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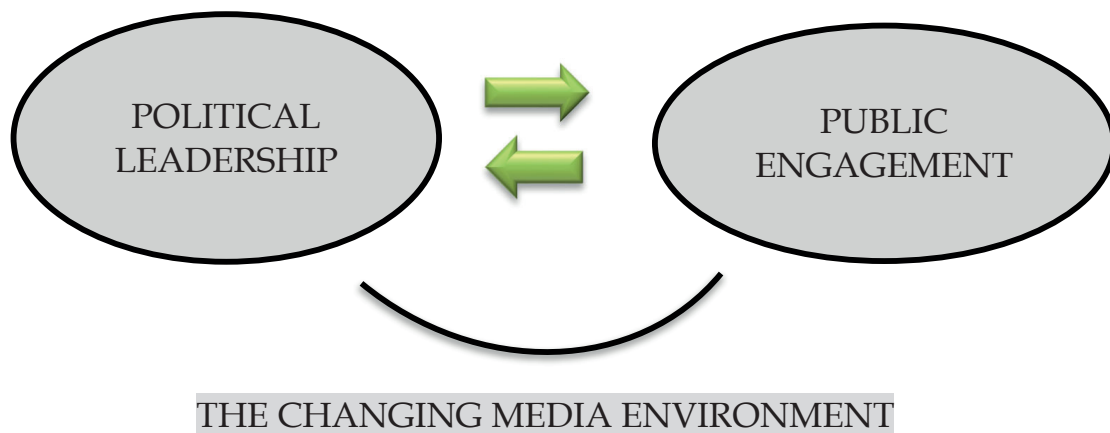
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Ülle Toode

# Political Leadership and Public Engagement in a Changing Media Environment

A Collection of Explorative Studies

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UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ  
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND  
SOCIAL SCIENCES

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Ülle Toode

**Political leadership and public engagement  
in a changing media environment**  
**A collection of explorative studies**

Esitetään Jyväskylän yliopiston humanistis-yhteiskuntatieteellisen tiedekunnan suostumuksella  
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## ABSTRACT

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The purpose of the research is to contribute to a better understanding of how political leaders operate in the current changing media environment and how this affects and, in turn, is affected by public engagement in society. This thesis has a multidisciplinary approach, drawing on insights from communication studies, political marketing and political sciences.

This thesis brings together the results of four studies reported in articles. Various methods are used to investigate cases of political leadership in the context of Estonia, a young democracy, and the older European democracies of Italy and Finland. In this way, it investigates the use of new communication means by political leaders, institutions, non-governmental organisations, pressure groups, movements and other political actors when communicating their messages to the public. Academic research in this field is still relatively limited.

Multidisciplinary analyses show that charismatic leaders with mainly monodirectional message-framing fit the new media environment even better than they did the mass media context in which professional journalists and the public service system could filter political messages and take part in the process of discourse creation in society.

The results highlight that the deliberative model of democracy does not fit the current media environment where charismatic leaders (or in this thesis rather called magnetic leaders) focusing on emotions tend to dominate the debate. At the same time, public engagement initiatives show weak results or involve only a limited part of the population.

In conclusion, a citizen satisfaction model is created to propose how the role of communication in post-web politics can be understood, either in enhancing citizen participation or, conversely, excluding some groups of society, and how communication and information freedom may contribute to deliberative discussion and boost trust and engagement in society.

Keywords: communication, democracy, emotions, political decision-making, power relations, public engagement

# TIIVISTELMÄ

Toode, Ülle

Poliittinen johtajuus ja yhteiskunnallinen osallistuminen muuttuvassa mediaympäristössä: kokoelma eksploratiivisia tutkimuksia.

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Tutkimuksen tarkoituksena on lisätä ymmärrystä siitä, miten poliittiset johtajat toimivat nykyisessä muuttuvassa mediaympäristössä ja miten tämä vaikuttaa yhteiskunnalliseen osallistumiseen, ja miten puolestaan yhteiskunnallinen osallistuminen vaikuttaa poliittiseen johtajuuteen. Tämä opinnäytetyö on lähestymistavaltaan monitieteinen hyödyntäen viestinnän tutkimuksen, poliittisen markkinoinnin ja valtiotieteen näkökulmia.

Tämä opinnäytetyö kokoaa yhteen neljän tutkimuksen tulokset, jotka on raportoitu artikkeleissa. Poliittisen johtajuuden tapauksia tutkitaan erilaisia menetelmiä käyttäen nuoren demokratian, Viron, ja vanhempien eurooppalaisten demokratioiden, Italian ja Suomen, konteksteissa.

Tutkimus pyrkii luomaan parempaa ymmärrystä uusista viestinnän menetelmistä, joita poliittiset johtajat, instituutiot, kansalaisjärjestöt, painostusryhmät, liikkeet ja muut poliittiset toimijat käyttävät välittäessään viestiään yleisölle. Akateeminen tutkimus tällä kentällä on vielä suhteellisen rajallista.

Monitieteiset analyysit osoittavat, että karismaattiset johtajat, jotka käyttävät pääasiassa yksisuuntaista viestin kehystämistä, sopivat uuteen mediaympäristöön jopa paremmin kuin joukkotiedotusvälineiden kontekstiin, jossa ammattitoimittajat ja julkispalveluiden järjestelmä voivat suodattaa poliittisia viestejä ja osallistua diskurssien luomiseen yhteiskunnassa.

Tulokset osoittavat, että deliberatiivisen demokratian malli ei sovi nykyiseen mediaympäristöön, jossa karismaattiset johtajat (joita tässä tutkimuksessa kutsutaan magneettisiksi johtajiksi), jotka keskittyvät tunteisiin, saavat yleensä yliotteen. Samaan aikaan yhteiskunnallisen osallistumisen pyrkimykset tuottavat heikkoa tulosta tai koskevat vain pientä osaa väestöstä.

Tutkimuksen yhteenvetona luodaan kansalaisten tyytyväisyyden malli, joka ehdottaa, miten viestinnän rooli post-internet aikakauden politiikassa voidaan ymmärtää joko kansalaisten osallistumista lisäävänä tai käänteisesti joi-takin yhteiskunnan ryhmiä ulkopuolelle sulkevana, ja miten viestinnän ja informaation vapaus voi edistää deliberatiivista keskustelua ja edesauttaa luottamusta ja osallistumista yhteiskunnassa.

Asiasanat: demokratia, poliittinen päätöksenteko, tunteet, valtasuhteet, viestintä, yhteiskunnallinen osallistuminen

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## PREFACE

The subject of this thesis resonates with current challenges in democratic societies across the globe, to better understand the phenomenon of the success and influence of charismatic (later on in this thesis rather called magnetic) political leaders in the context of the changing media environment and increasing socio-political instability all over the world.

The idea to investigate this topic came to my mind around ten years ago, and evolved in interaction with my supervisors, colleagues, students and friends, at home and abroad. The research was shaped by the social and academic environments that I experienced earlier, during my studies in TV journalism at the Danish School of Media and Journalism in Aarhus, and gaining my first MA at the Tartu University in Estonia in linguistics and the second MA at Cardiff University in Wales (UK) in journalism.

The results crystallised during my doctoral studies in the field of organisational communication and PR at the University of Jyväskylä in Finland. Herewith, I would like to thank the Department of Language and Communication Studies for various grants in different phases of the research and the support for the final proofreading. Without this help I could not have completed the project.

My interest in image management strategies on the TV screen started as a journalist in the beginning of the 1990's, when working for the Estonian public television news, and later, while working in Italy in journalism as well as organisational communication, moved to the topic of political leadership in the social media environment. It has been a long journey, both academically and personally, providing me the opportunity to reflect on my values and beliefs. Without all the people that I met during this long voyage this work would not exist.

First of all, I would like to express my deep and sincere gratitude to my supervisor Professor Marita Vos for her constant encouragement, patience and guidance, also in moments when it was difficult for me to move on. In addition, I would like to thank my other and earlier supervisors, the Professors Chiara Valentini, Epp Lauk, and Kaja Tampere who inspired me to start the doctoral programme in Jyväskylä. Special thanks for the reviewers of this thesis, Associate Professor Donna Davis of the University of Oregon and Doctor Howard Nothhaft of the University of Lund, for their clear and helpful comments.

Additionally, I would like to thank Professor Joseph Ben-ur from the University of Houston for the inspiring conversations during political marketing conferences around the world. Great support for my research process was gained in the interaction with my undergraduate and graduate students in journalism, public relations and international relations from all over the world at Tallinn University and Tallinn Technological University in the past twenty years. I am very thankful for all the comments and inspiration gained.

Furthermore, the present version of the text has profited from conversations and readings by some good friends and colleagues who have helped me to survive the journey. Most important of these has been Gianni Glinni, who will find some of his insights from our discussions about politics and the World recorded

here. I would like to pay special thanks to Laura Asunta, Hans-Petter Fagerli and Päivi Tirkkonen, all of whom took the time to comment my early manuscript. Sincere thanks also to all doctoral students who listened and gave me advice during the doctoral seminars at Jyväskylä. In addition, I thank the many scholars – some of whom known to me and many others not – who commented various papers and parts of the present thesis as presented in a variety of seminars, conferences and lectures in several countries.

I also thank my family for being always lovingly supportive when I had to take time away from them to work on this research. I am very thankful to my father, Julius Toode, who taught me to make my first photographs and let me use his camera “Zenit” back in 1980s, so that I could start my way into the world of visual communication, from still images into the audio-visual world.

Special thanks go also to my cousins Kaja Koovit and Toomas Laanemaa for the rich and adventurous childhood summers, full of imagination and the will to discover the World, spent in the countryside at our grandparents near Luunja in Estonia. Many thanks also to my niece Kaija-Liisa Koovit, for her help with the first proof readings of my articles. I also thank a small birdy Linnu, a tiny companion, who always gave me a lot of inspiration and who studied in his own way most of my books and articles with me at my computer, as he seemed to like the sound of the keyboard and the human peace of mind while concentrating on academic studies.

Last but not least, I would like to dedicate this thesis to three very important women in my life! One of them is my mother, Helve Toode, who from my childhood on always encouraged me to work hard but at the same time move on to reach the Wonderlands. She helped me believe that in our world “good” will win from “evil”, by telling me her fairy tales in the evenings including funny and inspiring modifications to make them fit modern times. My mother has been my great spiritual support in all the long years of this research. The second is my sister Silvia Toode, who has always been the greatest inspiration, support and help in my life. The third woman I dedicate this work to is my great-grandmother, Katharine Lewol, whom I never met, a strong and intelligent personality who, because of the different times, never had the similar opportunities to study and do research that women have nowadays.

Rome, 09.03.2020

Ülle Toode



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ABSTRACT

TIIVISTELMÄ

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III.	The People’s Assembly: Testing the collaborative e-democracy	
IV.	Charismatic leaders in a new perspective: Reality in Estonia and Italy	

# 1 INTRODUCTION

Over time, the relations between political power holders and citizens have been in a constant state of flux, affected by technological developments in society. In the past decades, a revolutionary change has taken place in how technology is used for communication and, consequently, this influenced the political leadership style and the prevalence of forms of public engagement.

This dissertation focuses on a better understanding of how political leaders operate in the current context of the post-web media (such as Twitter and social media) and how this relates to public engagement in society. Some recent examples would be the rise of radical and right-wing parties across Europe, Brexit and the election of President Trump in the USA – phenomena that have brought the term “post-truth” politics into the academic debate. Therefore, this thesis seeks to find out how the deliberative model of democracy shows in the current post-web media environment.

## 1.1 Research purpose and approach

The purpose of the research is to contribute to a better understanding of how political leaders operate in the current changing media environment and how this affects public engagement in society. The conditions for a deliberative democracy have changed over time, in the last decades following the technological developments that turned the mass media environment into a web-based context characterising the network society.

From the perspective of political communication, one of the main conditions for the classical principles of the deliberative democracy has been, in a broad brushstroke, the flow of information among political actors, autonomous professional media and citizens (McNair 2003). In this triangle, journalists have mediated the information from political actors to people and vice versa. Journalists also had the task of providing information to the different segments of citizens, so that these segments have an equal basis for engagement in the discussion

and can influence the decision-making in society in an inclusive way. However, in the current cyber environment, political communication has moved to a new realm and the role of journalists as information mediators has changed, as now political actors can directly communicate with citizens via interactive social media, and the other way around.

This raises several questions that this thesis seeks to answer. First, how does the deliberative democracy show in the current web-based media environment? Second, how has the role of politicians developed in the changing media environment? Third, which actors in society are real power holders in the new conditions? Fourth, how do civil society, citizens and power holders interact and compete for attention in deliberative debate in the media?

Therefore, core topics in this research are political leadership and public engagement, which are both seen in light of the transformation of the media environment, from old to new media scenery (as shown in Figure 1).

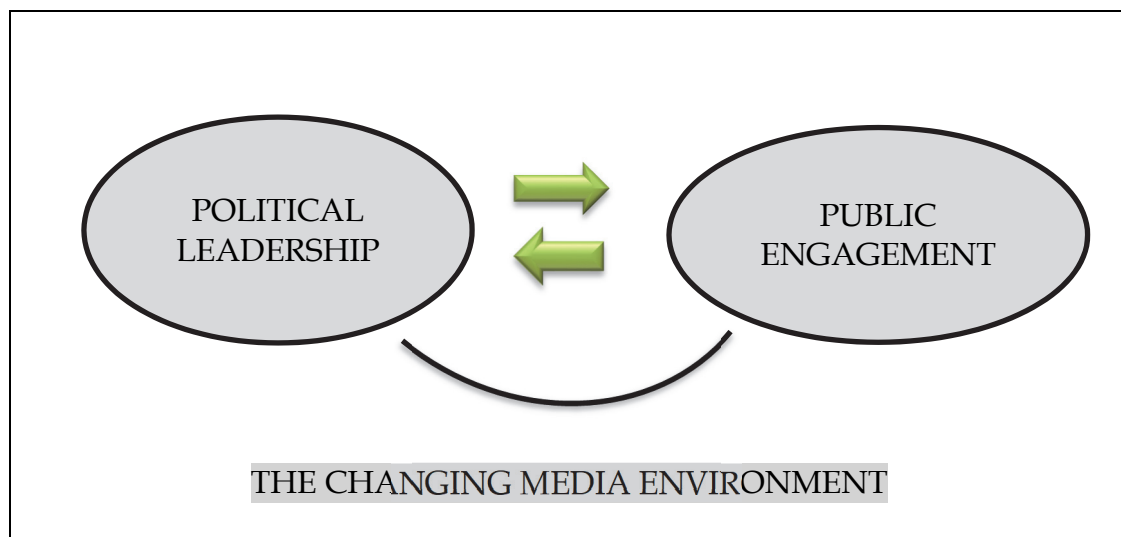


FIGURE 1 The setting of the research

This research focuses on the interrelations of political leaders and public engagement in the changing media environment. The post-web era (the period since the introduction of the internet) brought direct communication in social media to policy making (Novelli & Johansson 2019) and, thus, called for a type of leader that fitted its characteristics. At the same time, it also brought opportunities to boost public engagement and participation in decision-making processes, as shown in the literature (e.g. Dahlberg 2007; Lilleker et al. 2011). However, much is still unclear concerning the effects of the post-web media environment (this term is further explained in section 2.2) on the democratic process, and the interrelations between political leadership and public engagement.

The research in this thesis is characterised by a multidisciplinary approach, drawing on insights from communication studies, political marketing and political sciences. The literature found for this thesis relates to topics such as commu-

nication strategies in an electoral context, voting behaviour, consumer satisfaction and emotions in politics. This provided a basis for discourse analyses of written and audio-visual media texts, including, for example, politicians' verbal and non-verbal language.

As the topic of the thesis is wide, the approach is explorative, giving a first overview of insights from the literature in the theory part, while the empirical studies that follow each focus on a part of the topic, providing different pieces of the puzzle in greater detail.

## 1.2 Research process and thesis structure

This doctoral thesis combines the results from four related empirical studies that each approach the thesis' main topic from a different perspective, beginning with the mass-media environment and proceeding to the post-web environment.

- The first study investigates political leadership in a mass media environment. It focuses on the way in which politicians in Finland and in Estonia use TV news to present the most favourable image of themselves.
- The second study investigates political leadership and engagement in a concrete case. It examines the use of Web 2.0 features on political web pages and the use of interactive applications by political parties to increase citizen participation and, in this way, contribute to deliberative politics.
- The third study looks at engagement and leadership in another case. It aims to analyse whether a crowdsourced project (People's Assembly) in Estonia has been an example of the Internet fostering deliberative democracy or, rather, an attempt to maintain stability by those in power in the situation of crisis.
- The fourth study reflects on leadership and engagement by analysing the role of charismatic political leaders in present-day politics and, thus, invites a re-evaluation of the impact of leaders' charisma on contemporary societies.

The research design is further explained in Chapter 3. All four studies were reported in a research paper (see Table 1). All papers were authored by the author of this thesis.

TABLE 1 Overview of where the studies were reported

Study	Reported
Study I	Toode, Ü. (2009). The image presentation of parliamentary candidates in Estonian and Finnish public service (PS) TV news. In Rogojinaru, A. & Wolstenholme, S. (eds). <i>Current trends in International Public Relations</i> , Tritonic, Bucarest, 298-314.
Study II	Toode, Ü. (2016). Fostering dialogue or monologue? – Estonian party websites during the 2009 European Parliament elections. <i>Journal of Political Marketing</i> 15, (2-3), 120-148.
Study III	Toode, Ü. (2020) Estonian People’s Assembly: An attempt at collaborative e-democracy? <i>Online Journal of Communication and Media Technologies</i> , 10(1).
Study IV	Toode, Ü. (2020) Charismatic leaders in a new perspective: Reality in Estonia and Italy. <i>Studies in Media and Communication</i> , 8(1), 11-24.

This thesis consists of six chapters. Following the Introduction, Chapter 2 presents the theoretical framework, addressing political leadership, the changing media environment and public engagement. Chapter 3 brings forth the data collection methods and analyses of the data. Chapter 4 presents the central findings of this thesis based on the results of Studies I-IV. Here, the findings of the original articles are placed in the perspective of the thesis and the previous literature reported in the theoretical part, to synthesise the findings and respond to the research questions posed in this thesis. Chapter 5 focuses on the discussion and proposes a model that brings the insights gained in this work together. The model was presented and discussed by the author in conferences in the years 2015–2017. Finally, Chapter 6 presents the conclusions. The original articles are added as appendices.

## 2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter the theoretical framework of the thesis is outlined, considering the three theoretical blocks: political leadership, the changing media environment and public engagement (as briefly introduced in Figure 1 in the Introduction). Next, a synthesis of the main insights related to the topic of this thesis is provided and the research gap is discussed. This explains the basis for the research and will, in the next chapter, be followed by the research approach and the chosen analytical tools and procedures for the research inquiry.

### 2.1 Political leadership

This section addresses political leadership and how this relates to power. It scrutinises the characteristics of political leadership and discusses political leadership in turbulent times. At the same time, it introduces and clarifies the concept of “magnetic leadership”. Next, the focus is on the use of emotions in contemporary election campaigns, as before and during elections, public debate and engagement tend to be most intense and, therefore, more visible.

#### 2.1.1 Political leadership and power

The concept of political leadership involves an understanding of political processes and their consequences in society. Nevertheless, a widely accepted clear definition of leadership in politics does not exist. When discussing leadership in politics, different authors have focused on various aspects of the leader (e.g. Hartley & Benington 2010; Möller & Schierenbeck 2010; Schweiger & Adami 1999; Weber 1994).

Leadership has been discussed since ancient times, for example, by Homer in *The Odyssey*. However, the first to define political leadership in a scientific and methodical way, in the late modern period before the Second World War, was Weber, who (as discussed by Weber 1994) considered the structure of the modern



state to be based on the rational power of its bureaucracy, making the question of power and its evolution over time central factors of political leadership. Later, Raven and French (1959) related social power to ability to cause changes in the psychology of a group or individual. According to Pappas (2011) any political leader seeks to change or maintain an existing system. Thus, leadership is closely related to influence and power.

Various authors have attempted to present a typology of leadership. Weber related a leader to various types of power in society: (1) traditional power, sacred, like the power of a sovereign perceived as derived from God; (2) charismatic power, performative and based on being recognised as superior in society, such as a hero with an attributed symbolic role; and (3) rational-legal power, being impersonal and based on legitimacy, such as an authority in a state supporting ethical principles (Weber 1922/1978: I 212–301).

More recently, Möller and Schierenbeck (2010) distinguished two types of political leaders depending on how they connect to political power and authority: (1) formal leaders possessing authority by a formal high-level position in society; (2) informal leaders, being individuals who do not have a legally ascribed position in society but are still considered leaders among their followers. Elcock and Fenwick (2012) added to this: (3) individual leaders, whose influence depends mostly on charisma and personal attraction.

With the exception of the last addition, the typologies offered do not seem to resonate with the current rise of personality-based or celebrity-based leaders. These often utilise a slogan-like communication style in political messages in the post-web environment. Moreover, although Elcock and Fenwick (2012) mentioned something similar, they did not discuss the new conditions brought by the post-web environment.

### **2.1.2 Characteristics of political leadership**

Various authors have brought out different aspects of political leadership. Most scholars focus on personal traits of leaders, value their policy-making position and analyse their communication style (as brought together in Figure 2). These three aspects are considered to have equal influence on the effectiveness of leader performance (Adami & Schweiger 1999; Hartley & Benington 2010; Möller & Schierenbeck 2010; Pappas 2011, 2012a,b; Weber 1994). Leadership research agrees that the success of a leader results from his/her ability to attract followers. In this way, there is a power transfer from leader to followers (Kellerman 2008). Currently, socialising skills, image and personality are considered more important than the policy-making position and skills, even more so than in the mass-media era (Adami & Schweiger 1999; Ben-Ur & Newman 2002; Nessmann 2009; Newman 2001).

Figure 2 brings together different characteristics of a political leader found in the literature (Adami & Schweiger 1999; Goleman 2000; Hartley & Benington 2010; Möller & Schierenbeck 2010; Pappas 2011; Weber 1922).

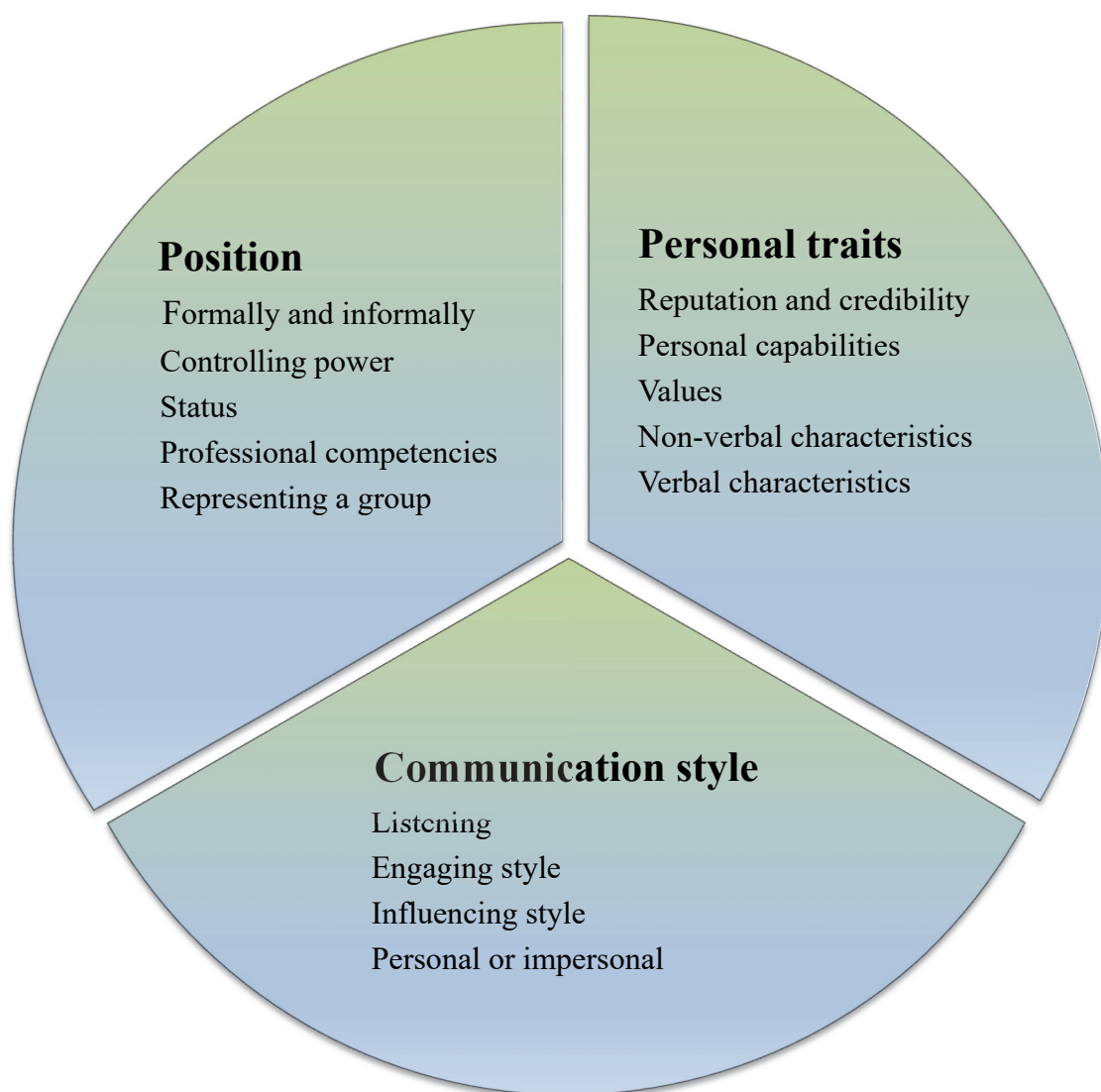


FIGURE 2 Characteristics of a leader mentioned in the literature

Figure 2 presents various attributes of a leader found in the literature, based on keyword searches in political and business leadership literature. The Position section shows how the leader is placed in the context. The Personal traits section includes individual characteristics of the leader that matter for the attraction of the leader to various followers. Non-verbal characteristics include, for example, appearance and presentation. The Communication style section illustrates how the leader relates to other individuals, in that way showing behavioural aspects of him or herself. Engaging includes empowering, while influencing includes, for example, coaching, persuading and authoritative behaviour.

In addition, two main aims of political leaders are mentioned in the literature: (1) the implementation of radical change (also called transformation or innovation); or (2) gradual change of existing systems and processes in society (as discussed by, e.g. Hartley & Benington 2010). These kinds of aims depend on the situation and may also suit a leader more or less.

There is no one right style of political leadership. The leadership style used in different situations depends on the needs of the followers and the pressure from the environment (Goleman 2000: 82-83). A leader may be able to apply various leadership styles and use what fits the situation. In the organisational environment, Goleman (2000: 82-86) mentioned six leadership styles: commanding, visionary, affiliative, democratic, pacesetting and coaching. In Figure 3, these six styles are arranged to show their interrelations, while also their explanation is adapted to political environments.

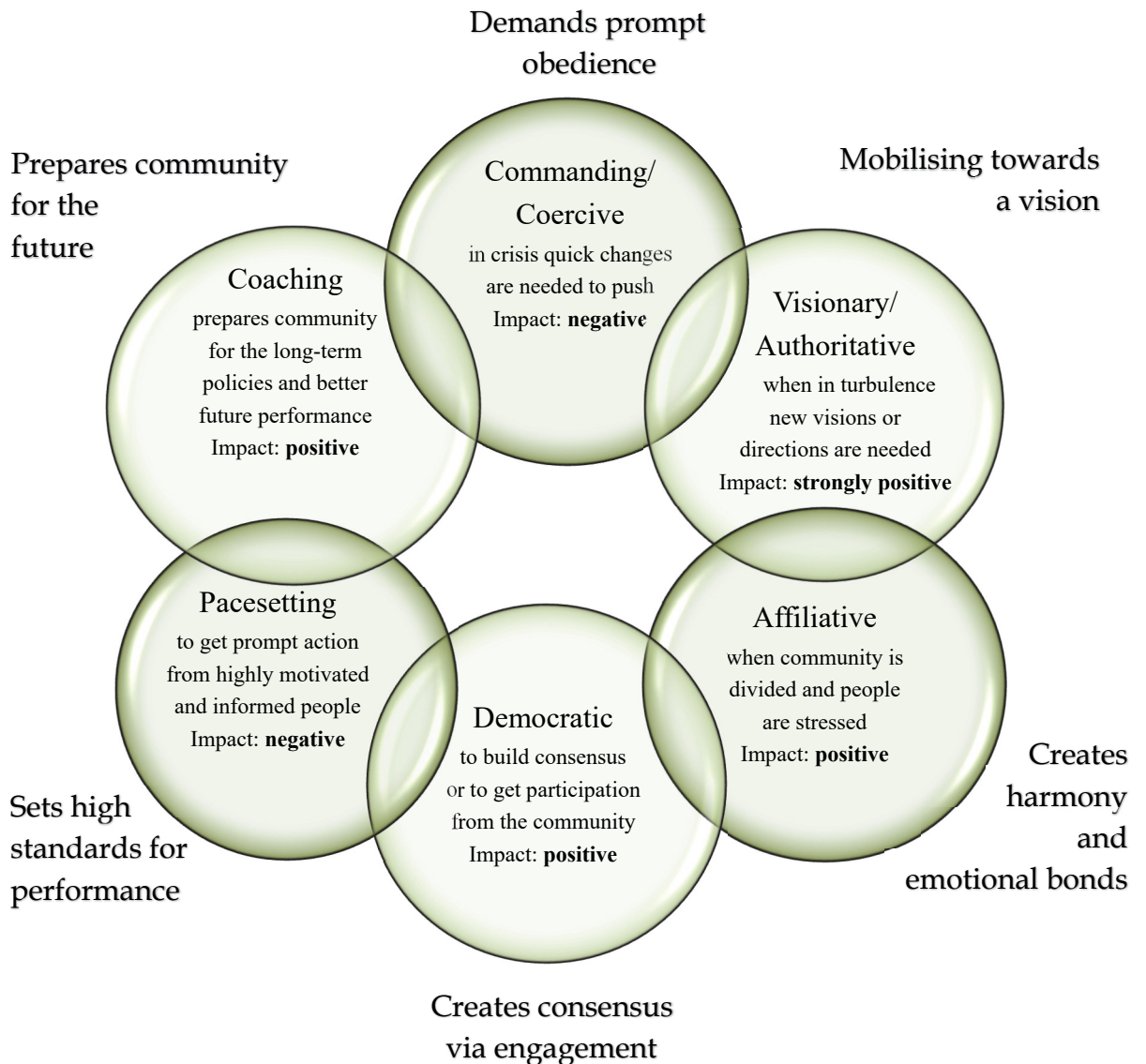


FIGURE 3 Leadership styles in different political environments

Figure 3 shows the six different leadership styles mentioned by Goleman (2000) for an organisational context. As Goleman (2000) stated, a commanding or pace-setting style can have negative impacts on the long term, while a coaching, affiliative or democratic style has positive effect on the situation, and a visionary or authoritative style can positively influence followers. Communication has a crucial role, as it enables a leader to mobilise people to follow his/her vision and create commitment. The leader's communication can be analysed from the perspective of what the media environment allows and/or provides.

Considering that currently most societies globally experience turbulence or crises, it would be important to better understand which leadership styles fit unstable situations. It has been noted that charismatic leaders arise in times of social change and imbalance or in the situation of crisis, while in the time of stability and economic growth their role diminishes (Bruns 1978; Grint 2000; Pappas 2011; Weber 1994). Although Goleman (2000) wrote about a business context, he also suggested that drastic changes call for a more coercive or authoritarian leadership style, whereas a harmonious context fits a more participative leadership style. In addition, he related this to the needs of the employees in question.

Therefore, Figure 4 was developed to illustrate a simplified model of leadership styles in different environmental situations, depending on the needs and level of experience of the followers in an environment of stability, change or crisis.

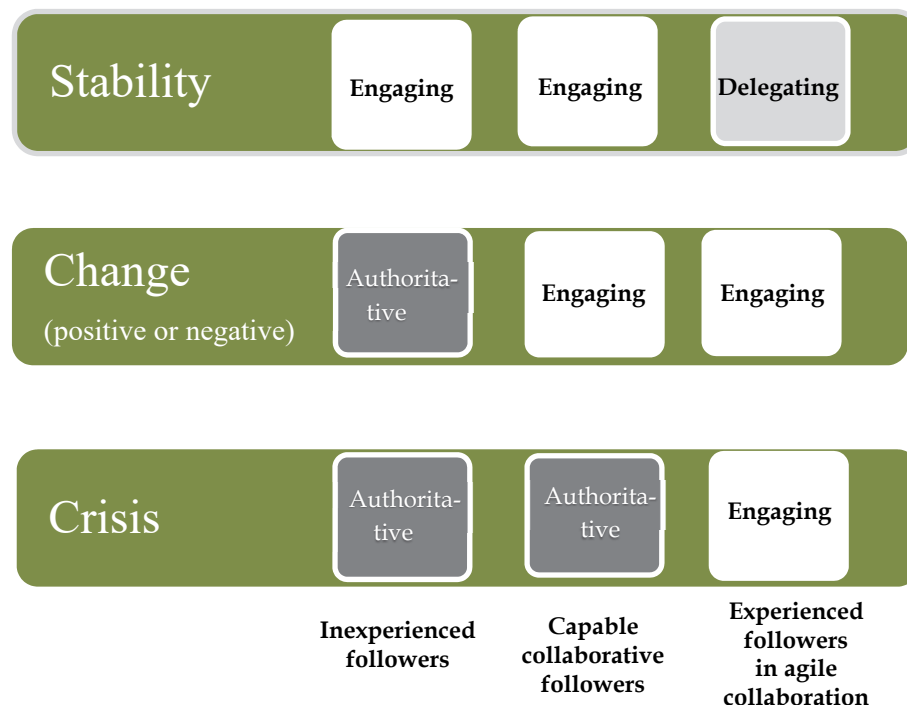


FIGURE 4 Leadership styles and levels of turbulence (partly based on Goleman 2000)

Depending on the turbulence level of the environment (stability, turbulence or crisis), the style of the leaders that this calls for varies from authoritative to engaging and delegative, taking into consideration the needs and collaboration experience of the followers. The style of the leaders, thus, tentatively, depends on the requirements of different situations. In other words, the political environment may favour particular leadership styles.

### 2.1.3 Magnetic leadership in current politics

Pappas (2012a: 6) distinguishes three types of political leaders: (1) traditional leaders, having personal (individual or collective) authority and traditional moderate aims; (2) legal-rational leaders, having impersonal (always collective) authority and procedural moderate aims; and (3) charismatic leaders, having personal authority (always individual) and the aim to radicalise society.

According to Weber (1994), charismatic leadership differs from other leadership types by its personal character and radical nature. Inspired by Weber, Pappas (2012a) included in political charisma “charismatic radicalism”, a force which aims to break traditional patterns and shake up legal bureaucratic and traditional procedural types of authority (Pappas 2011; Parsons 1964: 64). Thus, charismatic leadership may coincide with a period of tension in society causing collective anxiety of some groups. In such times, communication is pivotal. Weber (1994) highlighted the capacity of charismatic persons to communicate with other people in a simple way, wording complex ideas into simple terminology.

In the last decades, the term “charismatic (political) leader” has increased in usage in the context of election campaigns. Some political leaders are referred to as charismatic heroes or aspire to be able to communicate with followers in this way to motivate people and influence their behaviour. Several authors have explained that charismatic leaders are able to identify problems seen as important in society and suggest quick solutions for them, with the aim to mobilise public opinion in times of socio-political change (e.g. Grint 2000; Möller & Schierenbeck 2010). Thus, charisma is attributed to a leader by followers who recognise the issues addressed, possibly feeling unsatisfied by them or having an interest in them. The charismatic leader may have a self-centred or societal motivation and focus on addressing or, rather, just voicing problems to mobilise followers.

In the previous research, the concept of “political charisma” has suffered two main problems in the academic sphere. First, the concept cannot be clearly defined and, therefore, cannot be meaningfully analysed in academic research (Ake 1966; Schweitzer 1974; Spinrad 1991). Second, there are opposing opinions on if and how the phenomenon of charisma and charismatic leadership can be adopted into a current mind-frame and (neo-)liberal mass democracy (Bensman & Givant 1975; Loewenstein 1966; Shils 1958; Spinrad 1991).

The above problems can partially be explained by the positive associations generally generated by the term charisma. This is not strange, as in ancient Greek the word *χάρισμα* meant “gift” or “divine favour”. However, charismatic leaders, as stated by Weber (1994), are not always a positive power in society. In this way, it could be argued that next to, for example, Kennedy and the Dalai Lama, the

likes of Hitler and Mussolini could fit the characteristics of a charismatic leader. Therefore, in this thesis, a new term of “magnetic leadership” is introduced to avoid inviting associations solely with the positive elements of charisma and making the term applicable to the post-web era. This is supported by a dictionary of the English language that describes charisma as a personal quality or extraordinary power of “personal magnetism or charm” (American Heritage Dictionary).

Figure 5 presents magnetic leadership as encompassing both magnetic and charismatic elements. It also illustrates what is common for both.

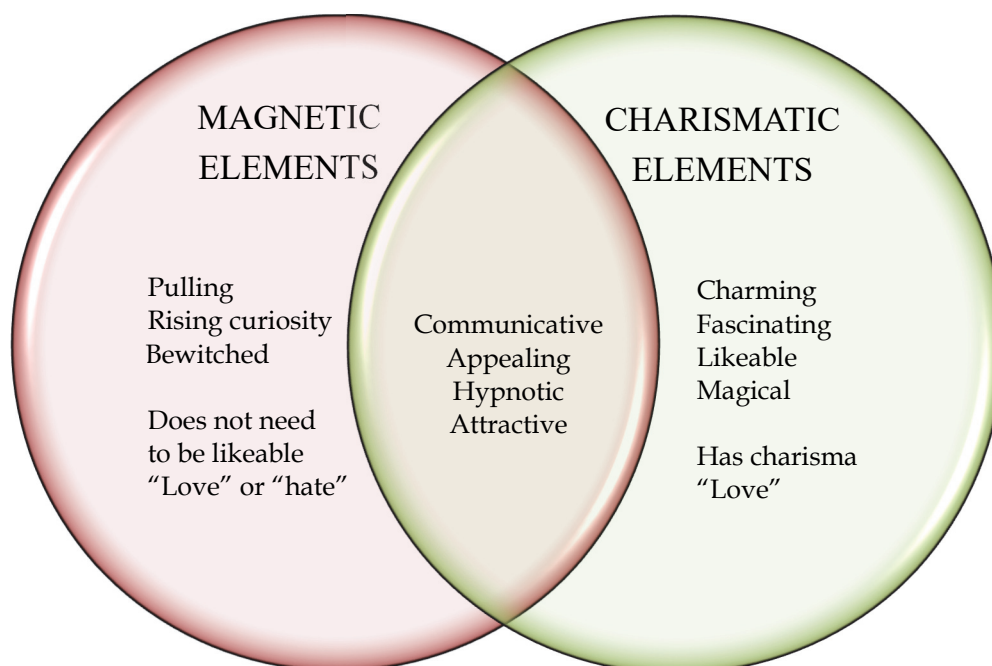


FIGURE 5 Magnetic leadership encompassing magnetic and charismatic elements

The difference between the adjectives charismatic and magnetic is that charismatic means related to, or having charisma, while magnetic means relating to, operating by or caused by magnetism (wikidiff.com). As the term “charismatic” mostly has a positive connotation, while “magnetic” has both negative and positive significations, in this thesis the term “magnetic leader” is used to refer both to positively charismatic leaders as well as extraordinary magnetic leaders with a strong positive or negative appeal. Magnetic leadership can, thus, include positive and negative human characteristics. It can be considered both for democratic and undemocratic leaders. Magnetic leaders draw much attention, evoking either positive emotions, such as admiration, or negative ones such as hatred. They often show great self-confidence and assertiveness, which becomes visible in verbal and non-verbal communication.

It could be concluded that magnetic leaders have the following physical, verbal and non-verbal characteristics:

- an appearance that encompasses the essence of the leader, both in a verbal and non-verbal sense (e.g. body language, clothing, confidence)

- energetic, positive or powerful communication style
- ability to listen and voice existing sentiments, which allows them to acquire devotees
- persuasiveness in presenting his/her own ideas
- awareness of his/her influence
- flexibility to seek opportunities in changing circumstances.

Pappas (2012a), based on Weber, offered two types of leadership in democracy: ordinary and extraordinary. Here, “extraordinary” could relate to the magnetic leader. The usual or ordinary leader is elected based on rational lawful principles, and his/her governance is impersonal and fits the situation of stability in a well-functioning deliberative democracy. Such a leader could be viewed as a mediator between the electorate and decision-makers. However, the unusual or charismatic leader governs with her or his personal magnetism and, rather, aims to break down the existing socio-political system.

Charismatic (or in this thesis called magnetic) leadership increasingly gained attention in the post-web communication environment, often going together with a populist way to frame messages (Pappas 2012a).

#### **2.1.4 Emotions and voter behaviour**

Machiavelli, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, in his famous work *The Prince*, drew the conclusion that people are governed by the emotions of love and fear (Viroli 1998). He stated that to have success, a governor has to practise both of them, and in this way can influence people.

Usually, the interest of people in politics is boosted by elections and protests. Both occasions could be seen as an opportunity to show unrest towards the government, decision-making or inertia. In these situations, an overabundance of negative emotions such as anger and fear can be observed (Brader 2011).

For over 2000 years Western civilisation has held wrong beliefs on decision-making. First, in the traditional Western philosophy from Plato to Kant, there has been the misunderstanding that the rational mind is separate from the emotional side of human beings, if not to say that in traditional understanding these would be opposites. The second misunderstanding, as proven by several scholars (e.g. Brader 2006, 2011; Häusel 2005; Lakoff 2008, 20011) was that rational thinking would be more important than emotions in human decision-making.

Whereas previously the importance of rationality has been emphasised in the decision-making process and in traditional normative models of deliberative democracy, now it is clear that human behaviour is strongly guided by emotions (Toode 2013) and that our decisions to a large extent are made by the subconscious mind (Lakoff 2011; Zaltman 2003). Decision-making usually follows emotions experienced in the context of the situation (Brader 2006; Hofinger & Manz-Christ 2011; Häusel 2005, 2011; Roth 2008; Weber 2012; Wegner 2003). Moreover, without emotional involvement in the decision-making process, a person is una-

ble to make important decisions (Häusel 2005, 2008). Häusel's research group developed a method that allows political parties to map electorates according to emotions and, consequentially, gain understanding of the target audience.

Brader (2010) constructed models that help to foresee the impact of emotional messages on audiences and their behaviour. This relates to basic emotions, in particular enthusiasm, fear and anger (Panksepp 2005; Plutchik 2003). These emotions are most often investigated and considered in preparing election campaigns (Brader 2006). In particular, negative emotions such as fear are considered to have considerable effect in persuasive communication, because they draw attention to political messages and can provoke actions (Brader et al. 2010; Graber 2007). In persuasive communication, it is assumed that it is hardly possible to change people's mind but feasible to reinforce deep-seated feelings and anxieties that people already have (Rees 1992).

Enthusiasm and inspiration that evoke emotions such as happiness, hope and anticipation have also been commonly used in election campaigns. Hope is a mobilising emotion in an electoral context but one of the hardest emotions to provoke. It is not easy to formulate a political message that creates an emotionally positive background to a campaign or communication strategy. Campaigns based on positive emotions work well, for example, where the economic conditions of the community are good, or where a party is ahead of others in the opinion polls (Brader et al. 2010).

Emotion-provoking techniques may be political or apolitical, verbal or non-verbal and can be linked to visual materials. Motivated and inspired voters are more interested in politics and feel a greater responsibility to vote and/or volunteer during a campaign. Such voters trust the leader, while disappointed voters are expected to change their views or even turn away from politics (Brader 2006).

People may not be aware of how emotions drive their behaviour as, according to Bargh (2006), emotions and the attitudes created by these emotions cause non-conscious behaviour. Fear and anger both create voters who are especially receptive to persuasion, but mostly anxious people are open to new information and seek compromise, while angry voters are closed to new information and, rather, look for punishment of the guilty (Brader et al. 2010; Druckman & McDermott 2008). Similarly, positive emotions should not be underestimated, for example, in crisis situations. Hope for a better future can make people act and overcome their fears (Brader 2006). It can be concluded that the various types of emotions and irrational decision-making by the public cannot be underestimated in society, even more so at election times.

## **2.2 The changing media environment**

In this section, the sweeping changes in the media environment are discussed, which have major consequences for political discussion.



### 2.2.1 Sweeping changes in the media

When in 1964 McLuhan stated “the medium is the message”, it was impossible to foresee the high level to which the digital media environment would affect human experience of the world and how rapidly society would adapt to this radically new cybertechnology-based communication. Since the introduction of the world wide web, there has been an ongoing academic debate about if and how the post-web communication environment may affect political deliberative discussions. It brought printed media text with audio-visual image-centred content in real time, sent out promptly all over the world. In this thesis, the term “*post-web media environment*” is used to encompass mass media as well as internet-based media such as social media.

The post-web media environment has brought other “rules of the game”, as it invites slogan-like messages and visualisations (e.g. short Twitter messages and self-made video content). Such media content can be posted by anyone (although this does not mean it is noted by others). In that sense, this development could be described as bringing the power of communication to the people, considering that in previous decades mass media content was created by institutions and professionals. For example, audio-visual communication was the realm of professional journalists, film makers and video producers. This change blurred the lines between producers and consumers of media content. The technical possibilities also invited visualisations (Jones 2013).

The use of image-based communication goes back to the beginning of the history of mankind, starting from the cave paintings at least 40,000 years ago. They were often used in power relations or politics. Examples could be the use of art in power communication in China, Egypt or during the 2000-year history of the Vatican and Christian Churches. Coming to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the use of audio-visual media by Göbbels as the propaganda minister of Hitler cannot be overlooked. Noteworthy is also the use of cinema in the Soviet Union as a tool of propaganda and, for example, Eisenhower’s use in 1956 in the USA of TV as a new medium to better reach the electors. These examples of the 20<sup>th</sup> century demonstrate that the era of mass communication as the playground for political communication began to flourish.

Later, a change away from forms of mass-televised media to new communication styles became notable between 1989 and 1992, when Clinton televisualised the charming leader, helped by so-called spin doctors. Communication techniques, including the use of the Internet, can help to disguise unwanted looks or emphasise characteristics. The USA’s President Obama, with his 2008 campaign, is remembered in election campaign history as a leader of interactive social media. In 2012, President Trump introduced his historical Twitter, or “140 characters”, campaign, later continuing his preference to use this medium.

Over the first decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, mankind has experienced the revolutionary transition from the so-called “old media” to the “new” web-based media surroundings, which has brought a momentous shift to a completely new communication environment in which modern devices make it possible to transmit

messages from the mass level to the micro level, while people relate to the new media in a much more personal and social way than before (Davis & Yang 2015).

In the mass media, content was “pushed” to passive users, while the post-web environment allowed people to broadcast or narrowcast their own messages, while creating their own media context, selecting and creating content (Jones 2013). World wide web inventor Berbers-Lee intended to create the web as a “collaborative medium” (Laningham 2006). This relates to another characteristic of post-web media: its capacity to mobilise people in virtual space, despite their geographical distance.

The previously widely used concepts of “old” and “new” media can be considered unclear, as they raise the question of what is “new” and in respect of what? Therefore, in this dissertation, the terms “pre-web”, indicating the era of traditional mass media, and “post-web”, meaning the Internet era, are used.

## 2.2.2 Developments from the pre- to post-web environment

The development from pre-web to post-web media shows a series of abrupt changes brought about by technological developments. Table 2 describes these changes in the media environment (building on, e.g. Choudhury 2014; Fou 2009; Laningham 2006; Lassila & Hendler 2007).

TABLE 2 Technological developments from the pre- to the post-web environment

Pre-web / traditional	Web 1.0 new	Web 2.0 social	Web 3.0 semantic
Pre-Internet era	Internet era 1989–ca. 2005	Internet era ca. from 2005–2019	Internet era ca. from 2019
Newspapers Other printed texts Radio TV	Non-interactive, static  Read-only, email, electronic documents (pdf)  Web sites and personal portals  Volume of content requires search engines	Interactive, read-write  User-generated content, social media, blogs, wikis  Fast information, efficient to find  Collaborative actions of users, follow and prioritise  User-established trust networks and trust radars	Computer-generated content  Individualised, shared in networks  Relevant and contextual information efficiently findable  Available anytime, anywhere, and through any channel (ubiquitous)  Internet of Things, ever-present Internet
Physical	Virtual, seldom connected	Virtual, more connected	Virtual, connected all the time

Whereas the pre-web media were largely non-interactive, the post-web media became known for user-generated content and connectedness. McNair (1995: 6) stated that, in the pre-web public service media system, professionally trained journalists fulfil the role of “watchdog” in society, informing citizens on the performance of those in power, while also communicating to political organisations how satisfied or troubled citizens are. The users or audiences were primarily passive consumers that did not have the opportunity to be engaged in content creation (Gobbo 2006). This changed when, after Web 1.0, dated 1989–ca. 2005 by Choudhury (2014), Web 2.0 became interactive, enabling read and write (Dougherty 2004).

The post-web era opened the possibilities for direct interactive communication between political organisations and citizens, without the “filter” of professional journalists. Thus, moving to the post-web era could be considered a revolutionary change, as voices of people at the grassroots levels began to be heard without the mediation of journalists. As a consequence of these developments, people currently spend more time being connected and need to learn various skills to use the resources offered on the web. Concerning Web 3.0, van Deursen and Mossberger (2018) also emphasised the importance of the Internet of Things, connecting people and technical appliances.

However, the post-web communication environment also opened channels for radicalised and extreme political forces. The web invites message framing, which is slogan-like, short and emotionally impressive. Moreover, there are countless opportunities for audiences to “pull” content and information towards them (Gobbo 2006), while content creators have to compete for attention on media platforms as issue arenas (Vos et al. 2014). On the web, professional journalists need to compete equally with the non-professional and the paid-content creators, such as advertising agents and fake news strategists.

In the current hybrid media system, pre-web and post-web media logics compete and, at the same time, also complement each other (Chadwick 2013: 207). Thus, the way of functioning of professional news in the mass media competes with the network logic that characterises the social media (Klinger & Svensson 2015). In the mass media era, journalists could be considered as professional gatekeepers and the citizens as relatively passive audiences. In the post-web media environment citizens function as peer networks (Klinger & Svensson 2015), which has changed content production. It used to be “push” media, where content was pushed to the audiences by media institutions. Moreover, the term “filtered media” indicates that media content was mediated by professional editors. The mass media logic followed the professional norms and news values, while the network media logic represents the ideal of “attention maximation” (Klinger & Svensson 2015: 1246). In the post-web environment, any citizen can take an active role online. According to Davis and Yang (2015), already a decade ago in the USA, the information gained on the web was the second main news source for adults after TV.

The new post-web environment also changed the way politicians interact with their voters, altering the communication style of candidates and transforming the content of political messages. Election campaigns tend to be personalised with heavy use of social media (e.g. in Estonia according to Toode et al. 2019). The new form of environment is often described as the “post-truth era” (Keyes 2004), or the “post-democracy” era (Crouch 2000). This is explained by studies (e.g. Åkerström 2016), that demonstrated that the post-web media environment favours simplistic, not in-depth message creation, and tends to picture the world in “black and white”, while stereotypes often result in creating division in society. In the situation of information overload there is often no time or wish to go deeper into the causes or consequences of political decisions taken.

The post-web environment also affected the voters’ perception of candidates and raised a particular kind of political personality that fits the post-web media electoral environment. As a result, these changes often go together with the phenomenon of rising populism in campaigning. The post-web setting is comfortable for newcomers, being movements, parties or single candidates, as it favours non-mediated communication and message creation without being filtered by professional journalists, as was the case in the earlier mass media environment.

### **2.2.3 Political competition for media attention**

After having explained the conditions in which the post-web media environment functions, this section focuses on how political actors operate in this new media environment, where all voices need to compete to be heard. To make one’s voice heard, first there is the need to get attention, after which it is even more difficult to keep the attention of the audiences. This is similar to how it was for audio-visual journalism during the era of mass communication when competition of public service broadcasters and commercial channels started to affect the production of media texts. It brought to the vocabulary of academic communication studies terms such as “infotainment”, “celebritisation of politicians” (Nessmann 2009) and later the debate on whether internet-based journalism was dumbing down the standards of pre-web journalism.

The question of competition for attention is even more crucial for the post-web media environment, as there are many communicators posting content on the web, which makes it difficult to stand out. This is part of the post-web media logic, as in the traditional mass-media setting, when politicians were governed by the pre-web media logic (Isotalous & Almonkari 2014). Table 3 compares mediated (news) media to the post-web non-mediated (or social) media.

TABLE 3 Message delivery dependence on professional news media

Mediated (news) media	Non-mediated (social) media
<p>In a mediated professional news-media environment, political leaders and other actors can deliver their message, but this is filtered by professional journalists or editors.</p> <p>Political leaders and other actors are dependent on the media environment, even if they have not adapted to the media to the extent that journalists suppose.</p>	<p>Political leaders and any other actors are not dependent on the traditional media (professional journalism).</p> <p>Anyone can deliver unfiltered messages, increasing competition for attention.</p> <p>Politicians and actors are not governed by pre-web traditional media logic. Post-web media have another logic.</p>

Mediated media are also called filtered media because of the interference of professional journalists or editors, while non-mediated media lack this filter and allow direct publishing by anyone communicating. Table 4 further explains this, focusing on the advantages and disadvantages of unfiltered media.

TABLE 4 Advantages and disadvantages of unfiltered media

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• direct communication</li> <li>• connectedness and sharing</li> <li>• options for interaction and participatory deliberation</li> <li>• for a leader: real-time message testing and options to gain data about followers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• unclear where the information comes from, no guaranteed credibility</li> <li>• loss of control, escalation</li> <li>• information overload provided by multiple senders</li> <li>• superficial and fragmented</li> </ul>

When people go online, they expect to be informed and involved, and they can comment or share content with others. Feedback options in social media, such as “likes” can test for reactions of voters, albeit superficially. Messages are often short (e.g. 140 characters in Twitter) and their credibility is unclear. Fast sharing can lead to escalation and intolerance. This facilitates a fast rise to power by leaders with magnetism attributes.

The post-web media environment comes with challenges for citizens. The conditions of the communication process in the information society make information management an engine for society to function. This situation is characterised by a revolutionary outburst of digital information and high technological communication, which has rapidly changed how societies are functioning and are organised. This has been expressed in the new term “digital citizens”, meaning individuals who have the means to participate in this form of society and use the Internet regularly (van Deursen & Mossberger 2018). Thus, societies and their citizens have entered the realm of cyber society.

## 2.3 Public engagement in the web environment

This section addresses the concept of public engagement, competition of multiple actors, issues in public arenas and processes in civil society in the digital era. It also discusses the potential of the Internet for deliberative debates.

### 2.3.1 The concept of public engagement

One of the main problems in relation to the ideal of the web as an environment for deliberative democracy is that of public engagement, involving public audiences and non-governmental organisations, with the aim to create the conditions for a more pluralistic society. Participation and engagement of non-political actors, such as citizens, pressure groups and civil society, or the “third sector” in the decision-making is crucial in democratic policy making (Hartmann 2017). In recent decades, the participation of citizens in political debates in cyberspace has increased. However, the post-web participation boosted via the Internet includes only some parts of society, while the voice of the “dominant” political actors continues to lead in the issues discussed and the course of the debate on issue arenas (e.g. Pellizzoni 2015; Luoma-aho & Vos 2010; Vos et al. 2014).

The term “public engagement” is used in the academic literature from the mid-1990s. It has much in common with the concept of participatory democracy, described already at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century by Rousseau, further developed by Stuart Mill in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and later addressed by, for example, Cole. Most often, public engagement is understood as the involvement of the public and third sector in civic and political life, in order to bring decision-making to the level of ordinary people, in contrast to an elitist approach in organising the society (Ferguson 1995).

A pre-condition of public engagement is a communication environment where journalists as professional mediators and other analysts of events enable people, by providing information exchange and knowledge, effective participation in deliberative debates and decision-making at all levels of society. This was considered so in the pre-web environment. In addition, the post-web media environment offers new possibilities for involving, energising and mobilising publics, as will be further discussed in the following sections.

### 2.3.2 Competition of multiple actors in issue arenas

In the present post-web media environment, communication between the multiple actors in society (governmental and other power-keepers, citizens, interest groups, etc.) has changed rapidly. Cyber technologies enable the spreading of information immediately when an event happens. The speed with which this takes place and the absence of geographical boundaries in the internet environment, and especially within social media networks, also allows the transmission of false information, often called “fake news”. Therefore, the post-web period in general is also known as the “post-truth era” (Keyes 2004). Citizens need to be

aware of the conditions of the post-web media environment, evaluate the credibility of messages and make sense of often conflicting sources of information.

In these conditions, communication on issues is complex, as multiple actors compete for attention for their viewpoints in debates on different media platforms. For this reason, the competitive post-web media environment has been addressed by the term “issue arena”, a virtual space for communication on issues that multiple actors have different stakes in (Vos et al. 2014). Actors may monitor different media platforms, where a particular issue that has their interest is addressed, and they compete with other stakeholders to make their voice heard (Luoma-aho & Vos 2010).

In the digital era, many non-governmental organisations use social networks or interactive web platforms as part of decision-making processes, aimed at finding solutions to social issues in society. Actors need to adopt their communication strategies to the post-web “media logic”, in which strong presence in the news media is required (Laursen & Valentini 2014), but also visibility in the cyber environment. In addition, crowdsourcing web forums are utilised as a novel form of public deliberative arenas, often referred to as “new governance style” (Pellizzoni 2015: 215). In this way, political leaders may encourage citizen participation in cyberspace. However, Pellizzoni (2015) critically noted that these web-forums are often a crisis management strategy of politicians to create a debate with limited segments of the population, in order to “silence” or emphasise issues of their choice.

### **2.3.3 Deliberative potential of the Internet**

Even if the normative theory of deliberative democracy offered by Habermas is much criticised by now, he has undoubtedly demonstrated the importance of independent media and communication in democracies. Currently, the discussion focuses on the possibilities and shortcomings of the post-web environment for deliberative debate.

The Internet has potential to provide conditions for deliberatisation, as public engagement can be enhanced by facilitation of participation and interactive communication (Castells, 1998). The users are given more control over content creation, although critics point out that the participation level is not equally spread in society (Dahlgren 2005, 2007; Jenkins 2006). Coleman and Blumler (2009: 169) pointed out that people need to understand what they may gain by web-facilitated participation. Many people, rather, behave as passive consumers on the Internet (Pruulmann-Vengerfeld & Reinsalu 2009) and do not actively participate in content creation or deliberative debate (SAAR POLL 2008: 16). Thus, the questions arise of what type of content will grow in cyberspace and which kinds of content creators may gain the most advantages in the post-web media environment.

The impact of the changed media context on political communication is usually viewed from the perspective of optimistic “utopian” equalisation or pessimistic “dystopian” normalisation theories (Lilleker et al. 2011; Nothhaft 2016:

66). Cyber “utopists” consider the web as having positive effects on wider engagement of publics and “deliberatisation” of politics, offering equal opportunities to small political parties to face the major political forces (Boulianne 2009; Rheingold 1993; Gurevitch et al. 2009). The pessimists suggest the opposite and argue that the big parties continue to dominate the post-web media environment and that the cyberspace within politics echoes the same shortcomings and issues of power relations as experienced during the mass media era (Davis 1999; Lilleker et al. 2011; Norris 2001; Witte et al. 2009). The web pessimists stress also that the cyberspace and social media networks offer perfect opportunities for extremist voices and refined cyber propaganda, in that way increasing the “digital” or “democratic divide” (Norris 2001: 274; Witte et al. 2009: 6; Witte & Mannon 2010: 51). Moreover, internet users discuss political matters usually with “like-minded others”, while the voices of differently minded people are not taken into consideration (Sunstein 2001). Therefore, cyber debates lack the principles of plurality and engagement of differently minded groups in society.

Nevertheless, the new media environment has offered new ways of communication via blogs, social media and video streaming, so that Internet users can directly link up with each other to share information, give support, mobilise and create collective identities (Dahlgren 2005). Dahlgren described a functioning public sphere as a concentration of spaces that facilitate the “circulation of information, ideas, debates – ideally in an unfettered manner – and also the formation of political will” (Dahlgren 2005: 148). In the context of political communication, the web offers possibilities for such a public sphere, as it facilitates direct communication between decision-makers and citizens. The introduction of Web 2.0 applications was mostly described as a facilitator of a deliberative democracy (Rheingold 1993: 131).

On the basis of the Habermasian normative theory (Habermas 1989, 2006), it could be argued that interactivity, digital information spread and communication technologies fit with democratic norms. Web 2.0 was considered an environment that boosts public engagement, makes politics and decision-making more transparent, fosters debates between decision-makers and citizens and gives different segments in society opportunities to express their voice. In the context of a deliberative democracy, Habermas (2006) emphasised that processes of decision-making are based on public argumentation among engaged equal citizens. Therefore, the cyber environment could offer new communication opportunities, both for political actors and citizens (Habermas 1989, 2006).

Other studies have underlined that in the post-web media era the public sphere is fragmented and destabilised (e.g. Witte et al. 2009). Furthermore, Dahlgren saw also an opportunity in the destabilisation of the public sphere, pointing out that older patterns in political communication will disperse, while the web-based environment offers new opportunities to “pull” information from various sources, bringing out diverse points of view (Dahlgren 2005, 2007; Gobbo 2006). In any case, already more than a decade ago, Dahlgren warned that the Habermasian public sphere might not work in cyberspace, because this norma-



tive model of deliberative democracy underestimates the reality of power relations, while the same problems may occur on the Internet as in the offline environment. One reason could be that web discussions often do not follow the high ideals set for a deliberative democracy. Dahlgren talks about an “optimal” level of engagement in the web environment, because with increased participation there are always few people with time to “listen”, as everyone primarily makes an effort to “talk” (Dahlgren 2005: 155-157). This raises the question of whether the potential of cyberspace really helps to achieve the conditions needed for deliberative politics.

Moreover, in the post-web era there might be a lack of information about the possibilities and presence of civil society, especially in the so-called “new democracies” or “New Europe”, where in the past century democracy has not developed in the same way as in the Western world. In those areas there is no deliberative tradition. Therefore, there are conditions to be fulfilled for post-web media to be able to boost participation and deliberation (Lilleker et al. 2011; Norris 2001; Pellizzoni 2013; Vos et al. 2014; Wright 2012). The main potential for deliberative political debate is interactivity via social networking sites, such as Twitter, Facebook and online discussion platforms. Related to this, from the perspective of political communication and deliberative debate, “crowdsourcing” is important to consider. Crowdsourcing is a practice of engaging people with different viewpoints to contribute to a common goal, based on open access and free collaboration, which promotes collective creativity (Kaufman 2008; Brabham 2008). In this context, crowdsourcing as a phenomenon can facilitate networking on the person-to-person or societal level, offering possibilities for people to make a contribution (Brabham 2008). Blending of open source publishing and crowdsourcing permits a group of users to develop novel ideas and products together. While most pre-web media texts are copyrighted and controlled by the content publisher, crowdsourcing has the potential to raise the level of democracy in post-web interactive media.

Furthermore, studies have shown that, so far, there is little interaction for political deliberative debate in cyberspace (Lilleker et al. 2011). Most people are messaging their own content, they “message” much more than they read (Dahlgren 2005) and there is a lack of real person-to-person interaction. Therefore, even if the Internet potentially offers a promising environment for dialogue, it is often used in a one-sided way and for voicing radical viewpoints. Similar conclusions were made for engagement in news media where, according to Lawrence, Radcliffe, and Schmidt (2018: 1222), “the participatory promise of digital and social media is far from realised from either the journalistic or the public end”.

#### **2.3.4 Models of democracy in a post-web media perspective**

Stone (2012: 323) identified three political models where persuasive communication is involved: (1) the *rational democratic model*, which depicts the situation where information is neutral and decisions are made based on rational debate, while deliberation inspires citizens to engage and participate in decision-making

in society; (2) the *totalitarian* model, which describes an environment where power holders produce biased information and control the news flow, using information for controlling society, making citizens obey; (3) the *polis model*, which represents the situation where citizens, besides reason, make their decisions based on “irrational” elements, such as emotions and stereotypes, while political actors use communication strategies to make their voices heard, making information socially constructed.

The *rational-democratic model* fits the situation of deliberative democracies. Pappas (2011) called it the “ordinary” democratic situation in which, ideally, major crises are not present and society functions well. The corresponding “ordinary” non-charismatic leaders are voted for to represent or “mediate” the will of the majority of the citizens (ibid.). In broad brushstrokes, this situation coincides with the normative model of deliberative democracy of Habermas (1989). These representations of democratic society seem to fit the pre-web era when, in the period after the Second World War, Western countries seemed to have the common will to build well-functioning democracies to safeguard against situations of war and crises. It could be suggested that the *polis model* increasingly reflects the current media landscape, as cyberspace invites a fast exchange of views, which emphasise emotion. Furthermore, some countries are, rather, characterised by the *totalitarian model* in which the flow of news is controlled.

A detailed approach of various political models and how they might develop over time, from a communication point of view, can be found in the work of Nothhaft (2016). Nothhaft (2016: 68-69) identified five types of democracies: (1) aggregative democracy (vote); (2) deliberative democracy (talk); (3) synthetic democracy (post-politics, post-democracy); (4) pluralistic democracy (agonistic); and (5) material democracy (autonomist). This classification illustrates how the essence of democracy has changed over time in accordance with needs and desires, both from the side of people and political parties or leaders.

In the case of an *aggregative* (classical Western-style mass) *democracy* parties offer politically professional leaders who can engineer pragmatic compromises among voter groups to gain order in society, although they mainly focus on being re-voted in, and marginal groups lack attention, causing groups of citizens to back away from politics or incline towards populist extremes (ibid.: 70).

In a *deliberative democracy*, the idea is to arrive via participation in public debate of knowledgeable citizens to legitimate agreement; however, this impartial public deliberation is difficult to reach, and digital democracy has faced similar shortcomings to pre-web democracy (Nothhaft 2016: 71).

*Synthetic democracy* refers to the failure of liberal democracies after the collapse of communist regimes in the 1990s, when politics became marketisation of democracy and, in order to handle various risks, power moved to experts and technocrats (Nothhaft 2015: 73). The uncertainty of the modern age has also been described by Beck (1992) using the term “risk society”. At the same time, Giddens (1998) addressed Third Way centrism, which combined a left socialist policy with a capitalist economic policy. This emphasised a different role of the state that “should strive for greater equality and justice in society, yet not by redistribution

of wealth, however, but by empowerment of people” (Nothhaft 2016: 73). In this context also, the term “network society” was coined by van Dijk (1991, 2000) and extended on by Castells (1996). In the network society, power is held by networks, which are “opened and meritocratic in principle, so that a poly-centric society arises” (Nothhaft 2016: 77). One recent example could be the rise of the Five Star Movement in Italy.

The *pluralistic democracy* emphasises that there is no need to seek a consensus through debate between rational citizens with different agendas. This accepts that conflict will appear among individuals or groups with diverse interests and, thus, the democratic process should provide arenas for such differences to be confronted.

Nothhaft (2016: 77-81) introduced the *material democracy* in contrast to the other above-described models, as liberal capitalism of Adam Smith, considering redistribution of material wealth. This model aims to bring a shift to situations where most citizens work for wages and their well-being and participation in social and political life depends on material wealth or debts and lack of economical possibilities, whereas the means of production are controlled by small but wealthy elites (Nothhaft 2016: 81).

Having observed the different forms of democracy, the question arises of if and how the post-web media shape the democracy and, in that way, affect the public engagement. This question leads to four different possible answers, or scenarios, according to Nothhaft (2016: 68-69):

- an utopian optimist extreme, in which the post-web media world would factually be more democratic and is also perceived as more democratic;
- a dystopian pessimist opposite, as the social media structure and the post-web media realm is less democratic and is also perceived as less democratic (with as another option that society becomes gradually less democratic without people noticing);
- “nothing happens”, as the consequences for democracy may remain limited;
- a fourth pathway, as factually there is more, or at least not less, democracy when compared to the old ideal, but there is less perceived democracy, which might lower the functionality of society.

Nothhaft (2016) did not say which of the scenarios is most likely to happen. In any case, it is assumed that the main challenge for any traditional type of democracy is to gain well-informed citizens who are able to make political choices. However, already in the 1920s, Lippmann stated in his work, *Phantom Public*, that democracy is not controlled by the public but by educated elites. He also stated that in cases where the public is not fully informed, it is easy for elites to convince people to make up their opinion in a certain way and still make them feel they made a decision based on their own knowledge and opinion (Lippmann 1925). Thus, the idea that public opinion is “constructed” got much attention from political scientists, and persuasion was firmly placed on the academic agenda.

As in the post-web media environment, multiple actors compete for attention and they will frame the issues their way. To gain and keep the attention of the audience, persuasive and emotional messages are used. The prevalence of persuasion in the post-web media environment also brings about the use of more sophisticated communication strategies that aim to convince others to believe something or react in a certain way.

## 2.4 Synthesis and research gap

In this section a synthesis of the insights presented in this chapter is provided, after which the research gap is concluded.

The literature shows numerous works in the field of political leadership focused on the ruler's style (e.g. Bruns 1987; Grint 2000; Möller & Schierenbeck 2010). Other scholars underline the meaning of charisma for the efficiency of political leaders (Bensman & Givant 1975; Friedrich 1961; Pappas 2011, 2012a,b; Weber 1994) and their effect on the followers (e.g. Podsakoff et al. 1990). However, corporate leadership is addressed more in the literature than political leadership (Goleman 2002).

In political marketing the interests have widely been concentrated on analyses of voter behaviour prior to or after the elections (Ben-Ur & Newman 2002; Newman 2001), including studies that aim to advise political consultants on how to best carry out a winning campaign by reaching most efficiently the target group (Brader 2011; Brader et al. 2010). A lot of literature on the level of neuropsychology highlights the effect of emotions on human actions or reactions concerning political decision-making (e.g. Damasio 1994; Egorova 2011). However, few researchers have observed how followership can change the leader (Kellerman 2008). Some considered whether human decision-making is a rational or irrational process (Lakoff 2011), while others focused on the role of emotions and voter decisions during the elections (Hofinger & Manz-Christ 2011).

The literature on political communication includes attention to research on post-web media impacting on society, mobilisation and engagement of the voters and democratic debate in cyberspace (Dahlberg 2007; Dahlgren 2005, 2007; Habermas 2006; Lilleker et al. 2011; Lilleker & Malagon 2010; Pellizzoni 2012). Some recent literature focused on the democratic deficit (Stone 2012) or "death of democracy" in the post-web world (Levitsky & Ziblatt 2018).

As a basis for this thesis, the academic literature has been examined and reported in this chapter, focused on political leadership, public engagement and the alteration of the media environment from the traditional pre-web environment to the new post-web ambience. Looking back at the previous sections of this thesis, it stands out that in the post-web environment, political leadership styles, including the related communication strategies and processes of power holding in society, have changed rapidly when new possibilities were offered by the development of information technology. The post-web media landscape, together with the current turbulent time with its diverse crises, brought constraints

for the deliberative democracy model in society and favoured the rise of magnetic leaders, often with a populist way to frame messages and authoritarian intentions. In the literature, when looking at the phenomenon from different perspectives, communication studies, political marketing and political sciences, several reasons for this surfaced.

The post-web media environment seems to especially fit the magnetic leader type, because of its immediate information spread, which emphasises emotions and makes it easy to promote false information, also called “fake news”. On the one hand, post-web media potentially offers more opportunities for public engagement, increased visibility of minor political actors and multi-actor deliberation. On the other hand, segments of socio-economically weaker groups in society may lack the will, abilities or other conditions to participate in web-based deliberation. Thus, problems of the mass media era also exist in the post-web cyber environment. Furthermore, well-established actors seem to benefit more in the post-web communication environment, and extremist groups can more easily mobilise followership.

Another phenomenon that influences both public engagement and political leadership is the multitude of information offered in the post-web environment. The post-web system allows the spread of an almost endless number of messages promptly, causing people to spend much time filtering important or useful information from what they consider “trash news”.

In this situation, political and non-political actors fiercely compete for attention in issue arenas on web platforms, often using sophisticated communication strategies to monitor, win position and promote issues that they have an interest in. At the same time, messages get shorter and are often presented in a visual or audio-visual format. Thus, the communication of the actors involved tends to be strongly persuasive and emotional in the post-web, highly competitive media environment.

To sum up, Figure 6 maps the interrelations indicated in the earlier literature and presented in this theoretical chapter.

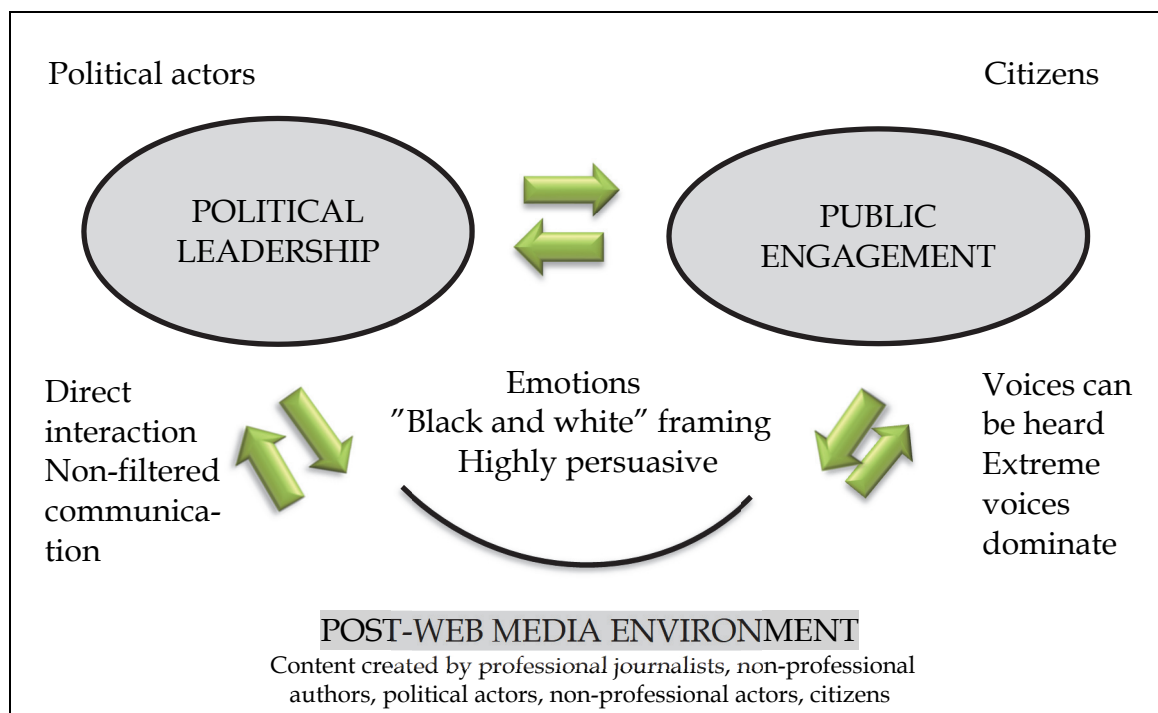


FIGURE 6 Theoretical basis for the thesis

The post-web environment affects how the leadership style relates to public engagement, which calls for new communication strategies as the competition in a multitude of issue arenas active on the Internet has become more intense. The web-based media favour magnetic leaders, while new forms of public engagement appear that potentially open new forms of deliberation.

Although the previous research has brought forth intriguing insights, there are still many unsolved research problems in the field of study concerning the interrelations of political leadership, public engagement and the post-web media environment. The impacts of the new setting on democracy are unclear. Research into the effects of the post-web media environment on political leadership, on public engagement and participation is largely missing. Meanwhile, studies that answer the question of if and how social media and deliberative crowdsourcing platforms boost public engagement and participation in decision-making are also rare. Issue formation and manipulation of information on web platforms via emotions have not yet been studied in relation to the model of deliberative democracy. Emotions are mostly studied in an electoral context for creating winning strategies, rather than in the context of promoting or hindering participation and deliberation in the post-web society. What influences issue discourse on multi-actor arenas in the post-web media environment? Does deliberation, as understood so far in the literature, fit the post-web "democracy" at all or should one rethink how democratic governance functions in the post-web era?

Based on these observations it could be concluded that there is a lack of multidisciplinary research that aims to observe and better understand the phenomenon of the changing post-web media environment, how this goes together

with the rise of magnetic leaders and relates to public engagement. This thesis aims to contribute to a better understanding of this phenomenon, focusing on:

- how the deliberative democracy shows in the current web-based media environment
- how the role of politicians developed in the changing media environment, and which actors in society are real power holders in the new conditions
- how civil society, citizens and power holders interact via the media in deliberative debate, and how the diverse actors compete in the media for public attention.

In the next chapter, the research design and detailed research questions for the four empirical studies are outlined.

## 3 RESEARCH APPROACH

This thesis applies a multidisciplinary approach to political leadership and public engagement in the changing post-web media environment. The purpose of the research is to contribute to a better understanding of how political leaders operate in the current post-web environment and how this affects public engagement in society. Supported by the theoretical framework described in the previous chapter, the empirical data were gained in four empirical studies. This chapter provides an overview of the studies, including the research questions and the methods applied.

### 3.1 Overview of the studies

To gain insights into communication by political actors when communicating with the public and how political communication in the current media landscape relates to public engagement, four studies were implemented. They centred on:

- TV presence and image presentation of politicians
- interaction of politicians with citizens
- e-democracy and crowdsourcing
- charismatic leaders.

An explorative approach was chosen to gain first insights into this broad topic. For each of the above central themes an empirical study was outlined. All empirical studies dealt with the three central research questions for the thesis (as outlined at the end of the previous chapter), but from a different viewpoint and presenting different time periods in the transition period from the TV and mass media-dominated environment to the post-web media era.

Study I scrutinised the TV presence and image presentation of politicians in the main news bulletins. In the post-web era, a hybrid system exists in which, next to the web-based media, traditional mass media also affect how political leaders appear to citizens. Initially, TV in particular had much impact. The study



focused on public service TV as the dominant channel for citizens gaining political information prior to elections in the pre-web era. In the context of this thesis, Study I helped to understand how politicians presented a favourable image in the mass media environment and what characteristics of the communication could be observed in this media environment.

Study II examined the interaction of politicians with citizens. This study focused on the use of an interactive Web 2.0 application by politicians during the campaign for the European elections in 2009 in Estonia. For this thesis, Study II helped to understand how decision-makers use new possibilities for direct interaction with citizens to foster participatory politics by means of a web-based platform. It also described how politicians present themselves in the cyber environment.

Study III considered e-democracy and crowdsourcing. This study focused on a crowdsourced project carried out in 2013 in Estonia, aimed to increase citizen participation in decision-making via a web platform created for that purpose. Alas, the participation level remained very low and the project failed. This study added insight into the pros and cons of e-democracy and crowdsourcing by politicians.

Study IV focused on the rise of charismatic (or in this thesis called magnetic) leaders in conditions of instability. This explorative study aimed to clarify why charismatic politicians have success in present-day politics and how the phenomenon of charismatic leaders with a high number of followers affects democratic conditions. In this way, the study contributed to understanding how political actors currently communicate their message to the public.

Table 5 shows an overview of the four studies and the publications in which the results were reported.

TABLE 5 Overview of the studies, their focus and the related papers

<b>STUDY I: TV presence and image presentation of politicians</b>	
The focus was on audio-visual news. The study looked at the way in which politicians in Finland and in Estonia use TV news to present the most favourable image of themselves in the pre-election period.	Toode, Ü. (2009) The image presentation of parliamentary candidates in Estonian and Finnish public service (PS) TV news. In Rogojinaru, A. & Wolstenholme, S. (eds). <i>Current trends in International Public Relations</i> , Tritonic, Bucarest, 298-314.
<b>STUDY II: Interaction of politicians with citizens</b>	
The focus was on the use of interactive Web 2.0 applications by politicians. Data from political party web pages during the 2009 European Parliamentary elections in Estonia were analysed.	Toode, Ü. (2016) Fostering dialogue or monologue? – Estonian party websites during the 2009 European Parliament elections. <i>Journal of Political Marketing</i> 15, (2-3), 120-148.
<b>STUDY III: E-democracy and crowdsourcing</b>	
The focus was on deliberative discussion. The study aimed to critically analyse the People's Assembly (Rahvakogu), a crowdsourced project carried out in Estonia in 2013.	Toode, Ü. (2020) The People's Assembly: Testing the collaborative e-democracy? <i>Online Journal of Communication and Media Technologies</i> , 10(1).

STUDY IV: Charismatic leaders	
The focus was on the role of charismatic political leaders in a current democracy. The purpose of this explorative study was to identify the meaning of charisma in our time and, in particular, how current power holders tend to use charisma in their communication.	Toode, Ü. (2020) Charismatic leaders in a new perspective: Reality in Estonia and Italy. <i>Studies in Media and Communication</i> , 8(1), 11-24.

In the following section, each study is further explained.

### 3.1.1 Study I: TV presence and image presentation of politicians

Study I looked at the way in which politicians in two Northern European countries – Finland and Estonia – used TV news to present the most favourable image of themselves in the 2007 pre-election period. Special attention was given to the use of interviews, as this was the dominant way for political leaders to communicate their messages to a mass audience in the pre-web environment. It meant that the party ideology had to be adapted to the “sound-bite talk” used in televisualised campaigning.

This study contributed to the research with data from 2007, when the Internet and social media channels were not yet widely used in political campaigns in Europe. In most European countries, TV still had the central role in image presentation of the political leaders, and the political campaigns were predominantly designed for the mass media environment.

The study investigated the TV presence and image presentation of politicians in public service (PV) TV news, at the time the most trusted channel of political information for the electorate. Attention was given to how politicians appeared during the TV news interviews, their image and voice. The study considered how frequently and in what way candidates appeared as interviewees in the main evening news bulletin of PS TV news and whether the TV appearances may have influenced the election results. It also scrutinised how a desirable image is created by political interviewees, by investigating the use of statements showing certainty and commitment (following Simon-Vandenberg 1996).

Finland and Estonia were chosen because both had general elections in 2007. Furthermore, both have experienced cultural or political domination from neighbouring countries and are similar in that sense. Both countries are also relatively small and belong to Northern Europe. However, at the time, the Estonian political culture was still very different from the Finnish one, as Estonia’s transition process from a socialist culture to a Western democracy was not yet complete.

The data were collected from the recordings of main evening news bulletins of PS TV in Finland and Estonia within 30 days before the general elections of 2007. Both verbal and non-verbal variables were considered when analysing the appearance of political candidates in the case of TV news interviews. To examine the linguistic elements used to convey intellectual power, the modality model of

Simon-Vandenberg (1996: 391-392) was applied to consider whether an utterance was presented as true, reliable and authoritative.

### **3.1.2 Study II: Interaction of politicians with citizens**

Study II scrutinised the interaction of politicians with citizens. It presented data from the analyses of political party web pages during the 2009 European Parliamentary elections in Estonia. The study examined the presence and absence of Web 2.0 features on the sites and aimed to find out whether interactive applications were used by political parties to increase participation and foster deliberative politics.

Estonia, as a small ex-Soviet country, emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union as an advanced e-society. Therefore, it was chosen as the setting for a case study to explore if and how decision-makers use the Web 2.0 elements for fostering a Habermasian dialogue between citizens and power holders in society.

The results show that the Estonian parties still acted according to the one-sided model of communication suitable for Web 1.0, even though all conditions for interactive deliberation from a technical and infrastructural viewpoint were fulfilled.

The study discussed the possible reasons why parties might not be interested in using Web 2.0 elements on their web campaign and how this is linked to the situation of low interest in politics among citizens. The results underlined the need for further systematic comparative research to draw conclusions on the changes in political communication in the post-web environment.

### **3.1.3 Study III: E-democracy and crowdsourcing**

Study III focused on e-democracy and crowdsourcing. It contributed by critical analyses of a collaborative e-democracy project in which governmental and non-governmental stakeholders collaborated to develop laws and policies. Estonia was again chosen as the setting for the case study, being a transition democracy with a very high internet penetration. Thus, it was considered an inviting environment for participatory crowdsourcing initiatives. The People's Assembly (Rahvakogu) served as a case study as it was a project carried out in Estonia in 2013 in which Estonian citizens could participate in the decision-making process via a website created for this purpose. In the years 2017-2019 there were also other projects for which the platform was used, but these are outside the scope of this study.

The main question raised in this study was whether this project corresponded to the requirements of collaborative e-democracy. Or could it rather be characterised as an attempt to maintain stability by those in power in a situation of instability or crisis, as some authors concluded in the case of some earlier similar projects (Bynum & Rogerson, 2004; Coleman & Blumler 2009; Pellizzoni 2013)?

The study considered which principles the participants in the deliberative discussions were chosen under and whether all members of society had equal access to the debate. The analyses demonstrated that not all the conditions for collaborative e-democracy were considered.

It was concluded that these kinds of interactive platforms can increase the effectiveness and the quality of policy decisions. However, they can also be highly regulated “top-down” initiatives, as earlier research brought forth (Pellizzoni 2012). The study suggested that governments include deliberative elements in e-government projects and provide an adequate infrastructure for all citizens involved. The broader question raised in the discussion was how well the concept of Habermasian deliberative democracy fits in current policy processes of the post-web era.

### **3.1.4 Study IV: Charismatic leaders**

Study IV focused on charismatic (or in this thesis called magnetic) leaders. It analysed the role of charismatic political leaders in present-day democracy. The purpose of this explorative study was to better understand whether charismatic leaders fit the post-web setting of democracy and, if so, what the positive and negative sides of the rising role of charisma in modern elections are. The study focused on what political charisma, nowadays, includes and how it might affect politics. It helped shed light on how the role and style of politicians have developed in the changing media environment. As case studies, Estonia and Italy were observed, the latter being a country that has been for years a subject in political communication because of the phenomenon of “Berlusconisation” of the media.

The study took into consideration the theoretical approach of Weber and built on the charisma index of Pappas (2011). The results demonstrated that charismatic leaders tend to make better use of the possibilities offered by social media. The study concluded that the post-web environment favours populist message framing and makes it easier for radical voices to dominate public discourse. It also discussed if and how charismatic (magnetic) leaders fit into the context of deliberative democracy.

## **3.2 Research questions**

Four studies were designed to explore different aspects of the central theme of the thesis – political leadership and public engagement in a changing media environment. Furthermore, each study investigated matters central to its focal case or situation. Table 6 lists the corresponding research questions (RQs) for the four studies.

TABLE 6 Research questions for each of the four studies

<b>STUDY I: TV presence and image presentation of politicians</b>	<b>STUDY II: Interaction of politicians with citizens</b>
<p>RQ1: How frequently and in what way do candidates appear during the interviews given for the main evening news bulletins of public service TV in Finland and Estonia during the official electoral campaign (30 days) before the general elections of 2007?</p> <p>RQ2: Does the frequency of parties and candidates' TV news presence affect the voting behaviour in the observed countries, and, if so, to what extent?</p>	<p>RQ1: To what extent do political parties, as relevant political actors, incorporate Web 2.0 applications into their online communication with citizens and campaigning in Estonia?</p> <p>RQ2: Are politicians really interested in participation and engagement of citizens?</p>
<b>STUDY III: E-democracy and crowdsourcing</b>	<b>STUDY IV: Charismatic leaders</b>
<p>RQ1: Was the People's Assembly, a crowdsourced project carried out in Estonia in 2013, an attempt to raise engagement or, rather, an example of how to maintain stability by power holders in an unstable situation?</p> <p>RQ2: Why was the participation level low?</p>	<p>RQ1: How do we understand charismatic (magnetic) leadership in contemporary politics?</p> <p>RQ2: How do power holders use charisma in their political communication?</p> <p>RQ3: Does the rise of charismatic leaders mean less democracy?</p>

Below, the methodology and findings of the studies will be described in detail. The original papers are included as appendices to this thesis.

### 3.3 Methodology

Research processes were defined by Leedy and Ormrod (2001:14) as a practice of "collecting, analysing, and interpreting data in order to understand a phenomenon". According to Creswell (2014: 35), research is always based on "claims of knowledge", which help formulate the research questions, build the theoretical framework and choose the research strategy and appropriate methods to get the questions answered. He explained that it is necessary to combine quantitative and qualitative data analyses, combining diverse methods and a multidisciplinary approach to achieve results that aim to understand the studied phenomenon from a wider viewpoint (Creswell 2014). This approach has also been a basis for this doctoral thesis.

For the four studies, diverse and often mixed methods were used, according to the research requirements. These included qualitative and quantitative methods, such as content analysis of media texts and critical discourse analysis. This is further specified below in Table 7.

TABLE 7 Overview of the methods used in the four studies

STUDY I: <b>TV presence and image presentation of politicians</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Qualitative content analysis</li> <li>• Quantitative content analysis</li> <li>• Non-verbal image measurement</li> </ul>
STUDY II: <b>Interaction of politicians with citizens</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Qualitative content analysis</li> <li>• Quantitative content analysis</li> </ul>
STUDY III: <b>E-democracy and crowd sourcing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Argumentative literature review</li> <li>• Qualitative and quantitative content analysis</li> <li>• Partly, critical discourse analysis</li> </ul>
STUDY IV: <b>Charismatic leaders</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Theoretical literature review</li> <li>• Critical discourse analysis of political speeches</li> <li>• Charisma index</li> </ul>

### 3.3.1 Qualitative and quantitative research

As the purpose of the research was to better understand how political leaders operate in the current changing media environment and how this affects public engagement in society, most methods used for the research presented in this thesis are qualitative, but the data were supplemented by some quantitative methods. At the same time, each study used a combination of different methods to answer the research questions posed.

Creswell (2014: 32) explained that the strategy of research can be either qualitative (e.g. observing a situation), or quantitative (e.g. using experiments). *Qualitative research* focuses on gaining deeper insight into a phenomenon (Creswell 2014). In this research, qualitative work included qualitative content analysis for studies I, II and III, whereas in Study I non-verbal image measurement was also used, and in Study IV critical content analysis and the charisma index developed by Pappas (2011).

*Quantitative research* focuses on gathering a large numerical data sample to generalise outcomes across groups of people and, in this way, further clarify a particular phenomenon. However, the reliability and validity of the quantitative methods are often criticised (Creswell 2014).

In this research, quantitative content analyses were used in studies I, II and III. In all three cases the quantitative method added to the qualitative methods utilised. Creswell (2014) recommended such a mixed method approach, which enables the researcher to use both quantitative and qualitative data, providing

opportunities for data analysis and positioning the research in a wider perspective (Creswell 2014: 33).

Below, the methods used in this thesis will be explained.

### 3.3.2 Qualitative and quantitative content analysis

In this thesis, different forms of content analysis were used. By content analysis, different forms of personal or mediated communication are studied in an unobtrusive way, observing rather than intruding on what is investigated (Berger 2011).

*Qualitative content analysis* is one of the research methods focusing on the use of words (quality) instead of numbers (quantity), according to Creswell (2014: 32). Hsieh and Shannon (2005: 1278) provided the following definition of qualitative content analysis, being “a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns”. Kuckartz (2019) noted that there are very different ways of conducting qualitative content analysis, also called qualitative text analysis. Often the unit of analysis is a string of words. The categorisation is done carefully, for example, using pre-defined criteria derived from earlier literature. The categorisation helps to compare and interpret the studied material. Kuckartz (2019) recommended to not only compare the material within each category, but also to look at it in a case-oriented holistic way to note patterns.

This method was applied in Study I to analyse audio-visual “sound bites” of politicians (brief recorded statements by the interviewees in a news story). The focus was on observing how politicians communicate intellectual power, following Fairclough (1995) and Simon-Vandenberg (1996). The “sound bites” were categorised into three groups: (1) referring knowledge; (2) referring lack of knowledge; and (3) expressing emotional and social commitment. Next, each of these main categories was divided into sub-categories.

In Study II, the analysis concerned political party webpages. The website features were grouped according to the coding models of the Comparative European New Media and Elections Project. This related to the presence or absence of interactive website features (following Lilleker et al. 2011; Lilleker & Malagon 2010).

In Study III, input on a political web platform and real-world deliberative debate of selected participants was studied. This concerned the online platform and offline initiative of the People’s Assembly of Estonia (Rahvakogu). The analysis focused on a report that summarised the crowdsourced outcomes from the perspective of deliberation. Qualitative categories were worked out based on the topics offered for the debate on the web forum, to better understand the participants’ interests in the selected issues, which required a quantitative analysis method. Qualitative content analysis was combined with critical discourse analysis (see next section).

In *quantitative content analysis* a quantitative approach is applied to study materials, for example, using statistics after coding and counting for various categories. Here, this was used as a supportive method to help analyse various types

of materials, following Kuckartz (2019), who suggested combining qualitative content analysis with, for example, quantitative content analysis. In Study I, quantitative content analysis was used to count the number of times the political leaders appeared in the TV news. In Study II, this was done to calculate the interest of participants in selected topics and the presence or absence of the Web 2.0 applications on political web pages. And finally, in Study III, this was undertaken to take stock of the input on an interactive web platform.

### 3.3.3 Critical discourse analysis

Critical discourse analysis is considered an effective method for analysing the interrelation of power and language (Fairclough 2003). According to Fairclough (1995) the term “discourse” can be used referring to the use of both spoken and written language, but it can also be extended to include images (photos, film, video, diagrams) and non-verbal communication such as facial expressions and gestures. Its meaning is based in language studies related to social (inter)action in real situations, but also in post-structuralist theory as a social construction of reality, or, in other words, a form of knowledge in society as defined earlier by Foucault (Fairclough 2003).

According to Lukes (1974) the most influential political power belongs to those people, groups and organisations that dominate the communication at both macro and micro levels. The macro level relates to media ownership, control over who has access to the public, how issues are defined and framed in news, who omits certain stories privileging others and who has the most influence over labelling events and processes, whereas the micro level means who takes turns in conversations, who sets the agenda for conversation and who manages conclusions and topic shifts (Hacker 1996). The domination of the communication can be noted in conflicts over political interests, how issues are defined and how agendas are set for decision-making (Lukes 1974).

Discourse analysis is an effective method to identify how power, language and ideology are related. The focus can be on syntax, argumentation, lexicons, semantics, narratives, rhetorical structures, semiotics and grammar of political texts. In addition, discourse analysis can also be used to examine sign systems, codes and linguistic mechanisms in relation to power inequalities and relationships.

Critical discourse analysis was used as a research method in Study IV, focusing on political speeches. The aim was to analyse power relations in verbal and non-verbal communication. Partly, the method was also used in Study III to analyse the design of web-forums as a media text. Thus, in Study III, a combination of qualitative and quantitative content analysis with critical discourse analysis was applied to better map the level of deliberation of crowdsourcing initiatives.

### 3.3.4 Other methods used

In Study I, next to quantitative and qualitative content analysis, *non-verbal image measurement* was also utilised. This method helps to evaluate non-verbal qualities



of an individual based on personal, communicative and social positive and negative attributes (Schweiger & Adami 1999: 361; Lacey 1998).

In Study IV, in addition to critical discourse analysis, the *charisma index* developed by Pappas (2011) was also applied. This model helps to evaluate the “charismaticness” of a leader that is called for in different society types (Pappas 2011: 5).

Literature reviews were also used. In Study III, an *argumentative literature* review was conducted. This entails examining the existing literature in a selective way, to support or neglect an argument or research problem present in the academic literature (USC Libraries Research Guide). Often, the aim of argumentative literature reviews is to collect literature that contradicts or is new to the current point of view in academic publications. The author of this thesis considered the potential bias of such a literature review type but deemed it an appropriate way to study the existing body of literature, as the aim was to find innovative approaches. This required a selective way in identifying sources, as befits this method (USC Libraries Research Guide).

In Study IV, a *theoretical literature review* was conducted to find a pattern in the corpus of theoretical literature with a historical perspective on charismatic political leadership. The aim was to establish a relationship between the existing theories, which are mostly developed from the work of Weber (1994, 2012). The charisma of leaders has been a controversial phenomenon in academic research (Pappas 2011), which may explain the gap noted in the current literature that, consequently, inspired the author of this thesis. To clarify the context in Italy and Estonia, also some statistical data were used.

### 3.3.5 Ethical considerations

Research ethics relate to the research conducted and the data involved. All data were collected from publicly available media: TV news interviews, publicly available web content and speeches.

Study I concerned broadcasted TV interviews. The transcripts of the interviews were obtained from the news organisations involved and the recordings were kept on a password-protected computer. Data mentioning the names of the politicians and their statements will be kept no longer than two years after publication of this thesis. In the paper that reported the results, names of politicians were mentioned, considering that politicians are professional spokesmen seeking to appear in public.

For Study II, the studied websites of the political parties were investigated. They were checked for anonymisation and contained no person-related data. Study III concerned a crowdsourcing online and offline project, for which only public reports, as well as citizen public input in the form of anonymised summaries were used. Study IV, as well as discussing literature, compared six political leaders by applying a charisma index. This served as an example and again concerned professionals actively seeking public attention, whereas mentioning names was deemed necessary by the journal involved. The data for studies II–IV were stored on a password-protected computer.

### 3.4 Research design of the studies

Below, the research design of the four studies is further explained. The studies are reported in chronological order of when the data were collected and, as mentioned previously, relate to: (1) TV presence and image presentation of politicians; (2) Interaction of politicians with citizens; (3) E-democracy and crowdsourcing; and (4) Charismatic leaders.

The research encompasses both traditional mass media and web-based media, as in Study I television interviews are investigated, while the other studies relate primarily to websites and social media.

#### 3.4.1 Study I

In Study I, the focus was on quantitative and qualitative content analyses of TV news interviews and non-verbal image measurement. The data were collected from the recordings of main evening news bulletins of public service TV (PS TV) in Finland and Estonia within 30 days before the general elections of 2007. The news stories where politicians appeared were selected and, next, the appearance frequency of the politicians, the length of the news stories and the number of politicians' "sound bites" were calculated. This showed how frequently candidates appeared as interviewees in the main news bulletins. The outcomes were compared to the number of votes they received in the elections.

For the qualitative content analysis, the audio-visual "sound bites" of the politicians were further analysed, after selecting those communicating intellectual power (following Fairclough 1995 and Simon-Vandenberg 1996). The author chose not to present statistical evidence to indicate the frequency of the observed modal expressions, as previous studies had shown that counting this might be difficult because of the open-ended nature of the expressions (*ibid.*). Moreover, frequency is considered less important than the strategic use of modal expressions by interviewees to communicate an image of a knowledgeable speaker who makes reliable statements (Simon-Vandenberg 1996).

For observing the non-verbal features used by political candidates in order to strengthen desirable image, it was considered how body language, dress code and the choice of the interview place helped to communicate the message. For the non-verbal image analyses, the methodology was partly based on the method of non-verbal image measurement of Schweiger and Adami (1999) and partly on the framework offered by Lacey (1998). Finally, the presentations of Finnish and Estonian politicians were compared.

#### 3.4.2 Study II

In Study II, a qualitative and quantitative content analysis was done, focusing on homepages of Estonian parties during the 2009 European Parliament elections.

The data collection was part of the Comparative European New Media and Elections Project, which aimed to explore the role that the Internet played during the elections across the European Union.

For the purposes of this paper, ten web pages were used, the main party website or the specific campaign website if one was created. One party had an inactive website, which was excluded. The sample included eight party websites and two campaign websites.

The quantitative content analysis was conducted on the election day. Dependent on the type of the website, up to a maximum of 214 features were identified as present or absent on the site using an online survey of current practices observed.

For the qualitative content analysis, the website features were grouped according to the previous coding models designed for an analysis of party websites (Gibson & Ward 2000; Lilleker et al. 2011; Lilleker & Malagon 2010). They were divided first as representing Web 1.0 or Web 2.0 then, next, also based on whether their main functions were to inform, provide interactivity, encourage visitor engagement online and attempt offline activism or mobilisation. Also considered was the use of elements demonstrating technical sophistication. Finally, the websites were analysed based on ideology.

### 3.4.3 Study III

Study III focused on a qualitative content analysis of the web platform of the People's Assembly of Estonia (Rahvakogu) in combination with a critical discourse analysis of the platform.

The analysis took into consideration earlier studies that described that deliberative web forums are often understood as an answer to the crisis of representative democracy, with discussions facilitated by mediator(s), whereas they have a "governed" character and often are created in a situation of institutional mistrust and deep division of interests in society, as was also the case for the project in Estonia. Although such forums may increase the effectiveness and quality of policy decisions, they often are top-down initiatives that relate to political interests and regulate the participation (Pellizzoni 2012).

For the qualitative content analysis, the design (Wright & Street 2007) and the topics of the Rahvakogu web forum were analysed. Two main aspects were considered: first, according to which principles the participants in this deliberative discussion were chosen; and second, whether all members of society (including minorities) had equal access to the debate.

The aim was to understand how the platform as a text worked ideologically. According to Simon-Vanderbergen (1996), to understand whether created meanings are working ideologically, one needs to note whether they serve relations of domination. Therefore, the analysis considered the social origins of this web platform option, where and who it came from, motivations for making the choice and its effects (positive or negative), and the interest of those involved (Fairclough 1995: 14-15). For the coding scheme the research considered, partly, the model of Wright and Street (2007) and the features of deliberative initiatives offered by

Freschi and Mete (2009). No later projects in the period 2017-2019 on the same webpage were included.

#### **3.4.4 Study IV**

Study IV focused on analysing the role of charismatic (or in this thesis called magnetic) political leaders in present-day democracy. Although the author of this thesis prefers the term magnetic (as explained in section 2.1.3), for reporting this study the preference of the publishing journal was followed.

The purpose of this explorative study was to clarify whether charismatic leaders fit the context of post-web democracy, and what the positive and negative sides are of the increasing role of charisma in modern elections. The study zoomed in on how current elements of political charisma might affect politics and how current power holders tend to use charisma in their political communication.

As case studies, Estonia and Italy were observed, using statistical data to clarify the context. For the discourse analysis, leaders with the most votes from the European Parliament elections of 2014 were chosen. The analysis took into consideration the theoretical approach of Weber and other recent research on political charisma, due to the difficulties in explaining “charisma” according to the traditional academic lexicon (Friedrich 1961). Moreover, the study utilised the charisma index developed by Pappas (2011), adding non-verbal elements such as body language and gestures deemed important by Schweiger and Adami (1999). This was done by means of a critical discourse analysis of video recordings of political speeches and audio-visual spots of the observed leaders. The material was from the year 2014, and the focus was not on the EU elections as such, but on the elements important for political charisma studied. In addition, the activities of the leaders on their Twitter and Facebook profiles were observed during the two weeks prior the EP Election day. In relation to this, also some statistical sources presenting data of social media use of political leaders in Estonia and Italy were taken into consideration.

The next chapter will present the findings of the four studies.

## **4 FINDINGS**

This chapter presents an overview of the central findings reported in the four original articles included here to meet the purpose of this doctoral thesis. The research was characterised by a multidisciplinary approach, including the theoretical perspectives of communication sciences, political marketing and political sciences, when analysing linguistic and audio-visual media texts, politicians' verbal and non-verbal language, communication strategies in an electoral context, voting behaviour and emotions in politics. The focus was on the changes in the process of message framing by power holders and whether the post-web environment fosters wide debate, citizen participation and deliberative democracy. Thus, below, the findings are presented to clarify the research results of the four studies, which cover the transition period moving from the traditional mass media-dominated scenery towards the post-web media era.

### **4.1.1 Findings of Study I**

The main findings of Study I, based on the research questions, are summarised in Table 8.

TABLE 8 Main findings of Study I per research question

<b>Study I. TV presence and image presentation of politicians</b>	
<p>RQ1: How frequently and in what way do candidates appear during the interviews given for the main evening news bulletins of public service TV in Finland and Estonia during the official electoral campaign (30 days) before the general elections of 2007?</p> <p>RQ2: Does the frequency of parties and candidates' TV news presence affect the voting behaviour in the observed countries, and, if so, to what extent?</p>	<p>Findings in brief:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The more frequently the candidate appeared, the more personalised or professionalised the campaign was.</li> <li>- Both the verbal and non-verbal communication gained attention.</li> <li>- Many slogan-like sentences were used.</li> <li>- There was a strong use of linguistic elements, which convey intellectual power.</li> <li>- Use of "authoritative" expressions.</li> <li>- There was an evident personalisation trend.</li> <li>- Candidates were presented as political celebrities (more evident in Finland than in Estonia).</li> </ul> <p>- Parties with candidates appearing more frequently in TV news gained more votes and seats in the parliament.</p>

The comparative analysis of TV news interviews of Estonian and Finnish politicians within the month prior to the election day show that the candidates' appearance significantly influenced the election results in both countries. In Estonian TV news, sync interviews were used more often and on average they were longer than in Finland. In most Finnish cases an interview of a politician was used only once in a TV story, whereas in Estonia it reappeared in the same story. During the Estonian electoral campaign, the ruling Reform Party representatives were interviewed in 37 cases. This is almost twice the number of times that the Finnish National Coalition Party leaders got airtime in TV news interviews. Probably the political TV reporters in Estonia in 2007 were more taking less notice of giving equal time while "packaging" the story. Therefore, compared to Finnish interviewees, active Estonian politicians had better opportunities to communicate via the TV news. This may show a difference between post-Soviet and democratic societies.

In both countries during the official election campaign, in general, only party leaders who were well-known top politicians were interviewed, illustrating that political issues in both countries are primarily represented by political celebrity personalities. The personalisation trend was even more evident in the case of the Finnish public service TV news. During the official general election period in Finland, in general, only the leaders of the three leading parties were interviewed (the Centre Party, which was also the prime minister's party, the Social Democratic Party, and the oppositional National Coalition Party). In most

cases, the leaders of the three parties were interviewed in the context of the forthcoming elections, although they did not give any direct election promises. However, Estonian candidates were mostly interviewed outside the context of direct electoral campaign issues.

Although TV news interviews are not the only element to consider while analysing voter behaviour, the study shows trends that were also reflected in the election results. It can be concluded that, also in Estonia and Finland, the personalisation, or sometimes called “Americanisation” of politics is a recognisable trend. Concerning intellectual power, the candidates in both observed countries tended to present the most favourable image through using expressions that emphasise certainty but also social and emotional commitment, as noted earlier by Simon-Vandenberg (1996).

#### 4.1.2 Findings of Study II

The main findings of Study II, based on the research questions, are summarised in Table 9.

TABLE 9 Main findings of Study II per research question

<b>Study II. Interaction of politicians with citizens</b>	
<p>RQ1: To what extent do political parties, as relevant political actors, incorporate Web 2.0 applications into their online communication with citizens when campaigning in Estonia?</p>	<p>Findings in brief:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The use of interactive applications was low.</li> <li>- Estonian parties focused on a one-sided or top-down model of communication.</li> <li>- Real dialogue did not take place.</li> <li>- A digital divide between parliamentary and non-parliamentary parties is visible.</li> </ul>
<p>RQ2: Are politicians really interested in participation and engagement of citizens?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The politicians did not seem interested in increasing citizen engagement via interactive applications.</li> <li>- The use of Web 2.0 did not depend on ideology.</li> </ul>

Based on the quantitative content analysis of party websites in the context of the European Parliament elections in 2009, it could be concluded that the use of Web 2.0 features on all websites seemed limited for all categories. Interactive applications were not strategically used for fostering a dialogue between the politicians and citizens. Moreover, the low use of interactive Web 2.0 features was dependent on the political parties’ popularity and size, but not on their ideology. An exception was the minority Russian Party in Estonia, which was more active in using the web.

The Estonian European Parliament e-campaign reflected the pattern of traditional offline campaigning that has been said to result in political alienation

among public groups and negative thinking towards politics. The users of the political websites could easily be profiled by the habits of Internet usage in general, following Norris (2001), who states that factors like age, education, income and occupation can explain the e-divide. Study II also demonstrates that active e-voters and Internet users differ strongly in their political preferences (Trechsel et al. 2010). The results of Study II show that the Estonian parties still focused on a one-sided or top-down model of communication, based on Web 1.0 features, even though all conditions for deliberation from the technical and infrastructural side in Estonia were fulfilled.

Based on the findings, the study discussed the possible reasons why parties might not be interested in using Web 2.0 elements in their web campaign, and how this is linked to a situation of low citizen participation and interest in politics. This underlined the need for further systematic comparative research to draw conclusions on online campaigning and cyber-democracy.

### 4.1.3 Findings of Study III

The main findings of Study III, based on the research questions, are summarised in Table 10.

TABLE 10 Main findings of Study III per research question

<b>Study III. E-democracy and crowdsourcing</b>	
<p>RQ1: Was the People's Assembly, a crowdsourced project carried out in Estonia in 2013, an attempt to raise engagement or, rather, an example of how to maintain stability by power holders in a crisis situation?</p> <p>RQ2: Why there was a low participation in Estonia?</p>	<p>Findings in brief:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Not all the population was included in the dialogue (there was regulation of participation).</li> <li>- The Assembly seems to have had a "governed" character.</li> <li>- It seems to have been used as a tool of power.</li> <li>- The dominant stakeholders determined the language of the debate.</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The debate was organised in a situation of institutional mistrust.</li> <li>- Not all citizens had equal access to the debate.</li> </ul>

The People's Assembly was presented as a tool for engagement, but its implementation restricted it to an "top-down" initiative from the presidential office in the situation of governmental crises. The participants were divided into groups of eight to ten persons and the debate was mediated by an expert moderator. Proposals for new laws could be presented only on specific topics. Experts filtered out the "best" proposals. The final voting was carried out by only 500 people, and only Estonian citizens, excluding language minorities such as those who were Russian-speaking, as the proposals and the debate were carried out in Es-



tonian only. Of the randomly chosen representatives who were called to participate in the debate, 70% did not want to be part of the project and, finally, only 300 came to Tallinn to give their vote. Thus, the participation rate was very low.

It could be concluded that, by those in power, the public was seen as policy consumers rather than as policy-responsible citizens, which reduced the conditions for deliberative debate.

#### 4.1.4 Findings of Study IV

The main findings of Study IV, based on the research questions, are summarised in Table 11.

TABLE 11 Main findings of Study IV per research question

<b>Study IV. Charismatic leaders</b>	
<p>RQ1: How do we understand charismatic (magnetic) leadership in contemporary politics?</p> <p>RQ2: How do power holders use charisma in their political communication in modern democracies?</p> <p>RQ3: Does the rise of charismatic leaders mean less democracy?</p>	<p>Findings in brief:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The literature suggests that the post-web environment favours charismatic leaders.</li> <li>- It is noted that charismatic leaders tend to use populist message framing, and that the post-web media environment is advantageous for newcomers with a radical voice.</li> <li>- The charismatic leadership type that seems to thrive in Web 2.0 would be expected to do less well in the situation of a stable democracy.</li> </ul>

The research explored if and how the communication style of some well-known political leaders in Italy and Estonia had altered in the changing media environment. The results showed that the post-web environment favours charismatic (magnetic) leaders with a populist message framing and makes it easier for radical voices to dominate public discourse. Moreover, also “hate discourse” was used, in Italy by all three Italian leaders against the other leaders and parties, and in Estonia, only by Savisaar in a more moderate way. This is not uncommon in today's politics.

Study IV concluded that those leaders that tend to be more charismatic in terms of the charisma index and, at the same time, attempt to use innovative emotional image strategies and populist message framing in the post-web media environment, tend to rapidly gain popularity among their followers. Thus, Web 2.0 favours strongly charismatic leaders who fit less within a context of a stable democracy.

#### 4.1.5 General conclusions considering the findings

The data gathered in the four studies support the hypothesis that the traditional normative model of deliberative democracy does not fit the new media landscape and that this novel communication environment favours populist message framing, as it emphasises emotions and makes it easier for extreme voices to dominate in public discourse in society.

TABLE 12 Main conclusions of the studies concerning the post-web environment

Focus of each study	Main conclusion from the perspective of messages and dialogue
TV presence and image presentation	Politicians with personalised messages and using slogan-like sentences were more often interviewed in the TV news and gained more votes. There was less emphasis on the content of the message than on expressing an image of certainty and emotional commitment. Image is power?
Interaction of politicians with the citizens	Opportunities to use Web 2.0 for interaction were hardly used in party websites. The communication style was still as one-sided as in Web 1.0. Dialogue is an illusion?
E-democracy and crowdsourcing	A web platform announced as a project for engagement might partly be seen as a disillusion. Even crowdsourcing platforms can be used as a tool of power, as such novel means can easily be misused depending on the intentions of the various actors involved.
Charismatic leaders	The rise of charismatic leaders was noted as a clear trend. The Web 2.0 setting favours populist messages. Image brings power?

In general, the technical opportunity offered by the Internet to participate in decision-making in society, as such, does not mean creating a true dialogue. Different actors with different intentions utilise the new ways to communicate with the electorate. The characteristics of the actors and their interplay, together with the characteristics of the media environment, influence the communication.

The results show that the traditional normative model of deliberative democracy does not fit the current post-web communication environment, as public engagement initiatives show weak results, while, at the same time, the media setting favours charismatic (magnetic) leaders. The latter is consistent with Young and Åkerström (2016), who note that the new media landscape tends to favour alternative realities rather than stimulate deliberative communication and collective intelligence. The media shape the discourse and, thus, as noted in section 2.2. the changed media environment also has its consequences. This is clearly the case for political communication, as the findings of this research show. There are indeed strong interrelations between political leadership and public engagement, affected by the post-web media environment, as was depicted in Figure 6.

The findings underline how easily, in the post-web media environment, magnetic leaders can gain media attention to increase their power position and

attempt to dominate the collective opinion-forming process of deliberative democracy. This phenomenon is facilitated by the fact that, in the current post-web environment, policy making does not appear to be a decision-based but, rather, an emotion-based process.

The question arises of whether it would be possible to make the deliberative participatory society work in the post-web context and, if so, how? This will be addressed in the discussion chapter.

## 5 DISCUSSION

In this chapter a citizen satisfaction model is proposed, which goes beyond the earlier chapters of this thesis to discuss some consequences of the literature presented and the individual studies undertaken. The model is constructed based on the multidisciplinary approach developed in this thesis.

Next, in Chapter 6, the conclusions of the research will be presented in relation to the central questions of this thesis and how these were answered based on the four studies conducted and the insights gained from the earlier literature.

The focus of the dissertation was to better understand how political leaders operate in the current changing media environment and how this affects public engagement in society. The results confirm that the post-web environment indeed brought a revolutionary change to political communication. Thus, the question arises of whether it would be possible to make the deliberative participatory society work in the post-web context and, if so, how? To citizens, the post-web world may seem chaotic, a society moving in every possible direction simultaneously, while power holders or politicians lack a long-term vision on how to organise society, held captive in its post-web conditions, emphasising fast exchange of emotion-rich but often shallow messages. The following sections go beyond answering the research questions and propose a way to make sense of this.

### 5.1 Proposing a satisfaction model of individual citizens

The proposed satisfaction model is inspired by the consumer satisfaction approach in marketing (Oliver 1980), but also considers Brader's (2011) research into the engagement and reactions of the mass public based on their emotional state. At the same time, the model takes note of leadership studies (e.g. Goleman 2000), the classification of democracies as developed by Nothhaft (2016) and the communication style of the power holders in different types of society as described by Stone (2012).

The model aims to illustrate the operating rules to match a set of relevant points in the communication process, resulting in six different political “lifestyles”. The term lifestyle is used here to address political lifestyles, even though in another context it may have a broader meaning, as a general way or style of living. The model also aims at gaining understanding of the current media landscape. It provides a simplified representation of the communication process that can be used to help understand the nature of communication in the post-web social setting.

Based on the existing literature and the four studies completed for this thesis, the model tries to capture the dynamics and relationship of the communication style of the leader and the aimed-for purposes. It also identifies different lifestyles based on the emotional state of citizens, how satisfied they feel and to what extent they feel the need to be engaged in decision-making processes and the creation of sustainable material well-being.

The model aims to help consider theories that support the idea that well-informed, engaged citizens are willing to collaborate with the political leaders and those in power, have trust and respect the state and its institutions, and thus are willing to actively contribute to society. It demonstrates that those circumstances similar to deliberative democratic conditions might be more sustainable and offer decision-makers or power holders a greater and more valuable potential from the perspective of human capital. This notion is derived from the continuous balanced circulation of two opposite situations where, first, citizens are satisfied and their expectations equal experience, and second, citizens are dissatisfied and therefore actively, responsibly and deliberately want to engage in political communication in order to improve their conditions in collaboration with power holders, moving in that way back to a situation of satisfaction and trust. The model attempts to propose a simplified solution to how different political lifestyles are created depending on the communication environment and leadership style.

In political marketing, the aim is to satisfy the needs and desires of the voters as consumers. This approach is adopted from the business marketing field. As is understood in product marketing, satisfaction may arise when consumers compare their experiences to their expectations (Oliver 1980). If the experience undergone is higher or at least equals expectations, the consumer usually is satisfied. In cases where the experience is lower than expected, as a consequence, the consumer is dissatisfied. Spreng et al. (1996) pointed out that a person’s desires also play an important role, as these shape his or her feelings of satisfaction. They proposed that “satisfaction arises when consumers compare their perception of the performance/experience of a product or service to both their desires and expectations” (ibid.: 15). At the same time, experience and desires are based on the information received or, in other words, communication.

Trust is one of the main elements when building lasting relationships in democratically sustainable communities. Engaged relationships are not possible without trust. Without engagement in relationships, both from the side of the leader and the citizen, political leaders cannot be successful in the long run. Trust

creates commitment and commitment encourages unity and synergy. Research in the field of social sociology has shown that the unity and teamwork of citizens who have a high level of trust makes them engage and contribute more to the common good of society. Besides communication and trust, the model emphasises the importance of emotions for citizen behaviour. The most studied emotions in the context of electoral behaviour are enthusiasm, fear and anger (Brader 2011). From the perspective of social psychology, it could be concluded that individuals, on the very basic level, deal equally with two recurring situations in life: first, pursuing their goals; and second, avoiding harm. This modulates responses that are connected to enthusiasm and fear (ibid.: 48). Therefore, as suggested by Brader (2011), for this model of citizen satisfaction, emotions considered in the different situations indicated are enthusiasm, fear and anger.

The model could be used either for the individual/interpersonal or group/mass level but, for simplicity, in the description below, mostly the individual citizen context is considered.

The model aims to help researchers to position the leader. It aims to better understand how the leadership style relates to public engagement and how to position the citizen in the context of different communication strategies. It represents how, with diverse communication strategies, different emotions can be created and how this relates to the various political lifestyles or the environment of independence or dependence.

The post-web media environment enables direct communication between political leaders and citizens, without mediation by professional journalists. Consequently, the communication strategies that focus on creating certain feelings and emotions among the audience have gained importance (Brader 2011). At the same time, the competition on issue arenas has grown because of the multitude of actors active in offline and online media (Vos et al. 2014). Therefore, the emotional dimension of the communication strategy of political leaders became increasingly important.

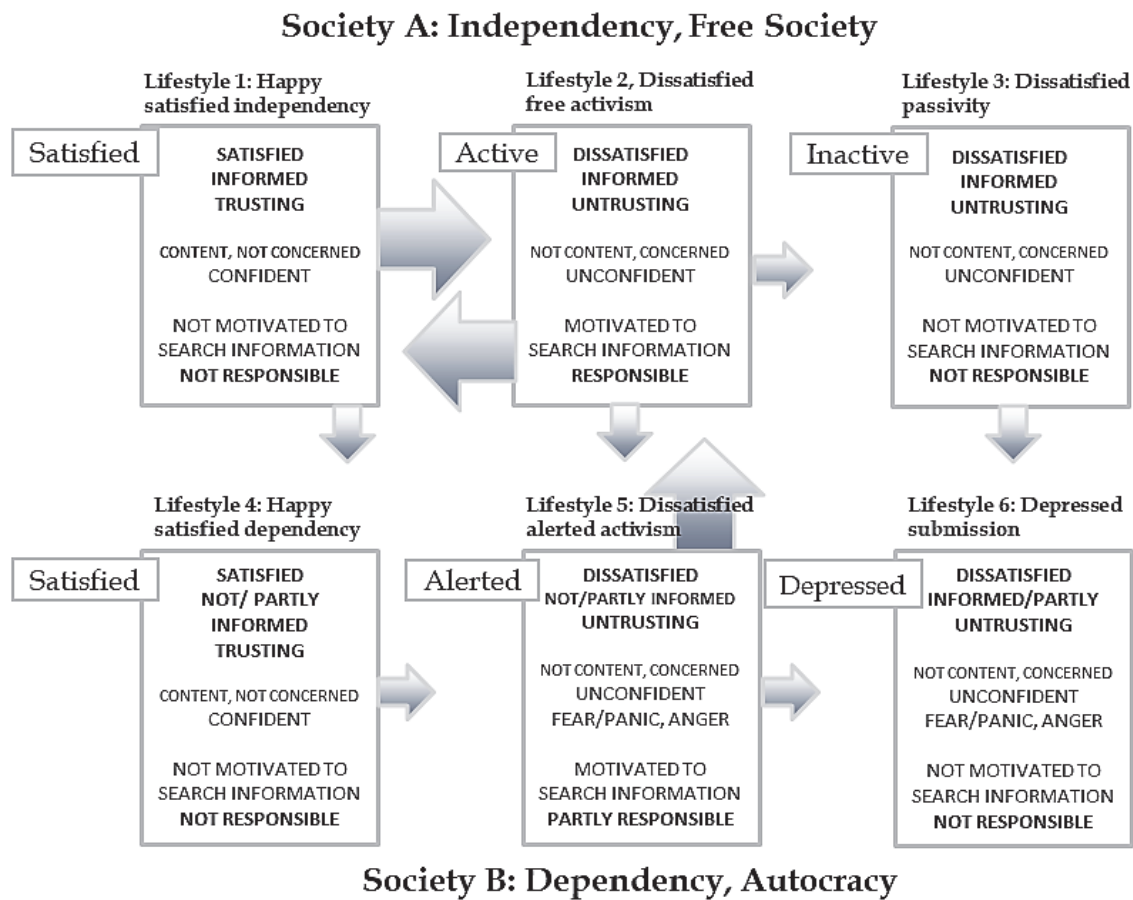


FIGURE 7 The satisfaction model showing types of citizen engagement and leadership

In Figure 7 two types of societies are considered. The upper level of the figure represents Society A, which is characterised by Independency/Free society, whereas Society B on the lower level is characterised by Dependency/ Autocracy. Communication as a process may provide people with information. In other words, it can lead citizens to being informed or lacking information. Based on the received information, the individual becomes motivated and feels a desire to act in order to improve the situation (Lewin 1951), so that the “experience” can be equal to or be higher than the “expectation” (Oliver 1980). However, the individual can become passive and not motivated to participate if the expectations are fulfilled. In this way, the communication strategy of the leader can bring the individual from one lifestyle to the other and from Society B to Society A, or vice versa (as visualised in Figure 7). These two types of society are divided into six lifestyles, based on the emotional responses of the individual: happiness, unhappiness, enthusiasm, fear or anger.

The “force” that causes the change of political lifestyles (as shown in Figure 7) is information quality, for which the basic principles of the public service media can be considered (McNair 2003). The conditions for deliberative democracy and grassroot-level collective decision-making are the legitimate right, opportunity and will of all segments of society, and the knowledge-based capability to

participate in decision-making of all individuals concerned and affected by the discussed issues. It also means that these citizens actively feel the need to be engaged in socio-political debate and decision-making, and the society functions according to the principles of pluralism (Dahlgren 2005; Habermas 2006; Lilleker et al. 2011, Negrine 1995).

Based on the findings of the four studies reported in this thesis and the previous research presented in the theoretical part from a multidisciplinary perspective, it could be concluded that for a sustainable well-functioning society, balanced and real-facts-based information has a crucial meaning. Therefore, the model considers the presence of public-service-style professional journalists in the post-web society. Their role is to monitor the information quality, intervene when needed and maintain the reputation of the news media, based on the trust of their media institutions and their personal news production. This also assumes a "demand" from the part of citizens to have this kind of screened and balanced information offered by professional journalists or other information providers.

The level of pluralism and freedom of speech depends on the type of regime in society. Verifiability of adequate information in the post-web world depends on a balance of power between dominant actors, professional journalists with public service values and grassroot-level community members in society. If these conditions are not achieved, the deliberative sustainable society cannot effectively function.

In the context of the citizen satisfaction model, the deliberative democracy is possible only in Society A (Independency/Free society in Figure 7) in Lifestyles 1 and 2. In Lifestyle 3 the individual becomes passive and lacks the motivation to act in order to resolve problems or seek new information. From Lifestyle 3 the citizen can fall to Lifestyle 6 in Society B.

For deliberative debate and participatory democracy, the ideal situation would be the continuous or simultaneous circulation between satisfaction in Lifestyle 1 and dissatisfaction in Lifestyle 2. Therefore, the most crucial, from the perspective of deliberation, is Lifestyle 2. In the situation of motivating dissatisfaction in a free and pluralistic society, where well-informed people feel responsible for their action, real deliberation is possible. As a result, the citizen might move back to Lifestyle 1. In this case, it would be problematic if the citizen is highly satisfied with her/his experience and, therefore, becomes too passive to gain new information and too trusting towards the political actors and, as a consequence, might fall to Society B (Dependency, Autocracy) in Lifestyle 4, if the thus favouring communication strategies are applied. This scenario could be easily implied in a case where, as well as citizens, journalists also become too passive.

Comparing societies A and B (Independency and Dependency), the most important lifestyles for change are 5 and 2. The difference is that in Society B the deliberation is not possible, but it can be a lifestyle from where it is possible to move to Society A, where deliberation and grassroots engagement is wanted and possible.

According to Lukes (1974: 12-20), power has three dimensions: (1) decision-making or issue power, where, through laws, obedience is asked of citizens and



accepted without wider debate as being the norm; (2) non-decision-making or agenda power, where the agenda for decisions and influencing the decisions is composed by controlling the context of the decisions; and (3) manipulative or ideological power, where stakeholders are manipulated by controlling the agents involved by what is considered a “right” approach. All these three dimensions or “faces” of power are directly connected with the culture of the society.

In the context of the satisfaction model proposed in this dissertation, the three dimensions of power are controlled by political leaders in agenda setting and can be identified in their communication strategies. In that sense, the behaviour of a political leader shows her or his position in the process of constructing or silencing a discourse (Fairclough 1995), and while planning and executing communication strategies in issue arenas (Vos et al. 2014). The individual citizens have more difficulty in making their voice heard in the competition (ibid.). Therefore, the dominant socio-political actors have a privileged position while organising information to other actors. In the current post-web environment, it is easy to distribute fake news or spread biased information, especially in the social media. Moreover, in this environment such actors have the advantage (Novelli & Johansson 2019). It could be concluded that the post-web media environment favours, first of all, the agenda setting and issue proposals from dominant political actors.

Below, the various lifestyle types mentioned in Figure 7 will be further explained.

## 5.2 Situation types based on satisfaction or dissatisfaction

This model of citizen satisfaction consists of six situation types or lifestyles based on satisfaction or dissatisfaction of the citizen or individual and the emotional response, which causes a certain kind of behaviour response and action. At the same time, it is also based on *situational variables*, in other words, characteristics of the environment that potentially affect citizen behaviour.

The situational variables in this thesis are chosen in accordance with the deliberative model of democracy and consumer behaviour patterns based on consumer satisfaction, including satisfaction (satisfied - dissatisfied); knowledgeability (informed - not informed); trust towards power holders/institutions (trusting - not trusting); participation (active - passive); emotions: happiness (yes - no), anger (yes - no), fear (yes - no); responsibility (responsible - irresponsible).

At the same time, the citizens' behaviour response is directly connected with the communication, both among citizens (interpersonal trust) and between people and the power holders (trust in institutions, political parties, leaders and other political actors).

### **5.2.1 Lifestyle 1: Happy satisfied independency**

In Lifestyle 1 on the level of independency (see Figure 7), the experience of the citizen corresponds with the expectations formed based on gained or received information. It could be considered a scenario in which the citizen is happy, as expectations are satisfied. This individual has high trust towards the institutions and decision-makers. The citizen feels content but, therefore, becomes passive because there is too much trust towards institutions or the state. In that sense, it could be argued that the citizen becomes irresponsible, because the trust and expectations towards the state are too high. This situation could, to some degree, be comparable with the environment of traditional European welfare states, where citizen protest movements tend to be less frequent compared to, for example, Southern Europe. Nevertheless, if in this situation a lack of equilibrium appears, there are two scenarios. First, if the citizen in question has a dissatisfying experience she/he can move to Lifestyle 2 (described below), or if she/he has a so-called over-satisfying experience caused by passiveness and too much trust, she/he can fall into Lifestyle 4 (described below).

### **5.2.2 Lifestyle 2: Dissatisfied free activism**

In Lifestyle 2 (see Figure 7), the experience of the citizen is lower than their expectations, based on the information she/he has access to. The citizen does not have trust towards the institutions or politicians. This kind of citizen is not happy and has the will to improve the conditions. This citizen is informed, responsible for her or his actions and as an active member of the community wants to reach Lifestyle 1 again. At this stage, politicians can inspire trust and loyalty by open communication. In this lifestyle, citizen-activism and grassroots movements have a crucial role. In cases where dissatisfaction increases, the person can move to Lifestyle 3 (described below) or Lifestyle 5.

### **5.2.3 Lifestyle 3: Dissatisfied passivity**

In Lifestyle 3 (see Figure 7), the citizen becomes inactive because of a growing dissatisfying experience in Lifestyle 2. Thus, the individual loses trust in the system and the power holders and, next, becomes inactive and not motivated to solve the problem or seek new information. As a result, this citizen can fall from the level of independency in Society A to the level of dependency in Society B and into Lifestyle 6 (described below).

### **5.2.4 Lifestyle 4: Happy satisfied dependency**

In Lifestyle 4 (see Figure 7), similar to Lifestyle 1, the citizen's experience equals their expectations, as there is not enough knowledge on if and how the situation could be improved. This citizen is "blindly" loyal to and trusting the institutions and power holders because trust is very high. This individual does not have special expectations or hopes, as "life has been good". Passiveness, caused by the

conditions in which expectations correspond with the experience, prevent this citizen from moving up to Lifestyle 1. This kind of citizen is not responsible for the common good of society. As loyalty and trust are very high and the person is passive, the individual is not willing to gain new information. In cases of continuous dissatisfying experience in the environment of dependency from power holders, there are two possibilities. First, the citizen gets angry or afraid and reaches Lifestyle 5 (described below). This happens if new information enters the environment. At the same time, studies show that in cases where there is a controllable threat, people get angry, whereas if the threat is unknown, they become afraid (Brader 2011). These two scenarios each cause a different behaviour, as angry citizens are closed to new information and want to punish the one who has caused the threat, while in the case of an unknown, unexplainable threat, people become afraid and are more open to new information in order to solve the problem (ibid.).

It could be argued that, for a leader with authoritarian intentions, the goal is to keep individuals on the dependency level, because the alternative would be radical change or collapse of the existing political system.

### **5.2.5 Lifestyle 5: Dissatisfied alerted activism**

The situation of Lifestyle 5 emerges on the dependency level if the citizen in Lifestyle 4 has constantly dissatisfying new experiences (see Figure 7), which cause loss of trust in cases where the citizen gains new information. The core emotion in this situation is anger. As the expectations are higher than the experience, the citizen wishes to improve the conditions through prompt action and can be considered responsible for changing the environment. At this stage, the citizen's action might cause radical changes or a collapse of the system, which moves the citizen up to Lifestyle 2. The possibility that power holders in this phase manage to offer a new satisfying experience to the citizen through communication and threat removing is very low. Therefore, it is very difficult to make the citizen move back to Lifestyle 4.

Lifestyle 5 could be considered the most crucial one from the perspective of emotions, because here fear and anger arrive on the scene. In this situation it could be that expectations are higher than experienced because of the unknown. If the leader is not able to offer a satisfying experience by removing the threat, the fearful citizen might move to Lifestyle 6 (see Figure 7). If this kind of citizen feels a strong need to defend against and prevent the threat, the individual can rise to Lifestyle 2, in cases where the leader in Lifestyle 5 is not able to offer security. At this point, protest movements and citizen activism have a central role in the attempts to bring change to the existing system.

It could be argued that, for a leader with authoritarian intentions, in Lifestyle 5 it might be interesting for them to communicate uncontrollable fear to maintain power or avoid the collapse of the political system.

### 5.2.6 Lifestyle 6: Depressed submission

Lifestyle 6 happens in cases where the citizen does not have enough satisfying experience or information for moving up to Society A in Lifestyle 5. The result is a depressed, informed or partly informed, unhappy and dissatisfied citizen dominated by destructive emotions such as fear. This emotionally exhausted citizen no longer has the motivation to solve problems or seek new information. Thus, Lifestyle 6 is the worst type, in the context of a participatory and sustainable community. Consequently, influence or energy from outside the environment would be needed to change the situation.

## 5.3 The context of the model

According to the satisfaction model, not all individuals are open to information, which is a key element for the functioning of a normative democratic system (Habermas 2006). What is common to Lifestyle 5 and Lifestyle 2 is that a concerned individual is open to new information and motivated for change by concrete action. However, satisfaction on the level of dependency or independency causes less interest or motivation to search for new information and, thus, the individual becomes passive and does not seek information (Lifestyle 4). Therefore, this individual lacks the analytical thinking to better understand the processes in the society and to participate in the decision-making. The force that can bring a lifestyle change from one to another situation, or the move from Society B to Society A and vice versa, is always information. Information contributes to knowledge and a desire to improve the lifestyle situation.

From a deliberation perspective, the post-web environment guarantees – in the process of political communication – direct interaction between political actors and citizens. However, important information can also be hidden or altered. In that way, various versions of “truth” are easily constructed in various web communities (Åkerström 2016).

The satisfaction model shows that the traditional normative model of deliberative democracy cannot work in the post-web situation, because citizen engagement depends on information received and communication strategies used, as was discussed earlier. Nowadays society is in constant change and, as Stone (2012) explained, politics are so complicated and irrational that they cannot fit the normative situation described for a static and rational democracy in former studies (e.g. Habermas 2006).

## 6 CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter the research is evaluated, the contribution of the work is addressed, and the limitations of the research and further research are discussed.

### 6.1 Evaluating the research

The purpose of the research was to contribute to a better understanding of how political leaders operate in the current changing media environment and how this affects public engagement in society.

This thesis sought to answer the following central research questions: How does the deliberative model of democracy show in the current web-based media environment? How has the role of politicians developed in the changing media environment? Which forces in society are real power holders? And how do civil society, citizens and power holders interact and compete for attention in deliberative debate in the media?

The results of this thesis showed that the traditional normative model of deliberative democracy does not fit the current post-web communication environment with, on the one hand, the tendency that charismatic (magnetic) leaders focusing on emotions may get the upper hand, while on the other, public engagement initiatives show weak results or might involve only a limited part of the population.

The new media environment favours simplicity and boosts the tendency to see the world in black and white and communicate in a slogan-like way using picture-based message framing. There is an urgent need to see the bigger picture, both for ordinary people and political actors. This also makes it important for communication professionals to consider the context as explained in the satisfaction model proposed.

Consequently, it would be important to create and maintain an educational system that supports the competencies to analyse information and understand the hidden processes behind the current web-based information exchange in society.

The researcher reflected on responsible conduct of research, following the criteria of the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity (2012). Care has been taken in collecting, analysing and archiving the research data, as well as in presenting and evaluating the results. The chosen methods were applied and described carefully in section 3.4. The papers were peer-reviewed by the publishing medium and earlier when presented in conferences. Ethical considerations were presented in section 3.3.5 of the thesis. No permits or ethical reviews were needed in this case. Some funding has been received from the university department, as was mentioned in the Preface. No other financing or commitments apply to this research.

## 6.2 Contribution

The findings of this research demonstrate that the post-web social media environment tends strongly to give advantage to extremist society-dividing movements, charismatic (magnetic) leaders and to a highly simplified way of message construction, often with a populist framing.

The research results contribute to a better understanding of how political leaders operate, undergoing or actively taking into account the current changing media environment and how this relates to public engagement in society, as was made explicit in the proposed satisfaction model.

Through multidisciplinary analyses, conclusions were drawn that the magnetic leadership type, with its mainly monodirectional message-framing fits well in the new media environment; even better than in the traditional mass media context when professional journalists and the public service system, as noted by Fairclough (1992, 1995), filtered political messages and had the primary role in discourse creation in society.

The citizen satisfaction model, based on the four individual studies and theoretical research created in the discussion chapter, addresses key issues in the current challenges of public engagement such as trust. The model contributes to the wider understanding of how communication can influence people's inclusion or exclusion of some groups in society, and how communication and freedom of information contributes to the birth of deliberative discussions, responsibility and engagement in society.

Academic research in this field is still relatively limited. There is a lack of multidisciplinary studies that evaluate the impact of the post-web media environment on deliberative participation and the role of current deliberative issue arenas in political leaders' communication and citizen involvement. This thesis attempted to fill the gap by providing four explorative studies and constructing a multidisciplinary theoretical framework offered in Chapter 2 to approach the research questions raised for this thesis.

The research shows a new way to study political communication from the perspective of content creators, citizens as well as political leaders. The results call for more research on the realities of current political engagement techniques

that seemingly create opportunities for citizens, while they in fact may reinforce hidden power hierarchies.

As brought out in Chapter 5, where the satisfaction model of citizen/individual is offered, a society characterised by sustainable material well-being, harmony with nature and a comeback of ethical or spiritual values is theoretically possible, but would require radical changes in the way societies are led, which strongly depends on the political leaders and elitist groups that have the power to shape communication flows and choose the style of communication that in turn may enhance citizen engagement in society. The approach could create collaboration, participation of society members and joint responsibility for the community's social and material well-being (Castells 1998), by enhancing the feeling of being part of it as responsible members of society with the will to engage in its decision making processes (Law et al. 2005; Podsakoff et al. 1990).

### **6.3 Limitations of the study and further research**

The multidisciplinary approach in the field of political leadership and public engagement in a changing media environment offered a relatively new realm of study. Therefore, there is an urgent need for intradisciplinary research in the field.

As the aim of the dissertation was broad, the four studies carried out for the thesis mainly observe what is going on in the cases selected. They are a collection of explorative studies. The related articles demonstrate the complexity of the topic, which should be further investigated from different perspectives and diverse cultural contexts using different sets of data and methodology.

The intention was to give a broader perspective to the research topic of the thesis, which would allow better mapping of the trends in how political leaders operate in the post-web environment and how this might affect and be affected by public engagement in society. In this way, the research also, in a broader sense, sheds light on how cyberspace influences the development of democracy.

The satisfaction model, in itself, remains a proposition, inviting further research, having been discussed based on the research results, but being very broad, going beyond the findings of the studies and the existing literature reported. As the approach was multidisciplinary, the model may inspire scholars from different disciplines to look into different aspects.

Future research into the examined phenomena can further clarify, both for academics and communication professionals, the positive and negative sides of political communication in the post-web society. This could include difficulties related to fake news in what has been called the "post-truth era". The post-web environment offers an almost infinite number of solutions for information spread. However, the post-web media environment can also be considered to offer conditions for a "nothing will change" situation (Nothhaft 2016: 68-69).

From the limitations of this thesis, it could be concluded that there is an urgent need for further interdisciplinary empirical and theoretical research concerning political leadership in the post-web media environment. Castells stated

the following more than two decades ago when describing the dangers of the impact of the cyber society on democracy:

*Our economy, society and culture are built on interest, values, institutions and systems of representation that, by and large, limit collective creativity, confiscate the harvest of information technology, and deviate our energy into self-destructive confrontation. This state of affairs must not be. (Castells 1998: 359)*

In other words, extensive changes in the level of institutions, organisation of states and leadership models should be considered if modern societies and Western citizens are to expect a more democratic society in the post-web era.

Therefore, it could be concluded that future research should give attention to changes in citizen behaviour in the context of emotionally overloaded and often false information flows or shortcomings in professional journalism content, which in the previous media era of the last century had the role of the “gatekeeper” and “watchdog” of society in the deliberative democracy. It would be important to understand whether a model similar to the public service media institution model and its related principles could be implemented in the post-web media environment, in order to offer citizens balanced information and allow all different groups in society to be engaged.

There also seems to be a need for comparative studies on developments in different countries and cultures, to map trends and provide updated data to researchers to be able to raise attention to potential disturbing changes occurring in public web debates.

Future research could also benefit the awareness of political leaders and citizens of the need for engaging segments with different viewpoints at all levels of society in deliberative discussion and how this may be undertaken.



## SUMMARY

The purpose of this research is to contribute to a better understanding of how political leaders operate in the current changing media environment and how this affects public engagement in society. This thesis brings together the results of four studies reported in articles. These empirical studies approach the thesis' main topic from different perspectives. Various methods are used to investigate cases of political leadership in the context of Estonia, a young democracy, and the older European democracies of Italy and Finland.

- The first study investigates political leadership in the mass media environment. The focus is on the way in which politicians in Finland and in Estonia make use of interviews in the main TV news to present a favourable image of themselves, for example, using expressions emphasising cognitive certainty or emotional and social commitment in TV news.
- The second study investigates political leadership and engagement during the European Parliament elections in 2009. It examines the use of Web 2.0 features on political party webpages, as interactivity-based applications can increase participation and, in that way, contribute to deliberative politics.
- The third study looks at engagement in politics in another case. It aims to analyse whether a crowdsourcing project (People's Assembly) in Estonia has been an example of the Internet fostering deliberative democracy, or rather an attempt to maintain stability by those in power in an unstable situation.
- The fourth study reflects on leadership and engagement by analysing the role of charismatic political leaders in present-day politics and, thus, it invites a reevaluation of the impact of a leader's charisma on contemporary societies.

In general, the results of the four studies show that the opportunity to participate, as such, does not mean creating a true dialogue. In the post-web media environment, especially in social media networks, leaders with authoritarian intentions can easily gain huge followership as their message is easily and almost costlessly brought to target audiences without the "filter" of professional journalism. This has caused the widely criticised phenomenon of fake, also called "post-truth", information spread. In that way, also previously marginalised extremist leaders or groups can robustly intervene in the process of public discourse formation via "false news"-influenced public opinion.

While combining the results of the four papers with the current theoretical literature, it could be concluded that the current decision-making and citizen behaviour is not a rational-based but is an emotion-based process. Leaders can often expect followership based on a communication strategy of emotions.

In the discussion part of the dissertation, a citizen satisfaction model based on prevalent emotions of citizens, as created by the communication strategies of those in power, is presented.

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## **ORIGINAL PAPERS**

### **I**

#### **THE IMAGE PRESENTATION OF PARLIAMENTARY CANDIDATES IN ESTONIAN AND FINNISH PUBLIC SERVICE (PS) TV NEWS**

by

Ülle Toode, 2009

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**THE IMAGE PRESENTATION OF  
PARLIAMENTARY CANDIDATES IN ESTONIAN AND  
FINNISH PUBLIC SERVICE (PS) TV NEWS**

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**Key words: image-building; elections; managed communication; TV news  
interviews**

**ABSTRACT:** The paper looks at the way in which politicians in two small Northern European countries - Finland and Estonia - use television news in order to present the most favorable image of themselves in pre-election period. The special attention is paid on the use of interviews.

This study considers how frequently and in what way candidates appear as interviewees in the main evening news bulletins of public service television in Finland and Estonia during the pre-election period. The non-verbal elements of communication used in order to create desirable image are also observed and mapped. The article looks also how desirable image is created through the use of expressions emphasizing cognitive certainty or emotional and social commitment, the elements which are considered important by image-building strategists. The presentation of Finnish and Estonian candidates is also compared in order to find out differences between the two countries.

It is concluded in case of both countries that less seats the party got in the parliament, less professionalized was the campaign and less interview space it was given.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This study considers how frequently and in what way candidates appeared during the interviews given for the main evening news bulletins of public service television (PS TV) in Finland and Estonia during the official electoral campaign (within 30 days) before the general elections of 2007.

The presentation of Finnish and Estonian party candidates is compared in order to find out differences between the two studied countries. Finally, an attempt is made to draw conclusions about whether and to what extent the frequency of parties and candidates TV news presence affected the voting behavior in observed societies.

Attention is not on how journalists present politicians but how politicians appear during the TV news interviews. That way the author hopes in the next stage of the research to find out whether there are used certain techniques to “feed” political candidates to the journalists so that the political leaders can appear most favorably for the TV news audience.

The research attempts to answer the following questions:

1. How frequently were political parties given space for interviews?
2. How did candidates appear during the interviews?
3. Were there differences on what way elected and non-elected parties and their candidates appeared?
4. Were there differences in how candidates appeared in Finland and Estonia?
5. Could it be concluded that the frequency and style of candidates’ presentation affected the election results in Finland and Estonia?

Finland and Estonia are chosen for this study because both had general elections in spring 2007. At the same time, both have experienced the cultural or political domination from neighboring countries and are similar in that sense. Both countries are also relatively small and belong to Northern Europe, but Estonian political culture is still rather different from the Finnish one, as Estonia’s transition process from socialist culture to western democracy is not over yet.

## 2. IMAGE AND POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS

Candidates and their image-makers do the best they can to create images that attracts voters. Therefore, a clever campaign consultant has become the main player of a political leaders' or parties' team. In this environment political marketing or *PR-ization* of politics has become an international phenomenon, with parties all over the world using marketing techniques and approaches (Louw, 2005; Fox and Lees-Marshment, 2002; Harris, P. and Lock, A., 1996).

The following points are argued to be important for the voter in making his or her decision in favor of one or another candidate: (1) His/her **Image**; (2) **Principles**; (3) **Capability**; (4) **Quality**; (5) **Availability**; (6) **Representation of the society**; and (7) **Optical phenotype** (Kapfer (1990), cited in Schweiger and Adami, 1999:353-4).

What is gathered by studying the current literature is that in order to be elected political institutions and candidates face the following challenges:

1) As considerable portion of the electorate tends to be indifferent to politics (Newman, 1999: 104) it has led to 'de-politization' of political life;

2) in order to attract greater parts of the voters the electoral promises of different parties and candidates are more and more similar. The lack of distinct political theses enables voter to provide his/her own interpretation;

3) the mass media has important role on the final results of the elections (Harris and Lock, 2001; Shea, D. M., Burton, M. J., 2006). Some researchers refer to it even with terms such as "mediatization" of politics or "media-driven democracies" (Mazzoleni and Schulz, 1999). The voter forms her or his opinion about the candidate mainly based on the information gathered from the media;

4) television and audio-visual new media play the central role in the communication process between politicians and citizens (McNair, 2003; Curran, 2002; Newman, 1999).

Above described situation has led to the "personalization" of politics (Kapelou, 2000) and according to some researchers, image is more dominant than political issues (McNair, 2003; Newman 1999: 88; Schweiger and Adami in Newman, 1999: 351-353).

Already in 1970 Dan Nimmo stated that acceptance or rejection of a politician is emotional decision that is driven mainly by the personal image of the leader (sited in Newmann, 2001). The primacy of image in political campaigns has been blamed to a certain extent on the influence of the US, or “Americanization” of campaigning. In the USA politics has always been more personality-oriented and money or media driven than the party politics in Europe, where it has been marked by the distinct and widely divergent ideologies of contending parties, free TV-time and public funding (Plasser, Scheucher and Senft in Newman, 1999: 90-1). The use of marketing strategies in political campaigns is a global trend, which often is called ‘professionalisation’ of politics (Schweiger and Adami, 1999; Esser and Pfetsch, 2004). Kavanagh (1995) explains that the ‘professionalisation’ of campaign communication can be characterised as follows: (1) increasing importance of campaign communications, (2) more and more campaign resources are devoted to media strategy and tactics; (3) a party’s victory or defeat is explained in terms of campaign communication and media strategy, (4) campaigns are adopted to the requirements of television; (5) the idea of electioneering is described as ‘political marketing’; (6) increase in ‘negative’ campaigning; (7) political journalists find it difficult to cover elections in an era of ‘manipulative’ politicians and campaign advisors; and, (8) main gainers from ‘professionalisation’ of election campaigns are the ‘independent experts’, who are mostly recruited from outside the parties.

While describing the context of the growing importance of politician’s image there should be also mentioned that several researchers from divers countries have drawn the conclusions that recently the number of floating voters is increasing, and instead the “shift towards issue voting” can be noticed both in Europe and the USA (Worcester and Baines, 2006; Habermas, 2006). It is argued that in a time of low party loyalty the candidate’s image (Strachan and Kendall, 2004; Schönbach, 1993 cited in Schweiger and Adami, 1999:354) or the “stereotyping of the candidate” (Ben-Ur and Newman, 2002) <sup>1</sup> is the most important thing for voters while deciding to whom to give their vote. At the same time, the “volatile voters” decide the election results (Worcester and Baines, 2006; Newmann, 1999).

It is argued that European political marketing practice the know-how from the US is considered as a role model (Plasser, Scheucher and Senft, 1999). Meanwhile, the comparative studies show that the European campaigns are ever more personalised and become increasingly expensive (Esser, R. et al 2000; Plasser et al, 1999). Some researchers demonstrate also that there is no country in Western Europe where US political consultants, or so called 'spin-doctors', are not used in recent election campaigns (Bainier et al, 1999:20). Therefore, as Schweiger and Adami (1999:357) argue, image could be considered as one of the most important factors in the decision process for voters, and the image has got the central role in the "professionalized" campaigning environment also in diverse European countries.

### **3. 30 SECONDS TO MAKE AN IMPRESSION**

Audio-visual news media has a very important role to play on the landscape of "personalised" political campaigning. In spite of the fact that more and more people have access to the Internet, television seems to play continuously the dominant role in the political communication process. Besides using new information technology in order to "promote" their message, politicians and their campaign managers still intend to use TV-news to persuade the mass audience.

There could be distinguished two types of media coverage: (1) paid and (2) free media. The first one embraces both radio and television 'spots', paid programmes, and newspaper advertisements, but also any other form of paid communication, such as direct mail and phone calls. The free or 'earned' media coverage, on the other hand, is any form of mass communication without direct financial compensation to the transmitter (Schnur, 1999:143-54). In case of paid coverage campaign managers can directly control the message, but the audience tends to attach less credibility to a message they receive that way. Instead, campaign managers know, that voters tend to trust more free media, especially the news coverage, even if the message is not always received by the potential voters in exactly the form the candidate or campaign originally intended (ibid: 154-55).

At the same time, in TV coverage, both the verbal and the nonverbal signs, such as dressing, hairstyle, charisma, body-language, even tone of the voice, become extremely important elements in the process of image formation (McNair, 2003; Newman, 2001:966).

No doubt, one picture is better than 1000 words and nowadays, in the “era of 30-second soundbites”, as Newman (2001:967) puts it, TV-news still is one of the most important and trusted communication means that media advisors of political leaders use while communicating with their potential voters.

#### **4. PR-IZATION OF THE POLITICAL PROCESSES**

Eric Louw describes ‘americanisation’ of politics as PR-ization of liberal democracies and explains that each country has been impacted differently by this phenomenon because of the different political cultures in each, and because of PR-ization started at different dates in each country.

According to diverse studies ‘americanisation’ or PR-ization has changed political parties, as power has shifted away from party leadership and moved towards consultants and spin-doctors (Newman, 2001; Louw, 2005).

It means that the “message” of the party is often created by PR professionals who in general are no faithful party members. In other words, “Brokers now need to possess media and research skills in order to analyse and steer public opinion” (Louw, 2005: 150). Those well-paid professionals increasingly also select the political leaders upon how well they can perform *televisually*, or in other words, how well they can perform and fit within the image manufacturing mechanism.

It means that political leaders in these situations require different attributes to be selected as candidates. An ideal political candidate needs to be:

- credible (convincing) television performer;
- visually appealing to voters; and
- be able to speak in sound bites (ibid).

At the same time, political candidate must be able to follow scripts drawn by professional campaign consultants. With the help of spin-professionals the candidates



possessing these skills can to appeal directly to voters. Hence, televisual aspirant leaders with charisma, with the help of spin-doctor, can force the hand of party nominating processes. Consequently, this has altered party power relationships in favor of those who best understand the rules of the marketisation or PR-ization and televisualization. (Louw, 2005).

It could be also argued that spin-doctors, with the help of impression management techniques, have *celebrity-ized politicians* in order to *sell* them to electorate (Louw, 2005: 172). In other words, politicians have become experts in creating ‘faces’ (or ‘masks’) by *performing* scripts written by media consultants for television audience.

Louw (2005: 179) brings forth the roles of spin-team and politician in the process of **constructing a political celebrity:**

ROLE OF SPIN-TEAM	ROLE OF POLITICIAN
Research target audiences to find what sort of personality is appealing	Analyse target constituency and work with Spin-doctors to understand this target group
Script a personality that appeals to target audience/s	Help to construct the script
Find and/or create a ‘face’ that appeals to target audience/s	Understand and internalize the script
Develop gimmicks and pseudo-events that attract audience attention	Work at building and maintaining an appropriate ‘face’ and ‘persona’ – i.e. built ‘profile’ (that is ‘recognized’ and ‘known’)
Transform ‘issues’ into ‘personalities’	Develop a ‘fantasy’ relationship with audiences – i.e. gather audiences and turn them into ‘followers’
	Help followers to ‘make sense’ of the world by simplifying complex issues into

Concretize myths into an identifiable 'leader'	slogans and symbols – i.e. provide a 'leader'
Work backstage to build celebrity	Perform a personality/'face' that embodies myths
	Perform 'the script' front stage to build celebrity

This means television has helped to built mass consent for liberal capitalism by deploying the 'ideology of commonness' and celebrating 'averageness' within a new genre of televisualized politics – a genre that saw television celebrities crafted as tools to entertain, titillate, distract and steer the masses (ibid:180).

Significant part of television driven politics has the consequence that political leaders are trained to be politician celebrities who must be able to perform in front of television cameras to project the charismatic image and of being simultaneously 'ordinary' but also 'leader'. As with other celebrities, celebrity politicians are special for being famous, not for being superior. It means successful politicians need to be attractive personalities and get on well with so called 'ordinary people', so that the voters could identify themselves with the leader. At the same time, they have to be appealing on TV screen. As Louw puts it: "Politicians now attempt to portray themselves as 'Mr. Everyman' or 'Ms. Everywoman' (ibid: 180).

According to Denton (1988: 55, cited in Louw) a successful celebrity politician is constructed by:

- developing name recognition;
- studying the art of self-promotion geared towards turning oneself into a televised;
- fantasy figure the masses can identify with;
- projecting an aura of warmth and sincerity;

- learning to substitute ‘personality’ for ‘issues’ because ‘personalities... are more salient and easier to understand than issues’;
- learning to appeal to mass television audiences by staging performances that ‘reduce complexity’;
- crafting appearances open to multiple different audience interpretations/identifications (1988: 47).

Television is the ideal medium for this, because it allows audiences to perceive character details.

## 5. CONCEPT OF IMAGE

In social science the image-production process is mostly viewed through “impression-management” theories. Impression management focuses on the target group and defining the communication strategies. In this case image is seen as the impression that a person or an organization makes on another individual (Schweiger and Adami, 1999).

Vos takes into consideration elements from a broad range of relevant cross disciplinary literature in order to offer for communication managers of companies a cohesive body of elements on which it could be possible to develop communication policies of their organization. She clarifies the meaning of image in the context of business marketing by defining the concept of corporate image (Vos, 2006: 14:19)<sup>2</sup>.

This concept of image can be easily adapted to the environment of political marketing, if we view party organization with its ideology as a brand and political candidate or leader as the product of this political brand. At the same time, the general elements of corporate image can be used to determine the basic nature of personal image of a leader.

Some researchers distinguish the term *political image*. Strachan and Kendall bring forth that rather than being “a strictly visual impression or depiction, the term political image refers to a carefully constructed condensation of all the attributes a candidate wants to convey to the voters into easily recalled, visual and verbal symbols” (Strachan and Kendall, 2004: 135). In other words, political image can be viewed as a symbolic

device, which can be constructed with both visual and verbal messages. In the political arena the images seem to be often intended to symbolize much more than politician's most attractive personal qualities. In most cases the political images are constructed to fill candidates with mythical qualities that stand for whole the nation itself.

Political rhetoric, or messages communicated with the intention of persuading the electorate, has always included image manufacturing strategies. Quite recent changes in 20<sup>th</sup> century in the electoral landscape and in communication technology have moved such efforts to central stage. As electorate's party preferences have declined, the electorate tends to rely more the candidate's imagery. At the same time, thanks to technological developments the image creation can now be accomplished with a far greater variety of persuasive visual symbols and strategies.

Verbal or written rhetoric, which attempts to persuade with verbal symbols or words including the full array of assertions and arguments, has historically been the primary means of political persuasion simply because available means of communication did not allow candidates to convey messages visually to a vast electorate. Anyhow, candidate's linguistic construction of political images has been always supplemented by visual symbols. These were portrayed on campaign novelties and in campaign brochures. As the communication technology has developed, the use of visual rhetoric has expanded as visual symbols that construct meanings can be readily conveyed to a mass audience. With the birth of television, the candidates have increasingly relied on visual symbolism to construct persuasive imagery.

Vos explains that both direct and indirect experience have very important role in image forming process (Vos, 1992: 24). Besides the visual sense, television can be considered particularly important mediator of images also in psychosocial sense, because television creates the impression of real, immediate and transparent reproduction of the reality. In that sense audiovisual media serves as a substitute for audiences' direct experience in image forming process (Strachan and Kendall, 2004: 137).

Graber (1988) relies on schema theory, developed by cognitive psychology, to explain how people process political information and make decisions based on it. According to this theory individuals select information from their direct or indirect experiences in order to create mental constructions that organize received information

about situations and individuals. These mental constructs can be called the schemas, and they include a general pattern and limited number of illustrative examples. At the same time, direct experiences have far more influence on schema development than indirect secondary experiences (Graber, 1988: 90-91). People tend to think that picture doesn't lie. Therefore, television as substitute for person's direct experience is such a persuasive medium. At the same time, once the schema has been developed and the decision about a person or situation done, it is extremely difficult to change the image what a person already has.

Schweiger and Adami bring forth the positive and negative Image Attributes of a political candidate, by listing the main *dimensions*: honesty, quality, national roots, strength and passion (Appendix 1).

All these attributes can be recognized as elements of politician's image in audio-visual context.

## **6. DATA ANALYSES AND RESEARCH METHODS**

In this study both verbal and non-verbal variables are considered while analyzing the appearance of political candidates in case of TV news interviews.

For the non-verbal image analyses the methodology is partly based on the method of nonverbal image measurement of Schweiger and Adamai (1999) and framework offered by Lacey (1998).

TV news interviews is the best way for political leaders to communicate their "message" to the mass audience. Several techniques can be used to "send" the message as authentic as it could be. One way here is to apply "sound bites" while talking (Louw, 2005; Newman, 2001). It means the party ideology should be adopted to the "sound-bite talk" in the *televizualised* campaigning landscape. At the same time, here should be considered nonverbal communication, as the non-verbal elements are considered central to the communication process by being "an inherent and essential part of message production and interpretation (Burgoon, 1994, in Giles and Le Poire, 2006: XV).

Argyle (1988) concluded there are five primary functions of nonverbal bodily behavior in human communication:

- Express emotions
- Express interpersonal attitudes
- To accompany speech in managing the cues of interaction between speakers and listeners;
- Self-presentation of one's personality
- Rituals (greetings).

These functions are also important while analyzing non-verbal communication of political leaders when they are interviewed for TV-news.

Based on that, both verbal and non-verbal elements of signification were considered while analyzing the politicians' TV news interviews for this study.

For the textual and discourse analyses of the audiovisual news as "media text" the author uses models of Fairclough (1992; 1995) and Simon-Vandenberg (1996).

Schweiger and Adami (1999) bring out positive and negative Image Attributes of a Political Candidate (Appendix 1). The author of this study has decided to those expressed by verbal and to those expressed by non-verbal means.

The author has chosen to use public service TV news because majority of the people in Europe still tend to consider PS TV news as one of the most reliable political information sources. Year by year the online media is gaining more importance for the political campaigns, but the 2-to-3-minute news format is often used also in case of video coverage available via the Internet. Another reason here is that media advisers pay a lot of attention on how to get free or 'earned' media coverage, that voters tend to trust more than 'paid' media (Schnur, 1999: 143-55). At the same time, the author has worked several years as a reporter for Estonian Public TV.

In this study the main focus remained on how political leaders use TV news interviews to convey the most desirable image of themselves. Some attention was paid on the non-verbal communication and visual means of signification such as body-language, appearance, dress, charisma, non-verbal aspects of speech, i.e., all those elements of communication which according to existing literature plays a very important role in the process of constituting a political 'image' or identity (McNair, 2003; Newman, 2001; Schweiger and Adami, 1999, Lacey, 1998).

## 6.1 Image-manufacturing through political interview

Politicians, who by definition aim at gaining or retaining social power, must create an image of intellectual power while interviewed. They must show that they know more than their opponents in the struggle for social power, using both verbal and non-verbal means to let this impression on the audience. Journalist often formulates the viewpoint of an opponent (real or imaginary) and that way holds conversational power, but also determines the topic of the talk. Meanwhile the interviewee will try to use his or her turn to convince the audience of his or her own cognitive certainty with the highest degree of confidence that his or her own statements are true and that the opinions of the opponent are wrong.

While analysing the news interviews the question is not whether the text is working ideologically, but *how* it is working that way. Fairclough, using Thompson's conception, understands ideology as 'meaning in the service of power' (Thompson 1984, 1990, in Fairclough 1995: 14). To understand if created *meanings* are working ideologically it is necessary to see if they serve *relations of domination* (Simon-Vandenberg, 1996). In order to understand whether a *text* works ideologically one should answer the following questions :

1. what are the **social origins** of this option?
2. **where** and **who** does it come from? (f.ex. *whose* representation is it)
3. what **motivations** are there for making this choice?
4. what is the **effect** of this choice, including its effects (positive or negative)?
5. the **various interests** of those involved? (Fairclough, 1995: 14-15).

In case of political interviews politicians can shift the agenda and their answers have become strategically vague and evasive. Speakers make the selection of **lexical and grammatical (modal) devices** in order to **persuade the audience** (Simon-Vandenberg, 1996).

While focusing on the linguistic elements used to convey intellectual power Simon-Vandenberg (1996: 391-2) considers the *modality*, which could be viewed as the

mode in which an utterance is presented as **true**, **reliable** and **authoritative**. Modal expressions in general are open-ended expressions.

Desirable image from a politician's point of view includes such features as knowledgeable, honestly, trustworthiness, accountability, sense of purpose and humanness.

For this research the author considered the features what Simon-Vandenberg (1996) calls *knowledgeability* (Simon-Vandenberg, 1996: 391-2) and Schweiger and Adami (1999) brings forth as *quality* (Appendix 1). Anyhow, the features of knowledgeable, reliable and authoritative leader must be supported by non-verbal means of communication, which will be also mapped.

### *6.1.1 Verbal features for persuading the audience*

In this part of the study the author looked at the ways in which political candidates use interviews in television news reporting in order to present the desirable image of them during the election period.

The study focuses here on the linguistic elements used to convey **intellectual power**. Here the research was based on the model of Siman-Vandenberg (1996) and the data used is the interviews candidates in Finland and Estonia gave to public service TV news 30 days prior the general elections in 2007. The author has chosen not to present statistical evidence to indicate frequency of observed *modal expressions*. Previous studies show that the 'counting' might be difficult because of the open-end nature of the expressions. At the same time, the frequency is considered less important than the strategic use of modal expressions used by interviewees to communicate image of knowledgeable speaker who makes reliable statements. (Simon-Vandenberg, 1996).

The candidates mostly tended to present the most favorable image through using the expressions, which emphasize certainty, but also social and emotional commitment, as noted by Simon-Vandenberg in her study (1996).



Interviewees expressing certainty by:

a) Referring source of knowledge

a.1) referring commonsense (*we are convinced, I heard recently, referring special committee*)

a.2) factual evidence

(*scientific research, opinion polls, i have no evidence, according to our data*)

a.3) hearsy evidence

(*someone has said it, not said it... no doubt...; referring press/media*)

a.4) majority opinion (*everybody recognize/understand it*)

a.5) past experience, 'knowledge' (*i know*)

b) Not referring source of knowledge

b.1) Relational clause (*it is (is not) the case that/ the truth is that*)

b. 2) Presupposition

c) Expressing emotional and social commitment

c.1) Emotional commitment

(*use of verbs: i believe, i think, i suppose, i have pleasure to say*)

c.2) Social commitment

(*'us' referring to general public*)

*6.1.2 Non-verbal features for persuading the audience*

For mapping and observing the nonverbal features used by political candidates in order to strengthen desirable image the author considered how body language, dress code and the choice of the interview place helped to communicate the message.

In most cases, both in Estonia and in Finland only experienced candidates or party leaders were interviewed. According to this study, those leaders who were representing those parties which got more places in the parliament, were more professional in communicating their message also with the help of body language. It

was clearly visible in case of Finnish main competing parties (Centre Party leader and prime minister Matti Vanhanene, Social Democratic Party leader Eero Heinäluoma, and especially the leaders of most successful National Coalition Party leaders Sauli Niinistö and Jyrki Katainen). The same trend was notable also in Estonia in case of Centre Party leader Edgar Savisaar and Reform Party leader and prime minister Andrus Ansip. All these party representatives in both countries can be considered according to Denton *celebrity politicians* (see p. 8). The leaders of smaller parties, instead, were not able to let the impression of so convinced, reliable, knowledgeable and professional politicians.

In both countries the interviewed candidates appeared in formal dress. As all the leaders of bigger parties in both countries are men, they mostly appeared in dark suit, light shirt and tie.

All the candidates were interviewed in work situations in office or the party head quarters, except some days before the Election Day, when the leaders were interviewed while meeting people on town streets, in the market square (Finnish case) or at super markets (Estonian case).

Election debate issues did not come up that often. In case of Finland the issues were represented only by small parties, the bigger parties did not represent them.

Sound bite talking was always used in case of professionalized campaign techniques (for example in case of Finnish National Coalition Party, Estonian Centre Party and Reform Party).

## **7. CONCLUSIONS**

If to consider that voters make up their decision based on the candidates image, principles, capacity, quality, availability, representation of the society and optical phenotype, as pointed out by Kapfer in Schweiger and Adami (1999), then it could be concluded that candidates TV appearance significantly influence the election results also in Finland and Estonia.

Having carried out the comparative analyses of Estonian and Finnish politicians' TV news interviews within the one month period prior the Election Day, it could be concluded that in Estonia the TV news sync interviews were used more often and in

average they were longer than in Finland. In most Finnish cases the interview of one leader was used only once in one story. In Estonia, on the other hand, the same politician in several cases appeared in the same story. During the Estonian electoral campaign, the prime minister's Reform Party representatives were interviewed in 37 cases. It is almost double compared to the Finnish National Coalition Party which leaders got most airtime via the TV news interviews in Finland. It gives the impression that political TV reporters in Estonia are more passive while "packaging" the story. Therefore, compared to Finnish interviewees the Estonian politicians have better opportunities to communicate more authentic "message" via the TV news.

It is clear that the politicians who already are in the government or serve as PM have more visibility in the media and the political arena. Therefore, it is understandable that they appear more often in TV news. Anyhow, in Estonia political television news stories could be considered less balanced than in Finland, where the principle of "equal airtime" was in most cases followed. In Finland the interviews with political leaders in PS TV news were shorter and all the political stories were better structured so that the journalist did not give away the control as the "framer" of the story. At the same time, during the official election campaign period there can be observed several news stories in Finland which with visual means bring the National Coalition Party forth as a success party. The same party was also often given the "final word". Even if the impression management strategies used to "sell" political leaders for the journalists is not focus of this article, it could be noted that National Coalition Party in Finland had managed its campaign very professionally and the party leaders performed always in the "celebrity" role.

In both countries during the official election campaign in general only party leaders who are well know top-politicians where interviewed. It illustrates clearly that political issues in both countries are represented by political celebrity personalities. The personalization trend was even more evident in case of Finnish PS TV news. During the official general election period in Finland in general only the leaders of 3 leading parties where interviewed (Centre Party, which is also PM party and Social Democratic Party; and oppositional National Coalition Party). In most cases the leaders of the 3 party where interviewed in the context of the forthcoming elections, but they did not

give any direct promises. On the other hand, Estonian candidates were mostly interviewed outside the context of direct electoral campaign issues.

By counting how many interviews different parties gave to the public service TV 30 days before the Election Day and by comparing the number with the election results the author concludes that less seats the party got less professionalized was the campaign and less interview space it was given (Appendix 2).

It can be also concluded that parties which use professional PR had better opportunities to create image that they are trustworthy, reliable candidates and more changes to convey “authoritative” expressions.

Definitely the TV news interviews is not the only and most important element to consider while analyzing the voter behavior, but nevertheless, the study helps to draw up the trends, which reflected also in election results.

It can be concluded that also in Estonia and Finland the image of politicians is more important than the election campaign issues, and that the personalization or ‘Americanization’ of politics is recognizable trend. Therefore, further qualitative research and comparative study in this field is needed to better understand different mechanisms behind the image-manufacturing tactics in diverse societies.

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<sup>1</sup> The study of Joseph Ben-Ur and Bruce I. Newmann (2002) shows that the primary component of the voting behavior in 2000 U.S. Presidential Elections was **social imagery**, which represents the stereotyping of the candidate to appeal to voters by making associations between the candidate and selected segments in society. It also represents what voters perceive as linking between the candidate and any social, economic, and political voting groups, The secondary component in voters decision making mechanism was political issues, and the tertiary components, candidate personality/morality and party traits/morality, significantly contributed to voter intention, though to a lesser degree.

<sup>2</sup> The essence of the image according to Vos:

(1) The image is a collective **experience**, which takes shape in various public mind. In this sense, the concept of image originates in the school of psychoanalysis in which also the subconscious elements plays a central role (Wieringa and Van Raaij, 1987, cited in Vos 1992: 24);

(2) The image is **personal**. It is not only a reflection of an object but an image that is constructed by receiver. Therefore, image of the same object, organization or person varies greatly from person to person;

(3) The image is **time-linked**. It can change in time. Image is strongly influenced by both the new events related for example to the objects, person, groups or organization and the social environment of the organization and person;

(4) The image can **vary from vague to vivid** and from restricted to comprehensive, depending, among other things, on the strength of the affective reaction and the time span between the present and the observation moment;

(5) The image **conforms more or less to the identity** and indicates how the identity is experienced, but image can be different from reality;

(6) The image is **created from (personal or indirect) experiences**. It could be viewed as a result of the interaction of all the experiences, convictions, feelings and impressions that the public has about a person, object, group, organization etc.

(7) The image **incorporates impressions and evaluations** about the object, person or organization. Vos also uses the definition of Dowling according to what "an image is a set of meanings by which an object is known, and through which people describe, remember and relate to it" (cited in Vos, 2006: 18).

(8) The image can influence people's behavior and the climate in which many decisions are taken. (Vos 2006: 16:19).

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**Appendix 1**

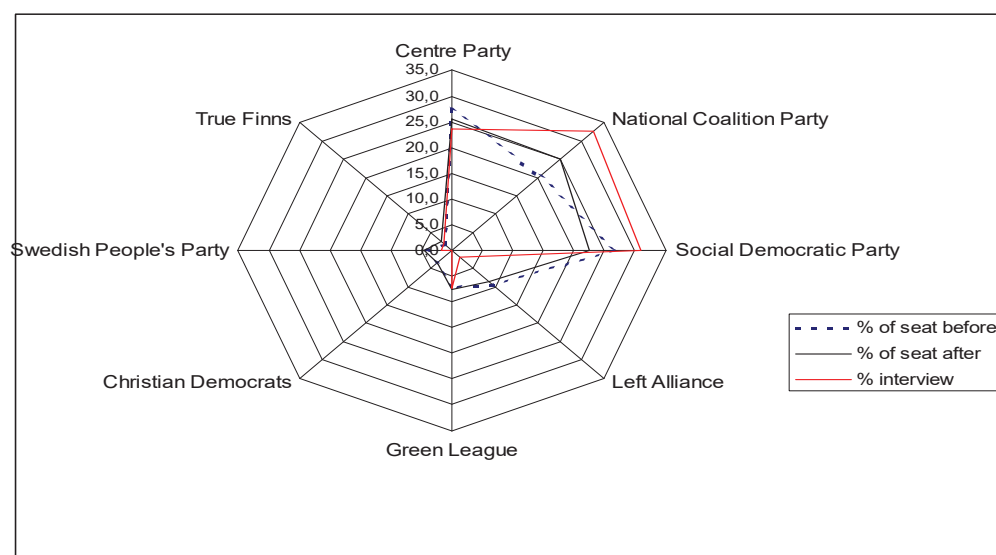
Schweiger and Adami (1999): positive and negative Image Attributes of a Political Candidate

Dimension	Positive Attribute	Negative Attribute
<b>HONESTY</b>	Honest, Credible, A man of his word Transparent, Reliable Honest reputation	Entangled in scandals Embezzlement Breach of contract
<b>QUALITY</b>	Knowledge, Educational background Capable, Mastermind Experienced	Does not know how to manage a government No business knowledge No international experience Not qualified
<b>NATIONAL ROOTS</b>	Available Represents our country Knows the needs of our nation Traditional Interested in our culture Loves our country	Foreigner Does not know the history of our country
<b>STRENGTH</b>	Strong, Winner, Carries his point Energetic, Tough Successful,	Weak Loser Without backbone
<b>PASSION</b>	Loves his job, Cares for our nation Helping hands, Modern ideas Sporty, Family oriented., Young Knows our problems.	Stubbon ( <i>kangekaelne, tōrges, visa</i> ) Emotionless

## Appendix 2

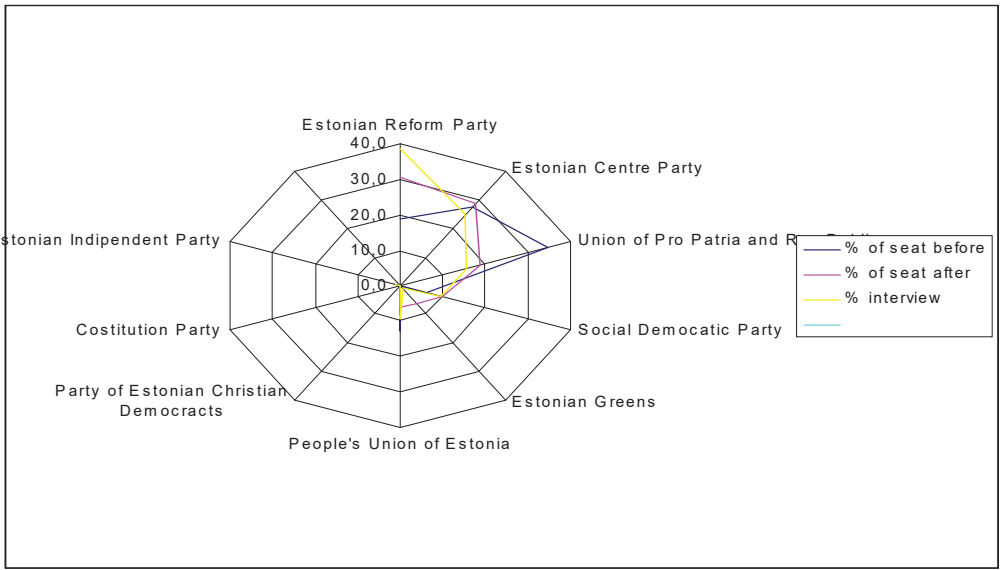
### 1. Finalnd – general elections 18 March 2007

	seat before	seat after	interview
Centre Party	55	51,0	13
<b>National Coalition Party</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>50,0</b>	<b>18</b>
Social Democratic Party	53	45,0	17
Left Alliance	19	17,0	1
Green League	14	15,0	4
Christian Democrats	7	7,0	0
Swedish People's Party	8	9,0	1
True Finns	3	5,0	1



### 2. Estonia – General Elections 4 March 2007

	seat before	seat after	interview
<b>Estonian Reform Party</b>	<b>19,0</b>	<b>31,0</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Estonian Centre Party</b>	<b>28,0</b>	<b>29,0</b>	<b>24</b>
Union of Pro Patria and Res Publica	35,0	19,0	15
Social Democratic Party	6,0	10,0	9
Estonian Greens	0,0	6,0	1
People's Union of Estonia	13,0	6,0	9
Party of Estonian Christian Democrats	0,0	0,0	0
Costitution Party	0,0	0,0	0
Estonian Independent Party	0,0	0,0	1





## II

### **FOSTERING DIALOGUE OR MONOLOGUE? ESTONIAN PARTY WEBSITES DURING THE 2009 EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS**

by

Ülle Toode, 2016

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# **Fostering Dialogue or Monologue? - Estonian party websites during the 2009 European Parliament elections**

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*Paper presented at the Ralph and Ruth Fisher Forum "Political Spaces in Eurasia: Global Contexts, Local Outcomes" at the University of Illinois, June 13-15, 2012 and in 2016 published in the Journal of Political Marketing. DRAFT VERSION.*

**ABSTRACT:** This paper presents data from the analyses of political party web pages during the 2009 European Parliament elections in Estonia. It examines the presence and absence of web 2.0 features on the sites and aims to find out whether interactivity-based applications are used by parties to increase participation and to foster deliberative politics. Estonia as a small ex-Soviet country has emerged after the Soviet Union collapse as one of the most advanced e-societies in the world. Therefore, Estonia is chosen as a case study to explore whether and how decision makers use web 2.0 elements for fostering Habermasian dialogue between the citizens and the power holders in the society where technical obstacles for deliberative politics do not exist any longer. The results show that the Estonian parties still focus on the one-sided or top-down model of communication, based on web 1.0 features, even though all conditions for deliberation from the technical and infrastructural side in Estonia are fulfilled. The paper concludes with a discussion on the possible reasons parties might not be interested in using web 2.0 elements in their web campaign and how it might be linked to the conditions where citizens' participation and interest in politics is low. There is also emphasis on the need for further systematic comparative research in order to draw conclusions on the changes in the online campaigning and political communication process in the era of cyber-democracy.

**KEYWORDS** deliberative democracy, e-campaigning, elections, Estonia, party websites, web 2.0

## INTRODUCTION

In today's climate, parties all over Europe have created their own web pages, which are actively used, especially during the elections. Direct interaction between decision makers and a higher level of citizens' participation are the vital elements of both web 2.0 applications and the e-democracy. The research indicates that the majority of political parties in Europe still offer top-down or unidirectional information and the applications that offer interaction are not widely used.

Recent studies show that the use of web 2.0 applications, which can offer opportunities for dialogue between the power holders and the citizens with the aim to contribute to deliberative democracy, is quite rare on political websites (Kluver, Jankowski, Foot, and Schneider 2007; Schweitzer 2011). Party and candidate websites are shown to underuse interactive features of web 2.0 and instead tend to utilize controlled top-down communication models. Even today, use of the web by political actors in Western societies for democratic deliberation seems to be limited

and contested, reflecting a complex mix of one-way and two-way communication. (Jackson and Lilleker 2009; Jackson and Lilleker 2010; Lilleker et al. 2011; Schweitzer 2011).

There is also evidence of a gap between smaller and bigger parties in terms of how professionally they use their websites (Strandberg 2008). From the parties' perspective, the early optimists suggested that the Internet allowed minor political parties to bypass the traditional media and communicate directly with the electorate (Rheingold 1993; Stone 1996). Later research has more importantly focused on how smaller parties or challenger candidates have been utilizing the interactive features of web 2.0 (Jackson and Lilleker 2009; Cogburn and Espinoza-Vasquez 2011; Schweitzer 2011). Recent years have brought some new knowledge on the use of web 2.0 in other Western European electoral contexts (Lilleker and Malagon 2010; Lilleker et al. 2011; Schweitzer 2011; Vardanega 2011).

Most of the existing literature on the use of web 2.0 elements on political web pages focuses on the Anglo-American perspective (Gulati and Williams 2007; Coleman and Blumler 2009; Jackson and Lilleker 2009, 2010; Lilleker and Malagon 2010; Cogburn and Espinoza-Vasquez 2011). There are few studies that involve Central European countries (Lilleker et al. 2011) or former Soviet countries.

In addition, some rare recent research has tried to demonstrate that on the party web pages there is a gap between Western and Eastern European countries when it comes to the usage of functions that offer interactivity and dialogue-based deliberative communication model (Lilleker et al. 2011). It should be considered that this evidence might reflect certain developmental differences in these societies and that more systematic comparative research is needed.

This study aims to empirically assess to what extent political parties, as relevant political actors, incorporate web 2.0 into their online communication and campaigning in Estonia, an ex-Soviet country and one of the fastest developing e-societies in the world. The research focused on the extent to which parties provided information and interactive experiences and how party sites attempted to engage with and mobilize website visitors.

Estonia is chosen for the case study as a middle-income transition democracy with one of the highest Internet penetration rates in the world; therefore, one would expect to see there a rapidly developing public sphere based on new information and communication technologies embedded in the web. Instead the study finds that the use of web 2.0 features seems limited, which bodes poorly for the enhancement of participatory democracy through the web.

## CONCEPTUAL LANDSCAPE OF THE STUDY

The term web 2.0 was first introduced in 2005 by O'Reilly and was usually used to indicate websites that use new forms of interaction-based information and communication technology (ICT) beyond the static pages of earlier websites, the so-called web 1.0 environment. Nowadays the term web 2.0 includes the whole present onlinemedia landscape, where it is possible not only to send written and spoken words but also to produce, upload, remix, link, and share materials in collaborative and complex ways (Dahlgren 2013). The new era of ICT has suddenly empowered the common old-days web user with new concepts like blogs, social media, and video streaming. For democracy, an important attribute that web 2.0 offers is a capacity to aid "horizontal communication," so that web users or participants can directly link up with each other "for purposes of sharing information as well as affect, for

providing mutual support, organizing, mobilizing, or solidifying collective identities (Dahlgren 2013, p. 63). It is also important to note that some scholars reject the use of the term web 2.0 (Anderson 2007), bringing forth that the first conception of the web in general was to stimulate collaborative or cooperative activities in cyberspace. Whether web 2.0 is qualitatively different from prior web technologies has been debated by World Wide Web inventor Tim Berners-Lee, who intended the web in his vision as “a collaborative medium” (developerWorks Interviews: Tim Berners-Lee 2006) and he would rather call the web 2.0 environment “Read and Write Web.”

As using the term web 2.0, this paper considers how new interactive and deliberative features are exploited to boost participation that encourages interaction and dialogue between the host of the website and the visitor and that provides a rich user experience (O’Reilly 2005). If in the context of campaign communication the politicians or power holders could previously use the Internet only as a campaign tool, then now the web environment could also be utilized to encourage participation during the elections.

Optimistic view holders have described the Internet as an idealistic public sphere where free deliberation leads to perfect discussion and where it is possible to realize the opportunities that participatory democracy provides (Habermas 2006; Boulianne 2009). Participatory democracy via the web is often seen as a solution and a chance to keep the electorate more active. Citizens have the opportunity to cooperate and websites’ visitors have the chance to create their own content. Some studies demonstrate that the Internet has a positive effect on engagement and it helps in the participation of those groups in society that otherwise are not engaged offline (Boulianne 2009). In this case, web technology helps to strengthen political participation and allows the direct communication between political actors and citizens without the mediation role of the mass media, as was the old model of political communication (Gurevitch, Coleman, and Blumler 2009).

Nevertheless, the existence of participation opportunities does not mean that there is really a change in the campaigning communication model, although the terms “participatory” or “deliberative democracies” are used more and more often in public discourse. Not all theorists are convinced that the Internet has brought big changes in electioneering. It has been stated that a rapidly developed public sphere does not automatically guarantee democracy (Blumler and Gurevitch 2001; Dahlgren 2005).

Other scholars demonstrate that the Internet still does not involve voter groups that have not been involved so far, and the “knowledge gap” of those individuals will even increase more with the Internet (Witte, Reutenberg, and Auer 2009, p. 6). Most previous studies approach the question of the Internet impact on the process of political communication from the perspective of optimistic equalization and pessimistic normalization theories.

### *Equalization*

Cyber optimists suggest that the Internet has a positive effect on engagement and it helps participation of groups in society that have been so far not involved offline (Boulianne 2009). The supporters of this approach believe that web technology helps to strengthen political participation and allows direct communication between political actors and citizens without the mediation role of the mass media (Rheingold 1993; Boulianne 2009). Equalization theories suggest also that minor parties are more likely to have an Internet presence, as the Internet allows them to bypass media and

communicate directly with the electorate. Some studies have focused on how web 2.0 application utilization can compensate for minor parties to which the mass media gives little attention (Jackson and Lilleker 2009). Main argument of supporters of equalization theories or cyber optimists have suggested that the Internet brings re-democratization of the public sphere.

### *Normalization*

The traditional normalization theory suggests that use of the Internet within politics reflects typical shortcomings and deficits of existing power relationships (Resnick 1998; Davis 1999; Margolis and Resnick 2000; Norris 2001). In this context, it is argued that major parties would most likely be present in the web and they would be the most technically sophisticated. Cyber pessimists find that the web offers only excellent opportunities for electronic propaganda and have demonstrated empirically that the Internet might not engage groups that have been not involved so far, and the “Digital Divide” increases the “Democratic Divide” (Norris 2001, p. 274; Witte et al. 2009, p. 6; Witte and Mannon 2010, p. 51). Sunstein (2001) argues that people discuss political issues in rather homogenous groups with “likeminded others” and, therefore, avoid different viewpoints in web forums and cyberspace.

### *Interactivity*

Kiousis (2002) defines interactivity as:

“The degree to which a communication technology can create a mediated environment in which participants can communicate (one-to-one, one-to-many, and many-to-many), both symmetrically and asymmetrically, and participate in reciprocal message exchanges (third-order dependency). With regard to human users, it additionally refers to their ability to perceive the experience as a simulation of interpersonal communication and increase their awareness of telepresence” (Kiousis 2002, p. 372).

Two types of interactivity can be identified in cyberspace, depending on whether it is a communication process between people (person to person) or an interaction with a computer (person to computer or network) (Stromer Stromer-Galley 2000). In other words, cyber-interactivity involves two main elements: the direction of communication and the level of receiver control. Ferber, Foltz, and Pugliese (2007) have developed McMillan’s (2002) four-part cyber-interactivity model into a six-part model that considers the three-way communication on the Internet.

Ferber et al.’s model takes into consideration interactivity not as a binary concept but as a progressive continuum and has been suggested to be useful in previous research to measure the presence of interactive technical features of a web page (one-way and two-way communication). It also considers the interaction among any number of participants via comment boards or chat rooms (three-way communication; Jackson and Lilleker 2010).

Interactivity on the web is not the same as actual interaction. Interactivity does not mean that the process of interaction between persons or with the network is actually taking place. The opportunity to leave a comment in cyberspace does not mean that people really write the comment. On the contrary, if a blog visitor comments on a blog entry, it does not mean that the author would read or reply to the



commentator. At the same time, interactivity can be encouraged or discouraged through the layout, design, and text on the web page. This study analyzes the possibilities of interactivity and not the interaction itself.

## DELIBERATIVE POTENTIAL OF WEB 2.0

According to Dahlgren (2005), a functioning public sphere is a concentration of communicative spaces in society that allow for the “circulation of information, ideas, debates—ideally in an unfettered manner—and also the formation of political will” (i.e., public opinion; Dahlgren 2005, p. 148). These spaces, in which now the Internet is gradually taking over an even more important role than the mass media had before, serve to facilitate direct communication between citizens and the decision makers (Dahlgren 2005). With the introduction of web 2.0, scholars with an optimistic approach to the Internet as a facilitator of the Habermasian deliberative democracy saw new opportunities. Rheingold (1993) has claimed that the Internet would bring “revolutionary” change into political debates and conversations thanks to its democratic structure, which would facilitate deliberative debates (Rheingold 1993, p. 131).

In fact, on the basis of Habermasian normative theory (Habermas 1989, 2006), it could be argued that web 2.0-centered interactivity, digital information, and communication technologies could offer new possibilities for political communication, which fits perfectly with democratic norms. Interactivity in cyberspace could make politics and decision making more transparent, involve more people, foster dialogue between citizens and those in power, and give opportunity to more individuals to express their voice.

Under conditions of Habermasian deliberative democracy, decision making and opinion formation is based on processes of public argumentation and reasoning among equal citizens (Habermas 1989, 2006). For that purpose, the web 2.0 environment offers perfect opportunities for both political actors and citizens. From the Habermasian public sphere perspective, web 2.0 could be viewed as having great potential as a “deliberative space” where equal citizens through public argumentation can freely exchange ideas through the form of opinions and influence the process of decision making (Dahlgren 2005; Habermas 2006). Web 2.0 applications offer citizens both the platform for public debate and a channel for interactive information exchange. That way, the public sphere could theoretically be extended and pluralized (Dahlgren 2005).

Another point the literature brings out is fragmentation. With the Internet and web 2.0 applications a “multimedia, multi-channel communication society” evolves (Kamps 2002, cited in Witte et al. 2009, p. 7). As a result, the public sphere will be fragmented and destabilized (Habermas 2006). At the same time, Dahlgren sees an opportunity in this situation. He states that this destabilization might bring dispersions of older patterns in political communication and might create space for new systems in which the web offers opportunities to “pull” information from diverse sources and get out various viewpoints so that the public sphere could expand (Dahlgren 2005; Dahlberg 2007).

Nevertheless, Dahlgren (2005) still takes a critical approach to the idea that the Habermasian public sphere would work on the Internet. According to him, Habermasian deliberative democracy is suppressing the reality of power relations, and in cyberspace there would be the same problems as in the offline environment. His

argument is that online discussions often do not follow the high ideas set for deliberative democracy (Dahlgren 2005, pp. 155–157). He also brings out that even if participation might increase in cyberspace, there would be less time to listen to each other; therefore, there is the need for an “optimal” level of participation (Dahlgren 2005).

Most scholars still agree that cyberspace, especially web 2.0, has huge potential for deliberative policy and the empowering of citizens, but there are critical issues that should be considered regarding the limitations of web 2.0 (Blumler and Gurevitch 2001; Dahlgren 2005, 2013; Coleman and Blumler 2009). At the same time, web 2.0 applications, such as social networking media, blogs, twitter, wiki, and collaborative filtering, provide their users with a whole new set of opportunities and different modes of dealing with information, interacting, and networking. Less clear still is the way of making the great potential function for creating the conditions needed for deliberative politics.

## BOOSTING ONLINE PARTICIPATION

One of the main problems in relation to the ideal of the Internet as an environment for participatory democracy is that of participation. According to Habermas (1989) discourse centered democracy has four requirements. Firstly, all parties that might be affected must be included; secondly, all participants should be provided with the opportunity to interact in a free, equal and easy manner; thirdly, there are no restrictions on topics; and fourthly, the outcomes can be revised (Habermas 1989, 2006).

According to some research (Verba and Nie, 1972; Verba, Schlozman and Brady, 1995) political participation in the US context has four traditional dimensions: voting, campaign activity, contacting officials or decision makers, and collective activities. In the Internet environment - specially thanks to WEB 2.0 applications - the level of interactivity has significantly increased and the potential to promote the ways for improving participation, information, and interest in politics has risen and with that contributes to the higher degree of deliberative democracy (Rheingold 1993; van Dijk 2000; Boulianne 2009).

Coleman and Blumler (2009, p. 169) point out that civic action needs to be invested with consequence and people need to understand what they can expect from participation in civic behavior as well as indicating to citizens what they gain out of participation. Existing studies have shown that Estonian Internet users tend to be passive consumers of the Internet and do not actively participate in the deliberative debates or content creation activities. Pruulmann-Vengerfeld and Reinsalu (2009) point out in their research on the Internet usage in Estonia that majority of people use the Internet in purpose of goods and services consumption and entertainment. It is also stated that very few users upload socially critical content to the social media web pages (i.g Youtube, Facebook, etc). A study carried out by Estonian social and market research company SAAR POLL shows that only 6% of the respondents have ever used internet for expressing their opinion or participating in a political discussion in Estonia (SAAR POLL, 2008, p.16).

## METHODOLOGY

The research was designed as a qualitative study using content analyses of Estonian party home pages during the 2009 European Parliament (EP) elections. Data collection was part of the Comparative European New Media and Elections Project (CENMEP)\*,1 which aimed to explore the role that the Internet played during the elections across the European Union.

For this paper, quantitative content analysis of the main party websites, or specific campaign website if one was created, was conducted on Election Day. Depending on the type of website, a maximum of 214 features were identified as present or absent on the site using an online survey. For the purposes of this paper, 10 party web pages were used. The sampling procedure was as follows: out of all 11 party websites, 8 party and 2 campaign sites were used. One party had an inactive site and was left out from the analyses.

The website features were grouped according to previous coding models (Table 1) designed for the analyses of party websites (Gibson and Ward 2000; Lilleker and Malagon 2010; Lilleker et al. 2011). The website features were divided, first, as representing web 1.0 or web 2.0 and then also by whether the main function was to inform, to provide interactivity, or to encourage visitor engagement online and whether they attempted offline activism and mobilization. Also considered was the use of elements demonstrating technical sophistication. Finally, the websites were analyzed based on ideology. The data were downloaded to a local computer and onto a computer at Radboud University for the CENMEP project. Websites were saved to the local computer.

### *Information Elements*

Information elements are all features that the parties use in order to inform and persuade visitors via their home page (Gulati and Williams 2007; Carlson and Strandberg 2008; Lilleker et al. 2011; Schweitzer 2011). All political websites are designed to provide information, but the main question in the context of this study is whether this information is presented as drop-down monologue and in plain textual format, which is typical of web 1.0, or whether interactivity-boosting web 2.0 applications are also utilized.

### *Interactivity Elements*

Interactivity is one of the most influential features making web 2.0 different from web 1.0. Lilleker et al. (2011) define interactive features as those that allow visitors to interact in some way with the host or other visitors and where the information flows in cyberspace in multiple directions. In regard to online participation, interactivity is the most important element of web 2.0. Supporters of the equalization theory argue that interactivity can increase political participation and foster direct dialogue between citizens and decision makers (Rheingold 1993; Boulianne 2009).

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\* CENMEP is a study of the use of the Internet during the 2009 European parliamentary (EP) elections that involves researchers from 23 EU member states. Project was directed by Maurice Vergeen (University of Nijmegen, the Netherlands), Gerrit Voerman (University of Groningen, the Netherlands) and Carlos Cunha (Dowling College, New York, USA). CENMEP was the successor to the 2004 Internet and Elections Project (Jankowski et al., 2005).

### *Engagement Elements*

Web 2.0 in comparison to web 1.0 provides visitors with new opportunities to engage themselves and to interact on higher levels, for example, viewing content, following links, and sharing and promoting links and content via Facebook or Delicious, etc. Modern politicians' sites also contain more and more entertaining audiovisual elements such as videos, graphics, music, animations, and pictures (Sundar et al. 2003; Lilleker et al. 2011, p. 198; Schweitzer 2011).

**Table 1** Grouping of the Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 features (Lilleker *et al* 2011).

**TABLE 1** Grouping of Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 Features

Information	Engagement	Mobilization	Interactivity	Technical Sophistication
		Web 1.0		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- News</li> <li>- Press releases/clippings</li> <li>- Newsletter archive</li> <li>- Speech section</li> <li>- List of upcoming events</li> <li>- Text/video/audio/photo</li> <li>- Newsletter archive</li> <li>- Party standpoints</li> <li>- Documents available to all</li> <li>- Documents for registered visitors only</li> <li>- Documents of party only</li> <li>- History/achievements</li> <li>- Code of conduct</li> <li>- FAQs</li> <li>- National/EU political information</li> <li>- Voting procedure information</li> <li>- Regional sites</li> <li>- Registers for mail</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Video/TV spots</li> <li>- Videos of conferences</li> <li>- Videos of appearances</li> <li>- Videos of home/private</li> <li>- Photo gallery</li> <li>- Public photos</li> <li>- Personal photos</li> <li>- Share by e-mail</li> <li>- Audio features</li> <li>- Streaming audio</li> <li>- Newsletter</li> <li>- Register to e-mail</li> <li>- Chat archive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Register as volunteer</li> <li>- Guest book</li> <li>- Register for events</li> <li>- Subscribe to events</li> <li>- Join party</li> <li>- Promotional material</li> <li>- Donation function</li> <li>- Shop</li> <li>- Site registration function</li> <li>- Site members area</li> <li>- Party members area</li> <li>- Register as voter</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Contact facility</li> <li>- Questions invited</li> <li>- Short poll</li> <li>- Long poll</li> <li>- Poll results published</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Animations</li> <li>- Download podcasts</li> <li>- Download speeches</li> <li>- Language switch</li> <li>- Translate function</li> <li>- Read out loud function</li> <li>- Change bandwidth</li> <li>- Download PDFs</li> <li>- Search</li> <li>- Embedded search</li> <li>- Press release via e-mail</li> <li>- Press release via RSS</li> </ul>
		Web 2.0		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Weblog</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- News rating facility</li> <li>- Video rating facility</li> <li>- Webcam feed</li> <li>- Photo rating facility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Personal events calendar</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Blog comment facility</li> <li>- Wiki</li> <li>- Collaborative program</li> <li>- Collaborative party history</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Online speech archive</li> <li>- Tag cloud</li> </ul>

**Table 1** (Continuing) Grouping of the Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 features (Lilleker *et al* 2011).

<p>- Political games          - Apolitical games          - Prioritize /rank function</p>	<p>- Collaborative features          - Links to SNS          - Promote via SNS          - Social bookmarking          - Chat facility with party          - Chat facility with others          - Forum          - Video comment facility          - Video sharing facility          - Photo comment facility          - News comment facility</p>		
19	20	13	20
Total number of Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 features: 86			

*Note.* Source: Lilleker *et al.* 2011.  
 SNS = social networking sites.

### *Mobilization Elements*

Mobilization in this paper is categorized as all mobilizing features on websites that parties use in the web 2.0 environment to mobilize visitors into active support both online and offline (Lilleker et al. 2011, pp. 198–199). Mobilization involves a range of activities that allow visitors to donate money, join the party, register as a supporter, and volunteer as an activist for the party, etc.

### *Technical Sophistication*

Technical sophistication includes all elements that can be linked to intelligent use of technology and that contribute to the overall usability of the page and guarantee a sophisticated online presence for the party. Features that aid reading, upload or download functions, or locating or that make the site visually more attractive and engaging are considered.

### *Party Ideology*

According to existing literature, the way parties use web 2.0 applications on their web pages depends also on their ideological direction. Social liberal democratic parties tend to provide sites more engaging and interactive dialogue-based communication. Right-wing parties are considered to use a more party-centric, informative style, with closed and more controlled information (Lilleker and Malagon 2010; Lilleker et al. 2011). However, other studies demonstrate that right-wing parties have been quicker to use new technologies and faster to adopt web 2.0 facilities (Jackson and Lilleker 2009). Therefore, the study tries to explore whether ideology plays a role in Estonia as well.

## ESTONIA AS E-SOCIETY

The usage of web 2.0 application adoption on political websites in Estonia is a particularly interesting case to study because Estonia is one of the most progressive countries in Europe when it comes to the use of the Internet and the other ICT in both the private and the public sector. Often the term “e-Estonia” is commonly used to describe Estonia’s emergence as one of the most advanced e-societies in the world. Overall, 77% of the population aged 16 to 74 years uses the Internet (Statistics Estonia 2011), and the state offers the population a wide range of e-solutions and modern e-services, including e-voting. The country has relatively high Internet usage, including Internet banking and e-government services as well as relatively high broadband diffusion.

At the same time, Estonia only regained its independence from the Soviet Union in the beginning of the 1990s and therefore can still be considered a developing or “new” democracy in the EU. Studies show that in spite of high Internet usage and a well-developed information technology system, not many people in Estonia use the Internet to participate in the political decision making process (Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt and Reinsalu 2009). Other studies on Estonian e-voting demonstrate that technology does not boost turnout (Vassil and Weber 2011). The research carried out by Estonian social and market research company SAAR POLL shows that only 6% of the respondents have used the Internet for expressing their opinion or participating in a political discussion in Estonia (SAAR POLL 2008, p. 16).

## CONTEXT OF ESTONIAN EP ELECTIONS

The 2009 EP elections in Estonia were held on June 7. Turnout was 43.9%, which was about 17.1% higher than during the previous EP election in 2004 and slightly above the European average of 42.94%. The election was conducted using the D'Hondt method with closed lists. Estonia has 6 seats in the EP, 5 of which went to major parties and one to independent candidate Indrek Tarand. Two of the seats were won by the Estonian Centre Party, a major center-left opposition party. Other dominant parties, such as the Estonian Reform Party (RP; liberal center-right), Union of Pro Patria and Res Publica, and Social Democratic Party got one seat.

As a second-order national election, EP elections are considered less important by voters, parties, and the media (Reif and Schmitt 1980; Tenscher and Maier 2009), and as such it could be seen that not all parties considered this campaign as being as important as the general elections.

**Table 2** Results of 2009 European Parliament Elections for the Parties in Estonia

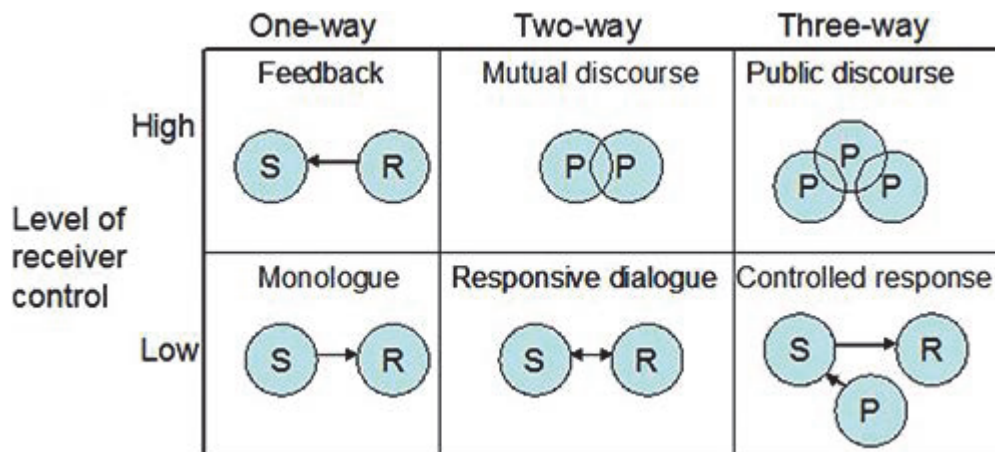
Party ID	Party	Nr of candidates	votes	Seats in EP
104	Eesti Keskerakond - Estonian Centre Party (EPC)	12	<b>103,506</b>	<b>2</b>
106	Eesti Reformierakond - Estonian Reform Party (RP)	12	60,877	1
105	Erakond Isamaa ja Res Publica Liit - Union of Pro Patria and Res Publica (ProP)	12	48,492	1
109	Sotsiaaldemokraatlik Erakond - Social Democratic Party (SC)	12	34,508	1
111	Erakond Eestimaa Rohelised - Estonian Greens (Gr)	12	10,851	0
103	Eestimaa Rahvaliid - People's Union of Estonia (PpIU)	12	8,860	0
107	Eestimaa Ühendatud Vasakpartei - Estonian United Left Party (no web)	6	3,519	0
110	Libertas Eesti Erakond - Libertas Estonia (Lib)	6	2,206	0
101	Vene Erakond Eestis - Russian Party in Estonia (RuP)	6	1,267	0
108	Erakond Eesti Kristlikud Demokraadid - Party of Estonian Christian Democrats (CrD)	3	1,715	0
102	Põllumeeste Kogu - Farmers' Union (FU)	2	612	0

## RESULTS OF THE ANALYSES

### *Web 1. Versus Web 2.0 on Party Websites*

Several researcher have focused on the question of whether political actors' wish to create a dialogue with the citizens via the Internet and with the support of Web 2.0 elements or whether they rather tend to maintain a monologic top-down structure of the communication more characteristic to Web 1.0 features (Jackson and Lilleker 2010; Lilleker et al 2011). No doubt, the role of the party web pages is to inform all of the visitors to their site, among them potential voters, but the main question here, for the context of this study, is to understand how the information is provided and if party web pages aim to create conditions for a "two" or even "three" way interactivity (Figure 1).

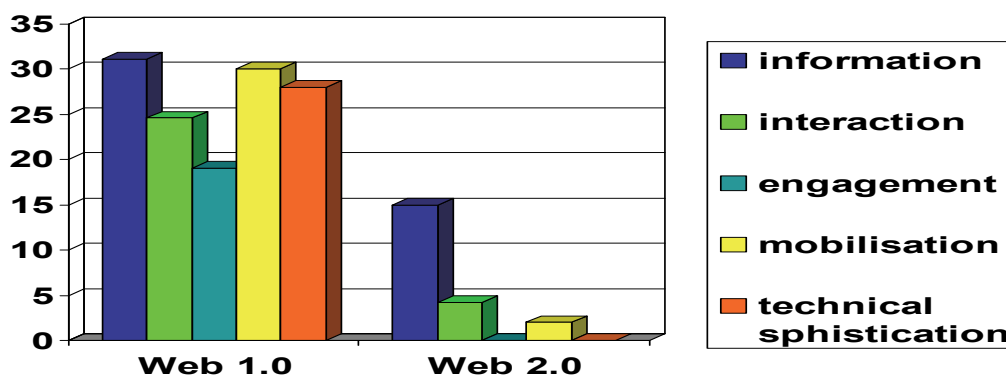




**FIGURE 1** Ferber et al.'s six-part model of interactivity in the web (S - sender; R - receiver; P - participant [sender/receiver roles are interchangeable]).

Even if latter analyses of the Estonian party web pages during 2011 General Elections show the increasing use of the web-campaigning (2011 Riigikogu elections) the results of quantitative content analyses of party websites in 2009 shows that the opportunities the Internet offers are not fully utilized.

The analyses suggest that in the context of the 2009 EP election all Estonian party pages remained dominantly in Web 1.0 informational communication mode (Figure 2). Estonian websites inform and mobiles visitors using mainly Web 1.0 features. Interactivity reminds surprisingly low. Results illustrate how the majority of parties underused features of Web 2.0 on their web sites and instead tended to utilize controlled top-down communication models more characteristic to Web 1.0. This type of web sites have been critically called “virtual billboards” with the aim to give political information and make one-way propaganda for the party or the candidate (Sadow and James 1999).



**Figure 2** Number of Web 1.0 and 2.0 Features Appearing on Party Websites by Type as Percentage of Total Possible.

*Information*

Lilleker et al (2011, p. 5) have pointed out that the research evidence indicates that many visitors of the political web pages mostly seek information and what they see on these pages can shape their voting behavior. It might be one reason why all Estonian parties predominantly and publicly offer, through Web 1.0 applications, information on their political standpoints and try to provide other informative texts (Table 3). Most active are the major parties, specially the governing centre-right RP and oppositional center-left Estonian Centre Party, which had more real possibilities to get the seats in the EP. Figure 2 illustrates how all parties predominantly use monologic web 1.0 applications.

**Table 3** Use of Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 Information Elements on Party Web Pages During Estonian European Parliament Elections †

<b>Information Web 1.0</b>	<b>ECP</b>	<b>RP</b>	<b>ProP</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Gr</b>	<b>PplU</b>	<b>UL</b>	<b>Lib</b>	<b>CrD</b>	<b>RuP</b>	<b>Total</b>
news	•	•	•		•	•		•		•	7
press releases/clippings	•	•	•		•	•					5
newsletter archive											
speech section		•									1
list of upcoming events	•	•		•		•			•		5
text/video/audio/photo		•				•				•	3
newsletter archive											
party standpoints	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	10
documents available to all	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	10
docs for registered visitors											
documents of party only											
party history/achievements		•	•	•				•		•	5
code of conduct	•	•	•	•	•					•	6
FAQs											
national/EU political info			•	•	•						3
voting procedure info										•	1
regional sites											
registers for mail											
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>56</b>

<b>Information Web 2.0</b>	<b>ECP</b>	<b>RP</b>	<b>ProP</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Gr</b>	<b>PplU</b>	<b>UL</b>	<b>Lib</b>	<b>CrD</b>	<b>RuP</b>	<b>Total</b>
weblog			•	•						•	3
<b>Total</b>			<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>						<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>

### *Interactivity*

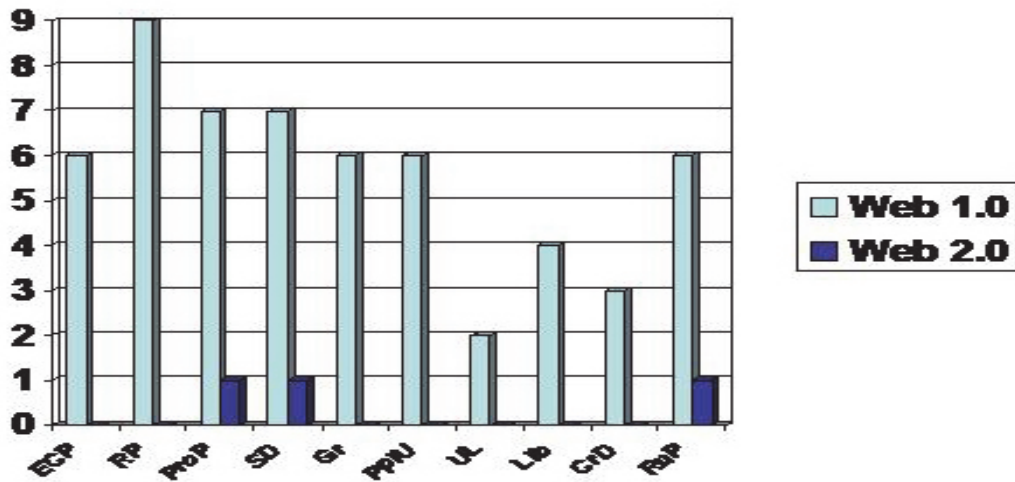
† For the presentation of the data the parties are listed in order of the votes gained during the elections. ECP - Estonian Centre Party; RP - Estonian Reform Party; ProP - Union of Pro Patria and Res Publica; SD - Social Democratic Party; Gr - Estonian Greens; PplU - People's Union of Estonia; UL - Estonian United Left Party; Lib - Libertas Estonia; CrD - Party of Estonian Christian Democrats; RuP - Russian Party in Estonia.

Interactivity reflects how much the party is willing to establish contact with citizens and whether conditions for dialogue are created (Witte et al. 2009, p. 12). Interactivity is considered the main web 2.0 element boosting online participation and requires information flowing not only one way but in various directions (Lilleker et al. 2011) by encouraging two- or three-way participatory dialogue (Lilleker and Malagon 2010). Interactivity also means a richer experience for the website visitor and makes them spend more time on the site. Through the direct discussion between the host or content creator and the visitor or visitors, opinions can be directly discussed through blogs, forums, and social networking sites. Such a communication model encourages website visitors to communicate in multiple directions in cyberspace. It is suggested that interactivity should be closely combined with information features both on the level of user to site and user to user (Lilleker and Malagon 2010) and could be considered one of the principal conditions for deliberative dialogue in cyberspace. Table 4 illustrates that interactivity elements were almost missing on the web pages of Estonian parties during the EP elections in 2009. Recent studies show that blog readers are involved in several participatory activities, both online and offline (Zuñiga, Veenstra, Vraga, and Shah 2010). The Estonian case study, however, shows that in the context of the 2009 EP elections, political actors did not use the potential that blogs or other web 2.0 powerful interactivity elements offer (Figure 3).

**Table 4** Use of Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 Interactivity Elements on Party Web Pages During Estonian European Parliament Elections

<b>Interactivity Web 1.0</b>	<b>ECP</b>	<b>RP</b>	<b>ProP</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Gr</b>	<b>PpIU</b>	<b>UL</b>	<b>Lib</b>	<b>CrD</b>	<b>RuP</b>	
contact facility	•	•	•	•	•	•	•		•	•	9
questions invited											
short poll	•									•	2
large poll			•								1
poll results published	•		•							•	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>		<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Interactivity Web 2.0</b>	<b>ECP</b>	<b>RP</b>	<b>ProP</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Gr</b>	<b>PpIU</b>	<b>UL</b>	<b>Lib</b>	<b>CrD</b>	<b>RuP</b>	
blog comment facility				•				•			2
Wiki											
collaborative programme											
Collaborative party history											
Collaborative features											
Links to SNS											
Promote via SNS			•	•							2
Social bookmarking											
Chat facility with party											
Chat facility with others											
Forum											
Video comment facility											
Video sharing facility											
Photo comment facility											
News comment facility											
<b>Total</b>			<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>				<b>1</b>			<b>4</b>

Note: SNS - social networking sites. ECP - Estonian Centre Party; RP - Estonian Reform Party; ProP - Union of Pro Patria and Res Publica; SD - Social Democratic Party; Gr - Estonian Greens; PpIU - People's Union of Estonia; UL - Estonian United Left Party; Lib - Libertas Estonia; CrD - Party of Estonian Christian Democrats; RuP - Russian Party in Estonia.



**Figure 3** Number of Web 1.0 and 2.0 Interactivity Features Appearing on Party Websites.

### *Engagement*

Lilleker et al (2011) suggest that interactivity and engagement are both based on the two-way communication, but engagement makes the site “experientially stimulating”, attractive and allow visitors to interact with features such as click-thrust, sharing, audiovisual and interactive games. There could be a distinguished low-level engagement mostly based on the interaction with the site presented by Web 1.0 features and engagement as a conversation represented by Web 2.0 elements on web sites. Good example of Web 2.0 engagement has been the Obama 2008 U.S. Presidential campaign (Lilleker et al. 2011).

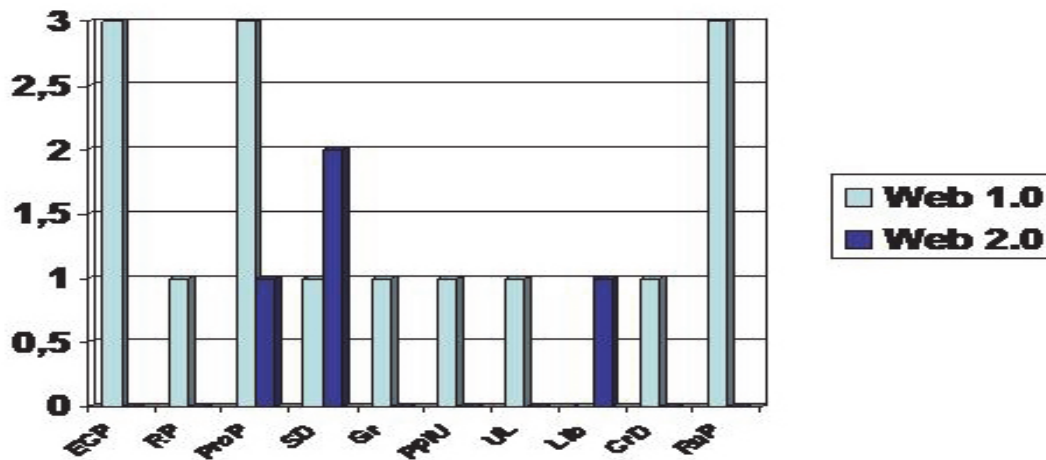
**Table 5** Use of Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 Information Elements on Party Web Pages During Estonian European Parliament Elections

<b>Engagement Web 1.0</b>	<b>ECP</b>	<b>RP</b>	<b>ProP</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Gr</b>	<b>PpIU</b>	<b>UL</b>	<b>Lib</b>	<b>CrD</b>	<b>RuP</b>	
Video/TV spots	•	•	•	•	•	•		•	•	•	9
Videos of conferences	•										1
Videos of appearances	•		•	•		•			•	•	6
Videos of home/private photo gallery	•	•	•	•		•					5
public photos	•	•	•	•		•					5
personal photos			•								1
share by email			•								1
audio features											
streaming audio											
Newsletter			•					•	•	•	4
register to email											
chat archive											
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>		<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Engagement Web 2.0</b>	<b>ECP</b>	<b>RP</b>	<b>ProP</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Gr</b>	<b>PpIU</b>	<b>UL</b>	<b>Lib</b>	<b>CrD</b>	<b>RuP</b>	
news rating facility											
video rating facility											
webcam feed											

photo rating facility			
political games	•	•	2
apolitical games	•		1
prioritize/rank function			
Total	2	1	3

ECP - Estonian Centre Party; RP - Estonian Reform Party; ProP - Union of Pro Patria and Res Publica; SD - Social Democratic Party; Gr - Estonian Greens; PplU - People's Union of Estonia; UL - Estonian United Left Party; Lib - Libertas Estonia; CrD - Party of Estonian Christian Democrats; RuP - Russian Party in Estonia.

The results of this explorative research indicate that Estonian parties mostly offered web 1.0 engagement (Table 5). These features were mostly used by major parties. The presence of engagement boosting web 2.0 elements was almost entirely absent in 2009 campaign in Estonia (see also Figure 4).



**Figure 4** Number Web 1.0 and 2.0 Engagement Features Appearing on Party Websites.

### *Mobilization*

Previous studies (Lilleker et al 2011) suggest that the mobilization in the era of Web 2.0 refers to the situations where the political actor seeks to mobilize visitors on their website through such activities as money donation, joining a party and registering as a supporter. Mobilization activities encourage people for repeat return to the web sites or take part in party events off-line. It mostly involves visitors who already are aware of the party. Lilleker et al (Ibib) distinguishes three stages of mobilization: first being engaged in the site, then willing to receive further information and finally to become an active supporter on-line or off-line. Therefore, mobilization should be key element on party websites during the elections (Ibid).

**Table 6** Use of Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 Mobilization Elements on Party Web Pages During Estonian European Parliament Elections.

Mobilisation Web 1.0	ECP	RP	ProP	SD	Gr	PplU	UL	Lib	CrD	RuP	
register as volunteer								•			1
guest book											
register for events			•								1
subscribe to events											
join party	•	•	•			•			•	•	6
promotional material	•								•		2

donation function	•							•			2
shop											
site registration function					•			•			2
site members area					•						1
party members area		•	v		•						2
register as voter	•	•	•				•		•	•	6
Total	4	3	3		3		2		2	4	23

Mobilization Web 2.0	ECP	RP	ProP	SD	Gr	PplU	UL	Lib	CrD	RuP	
personal events calendar											
Total											0

ECP - Estonian Centre Party; RP - Estonian Reform Party; ProP - Union of Pro Patria and Res Publica; SD - Social Democratic Party; Gr - Estonian Greens; PplU - People's Union of Estonia; UL - Estonian United Left Party; Lib - Libertas Estonia; CrD - Party of Estonian Christian Democrats; RuP - Russian Party in Estonia.

In the case of Estonia, some web 1.0 mobilization features such as joining the party or registering as voter were used, but the donation function was surprisingly underused, as well as the function of event registration or subscription. Table 6 and Figure 5 illustrates that most active were again major parties.

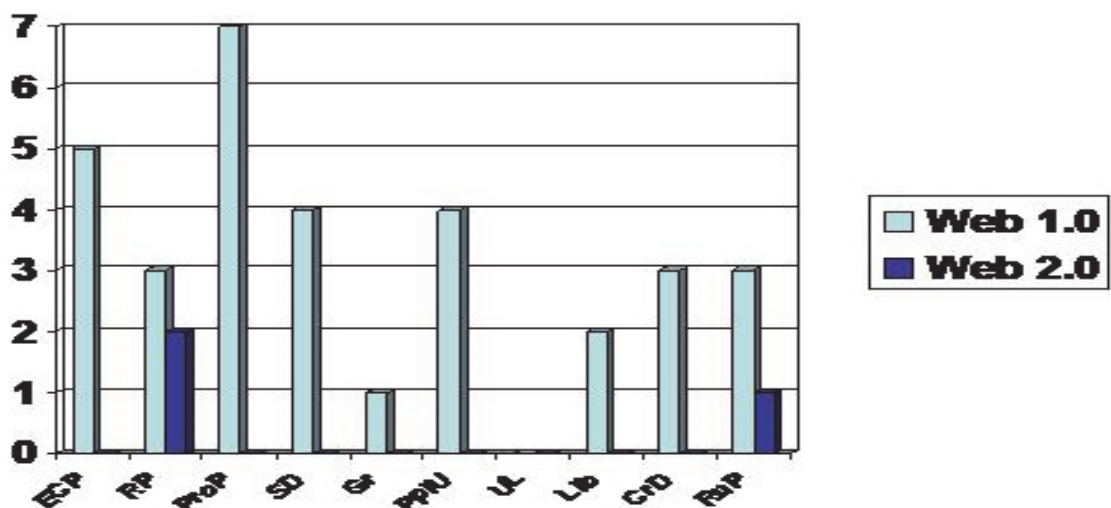


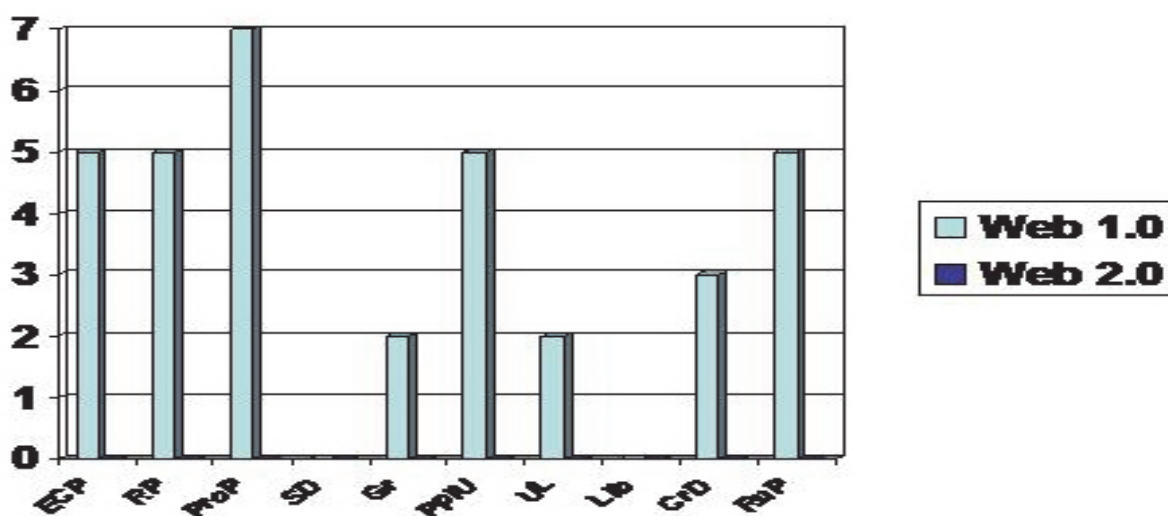
Figure 5 Number Web 1.0 and 2.0 Mobilization Features Appearing on Party Websites.

### Technical sophistication

When it came to technical sophistication, the rare use of web 2.0 elements on political web pages is still visible. Stroömbaöck (2007) has described how political actors seek the Internet to gain attention in order to create an image of modernity and technical sophistication and compares this process to professionalization of offline campaigning. The analyses of Estonian EP campaign web pages show that it seemed to be the case with most of the bigger parliamentary parties with web 1.0 features. Smaller parties tended to underuse technical sophistication features, as suggested by normalization theory (Table 7 and Figure 6).

**Table 7** Use of Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 Technical Sophistication Elements on Party Web Pages During Estonian European Parliament Elections

<b>Technical sophistication</b>											
<b>Web 1.0</b>											
	ECP	RP	ProP	SD	Gr	PpIU	UL	Lib	CrD	RuP	
animations	•	•	•		•	•	•		•	•	8
download podcasts											
download speeches											
language switch	•	•	•		•	•				•	6
translate function	•	•	•			•				•	5
read out loud function											
change bandwidth											
download PDFs		•	•			•	•		•	•	6
search	•		•			•			•	•	5
embedded search											
press release via e-mail	•		•								2
press release via RSS		•	•								2
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>7</b>		<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>		<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Technical sophistication</b>											
<b>Web 2.0</b>											
	ECP	RP	ProP	SD	Gr	PpIU	UL	Lib	CrD	RuP	
online speech archive											
tag cloud											
<b>Total</b>											<b>0</b>



**Figure 6** Number Web 1.0 and 2.0 Technical Sophistication Features Appearing on Party Websites.

The results of this study support previous research that demonstrates that even if political websites become more sophisticated, the use of top-down elements of communication are still dominant (press releases, newsletters, simple information about the party or the candidates, etc.) and the elements that guarantee interactivity are not that widely used (blogs, offering visitors opportunity to comment or add content to the political website, etc.; Carlson and Strandberg 2008; Lilleker et al. 2011; Schweitzer 2011).

While major parties used the technical sophistication of web 1.0 elements quite effectively, none of the parties used the web 2.0 opportunities. The major Social Democratic Party is surprisingly absent when it comes to more sophisticated web technologies (Figure 6).

### *Ideology*

According to the existing literature, parties on the left offer more interactive and engaging pages and parties on the right are more informative and party-centered and use a top-down model of communication (Lilleker et al. 2011: 7). In the case of the Estonian 2009 EP elections, these differences are not visible. Major parties, both center-left and center-right, are more active in using predominantly web 1.0 features, while web 2.0 was in all cases underused.

## CONCLUSIONS

From the quantitative content analyses of party websites in the context of EP elections in 2009, it could be concluded that the overall use of all web 2.0 features on all websites seemed limited for all categories. In general, the analyses suggest that web 2.0 applications were strategically not used in order to foster dialogue between the electors and the elected. From the results, we can conclude that the use of web 2.0 features was dependent on the political parties' popularity and size, but not their ideology. The only exception here is the minor Russian Party in Estonia, which is very popular among the Russian-speaking population in Estonia and which performed relatively well in using both web 1.0 and web 2.0 opportunities.

Web 2.0, which can offer opportunities for dialogue and contribute to deliberative democracy, is scarce in Estonia. The digital division between parliamentary and non-parliamentary parties remains visible. In that sense, the Estonian EP e-campaign reflects the patterns of traditional offline campaigning that have been said to result in political alienation among the public and increase negative thinking toward politics.

Visitors to political websites could easily be profiled by the habits of Internet usage in general. In the context of electronic voting in Estonia in the period of 2005 to 2009, the existing literature indicates that categories such as age, education, occupational status, income, and language still illustrate the clear trend toward an e-divide. The study also clearly illustrates that active e-voters and Internet users in Estonia differ strongly in regard to their political preferences (Trechsel, Vassil, Schwerdt, Breuer, Alvarez, and Hall 2010).

## DISCUSSION: CAN E-DEMOCRACY WORK?

Analyses of Estonian party websites in the context of EP elections in 2009 show that most decisions makers seem to be reluctant to open up for free discussion on the web. This might be partly explained by the fact that Estonia only gained its independence from the former Soviet Union in 1991, and therefore people still lack longtime experience of participatory democracy. As normalization theory would suggest, the citizens in such a society lack the knowledge and will to actively take part



in decision making, and the cyber environment or wide Internet penetration do not make a huge difference.

On the other hand, political leaders in the society which has experienced 50 years of the Soviet regime might lack the knowledge and experience to change the old-style monologic communication model. Political actors' effort to involve citizens in debate has a decisive role over the success or failure of deliberative democracy (Habermas 2006; Coleman and Blumler 2009). Two main questions remain: First, are parties willing to use interactivity in cyberspace but lack sophistication and experience? Second, might political parties be attempting to maintain a top-down power system by avoiding the possibility of changing the one way monologic authoritarian model into a dialogue based communication method?

Previous research has shown that the web could contribute to deliberative discussions in society only if cyber forums are designed so that they provide opportunities for such discussions (Wright and Street 2007; Strandberg and Gro'nlund 2012). The analyses of the Estonian party pages in 2009 demonstrate that in most cases no conditions are offered in the web for participatory equal debate between decision makers and voters. This might be explained by the fact that in 2009 websites were still designed unprofessionally and therefore web 2.0 features were underused. The parties could have not realized the significant participatory potential of cyberspace, but it could also be that if citizens lack the will to participate, political actors are not interested in knowledgeable citizens whose interaction might alter the decision making process and lead to unfavorable outcomes. Instead they tend to enjoy the privileges of old power structures and favor e-state as a control-overpeople system (Dahlgren 2005). The existing research on Internet usage in Estonia demonstrates that most people consume services online, but do not participate in (political) debates (Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt and Reinsalu 2009).

Coleman and Blumler (2009) suggest that so far as people are only considered to be policy consumers rather than policy responsible citizens, there are no conditions for the nascence of deliberative debate on the web (Coleman and Blumler 2009, p. 169). In other words, the responsibility is put on the existing political elite, which should create conditions for involvement of the public. Participation is a core element of deliberative dialogic politics. Habermas (1989, p. 66) notes that public opinion can only be formed if a public that engages in rational discussion exists.

Pellizzoni (2013) and Sintomer and Allegretti (2009) distinguish three different types deliberative experiences in Europe: (a) new public management, which improves public policies and administration by means of the involvement of citizens; (b) social justice, which strengthens cohesion, including minorities and empowering the weaker categories in the society; and (c) politics, which re-legitimizes the political system and expands participation and participatory democracy. Pellizzoni (2013), at the same time, shows that in the case of web forums, the discussions and criticism can be strong, but do not bring into question the true deliberative democracy. Therefore, it could be highlighted that the basic questions are not whether or how much deliberation works, but how deliberative democracy fits into and how it effects the existing broader policy processes. The problem is that the political deliberative web spaces also usually involve regulation of participation and involve some sort of political interest directly or indirectly. It is very important to take into account the manner in which principal participants in deliberative discussions are chosen and whether all citizens have equal access to these spaces (Pellizzoni 2013).

Another widely discussed question is the problem caused by the electronic divide. The study carried out for the Council of Europe by Trechsel et al. (2010) on

Internet voting in Estonia pinpoints e-voting participation patterns during the period of 2005 to 2009. It could be easily adapted to the environment of Internet usage and thus participation via the web in general. Even if the study shows that e-voting could slightly increase turnout and thus participation, some categories such as education, occupational status, income, and language still illustrate the trend toward an e-divide. Considering age, the research demonstrates that e-voting in 2009 was still been predominantly a property of younger voters (aged 18–49) and involves less of the older electorate. As is the case with the traditional electorate, e-voters with higher education and better income are much more likely to participate in the elections. The retired or unemployed population is clearly underrepresented (Trechsel et al. 2010).

Another question that could be brought up is how in the new web 2.0 era we perceive the essence of government. Some authors argue that the present forms of government are dominated by neoliberal rationality, which has expanded, on both the individual and collective level, the logic of market and entrepreneurship and strategic planning of competition does not leave much space for deliberative discussions, social justice and political equality (Pellizzoni and Ylönen 2012). If people are passive and do not “demand” participation, parties tend to maintain their power and discourse-setter role.

## LIMITADIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Web 2.0 applications such as social networking, blogs, wikis, and collaborative filtering provide their users with a whole new set of opportunities and different modes of dealing with information, interacting, and networking. Studies prove that the Internet has the capacity to reshape political communication and campaigning (Lilleker and Malagon 2010). The question of how to make this enormous potential function in favor of deliberation remains.

Estonia, a small post-Soviet and present EU member country, is often described as one of the most advanced e-societies in the world. For the latter, the deliberative e-democracy could be easily practiced in Estonia. However, the question of whether Internet usage reshapes and implementation of e-state changes the political landscape of Estonia by mobilizing the supporters of some parties and not the others, need further research and more evidence.

There are a number of possible limitations in the work reported in this paper. The analyses of Estonian party websites during the 2009 EP elections show that political web pages tend to have “governed character” (Pellizzoni 2013). This explorative study focused only on party web pages. The obvious next research step could be to carry out similar quantitative content analyses on the candidates’ websites in order to compare both party and candidate cyber presence and use of web 2.0 features. A similar qualitative approach and content analyses can be used to draw conclusions on the communication style and content of the websites of political actors. More relevant data could be gathered with discourse analyses.

As studies on the use of web 2.0 by political actors so far has mostly focused on the United States or Western European societies and comparative research in Eastern and Central European countries is very rare, it is not possible to compare the data presented in this study with other similar analyses.

Further research on Internet consumption in post-Soviet countries would bring more knowledge on whether the Estonian phenomena is only an exception or somehow could be considered a trend in Eastern and Central European countries or in

societies where citizens do not have that long of history in democracy and active participation in decision making. That could also indicate that the citizens in these societies in Internet democracy environments are more vulnerable in the situations where politicians do not wish to let go of their traditional power position (Dahlgren 2013).

It should also be considered that in many current debates, it is stated that the Internet has generally become less of a two-way communication mode, as multinational corporations and governments have imposed controls and occupied effective bandwidth (Pellizzoni 2013; Coleman and Blumler 2009). In any case, the possibility of interactivity and participation might have depended significantly on institutional, political, and sociocultural factors rather than particular tools, such as comment features.

Another important question is the essence of genuine participation, which is essential for democracy. While explaining participation, Dahlgren (2013) brings out that it is inevitable to distinguish between true participation and “mere access to the media,” as access is an important but not sufficient element of real participation. Similarly, interaction—which in the web environment is often considered as a two-way communication structure does not fully correspond to genuine participation. In the present cyberspace, according to Dahlgren, we find too many settings in which participation remains at the level of access or interaction, without actualizing power relations (Dahlgren 2013, p. 60). According to this view, participation is “ultimately about power sharing” and if this is absent we cannot talk about genuine participation, which is fundamental for democracy. In this context, participation manifests citizenship and becomes an expression of civic agency (Dahlgren 2013). At the same time, the use of ICT leads to a situation in which new forms of civic practices emerge and citizens, in Dahlgren’s view, feel themselves to have relevant knowledge, values, trust, and civic identities necessary for seeing themselves as political actors empowered to involve themselves in political life and power sharing (Dahlgren 2013).

Nevertheless, as previous studies have shown, it could be concluded based on this research that some difference in use of web 2.0 applications in old Europe and the new EU member states can be identified. Based on existing literature, it could be hypothesized that citizens in societies with shorter experiences of democracy might be more vulnerable and thus more open for the e-campaigning model, which tries to maintain the old top-down power system. For mapping the new trends on how and whether power holders in societies with shorter experiences of democracy create conditions for deliberative politics, the new comparative empirical data could bring significant improvement for the research in this field. Another question studies could focus on and debate is whether the normative model of the Habermasian ideal type of deliberative democracy fits into the new cyberspace and existing political power systems (Pellizzoni 2013; Coleman and Blumler 2009).

Given its identified influence on voting behavior, participation, and deliberative democracy, it could be concluded that more sophisticated cross-national comparative critical research into interactivity and interaction models used by political actors in the era of web 2.0 in diverse societies seems both justified and assured.

## NOTE

1. CENMEP is a study of the use of the Internet during the 2009 EP elections that involves researchers from 23 EU member states. The project was directed by Maurice Vergeen (University of Nijmegen, the Netherlands), Gerrit Voerman (Univeristy of Groningen, the Netherlands), and Carlos Cunha (Dowling

College, New York, USA). CENMEP was the successor to the 2004 Internet and Elections Project (Jankowski et al. 2005).

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### III

## **THE PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY: TESTING THE COLLABORATIVE E-DEMOCRACY**

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# The People's Assembly: Testing the Collaborative (e)-Democracy

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## ABSTRACT

This paper aims to critically analyse the Estonian People's Assembly (EPA), a crowdsourcing initiative carried out from 2013 to 2014. During the project, citizens could participate in decision-making and make proposals for laws and policies on a dedicated web-platform. Additionally, some people were invited for a traditional off-line debate. In that way, the project combined virtual communication tools with traditional discussion to apply the principles of collaborative e-democracy, in which governmental stakeholders and non-governmental stakeholders (such as local communities) join in a deliberative debate. The purpose of this paper is to observe, both, gains and problems of this crowdsourcing initiative. The analysis considered the design of the online space, if people had equal access to it, and the kind of issues proposed. It also applied critical discourse analysis (following Fairclough, 1995) and the index Quality of Understanding (Klinger & Russmann, 2015). As a conclusion, the paper suggests that virtual platforms can increase the quality of deliberative decision-making. However, they can also be seen as regulated "top-down" initiatives (Pellizzoni, 2012). In a wider perspective, the paper aims to contribute to knowledge on, both, positive and negative stances of deliberative crowdsourcing initiatives in a post-web society.

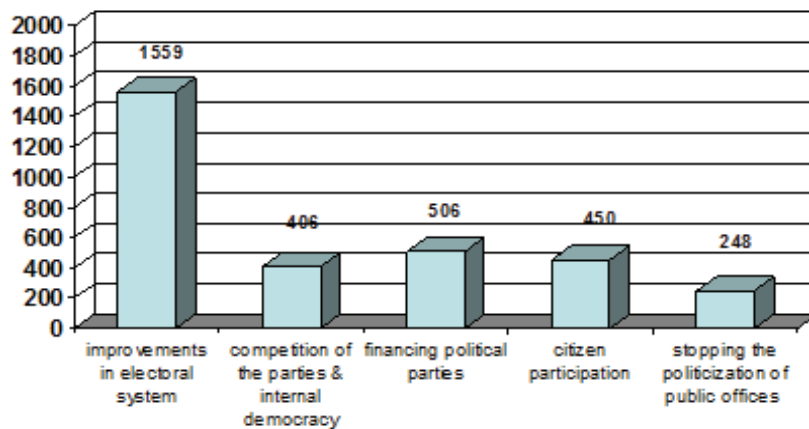
**Keywords:** e-democracy, e-government, web-forums, deliberative platforms

## INTRODUCTION: ESTONIA AS AN E-SOCIETY

This study observes an initiative of deliberative e-democracy in Estonia, a country which has rapidly developed from an ex-Soviet Republic to one of the most developed e-societies in the world. Already a decade ago almost 80% of the people aged 16-74 years used the Internet (Statistics Estonia, 2011). From the end of the 1990's, the state provided citizens with various e-services including, for example, online banking, online voting, and virtual interaction web-forums. Moreover, almost one third (28%) of the Estonian electorate used the available e-voting system during the general elections in the spring of 2019 ([www.valimised.ee](http://www.valimised.ee)). Therefore, when taking into account the optimistic approach towards cyber democracy (Boulianne, 2009; Jackson & Lilleker, 2009; Rheingold, 1993), one would expect to see in Estonia a rapidly developing online and off-line deliberative public sphere built on new communication technologies embedded in the web. In this context, the Estonian People's Assembly (EPA), which combined online and off-line deliberative initiatives, is a unique case to explore in order to better understand the impact such crowdsourcing collaborative projects might have on the post-web society from the perspective of deliberation.

The term e-democracy in this article is considered as "the use of information and communication technologies to engage citizens, support the democratic decision-making process and strengthen a representative democracy" (Macintosh, 2004, p. 2). The deliberative debate "space" consists of, both, virtual and physical issue arenas for the initiative (in this case the web-platform and deliberation day), where all the actors involved, political and non-political stakeholders (state institutions, governments, pressure- and issue groups, NGOs, business sector representatives, experts, professional journalists and average citizens) can

## Proposals and comments total: 3169



Source: [www.rahvakogu.ee](http://www.rahvakogu.ee), 2013

11

**Figure 1.** The proportion of proposals and comments within the main five topical areas

propose or debate the issues they are concerned about or affected by (Vos et al., 2014). In the current study no other communication channels are considered.

Only three out of 15 proposals that EPA participants submitted to Parliament became laws. The initiative has been widely criticized for not reforming the political system in Estonia, as was the original aim of EPA. However, it offered a unique possibility to better understand and evaluate the gains and weaknesses of such crowdsourced deliberative actions.

### THE PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY

After the political crisis in 2012, concerning illegal funding of the governing Reform Party (Jonsson, 2015), the President of Estonia, Toomas Hendrik Ilves, called on NGOs, citizen movements and academics for a discussion on how to restore the trust in Estonia's institutions and democracy. In this way, the initiative of EPA was promoted by an institutional actor (the President). The initiative was organized by volunteers from various civil society organizations. Thus, it constituted an online and off-line grassroots level participation initiative, with the idea to crowdsource policy proposals for decision-making via a web-forum ([www.rahvakogu.ee](http://www.rahvakogu.ee)).

In three weeks, the webpage had gained ca 60,000 visitors and nearly 2,000 registered citizens posted approximately 6,000 proposals and comments (see **Figure 1**). Later, experts from civil society organisations grouped the issue-proposals from five main topical areas into 59 issue-bundles for five seminars arranged for selected participants to "provide necessary knowledge for participants" before the off-line "deliberation day" in April 2013 (Praxis Centre for Policy Research, 2014). The aim was to select, via mediated face-to-face discussions between citizens, experts and politicians, the best issue proposals to be discussed during the deliberation day. In this way, the 18 most important issues were selected for the deliberation day. Interestingly, the first attempt to invite randomly selected participants from all over Estonia to participate the "deliberation day" failed, as not enough citizens agreed to participate (Salu, 2013). After a second call, 314 citizens agreed to participate from the randomly selected representative example of 550 persons (Praxis Centre for Policy Research, 2014).

During the deliberation day, the 18 topics were debated on tables of ca. 10 persons where the discussion was moderated by a facilitator, an expert selected by the organizers of the initiative. The participants were provided with pros and cons of each proposal. 15 out of the 18 topics, in the end, were sent to the Estonian parliament. Three of them became actual laws. All the participants evaluated the initiative and half of the

participants stated that the discussions had made them, at least on some issues, change their earlier opinion (Praxis Centre for Policy Research, 2014). As a conclusion, the organizers stated, that the “People’s Assembly was capable of increasing civic competence and creating more interest in the general public” (Praxis Centre for Policy Research, 2014).

The EPA initiative can be considered an example of collaborative e-democracy, in other words, a political system in which (1) governmental stakeholders (such as politicians and ministers) and (2) non-governmental stakeholders (such as NGOs, local communities and business actors) collaborate with (3) ordinary citizens on the development of public laws and policies. The web forum was implemented on a governmental social networking site in which all Estonian citizens with electronic ID could participate.

## DELIBERATIVE POTENTIAL OF CYBER SPACE

The Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary ([www.merriam-webster.com](http://www.merriam-webster.com)) defines ‘deliberation’ as a “long and careful consideration of discussion done in order to make a decision”. Legitimacy and transparency are conditions for an effective deliberation to take place (Burkart & Russmann, 2016). The deliberative democracy presumes participation, engagement and interactivity, and at the same time “all citizens must have an adequate opportunity to speak about public issues and citizens and their elected representatives have to engage in talk with each other” (Dahlgren, 2005, p. 149).

According to Habermas (1989), a discourse-centred or deliberative democracy has several requirements. First, all parties that might be affected must be included; second, all participants should be provided with the opportunity to interact in a free, equal and easy manner; third, there are no restrictions on topics; and fourth, the outcomes can be revised (Habermas, 1989, 2006).

By now, political debates on the web have been in the focus of academic research for decades (e.g. Dahlgren, 2005; Davis, 1999; Lilleker et al., 2011; Norris, 2001). Academic studies approach the question of the impact of Internet on deliberative politics, either from an optimistic (equalisation) perspective (e.g. Boulianne, 2009), or from a pessimistic (normalisation) perspective (e.g. Norris, 2001).

The optimists stress that the cyber environment, for issue arena debates, has all conditions for efficient public deliberation discussions (Castells, 2012; Rheingold, 1993). The pessimists do not question the potential of the cyber space as an environment for deliberative public arena, but they critically ask *if* and *how* this deliberative potential is used by political actors (Lilleker & Jackson, 2009; Toode, 2016) and the citizens themselves (Coleman & Blumler, 2009; Dahlgren, 2005). Supporters of the positive equalisation theory bring out, that the Internet has a positive effect on public engagement and that it boosts participation in public debates to those groups in the society which were not involved in the pre-internet era (Boulianne, 2009). The cyber optimists also suggest that the new technology helps to bring more participation on all levels, and in that way creates conditions for deliberative and direct conversation between political actors and citizens without a limiting “gatekeeping” from the side of journalists and mass media (Boulianne, 2009; Gurevitch et al., 2009; Rheingold, 1993). Moreover, some even suggested that the option to debate issues on the web in virtual issue arenas would create deliberative ‘conversational democracy’ (Corrado & Firestone, 1996). Therefore, from the *Habermasian* viewpoint (Habermas, 2006), the cyber-optimists believe in the potential of the web as a re-democratizing environment for the public sphere. They prefer to consider the web as an ideal public arena where real and free deliberation can lead to perfect and efficient debates, and in that way contribute to real participatory democracy (Boulianne, 2009; Habermas, 2006). This means, that by the optimists, the web is seen as a solution and a chance to keep the electorate more engaged, and as an environment where participatory democracy can flourish.

Others focus on the pessimistic or “realist” scenario suggesting, that the shortcomings and problems of the power relations existing in the traditional, or in other words, pre-web media environment will be transferred to the cyber space (Davis, 1999; Margolis & Resnick, 2000; Norris, 2001; Resnick, 1998). They argue that dominant stakeholders in the public debate, such as state institutions, governments, major parties or NGOs would most likely have better resources and possibilities to be present in the agenda-setting process and, thus, can influence the issue-selection for the debate (Meriläinen & Vos, 2011). The pessimists also state that the web offers excellent opportunities for cyber propaganda and that it might not engage those groups which have been not involved so far. Sunstein (2001), for example, brings forth that people usually discuss

political issues with agreeing groups or “*likeminded others*” and that, therefore, in web forums people are in the debate not focused on gaining different viewpoints but, instead, tend to amplify similarities (Sunstein, 2009). In this context, the “Digital Divide” might easily increase the “Democratic Divide” (Norris, 2001: 274; Witte & Mannon, 2010, p. 51; Witte et al., 2009, p. 6). In other words, the participation opportunities do not guarantee deliberative, open and pluralist participation. The rapidly developed public sphere in cyber space does not automatically bring positive impacts on democracy (Dahlgren, 2005; Blumler & Gurevitch, 2001). Therefore, some research has focused on the question if political actors really wish to create an effective dialogue with citizens via Internet or whether they rather tend to maintain a monologic top-down structure of the communication (Cogburn & Espinoza-Vasquez, 2011; Jackson & Lilleker, 2010; Lilleker et al., 2011; Toode, 2016). Margetts et al. (2016) point out that interactive social media definitely have a mobilising effect and encourage collective action and participation, but it might also result in emergence of what the authors call ‘chaotic pluralism’ – a phenomenon which needs to be further studied (Dahlgren, 2018; Pellizzoni, 2015).

Burkart and Russmann (2016) state that online deliberation is a process of interaction in which participants should follow a particular set of normative guidelines, to ensure that the content of a discussion becomes understandable. Herewith the authors propose a model to evaluate the “quality” of deliberation. As people have to understand the message to develop their opinion, the “quality” of discourses is considered the quality of “understanding” during the debates (Burkart & Russmann, 2016, p. 4142).

## CROWDSOURCING AND CRISES

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Brabham (2008, p. 75) describes crowdsourcing as web-based “problem-solving”. In social sciences, it could be described as an open-to-all invite by any actor to other actors in issue arenas to participate in the process of problem solving (Brabham, 2008; Pellizzoni, 2015; Vos et al., 2014). If the intention is just to listen to public concerns and views, monitoring web interaction can be an alternative choice (Ruggiero & Vos, 2014; Zhang & Vos, 2015), however, when the aim is to create a dialogue among people involved, this definitely calls for deliberative crowdsourcing platforms.

According to Pellizzoni (2012), political and deliberative web-forums often have a “governed” character and are organised by power holders in a situation of institutional mistrust and severe turbulence in society. The author brings out that web-forums may show high criticism in the discussion towards other participating actors, which poses an obstacle for real deliberative practice. Pellizzoni (2012) considers web-forums also an effective action to maintain the stability and existing order in the present system. Thus, deliberative web forums organized by power holders can indeed increase the effectiveness of policy decisions. There may be regulation of participation, agenda-setting towards certain issues, and moderation of the debate, which often reflect political interests from the side of dominant agents (Fairclough, 2003; Pellizzoni, 2012; Vos et al., 2014). Professionally framed issues tend to dominate the debate and survive the competition in issue arenas (Vos et al., 2014). Moreover, the “knowledge gap” between more active groups or individuals and those who tend to remain more passive in cyber debates can easily increase in the web environment (Witte et al., 2009, p. 6).

## DIALOGUE AND PLACE MATTER

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According to Wright and Street (2007) ‘deliberative democracy’ involves deliberative and democratic elements which should be present also on deliberative web-forums. Deliberative elements refer to mechanisms for decision-making, such as argumentation, rationality values and impartiality. The democratic element means that all citizens who are affected by the decision can participate the discussion or at least are represented, because in the core a deliberative democracy is not only the idea that people express their preferences, but also that they discuss those preferences (Wright & Street, 2007, p. 851), taking other points of view into account. This should be enabled by the architecture of such online forums, making it easy to gain knowledge on the issues at stake and comfortable to discuss opinions via the webpage. Based on these views, the design of the EPA web-forum was analysed.

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## DELIBERATIVE IDEALS

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Deliberative initiatives involve three main elements: (1) participation in the decision-making process by the people involved; (2) deliberation as rational discussion in which all main views are considered, and (3) equality in the sense that all segments of the population concerned with the issues have the opportunity to make their voice heard and considered. Dahlgren (2013) points out that, the more people are participating, the more financial resources and time are needed for deliberative discussions. At the same time, it is impossible for every individual to take part in a societal debate (Dahlgren, 2013). To respect equality everyone should be involved, or a representative random sample of the population should be created to participate in the discussion.

Fishkin (2011) defines deliberative democracy as a form of direct democracy, which corresponds to the requirements of deliberation and offers equality, but he does not require participation of everyone who wants to be included in the discussion. Fishkin's participatory democracy involves participation and deliberation on a certain level without total equality, because there are not enough resources to compensate overall participation to every single engaged citizen. Therefore, participation tends to involve that part of the general public with a strong interest in the issues and not the entire population (Fishkin, 2011).

Existing studies have shown that Estonian Internet users, like others, tend to be passive consumers of the Internet and do not actively participate in the deliberative politics (Toode, 2016). It is also stated that few users upload critical content to social media web pages such as YouTube and Facebook (SAAR POLL, 2008, p. 16).

Pellizzoni (2012) brings out that, although many web-forums offer discussions, few studies analyse the essence of such deliberative initiatives and scrutinise if these forums can be considered deliberative practices. Pellizzoni (2015) suggests viewing deliberative forums as "additional means or arenas of political struggle". He explains that in the current political landscape conflicts between political parties or turbulences are constantly present, and that deliberative forums are often used by political actors to remain in power rather than engage citizens in real decision-making. In that way, deliberative arenas might be used to give an impression of openness while avoiding real deliberative debate (Freschi & Mete, 2009). The authors stress that deliberative forums can even be a form of control over society (Freschi & Mete, 2009), without solving the problem of participation and involvement of the citizens.

According to Freschi and Mete (2009, p. 21), an important phase in the organisation of the web-platform is the shaping of the deliberative arena, including topic selection, identification of involved actors, formation of access rules and the choice of arena type (only online or a combination of online and off-line). There, the citizens as the actual 'deliberators' in the process, are in a weak position (Freschi & Mete, 2009), considering that multi-actor issue arenas often show competing interests (Vos et al., 2014).

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## COLLABORATIVE E-DEMOCRACY

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Collaborative e-democracy is a political system in which governmental political actors, such as ministers and politicians, and non-governmental political actors, such as local communities, collaborate in the creation of public laws and policies. For this purpose, a governmental website may function as an online forum in which all can participate.

Basically, collaborative e-democracy involves three elements. The first element is the collaborative democracy, a political system in which voters and those voted for collaborate to find solutions for decision-making with the help of information technology to boost the participation (Collaborative Democracy, 2007). The second element is a policy-making process via a social cyber forum, open to all citizens or their representatives, so that each citizen, directly or through a representative, can make proposals, evaluate them and vote. The third element of collaborative e-democracy is proxy voting, which means that people in a collaborative e-democracy select representatives or proxies to vote for them in situations where they lack time, knowledge or interest for direct participation. It would be difficult to imagine that all people in society really can or want to vote, every time, on every single policy issue. Thus, via a web-forum or social networking site, proxy voting and representation involve the main features of, both, the direct and representative democracy.

The policy process includes periods for suggestions and ranking, during which participants can submit proposals while the highest ranked proposals appear on top of the list. This is followed by an evaluation phase in which experts evaluate the impact of the proposals for the entire population. After that, all proposals considered optimal for solving a collective problem or reaching a certain goal are voted on and, in this way, new laws or policies are introduced. In the very end, during the revision phase, it is decided whether the problem has been solved or the goal achieved and, if this is not the case, the process may start again.

For the collaborative e-democracy system, O'Reilly (2005) mentioned the following positive features: (1) it is based on the principles of direct democracy; (2) open source governance enables participation of everyone interested; (3) it facilitates, both, collaboration of likeminded people and discussion of conflicting opinions; (4) it draws on collective intelligence; (5) it shifts responsibility from politicians and government to collaborative citizens.

Although deliberative web-forums are often understood as an answer to the crisis of the representative democracy, many studies question if the Internet really fosters global democracy or that it easily may become a tool for control and manipulation of the masses by some powerful actors in governments or corporations (Bynum & Rogerson, 2004; Coleman & Blumler, 2009; Pellizzoni, 2012).

## METHODOLOGY

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The EPA project was analysed according to two perspectives: (1) web-forum design and presentation (based on Wright & Street 2007), and (2) construction of the EPA arena from a wider deliberative approach (based on Burkart & Rossmann 2016; Dahlgren 2018; Freschi & Mete 2009; Pellizzoni 2015).

The principle for the analysis was worked out based on an argumentative literature review, which allows to collect and confront contradicting viewpoints in previous research (Dahlgren, 2018; Habermas, 2006; Pellizzoni, 2015; Wright & Street, 2007; Visser & Stolle, 2013). Next, the following criteria were considered: (1) the context of the initiative in society; (2) web-forum design; (3) the choice of topics; (4) the presence of mediators; (5) the principle for participant selection; (6) equal access to all segments of the population; (7) outcomes of the initiative. For the coding scheme the research considered, partly, the model of Wright and Street (2007) and the features of deliberative initiatives offered by Freschi and Mete (2009).

From the model Quality of Understanding (by Burkart & Russmann, 2016) the study primarily considered the distribution of the issues to potential participants who had access to the web-forum and were invited to the off-line "deliberation day". Other communication arenas such as professional media channels or social media networks were not included. Similarly, no later projects in the period 2017-2019 on the same webpage were included.

## RESULTS

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### Web-forum Design

Web-forum design is considered an important point of attention. Wring and Street (2007) state, that the democratising potential of most web-forums is limited, because the architecture and design of many such forums do not allow for deliberative discussion (Wring & Street, 2007, p. 853). The authors underline that the online forum design strongly influences how people discuss as, for example, the interface of the page can even cause polarisation.

The design of the EPA platform allowed to discuss each proposal separately. At the discussion platform participants could make proposals in five main issue-groups: (1) financing of political parties (rahastamine); (2) competition between political parties and their internal democracy (erakonnad); (3) the electoral system (valimised); (4) engagement and strengthening the role of civic society in politics between the elections (kaasatus); (5) politicisation of public offices (sundpolitiseerimine); and, lastly (6) varia was included to gather proposals which did not match with the five main areas.

The EPA website showed the colours blue, white and black, with only the entry button in red. It provided an institutional and "strict" style to the website, while the red button for entering might have given attention but also an impression of red light or limited access. Almost ¼ of the page was covered by a photo (clickable

**Table 1.** Features of the EPA initiative

1	<b>Issue and goal</b>	Collecting proposals on five main topics selected by the institutional organiser; screening the relevant proposals with experts for the Parliament
2	<b>Construction of the arenas</b>	Emphasis on ordinary citizens that possess an electronic ID card (enabling registration); participation on a voluntary basis; with a representative sample for the deliberative face-to-face meeting, prepared based on the results of the proposals
3	<b>Profile of actual participants</b>	Crowdsourcing for the debate on the web; first time the needed number of participants for the deliberative day was not achieved; the second call resulted in 314 effective participants of the 550 foreseen
4	<b>Deliberative device in action</b>	Formal situation for the online and off-line initiative; fragmented discussion; of the focal topics, the electoral system received most attention (nearly 40 % of the ideas), followed by financing of political parties and the role of civic society
5	<b>Influence on decision making process</b>	From nearly 2,000 online proposals, 18 were selected for the off-line debate, while 15 proposals were eventually sent to Parliament for further action, 3 proposals became laws
6	<b>Salient profile</b>	Crowdsourcing of participants for the online forum by the President
7	<b>Strategic effects</b>	Framing and legitimization of a limited number of selected issues; addressing Estonian speaking citizens, excluding those speaking Russian or without electronic ID; promoting the image of the President as an institution which stands for democracy; resulting in a calming effect on tensions in society.

video) of the first meeting of NGOs, politicians and experts with the President, who is visible as the host. The photo might create the feeling “we are working” but also “you are out”, resonating with a somewhat elitist perspective towards those not included in this meeting. The event was held in the basement of the Presidential Palace in Tallinn in a meeting room, known as the “Ice Cellar” (Jääkelder), where only few ordinary citizens have access. Considering this name, associations may be “frozenness” and “closure” or “hiding”, rather than openness and participation by ordinary people.

On the top of the page there was a black stripe, showing the time frame of the different phases of the EPA initiative. Under it, next to the name of the initiative “Rahvakogu” (meaning People’s Assembly) the different topical groups were presented. The slogan in grey said: “If you believe that debate is part of the solution, come and think too! Together, we make proposals for Parliament to change laws and policies.” (Translation by the author of this article). Underneath the slogan, the five main topics are represented in columns. Each topical column shows also the last posts. The page was officially available in Estonian, Russian and English. The real discussion took place only on the Estonian site.

The discussion page showed on the top a blue stripe showed a short presentation of the issue. The black stripe provided small clickable sections (Esita ka!) where users could leave their proposal concerning the issue. This was not easy to find and, thus, not inviting for the users. The main part of the page was formed by the single proposals. On the right side, the users could agree (by a blue button) or disagree (by a red button) with the issue. By clicking on the title there was an opportunity to comment the post and vote. In reality all five areas were included.

### Construction of EPA

According to Freschi and Mete (2009) the features to evaluate in the case of a deliberative initiative are: (1) issue and goal, (2) construction of the arenas; (3) profile of actual participants; (4) the deliberative device in action; (5) influence on decision making process; (6) salient profile; and (7) strategic effects. **Table 1** presents these features of EPA.

In favour of EPA, as a collective deliberative e-democracy initiative, it could be said that the issue proposals, according to the chosen parameters of the Index of Quality of Understanding (Burkart & Russmann, 2016), seem transparent and accessible for all those participants with an Estonian electronic ID card. For these citizens, the project facilitated participation in the policy-making programme and, in this way, being part of the decision-making process. It offered the circa 2,000 participants an experience of deliberative policy making and, at least for those who participated in the project, it increased the public awareness of collective problems, goals or policy issues.

The creation of the deliberative arena and the rhetoric around it helped the institutional stakeholders calm the turbulence in society. Thus, it could be considered, in part, effective as a crisis management strategy. On a general level, critics of collaborative e-democracy projects (e.g. Pellizzoni, 2015) underlined that, in most democracies, the constitution sets limits for direct democracy and governments may not be willing to give policy-making power to citizens in such a way (Toode, 2016). There are limitations also from the perspective of digital divide, because many people still do not know how to use the cyber technology for political participation. Consequently, dominant actors would have advantages in the process of issue selection and presentation (Vos et al., 2014). In fact, some authors bring out that citizens with the right to participate or vote might also lack a real understanding of societal issues which could make them vulnerable to manipulation and cause biased votes (Dahlgren, 2015).

## CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION: CAN (E-)DEMOCRACY WORK?

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The effort of political actors to involve citizens in political debate has a decisive role in the success or failure of deliberative democracy (Coleman & Blumler, 2009; Habermas, 2006). Herewith, two main questions remain. First, are power holders willing to open true deliberative discussions in cyber space, even though they may lack sophistication and experience in doing so? Or would political actors, to maintain the current power system, rather avoid a change from a one-way monologic pre-web communication model to a dialogic two-way communication model in the post-web era?

Previous research has shown that the web could contribute to deliberative discussion in society, but often no conditions are offered for a participatory equal debate between decision makers and voters (Wright & Street, 2007; Strandberg & Grönlund, 2012; Toode, 2016). This is often the case when citizens are considered to be policy consumers rather than responsible citizens (Coleman & Blumler, 2009). In other words, responsibility lies with the existing political elite to create conditions for involvement of the wider public. Participation remains a core element of deliberative dialogic politics. Habermas (1989, p. 66) notes that public opinion can only be formed if a public that engages in rational discussion exists.

Moreover, Pellizzoni (2012) notes that in the case of web-forums the posts and criticism can be strong but may not bring a true deliberative democracy. Therefore, the basic question is not whether deliberation works, but how deliberative democracy fits into and effects the existing broader policy processes. The problem is that deliberative web-platforms may also bring regulation of participation and some sort of political interests, directly or indirectly. Thus, one should take note of how the participants in deliberative discussions are chosen and if all citizens have equal access to these spaces (Pellizzoni, 2012).

Another widely discussed problem is the electronic divide. A study carried out by Trechsel et al. (2010) on e-voting in Estonia demonstrated that e-voting, in 2009, still predominantly was a property of voters aged 18 – 49 years, involving less of the older electorate. As is also the case in the traditional electorate, e-voters with high education and income participated more in the elections, while the retired or unemployed population is clearly underrepresented (Trechsel et al., 2010). Similar results are likely to still apply for e-democracy using web platforms.

Furthermore, one could question how the essence of government is perceived in the new cyber era. Some authors argue that the present forms of government are dominated by neoliberal rationality, which applied on, both, the individual and the collective level, the logic of the market and strategic planning leaving little space for social justice and political equality (Pellizzoni & Ylönen, 2012). This implies, that when people are passive and do not “demand” participation, the current parties tend to maintain their power and discourse-setting role.

In the case of the EPA project, the aim was “to get open government in Estonia to the next, more advanced level” (according to the organisers, published on the platform) and, thus, to involve people in the decision-making process. Some challenges could be noted:

- Proposals related only to specific topics.
- Experts filtered the “best” proposals.
- Final voting was done by 500 people, including only citizens with an Estonian ID.



- On the website, the proposals and debate were in Estonian only, even though one third of the Estonian population speaks Russian (their proposals could be sent in and were translated, but they could not follow the debate in their language).
- The interest of the citizens in participation was not as high as expected; 70 % of randomly chosen representatives in the first round did not want to participate.
- Finally, when a new sample was formed of 501 representatives who accepted the call to the Deliberation Day, only 314 came to Tallinn to debate and vote.
- The representatives were divided in 8-10 person groups, the debate was mediated – controlling the discourse?

Wright (2011, p. 249) stresses the importance of the question whether an internet-based deliberative initiative actually achieves what was expected. There has been some debate in Estonia on who gained from this initiative, power holders or citizens, for example, questioning the self-renewal capabilities of the political parties and if the expectations of the EPA project were met (e.g. Alas, 2013; Hõbemägi, 2013). Definitely, the EPA project was an innovative initiative and an interesting experiment of deliberative democracy. Foremost, it was a good case to study, not only for its virtues but also the challenges of such an initiative. A wider research concerning more deliberative web-platforms would enable a better understanding of the democratic capacity of such initiatives in current society. One of the most important outcomes of EPA is, that the required number of members to establish a political party fell from 1,000 to 500 which clearly provided grass-root movements with more opportunities to take part in policy making.

Interestingly, a study of Jonsson (2015, p. 11) showed that two-third of the participants in crowdsourcing, in the case of EPA, were higher-educated male professionals with right-leaning views. A total of 96 % of participants were of Estonian ethnicity (Jonsson, 2015, p. 11), which is high considering that approximately one-third of the Estonian population is made up by a large Russian-speaking minority (Eesti Statistikaamet 2019).

This research invites to rethink the meaning of e-democracy in the context of over-marketed politics. We part from the situation where many people feel that the government is remote or insensitive (Coleman & Blumler, 2009). In this context, it is important to underline the essence of genuine participation, which is essential for a democracy. While explaining participation, Dahlgren (2013) brings out that it is inevitable to distinguish between true participation and mere access, as the latter is not real participation and citizenship. People, in Dahlgren's view, need to see themselves as empowered actors, to involve themselves in political life (Dahlgren, 2013). In that sense, the process towards empowering web-platforms for deliberative debate has only just begun.

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## IV

### **CHARISMATIC LEADERS IN A NEW PERSPECTIVE: REALITY IN ESTONIA AND ITALY**

by

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## Charismatic Leaders in a New Perspective: Reality in Estonia and Italy

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### Abstract

The purpose of this explorative study is to put the existing theories on charismatic political leadership in a current post-web media context. It also seeks to better understand why “charismatic politicians” seem to have success in present-day cyber politics. The paper considers political charisma in a Weberian perspective and aims to explain what elements it includes in a current electoral environment characterized by a fast-changing media landscape. The paper places the existing theoretical models in the context of two European societies, by comparing Estonia and Italy as case studies. Estonia, a small ex-Soviet country has emerged in recent years as an advanced e-society with highly “internetized” media. At the same time, Italy became known by the phenomenon of the “Berlusconization” of the media, a popular subject of study in political communication. The analysis considers existing research, mostly based on the work of Max Weber, and aims to test the index of charisma, developed by Pappas (2011), in the two observed countries. The paper concludes with a discussion on if and how charismatic political leaders fit a deliberative democracy. Finally, attention is drawn to the need for further systematic comparative research to better understand the phenomenon of charismatic leadership in the post-web media environment.

**Keywords:** political charisma, leadership, elections, political communication, democracy

### 1. Introduction

The relationship built between persons while interacting is an important factor affecting the success of that interpersonal communication. In this process, both, the verbal and non-verbal elements matter. Charisma tends to be a special quality (Weber, 1994), emotional energy (Toode, 2014), or “secret ingredient” (Hosu, 2012) of human beings that includes such elements. Charisma is one of the commonly used words in everyday speech that only few can explain. One of the oldest uses of the term “charisma” comes from the New Testament, indicating “gift or grace of God”, while the Greek word “χάρισμα” means “divine favor”.

In 1947, Daniel Bell used the term “charisma” for the first time in journalistic language and soon it appeared in public discourse (Lingeman, 1968), yet the exact signification of the word remains unclear. The academic use of the term by sociologists relates to describing the qualities of a politician or considering “charisma” as a success factor for a leader. The American Heritage Dictionary currently introduces charisma as “personal magnetism or charm” and links the meaning of this word directly to leadership and emotions: “A rare personal quality attributed to leaders who arouse fervent popular devotion and enthusiasm”.

In recent decades, some scholars have tried to conceptualize the charisma phenomenon in leadership studies, while others have suggested to withdraw it entirely from the vocabulary of researchers (Schweitzer, 1974; Spinrad, 1991). Ake (1966), for example, argues that due to the conceptual uncertainty of the term “charismatic leader”, it is not possible to get meaningful data for epistemological analyses. Moreover, Friedrich considers Max Weber’s typology of legitimate authority “unsound” and suggests that it is “discarded” (Friedrich, 1961:16). One reason for dropping the term “charisma” from the academic lexicon has been its close relation to emotions and the irrational side of human beings. Nevertheless, the research in political psychology and behavioralism in recent decades, finds evidence that voting decisions are an irrational act and strongly relate to emotions (Brader, 2006, 2011, 2012; Dean & Croft, 2009; Hofinger & Manz-Christ, 2011) and, therefore, could have a strong relation to charisma of political leaders (Tempest, 2013).

It can be concluded that, in the current academic world, the term “charismatic leader” still seems to seriously suffer from two main defects. The first difficulty is the looseness of the concept. The second problem that charisma-researchers are confronted with, is the question how and if the idea of a “charismatic leader” fits into traditional theories and the understanding of liberal democracy (Bensman & Givant, 1975; Loewenstein, 1966; Pappas, 2011, 2012; Shils, 1958; Spinrad, 1991). The next section further explores this.

## 2. Political Leader in Crisis – A Charismatic Hero

With the phrase “Unhappy the land that is in need of heroes” Bertolt Brecht, in his work “Life of Galileo” (2013), was able to alter the common belief that it is a happy country that creates heroes. Brecht’s sentence has often been repeated when analyzing the trend that charismatic political leaders are increasingly called for in the current environment. Whereas, in the last decades the term “charismatic leader” has been used more and more frequently in political communication vocabulary, successful political leaders are also increasingly referred to as celebrities or “heroes” outside of an ordinary political context (Louw, 2005; Rees, 1991). It is suggested that a charismatic leader receives more attention from voters in times of social change and imbalance, while during a period of stability his or her role diminishes (Bruns, 1978; Grint, 2000; Weber, 1994).

In broad brush strokes, political leadership can be characterized as being formal or informal (Möller & Schierenbeck, 2010). In the first case, a leader holds authority because of his or her formal position in society. In the second case, a person is considered a leader even without a legally assigned high societal position. Such informal leadership would be close to what Weber considered a charismatic leader, as in this case personal charm and charisma play a predominant role (Bruns, 1978; Möller & Schierenbeck, 2010: 4; Weber, 1994).

The question raised here is: whether the increase of “charismatic leaders” in recent decades, in Western traditional democracies, represents a crisis of the democratic political system in societies where a democratic regime has been adopted since the end of World War II?

## 3. Political Charisma Revisited

The German sociologist, philosopher and political economist Max Weber, already a century ago, described the kind of leader who can easily gain follower support by his or her personal “charm” or “extraordinary charismatic” qualities (Weber, 1978). By explaining the leader’s charisma as a *power term*, Weber gave the word “charisma” a clearly political meaning, although he later questioned its irrational nature and began to believe in the decline of charisma as a political phenomenon (Weber, 1978). Weber considered charisma to be a different type of leadership about which the literature offered limited research. However, despite of the confusion around the concept, increasingly, scholars in the field of political communication and electoral behavior study phenomena related to what Weber described as the charismatic qualities of a leader.

Charisma is described by various authors as a certain warmth or personal capacity to “affect electorate emotionally” (Cwalina, Falkowski, & Newman, 2011; Falkowski & Cwalina, 2013), whereas Nye (2008) in addition mentions “personal magnetism”. Tempest (2013) links political charisma with a leader’s verbal and non-verbal image and body-language. It should be mentioned that in this field, already decades ago, some researchers pointed out, that the dynamics which connect the leaders with their followers are of irrational origin (Bensman & Givant, 1975; Spinrad, 1991).

From Max Weber’s theory, two main schools that study the emergence of the charismatic leadership are derived, that focus on psychological or sociological characteristics (Weber 1994). In the first school, psychology and organization studies concentrate on leaders who thanks to their extraordinary qualities get to a position to transform society. In the second school of thought, the attention is on the societal context that creates the need for a charismatic leader (Pappas, 2011; Weber, 1994).

To analyze charismatic leaders from the perspective of “political charismaticness”, Pappas reevaluates the meaning of charisma in the context of, first, *individual* and, second, *structural reductionism* (2012). In the context of individual reductionism, charisma means a set of personal or psychological characteristics specific to a leader. Much research here has focused on how to identify the qualities necessary for charisma to emerge (Bandura, 1982; Marcus, 1961; Shils, 1965), usually describing them as “presumed charismatic effects”. These studies focus on testing leaders for possession of such effects. In case of structural reductionism, the approach is crisis-based and focuses on the structural preconditions for the emergence of charismatic leaders. Charisma in this context is a result of social unrest and emerges in times of crisis.

Weber (1978) considers as one of the most important characteristics of charisma *extraordinariness* or *exceptional powers or qualities*. He uses term “charisma” to refer to the “quality of an individual personality, by virtue of which, he or she is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least exceptional powers or qualities” (Weber, 1978: 241). What matters, foremost, is how the individual is regarded by his or her “followers” or “disciples” (Weber, 1968: 4). Weber explains that charisma can also be presented as a result from collective anxiety or enthusiasm in “unusual, especially political or economic situations, or from extraordinary psychic, particularly religious states, or from both together” (Weber, 1978: 1117, 1121). Weber also brings forth that charismatic domination has a tendency to develop, later, towards a more stable structure in the society.

Pappas further develops the approach of *extraordinariness* in two directions, either by reducing this notion to a set of personal or psychological characteristics possessed, or by collective anxiety and enthusiasm in a “crisis-ridden situation creating an appropriate environment for the emergence of a charismatic leader” (Pappas, 2011). Based on this, Pappas suggests distinguishing two leadership styles in a democracy: usual or ordinary, next to unusual or extraordinary. Pappas (2011) also brings out measurable and empirically testable personal aspects of a charismatic leader under the term of *charismatic personalism*. This involves:

- the almost absolute and centralized control exercised by a single leader over some political party or other mass organization;
- the great, and unmediated emotional passion that accompanies the leader-led relationship, which may create deep social divisions;
- and the capacity to be delegate and missionary - as opposed to deliberative and procedural - character of leader-led relationships (Pappas, 2011: 3).

The second feature of political charisma is charismatic radicalism, described as a radical force which aims to destroy traditional patterns and disturb the legal-bureaucratic and procedural type of authority (Pappas, 2011: 4; Parsons, 1964: 64). To be precise, Pappas, in line with Weber (according to Weber, 1994), considers political charisma as a “distinct type of leadership which is personal and aims at the radical transformation of an established institutional order” (Pappas, 2011:10). He emphasizes the need to consider charisma as a “political power term” as an alternative focus to earlier foremost psychological and sociological connotations of the phenomenon of charisma (Pappas, 2011, 2012).

The next paragraphs discuss charismatic leadership in the changing media landscape dominated by social media.

#### **4. The Media Environment and Political Charisma**

When looking back on recent developments in the past half-century in relation to political communication and media environment, four main interrelated phenomena can be brought out:

- rapid technological progress bringing about drastic changes in the media environment;
- the rise of the network society (Castells, 2000);
- “professionalization” or “Americanization” of political campaigning (Ben-Ur & Newman, 2002; Mazzoleni, Stewart, & Horsfield, 2003; Negrine, 1995; Rees, 1991; Swanson & Mancini, 1992);
- “celebritization” and personalization of political leaders (Louw, 2005; Rees, 1991).

All these developments have directly or indirectly influenced leader presentations and ways in which political candidates have been perceived by the electorate. This is the era of the collapse of the traditional mass media environment, which is being replaced by a new personalized communication environment.

Candidates and their image-makers fight for the attention of voters, while their communication advisers implement the innovative strategies to compete in the new media environment. In these conditions, politics has become an over-PRized phenomenon with parties all over the world using new innovative marketing techniques and approaches (Fox & Lees-Marshment, 2002; Harris & Lock, 2001; Louw, 2005).

The following points are argued to be important for voters in making their decision in favor of a candidate: (1) his/her image; (2) principles; (3) capability; (4) quality; (5) availability; (6) representation of society; and (7) optical phenotype, the observable characteristics as a whole (Schweiger & Adami, 1999: 353-354).

The mass media has always had an important role on the outcome of the elections (Harris & Lock, 2001; Shea & Burton, 2006) and, already more than two decades ago, it could be stated that the majority of voters tend to be indifferent to politics (Newman, 1999: 104). This caused a depoliticization of modern politics in which, to attract voters, the electoral promises given by different parties and candidates have become more similar (Cwalina, Falkowski & Newman, 2011). This situation, in turn, led to a “personalization” of politics, making image dominant over political issues (Newman, 1999; Schweiger & Adami, 1999). The latter has been called “mediation” of politics or “media-driven democracies” (Mazzoleni, Stewart & Schulz, 1999).

Thus, the acceptance or rejection of a political leader can be seen as a largely emotional decision driven by the image and personal qualities of the leader (Nimmo, 1970). The personalization or professionalization of political campaigns has been blamed, to a certain extent, on the influence of the USA, in other words “Americanization” of political campaigning, as in the USA politics have always been more personality-oriented and money or media driven. In Europe, campaigning has been considered distinct and dominated by widely divergent ideologies of the contending parties, free TV-time and public funding (Plasser, Scheucher, & Senft, 1999: 90-91). The use of marketing strategies in political campaigns has seen a trend increase, which often is called “professionalization” of politics (Esser & Pfetsch, 2004;



Schweiger & Adami, 1999).

While describing the context of the growing importance of politicians' personalization and image, it should be noted also that research conducted worldwide has shown an increase in the phenomenon of "floating voters". In other words, people are no longer loyal to one party or one particular leader, they were used to vote for in the past, which makes it difficult to predict voter behavior in future elections (Habermas, 2006; Worcester & Baines, 2006). Moreover, research pointed out that, in a situation of low party loyalty, the candidates' image and personal qualities gain meaning in elections (e.g. Schweiger & Adami, 1999).

### **5. Personalization and PR-ization in the Post-Web Environment**

Audiovisual image-based media play an important role in "personalized" political campaigning. TV as a mass media environment could be easily compared to Internet-based communication, which is also increasingly focused on audiovisual image and telegenic appearance. New media offers direct access to free (meaning unpaid for) media to political candidates. In this case, political consultants can directly control the message, as voters tend to trust free media (Toode, 2009).

For audiovisual (TV) coverage, both, the verbal and the nonverbal signs such as dressing, hairstyle, charisma, body-language, and tone-of-voice, became important components in the process of image formation (Newman, 2001). Louw (2005) describes "Americanization" of politics as PR-ization of liberal democracies, explaining that each country has been impacted differently by this phenomenon because of their different political cultures and the process of PR-ization starting at different dates in each country. Increasingly, power shifted away from the party leadership towards consultants and spin-doctors (Louw, 2005; Newman, 2001).

It means that the "message" of the party or the candidate is often created by PR professionals who in general are not faithful party members. In other words, "Brokers now need to possess media and research skills in order to analyze and steer public opinion" (Louw, 2005: 150). These professionals increasingly select suitable political leaders based on how well they perform on a TV or computer screen. In other words, how well they fit the image manufacturing and personality branding mechanism in the current media environment.

In the context of the audiovisual and web-based media environment an ideal political candidate apparently needs to be: (1) a credible (convincing) television performer; (2) visually appealing to voters; and (3) able to speak in soundbites and slogans because of the shortened format in case of TV but also in the environment of micro-blogs such as Twitter and Facebook.

Consequently, party power relationships changed in favor of communication experts who best understand the rules of the marketization or PR-ization and tele-visualization (Louw, 2005). Here one could draw a link with charismatic candidates, as it could also be argued that politicians became celebritized thanks to spin-doctors and management techniques (Louw, 2005: 172). In other words, politicians have become experts in wearing "masks" and performing scripts written by media consultants for audiovisual audience appearances.

As in the era of mass television, political leaders similar to other celebrities, have been obliged and willing to entertain and steer the public, in order to attract and keep the attention of the voters (Louw, 2005: 180). The same situation was by Mazzoleni et al. (2003) described as "neo-populism" in the mass-media environment.

In this context, politicians have been trained to be political celebrities who must be able to "perform" at any given hour. In the "live" new media environment these qualities are even more important. During a public appearance, leaders may attempt to project a charismatic image, showing an impression of being simultaneously "ordinary" but also a "leader". Besides understanding complicated and diverse political marketing strategies including, for example, positioning and segmentation, successful politicians need to be attractive charismatic personalities that get on well with so called "ordinary people", so that voters can identify with them. At the same time, they have to be appealing on the screen. As Louw puts it: "Politicians now attempt to portray themselves as "Mr. Everyman" or "Ms. Everywoman" (Louw, 2005: 180). This phenomenon has smoothly moved to the cyber space and the web environment of the new media.

### **6. Method**

Although charismatic leadership might also arise in a pluralist democratic system in times of political stability (Pappas, 2012), this paper explores the phenomenon of charismatic leadership in times of political crisis or instability. It compares the leadership styles of the leaders of three most successful political parties in Estonia and Italy during the European Union elections in 2014. In the case of Estonia, these party leaders are Taavi Rõivas (Eesti Reformierakond – Estonian Reform Party), Edgar Savisaar (Keskerakond – Centre Party) and Urmas Reinsalu (Isamaa ja Res Publica Liit – the Pro Patria & Res Publica Union). In Italy the observed leaders are Matteo Renzi (Partito Democratico – Democratic Party), Peppe Grillo (Movimento Cinque Stelle – Five Star Movement) and Silvio Berlusconi (Forza Italia party). The aim is to map the similarities and differences of the emerging charismatic leadership in both countries. The

study explores how political leaders in the two observed countries use charisma in their communication in the changed media environment.

To begin with, the cases of Estonia and Italy are described using statistical data. Next, for both countries, the leadership style of the three most popular political leaders is compared. This analysis is based on insights of Pappas who states that charismatic or extraordinary leadership differs from other leadership types in two aspects: first, by its personal character of rule and, second, by its radical nature (Pappas, 2012). Based on this, Pappas created a charisma index. This comprised the following elements: “*personalism* (absolute control over party/movement, power centralization; leader-led relationship, unmediated and emotional, often divisive; missionary politics and extra-institutional authority delegation) and *radicalism* (subverting by delegitimization of old authority structures; instituting a novel authority structure; new hegemony)” (Pappas, 2011: 5). According to him, in this way it is possible to investigate political charisma empirically and gain scientifically valid data on this phenomenon (Pappas, 2011). Here, also socio-psychological aspects of charismatic leaders are taken into consideration, particularly non-verbal elements such as body language and gestures deemed important by Schweiger & Adami (1999).

For observing the elements of charismaticness, a critical discourse analysis of video recordings of political speeches and audiovisual spots of the observed leaders was implemented. To begin, the party programs for the European Parliament elections were studied to better understand the socio-political context. The speeches were chosen from the year 2014. The focus was not on the EU elections as such, but on the elements important for political charisma studied in this paper, as the aim of the analysis was to find the verbal and nonverbal elements that fitted the criteria of the “index of charisma” (Pappas, 2011) and non-verbal “image attributes” presented by Schweiger & Adami (1999). This included an evaluation of indicators related to power relations, such as the control over the political party, the character of the leader-follower relationship, trends towards extra-institutional authority and the will to create a novel power-structure. For this purpose, it was considered how the words “I”, “You”, “we/us”, “them/they” and “change” were used in speeches and audiovisual spots. Both verbal and non-verbal elements (look, dress, body-language, tone of voice), expressions communicating power relations with followers, qualities such as ethos, pathos, logos were taken into consideration.

For evaluating the activities of the leaders in the social media, the Twitter and Facebook profiles were observed during the two weeks prior the EP Election day. In addition, some statistical sources presenting data of social media use of political leaders in Estonia and Italy were taken into consideration.

## 7. The Case of Estonia and Italy

Estonia is a transitional post-communist country that entered the European Union in 2004. Estonia’s political history, after the restoration of its independence in 1991, has been characterized by a relatively high degree of political fragmentation and volatility. The center-right liberal Estonian Reform Party and the center-left Estonian Centre Party have remained two of Estonia’s largest parties since 1999. Next to these two leading parties the center-right and conservative Pro Patria and Res Publica Union and center-left Social Democrats have gained popularity. ([www.electionresources.org/ee](http://www.electionresources.org/ee))

Italy is considered to be a so called “old-European” society, which together with Belgium, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and at that time West Germany, established the European Economic Community (EEC) which later became one of the three pillars of the European Union. After the Second World War and the overthrow of Mussolini’s fascist regime, Italy has had a complex political history. Initially it was dominated by the Christian Democracy, when at the end of the 1980’s, after the corruption scandal of the previous political elite, media magnate Silvio Berlusconi became one of Italy’s most important political and economic figures in the next decades.

Electoral volatility is in Italy very high with 37,3 % (Emanuele, Angelucci, Marino, Puleo, & Vegetti, 2019). In the 2013 general elections, the “outsider movement”, the 5 Star Movement led by the actor and satiric Beppe Grillo, obtained 25,6 % of the votes and emerged as the most voted single party in Italy. Next, in 2014, during the EU elections, the Democratic Party led by the young and charismatic Matteo Renzi obtained 40.8% of the votes, which was the best result ever achieved by an Italian center-left party.

Compared to other “old” democracies Italy is a special case, as it has a long history of instability in government and fluid electoral laws, whereas Estonia is a former Soviet state which, after the collapse of the Soviet-Union in 1992, developed as an Internet society. Although Estonia and Italy seem to be two very different societies, remarkably, the voter behavior and trends during the EU election campaigns in 2014, show some curious similarities. For the comparison of these two societies the used economic, social and political indicators are: voter volatility, electoral polarization against one leader, average income polarization, government formation without the legal elections, trends towards centralization of power and media fragmentation, and trust in political parties. These characteristics help evaluate the conditions in society which might favor the rise of charismatic leaders, as is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Estonia and Italy compared based on economic, social and political indicators

(Sources: Eurobarometer, 2014; Ipsos, 2014; Statistics Estonia, 2014; TNS/Scyti in cooperation with the European Parliament, 2014)

	ESTONIA	ITALY
Voter volatility	High	Very high
Electoral polarization	Very high	Very high
Income polarization	Very high	High
Government without elections	Since February 2014	Since November 2011
Centralization of power	Very strong, via e-state	Very strong, via reforms
Fragmentation of the (mass)media	Very high	Moving towards high
No trust in political parties	Low/medium 67%	Very low 89%
Trust in political parties	Low 36%	Very low 20%

In Estonia, for example, the electoral perspective has largely been “Centre Party leader Edgar Savisaar versus everyone else”, while in Italia the political polarization focused on “media magnet Silvio Berlusconi versus everyone else”.

Voter volatility has been high in both countries and, in both societies, the political and economic polarization tends to be high also. Estonia and Italy have both had a Prime Minister nominated without general elections. In the public and media debate in 2014, the discourse has been strongly crisis and fear dominated. In Estonia, the security of the state has been questioned and fear has been evoked for a possible attack by the Russian Federation. In Italy, the discourse has been dominated by economic problems.

The results of the European Parliamentary elections in 2014 are presented in the following two figures, resp. Figure 1 for Estonia, and Figure 2 for Italy. For this study, in both countries, the leaders of the three parties that received the most votes during the European Parliament (EP) elections were chosen.

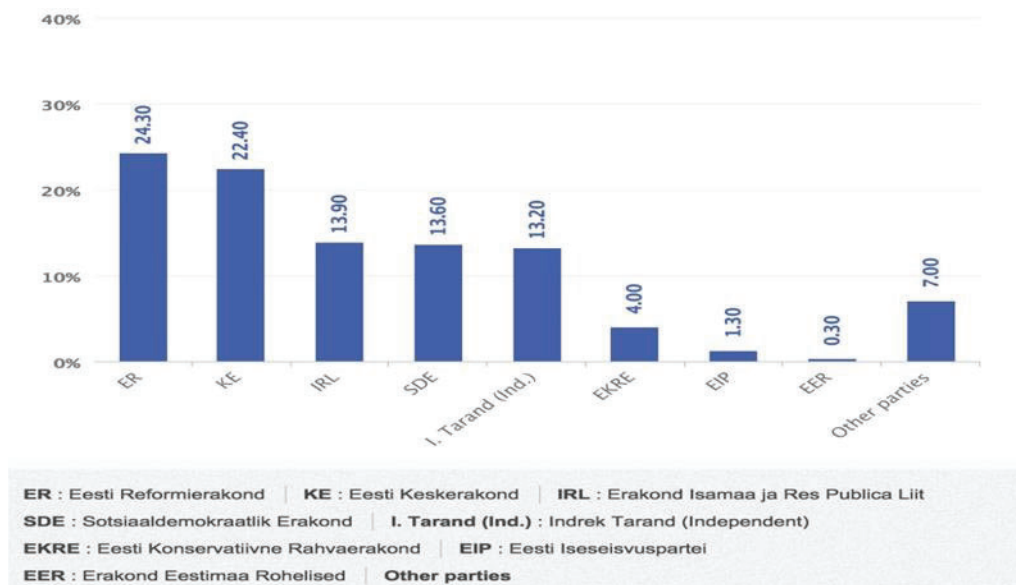


Figure 1. European Parliamentary election results by national party in Estonia, 2014 (Source: TNS/Scyti in cooperation with the European Parliament)

For Estonia, the Prime Minister and leader of the Reform Party Taavi Rõivas (born in 1979), the leader of opposition and head of the Centre Party Edgar Savisaar (born in 1950) and the leader of Pro Patria & Res Publica Union Urmas Reinsalu (born in 1975) were chosen for this study, even though the Social Democrats and the independent candidate, Indrek Tarand, got almost the same number of votes in May 2014. The Reform Party, led by Rõivas got 24,3% of the votes, the Centre Party led by Savisaar gained 22,4% of support and Pro Patria & Res Publica led by Reinsalu won 13,9% of the votes.

Taavi Rõivas has been the Prime Minister of Estonia since March 2014. In February 2014, the previous Prime Minister, Andrus Ansip, unexpectedly announced his resignation from his role to apply for the role of European Commissioner. Later, the Party chose the young Rõivas as the new head of the Party and the government.

Former Prime Minister and leader of the Center Party, Edgar Savisaar, could be considered the strongest leader of the Estonian center-left opposition, often criticized for using populist methods in order to achieve votes and popularity.

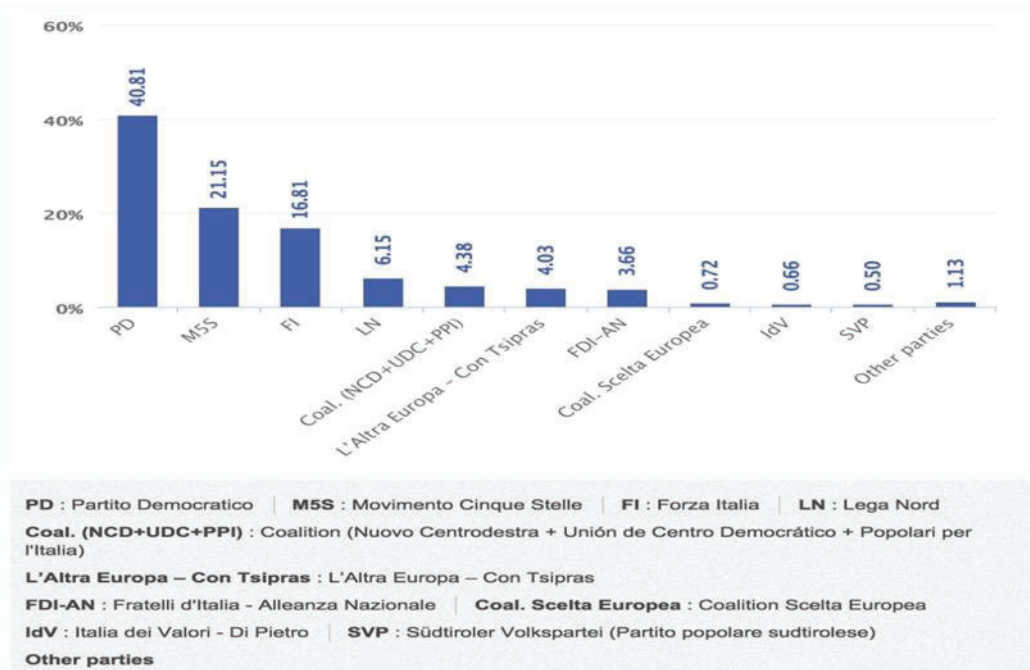


Figure 2. European Parliamentary election results by national party in Italy, 2014

(Source: TNS/Scyti in cooperation with the European Parliament, 2014)

In Italy, the Prime Minister and the leader of the Democratic Party Matteo Renzi (born in 1975), the leader of the Five Star Movement Beppe Grillo (born in 1948), and the well-known media tycoon and leader of the Forza Italia party, Silvio Berlusconi (born in 1936), were chosen for this study as the leading figures of the three main political forces in Italy. Democratic Party won 40,8% of the votes, the Five Star Movement 21,2% and Berlusconi's Forza Italia 16,8 % of votes.

Matteo Renzi became the head of the government, without elections in February 2014, after a crisis in the Democratic Party. The Party had been looking for a new leader in order to regain popularity. After the collapse of the Silvio Berlusconi era in November 2011, Matteo Renzi became the third Prime Minister in Italy, who gained power not through general elections but through being nominated as head of the – so called – technical government. Before Renzi, the technical government had been led by Enrico Letta and Mario Monti. At the age of 39, Matteo Renzi became the youngest Prime Minister in the history of Italy. He has also been described as the – de facto – leader of the European Socialists. The American magazine, Fortune, ranked him as the worldwide third most influential person under 40, and Foreign Policy mentioned him in the Top 100 Global Thinkers.

## 8. Comparing the Estonian and Italian Leaders

Following the five elements of the index of charismaticness given by Pappas (2012), Table 2 shows the analysis of Estonian and Italian leaders.

Table 2. The index of “charismaticness” applied to six Estonian and Italian political leaders in 2014

	PERSONALISM			RADICALISM	
	Absolute control over party/movement; power centralization	Leader-led relationship; unmediated and emotional, often divisive	Missionary politics and extra-institutional authority delegation	Destroying by de-legitimation some old authority structure	Instituting a novel authority structure, new hegemony
Rõivas	Yes	Medium	Medium	Low	Low
Savisaar	Yes	High	High	High	High
Reinstalu	Yes	High	Medium	Medium	Medium
Renzi	Yes	High	High	High	Very high
Grillo	Yes	High	High	High	Very high
Berlusconi	Yes	High	High	High	High

When comparing the results of Italy and Estonia and those leaders of the three parties gaining most votes during the European Parliament elections in 2014, the following conclusions could be drawn.

The score on the index of “charismaticness” (developed by Pappas, 2011) is high in the case of Italy’s political leaders. In Estonia, the index score is high for veteran-politician Edgar Savisaar. For the rise of charismatic leaders, the role of the media environment cannot be forgotten. In recent decades, there has been a drastic move from a mass-media driven environment towards the social media. In other words, the “push” or broadcast media model has changed to a “pull” or new (narrowcast) environment (Gobbo, 2006). Leaders need “followers” to convince the masses. From the analysis different types of leaders, based on the media model, emerge.

Silvio Berlusconi and Edgar Savisaar can be seen as leaders who own their success mainly to the mass-media environment. Savisaar finances, through the city council, the TV station Tallinna TV, which aims to promote his political activities on the local level. Both are often called “populist” politicians.

Beppe Grillo represents a new type of charismatic leader, who comes from the show-business environment. In that sense, he could be compared to Silvio Berlusconi who (next to mass-media elements) also used show-business elements in his TV programs and sees himself as a performer.

In Estonia, Taavi Rõivas is a young and charismatic politician who makes much use of social media. The relatively young and charismatic Matteo Renzi, similarly to Taavi Rõivas, represents a new kind of leader whose charisma is largely based on his performance in the new media. Matteo Renzi has also been nominated as Europe’s top digital leader in March 2014.

The most outstanding new-media leader still is Beppe Grillo, who owns his political success almost only to the new-media environment. Radical social mass movements are often considered to be bottom-up phenomena which appear depending on societal conditions. The Italian 5 Star Movement, at first glance, seems to be a grass-root-level citizen movement, whereas it has been organized by their charismatic leader, Beppe Grillo, and in that sense can be considered a movement organized from above. Grillo can be seen as a highly charismatic leader who, by a strong personal authority combined with a radical message, attempts to engage followers for radical political change in Italy. For communication with his followers he mainly uses live performances, his blog ([www.beppegrillo.it](http://www.beppegrillo.it)) and the social networking portal “meet-up” that facilitates offline group meetings in various locations. As a former TV-comic he has often been accused of using populism in his communication.

The comparison shows that those leaders who tend to be more charismatic in terms of “charisma index” and at the same time use innovative emotional image-strategies in cyber space beside the traditional media channels, seem to rapidly gain more popularity among their followers.

In a traditional liberal democracy, there is not much space for charismatic leadership, as most leaders in a democracy carry out moderate politics within an already existing legal-bureaucratic institutional system and the charismatic nature of a leader does not fit that framework. In any case, the question rises, if and how political charisma can be used in a favorable way in the democratic system?

Developing Weber’s theory further, Pappas (2012) describes three types of legitimate political leadership, being traditional, legal-rational, and charismatic. In case of the latter the basis for authority is personal and individual (Pappas, 2012). The personal aspect of charismatic leadership involves at least three elements: a direct, unmediated form; emotional passion; and the absence of institutional control over the charismatic leader (Pappas, 2012: 6). At the same time, charismatic leaders can emerge in a liberal democracy in two ways: 1) in an emergency situation or time of crisis, and 2) in times of normality (Pappas, 2012: 8-13).

In the case of the normal situation, it is important to consider the role of charisma in social mobilization and engagement (Ake, 1966: 6). A charismatic leader can mobilize people and create new identities and allegiances through the mechanism of symbolic framing (Goffman, 1974; Pappas, 2012). Frames are complex belief formation mechanisms, consisting of symbolic narratives that offer people new meanings about the world, create novel identities and social roles, widen the political agenda, offer the meanings for defining good and just society, and determine existing authority relationships (Goffman, 1974; Lakoff, 2011). Here the question arises, which frames are more effective for mobilizing followers in the direction of radical political action? It is argued that, for radical action to take place, people must first define their situation as unjust (Brader, 2006; McAdam, 1982). This explains why many leaders prefer to attract followers on the basis of social injustice or anger.

**9. Discussion – Charismatic Leaders: Revolutionary or Debauchee**

In present times, societies all over the world suffer continuous crisis and turbulence on all socio-political. This is also evident in traditional democracies in Western countries. In addition, there is a transition of the communication environment, from a pre-web mass media dominated and more predictable situation, to a post-web and less predictable scenery. Political leaders have had to adapt themselves to the new rules of the game. However, according to Kellerman (2008), science should also emphasize research focusing on followers, as the current changing times also requires well educated followers due to democratically ethical norms and common good of the community. Similarly, Pellizzoni (2013) suggests paying more attention to “citizen empowerment” and policymaking as a way for problem solving.

In times of turbulence, a leader should be able to change the behavior pattern continuously between the state of predictability and unpredictability. In other words, changing his or her style depending on the situation and the issue at stake. If an issue is stability-related in a stable context, the leader should take a different approach than in the case of an issue related to instability, when aiming to recreate stability in the environment by offering “surprising” solutions. Following this line of thinking, a model is proposed here, depicting a leader who needs to continuously change between stability and instability.

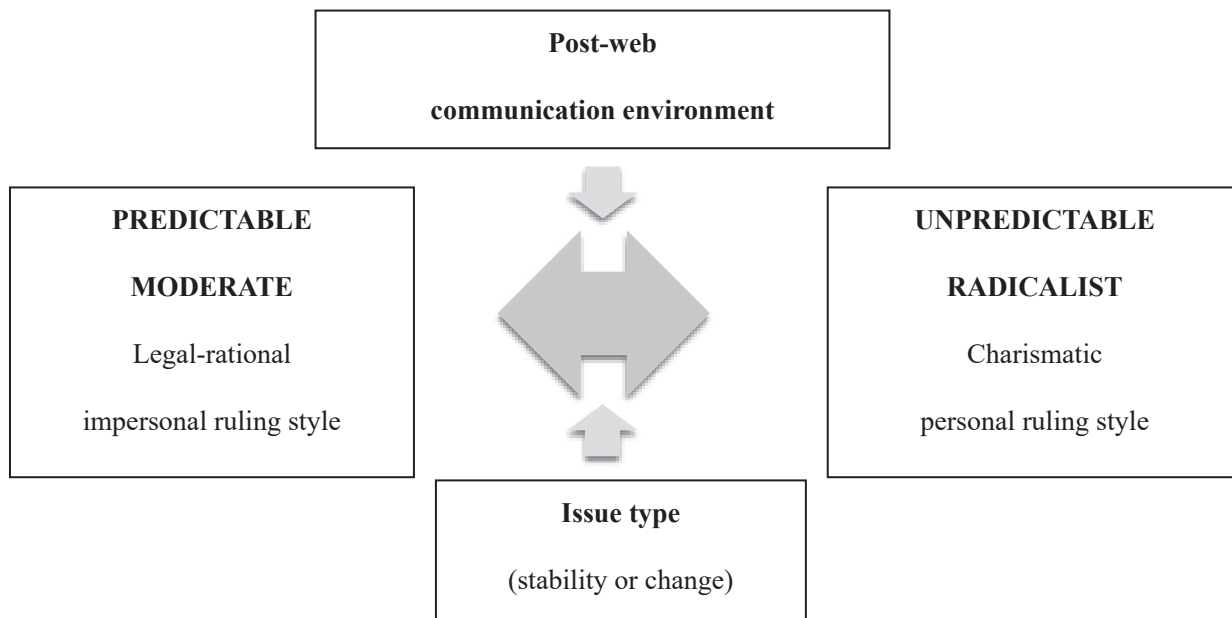


Figure 4. Post-web charismatic leader changing styles

As shown in Figure 4, a leader in the post-web context needs to flexibly approach different issues and be able to adapt his or her style from ordinary to extraordinary. This enhances the competitiveness of the political leader in issue arenas, virtual spaces where multiple actors are involved in issue debate (Vos, Schoemaker, & Luoma-aho, 2014) and compete for agenda setting power. For example, social media function as platforms for issue debate that can, depending on the

topic, fast gain large numbers of messages (Zhang, Vos, Veijalainen, Wang, & Kotkov, 2016).

While comparing the main leaders in Estonia and Italy, some interesting trends have been observed. In both countries, the Prime Minister had been nominated without elections. In both societies, a discourse of crisis and fear had been communicated, justifying the necessity of a technical government. Similarly, a centralization of power could be observed. In the case of Estonia, it was the use of info-technology and the system of an e-state. In Italy, Matteo Renzi has been carrying out several reforms which aim to centralize power.

In 2014, Silvio Berlusconi was the last elected leader in Italy, and he has since been followed by three technocratic governments until the general elections of 2013. This might be a sign of post-political establishment in society, as a “regime of truth” (Pellizzoni, 2013:11) might be created in situations of economic crisis, terrorism threat or climate change, where even the most contesting parties could be accepted to be a part of it (ibid).

The charismatic leader can be depicted in two different systems, the mass-media dominated environment versus the post-web environment. In the traditional mass-media dominated environment, charismatic leaders, mostly, stayed in contact with their followers using television and other traditional media. This made it easier to build a favorable solid image (e.g. Berlusconi and Savisaar). In the post-web era, television still has much influence on public opinion formation but social media channels such as Twitter and Facebook have come to dominate the agenda-setting in issue arenas (Vos, Schoemaker, & Luoma-aho, 2014), calling for a flexible personality and communication style in cyber politics.

Concerning mass media, while analyzing problems of a democracy, critics have often placed blame on the marketization of political communication, the process which considers voters as consumers (Coleman & Blumer, 2009). In the traditional environment of market politics, the voter participates in information consumption and chooses (relatively) rationally for a decision, which gives the leader who fits most expectations the highest chance of winning. However, the post-web era is dominated by the emergence of a new kind of digital charismatic leader which goes together with followers that are often characterized by a lack of involvement in decision-making and interest in politics in general (Lilleker et al., 2011). Thus, as this research demonstrates, digital charismatic leaders can easily mobilize their followers using a highly emotional communication style in post-web media (Novelli & Johansson, 2019).

Pappas (2011) places charisma in the context of democracy and accentuates the “extraordinary” (disruptive) role of charismatic leaders in a political system that relies on a traditional form of democracy. Charismatic leaders tend to emerge as a radical force in society, which may attempt to destroy traditional patterns and disturb the existing lawful and rational standard structures which govern society. This means that charismatic leaders can be seen as political reformists or even revolutionaries. As such, the society that a charismatic leader brings, could be characterized through the personalization of power and the related radical changes of existing institutions.

According to Pappas (2011, 2012) an “ordinary” leader is elected based on rational lawful principles and his/her governance is impersonal as befitting a representational democracy. Such governance depends on the need to mediate between voters and decision makers. The unusual or the emerging charismatic leader governs with a personality trait and his or her governance aim is to radically disrupt the *status quo*.

## **10. Conclusion: Political Charisma, the Old-New Phenomenon**

When The essence of charisma was researched in depth, almost a century ago, right before the emergence of historically significant authoritative and charismatic leaders at the beginning of the 20th century, in a democratic context. We can only hope that the newly found interest in this topic by scientists is not a forewarning of possible grave things to come, but rather an endeavor to better understand human nature. The impact of charismatic leaders may also inject belief in a better tomorrow during crisis situations and shape a society which allows for a safer environment for generations to come.

It could be concluded that we still have very limited knowledge of charismatic leadership. The emergence of radical charismatic leaders in a situation of normality might easily relate to such phenomena as mass radicalization and neo-populism. This underlines why this field of charisma studies should be of special interest for further research.

For future research in the field of political charisma, this study recommends a focus on key analytical categories as “extraordinary” phenomena, connected to leaders’ charisma as (neo)populism, social movements development and mass contention, and the emergence of radicalism and insurgent politics.

At this point, the Habermasian normative conditions for deliberative democracy could be recalled, according to which new technology and cyber space could offer conditions for a “new public sphere” and renewed initiatives of participatory democracy (Boulianne, 2009; Habermas, 2006). Not all theorists are convinced that post-web media have brought radical changes. The new media environment does not always enhance democracy (Blumler & Gurevitch, 2001; Dahlgren, 2005), but it can help bridge the “knowledge gap” in society (Toode, 2013; Witte, Reutenberg, & Auer, 2009: 6).

As demonstrated by applying the charisma index, charismatic political leaders might be more successful in the new media environment. Still, to gain a critical number of followers, the leaders need to construct their audience. This can be supported by involving citizens in the decision-making process, as responsible co-thinkers and not just as policy consumers (Coleman & Blumler, 2009), rather than just being passive followers.

Does the above mean that the democracy, as it is understood in the western world so far, is in danger? The answer to this, can be that a new democracy is emerging in a new form and that this also calls for a commitment of the academic world to provide, in this rapidly developing environment, the vivid and rational debate, new concepts, and multidisciplinary research on ways in which to enable the new democracy to offer fruitful conditions for, both, the new-style emerging leaders and the new-style empowered citizens.

To sum up, one could remind of the famous line from Samuel Huntington's *Democracy's Third Wave*: "For democracies to come into being, future political elites will have to believe, at a minimum, that democracy is the least bad form of government for their societies and for themselves" (Huntington, 1991: 33).

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