the Ideal Candidate and the Populist Candidate. 'Mythic' is understood here in the sense of Roland Barthes' concept of myth, which he described as a "system of communication": both a "linguistic system" of denotative signs and also a connotative "metalanguage" that "distorts" these signs and fixes them into a particular social meaning while at the same time "naturalising" such a meaning. This is to argue that images can be read as both literal depictions of specific moments captured by the camera, and also as symbolic objects conveying "natural" social meanings about, for instance, statesmanship and patriotism (1972, p. 109).

In their adherence to these two image categories, the Abbott Facebook images can be related to earlier examples of political campaign photographs. This is despite the fact that the images under analysis had been uploaded outside of an election year. The significance of this is discussed below. Furthermore, there was a general informal tone to the imagery that was suitable for a personal, everyday, profile of a politician.

The Ideal Candidate contains two key character elements: that of statesmanship and compassion. Images of statesmanship are visual manifestations of what Grabe and Bucy describe as the almost "mythic proportions" of the highest political office in the country, projecting power, authority and active leadership (2009, p. 102). The large number of military-themed photographs, in addition to the smaller, but still numerous, number of photographs of Abbott meeting foreign officials, as well as the images of Abbott in an office, can be placed within the statesmanship image type. Images of compassion are those that attempt to link a politician with "social symbols of compassion", such as children and families. These attempt to emphasise the "softer side" of the politician, while at the same time link the institution of family, as a symbol of stability, to the task and method of governance (2009, p. 104). Seven images, including two of the three cover photographs of the first six months of 2015, displayed this theme.

The Populist Candidate image type is also divided into two major character themes: that of mass appeal and ordinariness. Imagery of mass appeal represents the apparent popular appeal of the politician. The 43 activeness ('out and about') images fit this theme: Abbott meeting ordinary citizens at local charity events, or Abbott taking photographs with people on the street. Unlike the military photographs, which were typically reverent and austere in tone, these images largely depicted a smiling Abbott, happy to meet and greet his constituents. Images of ordinariness depict a more informal image of the politician, emphasising his or her more ordinary qualities. This can be coded through dress, such as a

loosened tie or rolled up sleeves, or through physical activity: such as participation in and enjoyment of sporting events. The 15 sporting images fit this category of ordinariness.

A better grasp of the specific ways in which the Ideal and Populist qualities are constructed and conveyed can be achieved through a close analysis of the images. A detailed investigation also highlights the aesthetics of informality that characterised these images, regardless of their particular image type. I have selected four images that exemplify Abbott's carefully constructed public persona on Facebook.

Image 1[6]

The first image, posted on 10 June 2015, depicts Abbott on an early morning run in Canberra (the Australian capital city), with members of the press gallery. The image is an action shot, with Abbott leading the morning run, decked out in a lycra sports outfit and a blue beanie. The blue beanie, which he and his fellow runners are wearing, features the logo of a charity foundation. The Australian Parliament building can be seen in the background, and the Australian flag flies high above the figures jogging in the foreground. There is no caption to the image.

Image 1 can thus be easily placed within the sporting category. Moreover, the jogging, and the intimate and informal relationship with the runners conveyed by participation in this group activity, also places the image in the Populist Candidate category, fulfilling the criteria of both mass appeal and ordinariness. Abbott is connoted as ordinary not only because he has ditched his politician's suit for lycra, but also because, like 'us', he needs to take care of his health. In addition, as Abbott is leading the morning run, there is the sense that not only is Abbott physically fit, he is also a leader – a man 'naturally' fit for leadership. This image of 'Australian' leadership is fitting for a country with a strong sporting culture. The inclusion in the image of Parliament and an Australian flag flying in the background portray Abbott as both literally and metaphorically leading a charge, sanctioned by popular consent and clearly certified as genuinely Australian. Furthermore, the blue charity beanie that Abbott is wearing symbolises his capacity for compassion, linking him to characteristics of the Ideal Candidate. It should also be noted that blue is the colour of Abbott's Liberal Party, thereby making broader connotations about the party's supposed compassion.

The informal tones of Image 1 are conveyed by its amateur quality. The image appears unfiltered, and the joggers' expressions are slightly awkward: half-closed eyes, and unflattering, scrunched-up faces suggesting a physical exertion that takes a heavy toll. There

is slightly too much unused space on the right side of the image, and the general image quality is not particularly high: somewhat blurry, and difficult to discern great levels of detail. There is an everyday quality to the image, conveying the impression of a more personal relationship with the Prime Minister. It could almost be a snapshot, typical of images uploaded to Facebook users' timelines. Hence, the image displays personal qualities that demonstrate Abbott's leadership capabilities, while nonetheless presenting Abbott as a knowable, authentic person through an informal aesthetic.

Image 2

The second image for analysis (uploaded on 19 April 2015) depicts Abbott kneeling and placing a laurel wreath at a war memorial. Abbott occupies the centre of the frame, with only a section of the memorial visible on the left-hand side of the image. Soldiers, holding their rifles, can be seen on either side of the memorial. In the upper-left-hand corner of the frame, a plaque inscribed with the words "Lest We Forget" is clearly visible.[7] In the background, there is a gathering of formally-dressed, middle-aged to elderly people sitting on plastic chairs. There is no caption. For many Australians, the image would speak for itself; such has become the importance of memorialising the nation's war history in recent years.

Image 2 clearly connotes qualities of the Ideal Candidate, a statesman whose respect and love for his country is exemplified not only by his attendance at this state event, celebrating past military service and mourning the loss of lives, but also by the austere expression on his face. The plaque informs the viewer that Abbott has indeed not forgotten the 'sacrifice' of those killed in overseas service. The soldiers in the photograph further contribute to the theme of service, and Abbott's service as Prime Minister can be easily associated with military service and national duty.

The solemnity of the occasion is juxtaposed against a certain informality produced by, again, the rather amateurish quality of the photograph, as if to reinforce the absence of a slick production contrived by a professional public relations team. Abbott's hands are affected by motion-blur, and the picture quality of his legs and feet is not as sharp as the rest of his body. Although Abbott's facial expression is respectfully stern, nonetheless his mouth is slightly, and somewhat awkwardly, half-open. The figures on chairs in the background are also unevenly blurry. The photograph could be an everyday snapshot, rather than the carefully-planned product of a professional photographer.

Image 3

The third selected image (uploaded on 25 May 2015), depicts Abbott in his office in a meeting with two suited figures on the other side of his desk. Abbott, on the left, appears to be in mid-speech, with his mouth open and his eyes looking directly at one of the men opposite him on the right. The other men have stern expressions on their faces, their eyes locked on the Prime Minister across from them. In the left-hand corner, there is an Australian flag. In the middle of the frame, on a wall, there hangs an artwork by an indigenous Australian painter. The caption reads: "The government is strengthening Australian counter-terrorism arrangements." It then informs the viewer that one of the figures seated – Minister for Justice Michael Keenan – will be taking on the role of "Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on Counter-Terrorism". The other figure, Mr Greg Moriarty, will be assisting Minister Keenan in the new position of "Commonwealth Counter-Terrorism Coordinator". A link is provided to "find out more".

Like the previous image, Image 3 highlights the elements of the Ideal Candidate that the Facebook page is designed to showcase. The Prime Minister is at work in his office – he is shown to be active. Abbott is in control, a statesman, as can be seen by the close attention he receives from his ministers, of not only his government but also the situation at hand ("counter-terrorism" activities). Thus, the impression is given of a strong, capable leader and a hard-working government, one that does not shy away from responsive and decisive action – especially in areas of national security. The Australian character of the office (the physical office, the office of Prime Minister, and the man occupying both of these) is indicated by the presence of both the national flag and a symbol of the indigenous peoples, the latter represented by the artwork in the photograph's centre. The gravity of the "counter-terrorism" context, as well as the efforts taken by the government to resolve it, is conveyed by the rather formal and lengthy titles used to aggrandise the two men opposite Abbott.

Image 3 lacks the rather amateurish qualities identified in the previous two images. The image is sharp, its space efficiently and effectively utilised and it is well-lit. The image also looks more clearly staged: the three men, rather improbably, are ignoring the presence of the photographer as they discuss serious government business. However, the image still gives the impression of an insight into the inner workings of government, and attempts to strengthen Abbott's personal credentials as a competent and effective political leader.

Image 4

The final image under investigation, posted on 29 March 2015, features a suited Abbott, accompanied by another suited man, sitting on a couch in a hotel room with a television behind them on which can clearly be seen an Australian cricketer mid-match. The word 'Australia' emblazoned across the yellow and green jersey, so familiar to most Australians, is the centrepiece of the television screen. Both men have turned to face the camera, throwing their arms in the air, and giving a thumbs-up. The caption states: "Watching Steve Smith hit #CWC15 winning runs! Congratulations to Michael Clarke on a brilliant One Day International career & New Zealand on a great tournament."

Image 4 clearly exemplifies the qualities of the Populist Candidate. The ordinariness of Abbott is demonstrated by his obvious enjoyment of a popular national sport. Abbott appears in the eyes of the page's Facebook followers to be attuned to the popular pursuits of 'ordinary' Australians as he watches live, broadcast cricket. Furthermore, Abbott is participating in a trending hashtag – a kind of tag used to track and sort related comments on social media. This appears to display not only Abbott's familiarity with new technology, but also his willingness to be part of the national commentary. In addition, his cheering on of the Australian team appears to demonstrate his national pride. Other details, such as an open bag of chips on a table and what appears to be a half-drunk bottle of soft-drink, reinforce his ordinariness. The promotion of Abbott as a person who snacks on junk food and watches TV like the rest of us is designed to establish his connection with the average Australian.

The tone of Image 4 is the most informal out of those discussed. The image is not particularly well-lit, with a glaring and uneven light washing over the left side of the image and is also shot slightly on angle. Both men smile and raise their thumbs somewhat awkwardly at the camera, and Abbott is not even directly looking into the camera's lens, as his eye-line is slightly askew. This amateur quality of Image 4 may even undercut its attempts at conveying ordinariness – giving too much insight into what could be a figure uncomfortable at a rather contrived attempt to appear 'ordinary'.

Discussion

It has been argued that the personal profile of Abbott was constructed through imagery that emphasised qualities of statesmanship, compassion, ordinariness and mass appeal. More specifically, these attributes were conveyed largely through images of patriotic military service, leadership at the international level, heterosexual family, athleticism and Abbott being active.

The images of patriotic military service, it should be noted, were not only uploaded during the memorials for the centenary of the Gallipoli landings but also during a period marked strongly by issues of national security. These issues mainly coalesced around border security and the perceived ongoing threat of the extremist Islamic State (ISIS) group in the Middle East, famously denounced by Abbott as a 'death cult'[8] Abbott took many opportunities to reiterate his famous election promise of "stopping the boats" of asylum seekers arriving on Australia's northern shore (Jones, 2010, Taylor, 2014). The news of atrocities committed by members of ISIS and their threat to Australia provided him with a chance to demonstrate "strong" leadership in preventing the infiltration of radical Islam (Tlozek, 2015, Kenny, 2014). Thus the image of a patriotic Abbott with deep, even pious, respect for the Australian military was particularly pertinent during this period of heightened national insecurity. It served to display a Prime Minister with the "strength" to defend his beloved country against foreign threats.

Although the number of individual family photographs was fairly low, the use of these images as cover photos placed great emphasis on this imagery of the Prime Minister's seemingly harmonious and ordinary private family life. The highlighting of his status as a decent family man continued for much of 2015. Cover photos provide a backdrop for the information and imagery posted on the page: due to their size and prominence they set a tone for a profile and are also frequently the first image noticed when visiting a profile. This prominent image of a heterosexual family, sanctioned by the sacred vows of marriage, constructed a rather familiar image of Abbott: that of a politician with strong conservative values, stemming from his well-known adherence to Catholicism (Marr, 2012, p. 2), and opposition to putatively 'anti-family' issues such as same-sex marriage (Hurst, 2015).

It was also not surprising that Abbott's athleticism was a fairly common recurring image on the page. Abbott has a known enthusiasm for an Australian sporting culture, being both a rugby player (FitzSimons, 2013) and a boxer (Flanagan, 2009) in his youth, and the image of an athletic Abbott in what are referred to colloquially as 'budgie smugglers' – that is, very tight men's swimming trunks – was a popular one during the 2010 and 2013 general election campaigns (Wright, 2009).

The images affected an overall link between the personal qualities of Abbott and the skills needed for leading an Australian government. The imagery of Abbott as a patriot, symbolised by the numerous military-themed images, signified his commitment to national security. Images of Abbott meeting and greeting foreign dignitaries suggested a confident and capable Australian statesman. The images of Abbott as a proud family man and a man who is

out and about conveyed both compassion and ordinariness, and thus his fatherly care for the country and his ability to relate to voters. And the depiction of Abbott as an athlete, which also displayed qualities of ordinariness and mass appeal, suggested an association with a strong, hard-working and healthy government.

Moreover, the informal tone of many of the photographs, gave the impression of being shot by non-professional photographers and suggested an absence of 'image handlers' (Grabe and Bucy, 2009, pp. 86-7). Image handlers are the rather shadowy figures working behind the scenes – political consultants, marketing firms, and campaign advisors – who develop, test and micromanage a politician's public persona by carefully crafting a political image that they calculate will resonate most with a voting public.

This is not to say that these image handlers were absent from the Tony Abbott Facebook page. The images were selectively uploaded, and the graphic images in particular exploit the campaign slogans of the Abbott-led Coalition of the conservative and rural parties. Rather, the page gave the *impression* of such an absence to create a closer, more personal connection to the man who is also a politician. Whoever ran the Tony Abbott Facebook page, whether it was Abbott himself or a crew of image handlers, carefully utilised Facebook's structural characteristics of profile construction and a privileging of personal and informal communication in creating an authentic Tony Abbott. Such an activity is what Stephen Coleman and Giles Moss described, in the context of the use of blogs by British politicians, as the "reduction of the perception of distance" (and *difference*) through the apparent intimacy conveyed through these personalised and personalising technologies (2008, p. 19).

Accordingly, the page was working within a process of what Rebecca Verser and Robert H. Wicks have described as "impression management" (2006, pp. 180-182). This can be understood as the behaviour demonstrated by a person or an organisation with the intent of controlling or manipulating the nature of the impressions formed by others. As noted above, visuals have long been used by politicians to manage the impressions given to voters, particularly when attempting to evoke positive emotional responses to political candidates.

The preoccupation with managing impressions is a form of political campaigning, even though these images were posted outside of an election year and thus we should understand these images in the framework of what Blumenthal described as a "permanent campaign" (1980, p. 7). This is a term used to describe how, once in government, politicians continue to utilise strategies to manage voter impressions and polling so as to improve their standing during the next election. It can be observed, for example, when Cabinet ministers receive advice more from political staffers than from public servants; when the public service adopts

public relations techniques to promote new policies; and when government information advertising becomes increasingly partisan at all stages of the electoral cycle (Onselen & Errington, 2007, pp. 79-80). Thus the production and projection of a political image remains crucial, even outside of campaign periods, and a politician, or a political party, is constantly campaigning (Sanders & Canel, 2013, p. 110).

Conclusion

The Tony Abbott Facebook went to an enormous effort to produce and project an authentic political image. This was constructed in relation to specific political positions and policies of the Abbott government, in particular with regard to issues of national security and same-sex marriage rights. It was both explicit, as in the case of the third image, and implicit, as in the prominent images of Abbott's heterosexual family. In the case of the latter, Abbott's known opposition to same-sex marriage correlated with images that appeared to celebrate a rather traditional notion of family. Thus this permanent campaign function on the page worked not only on an abstract level, in regards to constructing a general personal image, but also in relation to concrete policy or current political issues.

Furthermore, this well-crafted political image was notable in its contrast to another known image of Abbott: that of a politician prone to gaffes, known for his political miscalculations. An example of this is what Abbott termed 'the captains call' when he unilaterally announced the reinstatement of the unpopular system of granting knighthoods, a tradition from Britain, now widely seen in Australia as an anachronism. This decision was cited by his ultimately being cited by his successor, Malcolm Turnbull, as a reason for the removal of Abbott from his position of leader of the Coalition. In this way, then, the permanent campaign function of the page was not only to promote a particular 'Abbott', but also to counter this other Abbott whose unaccountable political bungles served to undercut notions of strong, capable, popular and healthy leadership.

Hence, Facebook is not just another platform through which to engage voters. Rather, its novelty for politicians lies in its potential, as seen on the Abbott page, to quickly respond to events through the veneer of an informal authenticity. Within Facebook's personable and personalising environment, the Abbott page promised insights into a real and accessible politician – untouched by image handlers.

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Endnotes

[1] At time of writing, Tony Abbott has been a conservative (Liberal Party) House of Representatives MP for the metropolitan New South Wales seat of Warringah since a by-election in 1994. He led the Federal Parliamentary Liberal Party from December 2009 to September 2015, which included periods as both Leader of the Opposition and as Prime Minister. see http://www.aph.gov.au/Senators_and_Members/Parliamentarian?MPID=EZ5

[2] https://www.facebook.com/TonyAbbottMP

[3] Detailed analysis of the interactional strings on the Tony Abbott Facebook page may clarify this. I attempt this in a separate paper currently in preparation.

[4] Kevin Rudd, of the Australian Labor Party, was Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs during 2001-2006, and was Prime Minister between 2007-2010, and briefly again in 2013. Joe Hockey, of the Liberal Party, occupied various ministerial positions during the John Howard-led Coalition government of 1996-2007. Hockey was also Treasurer during in the Tony Abbott-led Coalition government of 2013-2015. They regularly appeared on Sunrise, with good-humoured political banter, for a number of years. As their status changed they were unable to maintain this. See http://www.theage.com.au/news/national/sun-sets-on-sunrise-for-kevin-and-joe-show/2007/04/16/1176696758064.html

[5] ANZAC Day is an Australian national day of remembrance commemorating the landing at Gallipoli in the First World War and those lost in consequent wars. ANZAC is an acronym of Australian and New Zealand Army Corps.

[6] Due to Copyright restrictions the Journal is unable to include these images from the Facebook page https://www.facebook.com/TonyAbbottMP

[7] "Lest We Forget" is an important slogan in Australia. Taken from Rudyard Kipling's poem *Recessional*, and used by the Returned Services League of Australia, it is common 'shorthand' for acknowledging and paying tribute to Australia's war dead.

[8] A frequently used descriptor, for instance in the Prime Ministerial speech on the House of Representatives Condolence Motion on Martin Place Siege, 9 February 2015, reported widely, e.g. https://independentaustralia.net/politics/politics-display/keeping-australians-safe,7373