

# **BUILDING A PERSONAL POLITICAL BRAND USING FACEBOOK AND INSTAGRAM ADVERTISING**

**Jyväskylä University  
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## ABSTRACT

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Title Building a personal political brand using Facebook and Instagram advertising	
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<p>The how and where of political marketing and branding has changed significantly in the past decade. Social networking sites are increasingly used by actors like political parties to brand themselves and interact digitally with voters in real-time. While political branding has been researched extensively from the external perspective of the audience, the internal perspective, "brand identity", and especially that of individual politicians has remained under-researched, thus presenting a potential research gap.</p> <p>The goal of this thesis is to increase the understanding of the role of Facebook and Instagram advertising in building a personal political brand from the internal perspective of the brand owner and internal stakeholders, therefore addressing the call for further research on the internal perspective of branding.</p> <p>This study is a mixed methods research and was carried out as a single case study. The case was an election campaign of a single political candidate in the Finnish parliamentary elections of 2019. Qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews, which were processed through the thematic analysis approach. Quantitative secondary performance data of the campaign's social media advertising was then analyzed and compared with the findings of the qualitative thematic analysis.</p> <p>Both organic content and paid advertising on Facebook and Instagram are seen as an important and growing aspect of the personal political brand building process yet still interdependent with the use of traditional media. The importance of social media advertising is further supported by the advertising performance data, which shows that social media advertising, especially video, was effective during the case campaign.</p> <p>The theoretical contributions of the thesis reinforce findings of existing literature: Social media is seen as a good platform for continuous branding that is a natural continuation after elections, supporting the theory of "permanent campaign". The findings also support the importance of creating relationships with the audience and the notion that social media advertising is an important part of political campaign strategy. The Finnish political landscape is already in many ways "Americanized", where political marketing largely takes a market-oriented approach. The habits of the audience and their willingness to give away private information for the use of marketers may largely affect how Finnish political marketing on social media will develop from here.</p> <p>Managers should seriously consider both Facebook and Instagram for political brand building, as they offer cost-efficient ways to reach target audiences and the interactivity enables the creation of personal relationships between the individual politician and their voters.</p>	
Key words political marketing, personal political branding, social networking sites, social media advertising	
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## TIIVISTELMÄ

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<p>Tämän pro gradu -työn tavoite on lisätä ymmärrystä maksullisen Facebook- ja Instagram-mainonnan roolista henkilökohtaisen poliittisen brändin rakentamisessa brändin omistajan ja sisäisten sidosryhmien näkökulmasta ja täten tukee tutkimusta brändäämisen sisäisestä näkökulmasta.</p> <p>Tämä työ on monimenetelmätutkimus, joka suoritettiin tapaustutkimuksen muodossa. Keskiössä on yksittäinen vaalikampanja kevään 2019 Suomen eduskuntavaaleissa. Kvalitatiivinen primääridata kerättiin teemahaastatteluiden muodossa, jotka sitten käsiteltiin temaattisen analyysin kautta. Tuloksia verrattiin tämän jälkeen vaalikampanjan sosiaalisen median sekundäärisen kvantitatiivisen mainontadatan kanssa.</p> <p>Sekä orgaaninen sisältö että maksettu mainonta Facebookissa ja Instagramissa nähtiin tärkeänä ja kasvavana osana henkilökohtaisen poliittisen brändin rakentamista, mutta ennen kaikkea osana laajempaa kokonaisuutta perinteisen median kanssa. Sosiaalisen median mainonnan ja erityisesti videomainonnan tulokset tukevat digimainonnan tärkeyttä.</p> <p>Tutkimus tukee useita aikaisempia kirjallisia löydöksiä: Sosiaalinen media nähdään hyvänä alustana henkilökohtaiseen jatkuvaan henkilökohtaiseen brändäämiseen, tukien ”jatkuvan kampanjan” teoriaa. Suhteiden luominen äänestäjien kanssa nähdään tärkeänä sekä se, että sosiaalisen median mainonta on tänä päivänä tärkeä osa poliittista kampanjastrategiaa. Suomalaisen politiikan kenttä on hyvin ”amerikkalaistunut”, jossa poliittinen markkinointi on pääosin markkinasuuntautunutta. Yleisön käyttäytyminen ja valmius henkilökohtaisen tiedon antamiseen markkinoijien käyttöön tulee suuresti vaikuttamaan siihen, miten sosiaalisen median poliittinen markkinointi Suomessa kehittyy tästä eteenpäin.</p> <p>Päätävässä asemassa olevien tulisi vakavasti harkita sekä Facebookin että Instagramin käyttöä poliittiseen brändäämiseen, sillä ne tarjoavat kustannustehokkaita tapoja tavoittaa kohdeyleisöjä ja interaktiivisuus mahdollistaa henkilökohtaisten suhteiden luomisen yksittäisen poliitikon ja äänestäjien välillä.</p>	
Asiasanat poliittinen markkinointi, henkilökohtainen poliittinen brändääminen, sosiaalisen median alustat, sosiaalisen median mainonta	
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# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Motivation for research

Political discourse and where it takes place have changed significantly in the past decade. Instead of only having speeches in front of crowds, political actors and organizations have adopted social media platforms such as Twitter as an additional and complementary way of communicating with their stakeholders. (Maarek, 2014.) And this is isn't without reason; social networking sites offer favorable circumstances to public discourse due to their relative open access and overall structure that supports networking and sharing of information (Kruse, Norris & Flinchum, 2018).

The academic credentials of political marketing are largely rooted in traditional commercial marketing theory. However, political marketing cannot be placed neither within political science nor commercial marketing in a clear-cut way. (O'Shaughnessy & Henneberg, 2002.) Traditionally political scientists have done their research on political marketing through descriptive studies and researchers of marketing science have largely approached it through normative management theory (Butler & Harris 2009). In the past, due to this fundamental philosophical difference between the two schools, both political scientists and marketers had a serious lack of interest in researching political marketing; political scientists had not been interested in it as it is not directly connected to the democratic policy-making process and marketers had generally found politics less appealing than clearly defined products or services (O'Shaughnessy & Henneberg, 2002).

However, this separation has been greatly diminished in the past decade, as political discourse, public relations and political marketing have seen significant change, partially due to the increased relevance and popularity of digital media, such as social media (Strömbäck & Kioussis, 2019.) However, further research is being called for in the sphere of political public relations, including political marketing, to utilize the strengths and knowledge of all the relevant fields and to further establish itself as an independent field removed from the corporate setting, from where many of the public relations and marketing theory have originally originated. (O'Shaughnessy & Henneberg 2002; Strömbäck & Kioussis, 2019.)

A large portion of political marketing research has been conducted in United States and from the European perspective in the United Kingdom, due to which existing theories should be more rigorously tested in different applications and geographic locations with varying demographics. (Butler & Harris, 2009.) As such, this thesis studies the narrower context of political marketing in Finland and Finnish election campaigns, which as a venue of study appears to have remained under-researched. Furthermore, this approach will answer the call of

existing literature for further research. (Leppäniemi, Karjaluoto, Lehto & Goman, 2010; Strandberg, 2009.) The Finnish political marketing environment is discussed in detail in chapter 2.3.3

O'Shaughnessy & Henneberg (2002) called for the testing and challenging of mainstream theories, so that political marketing as a field may develop beyond classic concepts like 4P. Based on the review of literature on political marketing presented in this thesis, majority of the political marketing research in the past decade has focused on the external, voter-oriented perspective of political brand building and "brand image" (Phipps, Brace-Govan & Jevons, 2008; Smith & French, 2009; Pich & Armannsdottir, 2015). While some researchers have called for and presented frameworks for studying the internal perspective of political brand building and political brand identity, the field has remained under-studied (Armannsdottir, Carnell & Pich, 2019; Pich & Dean, 2015). Where existing studies on the internal orientation have been made, they have focused on the political brands of the parties and larger organizations, instead of individual politicians. (Armannsdottir, Carnell & Pich, 2019). Therefore, the focus of this thesis on the internal brand perspective, brand identity and the "personal political brand" of the candidate directly addresses the call for further research (Armannsdottir et al., 2019). Personal political brand as a concept stands for the set of personal characteristics, values and beliefs of an individual candidate that are intended to be communicated to the intended target audience (Armannsdottir et al., 2019; Labrecque, Markos & Milne, 2011). Political branding is discussed in more detail in chapter 2.2 and its subsequent subchapters. Additionally, the thesis contributes to the political marketing research in Finland, which as of writing has been relatively limited, as mentioned earlier.

In addition to an internal perspective this thesis focuses on the role of social media in personal political brand building process, more specifically the Facebook Ads platform, which is used to manage all paid advertising in both Facebook and Instagram. The effects of social media advertising on brand perception and engagement have been researched extensively (Florenthal, 2019; Thornhill, Xie, Lee, 2017; Tran, 2017) as well as the effects and role of social media in interacting with voters (Kruikemeier, Sezgin & Boerman, 2016; Safiullah, Pathak, Singh & Ansul, 2015). The current research and perceived challenges by authors in the fields of political marketing, branding and social media sites is visualized in Figure 1 on the next page. However, no existing literature could be found that researched the role Facebook and Instagram advertising in building a personal political brand from the internal stakeholder perspective, thus a potential research gap existed. With a potential research gap identified, a research problem and the subsequent research questions could be formulated. These are presented and discussed in the next chapter.



# Call for future research in existing literature

<u>Political marketing</u>	<u>Branding</u>	<u>Social networking sites</u>
<p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Privacy</b> (both use of private data and influence from other countries) (<i>Chester &amp; Montgomery, 2017</i>)</li> <li>• <b>Accountability &amp; rules</b> (<i>Chester &amp; Montgomery, 2017</i>)</li> <li>• <b>Personalization &amp; depoliticization</b> (<i>Muarek, 2014</i>)</li> <li>• <b>Understanding &amp; engaging younger voters</b> (<i>Pich, 2018</i>)</li> </ul> <p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>New technologies</b> (AI, VR, cognitive computing) (<i>Chester &amp; Montgomery, 2017</i>)</li> </ul> <p>Call for future research</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Consistent measurability</b> - Are researchers measuring what they intend to measure? (<i>Nielsen, 2015</i>)</li> <li>• <b>Epistemological problems</b> - Need for more conceptual groundwork (<i>Nielsen, 2015</i>)</li> <li>• <b>Paradigmatic problems</b> - Focus on common conceptual foundation to promote cumulative research (<i>Nielsen, 2015</i>)</li> <li>• <b>Cross-referencing theory</b>- Cross-referencing theory between marketing and political science (<i>Butler, 2009</i>)</li> <li>• <b>More locations &amp; applications</b> - Majority of research is from US and UK and focuses on 2-party systems (<i>Butler, 2009</i>)</li> <li>• <b>Development of new models</b> - Politics and commerce are different, thus new generalizing models are required (<i>Butler, 2009</i>)</li> </ul>	<p>Challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Consistency of brand identity and image</b> - How maintain personal brand identity consistent with the external requirements based on the brand image (<i>Armannsdottir et al., 2019</i>)</li> </ul> <p>Call for future research</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Testing of theoretical models</b> (<i>Armannsdottir et al., 2019</i>)</li> <li>• <b>Personal political brands</b> (<i>Armannsdottir et al., 2019</i>)</li> <li>• <b>Engagement of Gen Y and Z to brands in social media sites</b> (<i>Florenthal, 2019</i>)</li> <li>• <b>Understanding emotions driving brand engagement</b> (<i>Florenthal, 2019</i>)</li> <li>• <b>More politicians &amp; different party and electoral structures</b> (<i>Phipps et al. 2008</i>)</li> <li>• <b>Role of brand equity in single issue activism</b> (<i>Phipps et al. 2008</i>)</li> </ul>	<p>Call for future research</p> <p>Personalized ads</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Personalized ads based on consumer activity and their effect on customer perception</b> (<i>Trm, 2017</i>)</li> <li>• <b>Effect of personalized political ads on social media to engagement</b> (<i>Kruikemier, 2016</i>)</li> </ul> <p>Demographics &amp; context</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Cross-cultural differences in the use of Instagram</b> (<i>Djajirova &amp; Rustowth, 2017</i>)</li> <li>• <b>Social media marketing in different platforms, different countries, cultures and different contexts</b> (<i>Alalwan et al., 2017</i>)</li> <li>• <b>Effect of demographics on brand engagement &amp; purchase</b> (<i>Thornhill et al., 2017</i>)</li> </ul> <p>Shared, owned, earned and purchased media</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Shared, Owned, Earned, Purchased media (SOEP) on social media</b> (<i>Machamara et al., 2016</i>)</li> <li>• <b>Further effects of OSM (owned social media) and ESM (earned social media) on brand purchase</b> (<i>Thornhill et al., 2017</i>)</li> <li>• <b>Which categories of OSM and ESM are most effective?</b> (<i>Thornhill et al., 2017</i>)</li> </ul>

FIGURE 1. Call for future research in existing literature

## 1.2 Research problem and research questions

The aim of this research is to increase the understanding on the role of Facebook and Instagram advertising in building a personal political brand, done through the Facebook Ads platform. The role of paid Facebook and Instagram advertising in the overall process of building a personal political brand is studied as well as the special characteristics of both platforms that contribute to building a personal political brand. This is done from perspective of the brand owner and the internal stakeholders, which for the purpose of this thesis are the political candidate and the members of the campaign team.

The research problem formed for the purpose of this study is how paid Facebook and Instagram advertising can be used in building a personal political brand. The research problem is limited to paid advertising on Facebook and Instagram because of the case study chosen for this thesis which was an election campaign of a single candidate for the Finnish parliamentary elections in 2019. Majority of the digital marketing activities for this campaign took place on social media and a large portion of that on the social media platforms Facebook and Instagram. Advertising for the two social media platforms is controlled through the Facebook Ads platform, as the two social media platforms are both owned by Facebook Incorporated. The research focuses on the internal perspective of branding – what aspects are seen as important and influential in building a personal political brand from the perspective of the brand owner as well as other internal stakeholders that are closely involved in the brand building process. The case is discussed in chapter 1.4.

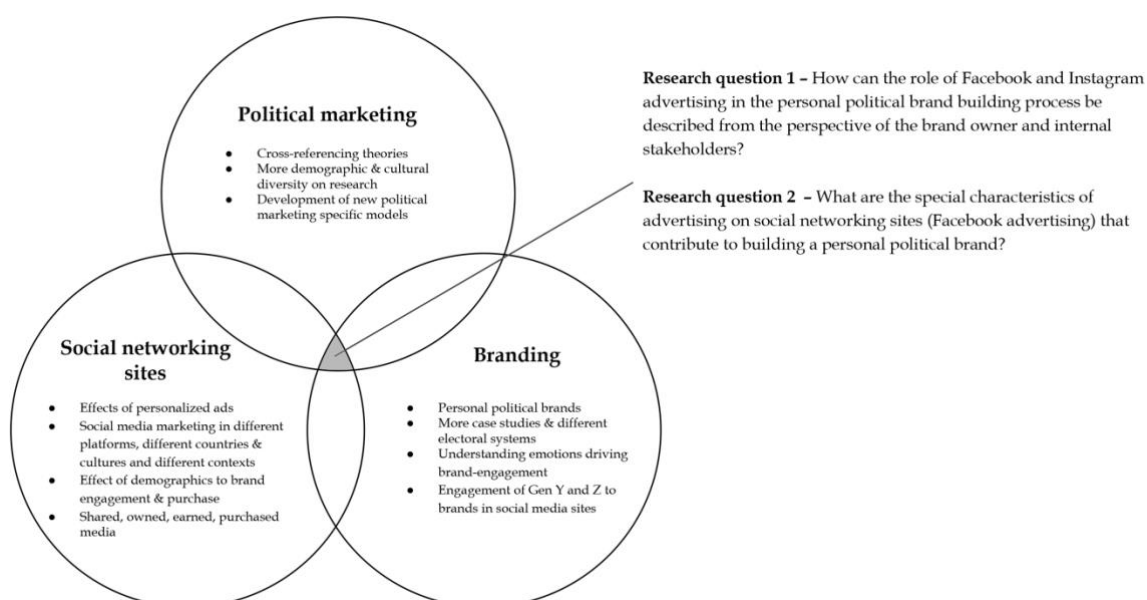


FIGURE 2. Research questions in relation to the theoretical framework

Two research questions are formulated and their alignment with the calls for research from the scientific fields chosen for this thesis is illustrated in Figure 2 on the previous page. The first research question is *“how can the role of Facebook and Instagram advertising in the personal political brand building process be described from the perspective of the brand owner and internal stakeholders?”*. A brand owner, in this case the candidate themselves, is someone who ultimately decides what the brand is and what it is not (Fisher-Buttinger & Vallaster 2008). In business language internal stakeholders are persons who have an interest in an organization, in this case the political campaign and consequently the candidate’s personal political brand, due to a direct relationship by being part of it (Chen, 2020). The first research question is answered by analyzing the answers of seven semi-structured interviews as well as by analyzing secondary performance data of digital advertising of the campaign that ran through the Facebook Ads platform. The first research question aims to increase the understanding on what the role of Facebook advertising is in the overall process of building a personal political brand.

The second research question aims to find out if the brand owner and the internal stakeholders think advertising on social media has specific attributes that make it suitable for brand building. Therefore, the second research question is *“what are the special characteristics of advertising on social networking sites that contribute to building a personal political brand?”* By answering these two research questions, this thesis aims to gain a more holistic understanding on what is the role of Facebook advertising in personal political brand building from the brand owner’s and the internal stakeholder’s perspective and aims to map specific features and functionalities of the Facebook advertising platform that contribute to the overall personal political brand building process.

### **1.3 Structure of the study**

This chapter introduces and explains the structure of the thesis. The first chapter introduces the research topic derived from current political marketing landscape and how developments in digital technologies and user behavior have brought social media platforms to the forefront of digital marketing activities. The motivation and justification for the research is further supported by presenting the current state of academic research on the matter and perceived research gaps. Finally, based on the state of current research in political marketing, especially creation of personal political brands by using social media advertising, a research problem is derived and from that research questions that the thesis aims to answer.

The second chapter consists of the literary review of the thesis, introducing the main theoretical concepts and current literature relevant to the research topic. As the topic of this thesis touches on multiple fields of marketing, each field seen as relevant is discussed extensively. First, social media networking sites are

discussed and how their arrival and exponential increase in popularity have affected political discourse as well as the behavior of voters and their expectations towards political actors. Second sub-chapter discusses theory of branding and how the use of traditional branding theories may be used to affect the image of a political organization or even of an individual politician and whether the emergence of social media platforms has changed branding strategy and activities is discussed. The final theory discussed is political marketing and the history of marketing activities in politics is explored extensively. The relationship of political science and political marketing is discussed as well as the effects of commercial marketing strategies on western politics.

The third chapter discusses the methodology chosen for this research. First, the parliamentary election campaign chosen as the case study for this thesis is introduced and the background of the Finnish political system is briefly explained as well as the role of the author in the case campaign in spring of 2019. The reasoning for the research approach is explained, as well as the role of the author of this thesis in the case study campaign. The data collection methods are discussed, as well as the methods of ensuring scientific accuracy during data collection and analysis. Next, the analysis method of the collected data is introduced as well as the steps how through the analysis of the data is turned into observations and finally into the reported results.

The results of the research are introduced in chapter four, as the analysis of the collected primary and secondary data and the main findings from it are presented. Finally, chapter five presents the conclusions that were made based on the research results in the light of existing research and prevalent theory in social networking sites, political marketing and branding. The chapter ends by acknowledging the potential limitations of the research and presenting potential topics for further research.

## 2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

When discussing the role of social media platforms, in this case Facebook and Instagram in building a political brand, multiple disciplines overlap from digital marketing to political science. Thus, in this chapter each of the main concepts that relate to the topic of this thesis are discussed in detail. Chapter 2.1. explores what social media sites are and how they have shaped the digital business and social landscape in the past decades, as well as their effect on political communication. Chapter 2.2 looks at the theoretical concepts of branding and how they are applied in a political context through political branding. Branding on social media is also discussed. Finally, in chapter 2.3 the concept of political marketing is discussed and how it is differentiated from commercial digital marketing as well as how the role of marketing has developed in political communication from early 20<sup>th</sup> century all the way to today.

### 2.1 Social networking sites

In the past decade social media has turned from a special phenomenon into an everyday reality. Social media is no longer some distant technology that only young people use, it has become an important tool not only for networking and communicating with family and friends but also for doing business (Dijck, 2013). Boyd and Ellison (2007, p. 211) define a social network site as

*“a web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system.”*

What differentiates social networking sites from other online communities is that not only do social media sites allow one to connect with friends and strangers, but they also enable one to make their network visible to others. Depending on the platform this means the number of friends, connections or followers they have, all often visible to their connections or even strangers. (Boyd & Ellison, 2007.)

The social media landscape has been and remains volatile, as shown in numbers in chapter 2.1.2. However, in order to understand the reason why various platforms exist and how they differ from each other, general categorization is necessary. Dijck (2013) presented four types of social media: social networking sites (SNS in short), user-generated content (UGS), trading and marketing sites (TMS) and play and game sites (PGS). Social networking sites focus on creating interpersonal connections either between individuals or groups and the relationship-types can vary from personal, to recreational, professional

or geographical among others (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Dijck, 2013; Biteable, 2020). Examples of social networking sites are Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. UGS are used primarily to share and promote various types of amateur or professional content and to connect with like-minded creators. Examples of this type of social media sites are YouTube, Vimeo Instagram and Snapchat. TMS are dedicated to selling and buying products, Amazon and eBay being examples of this type of a site. Finally, PGS focus on providing a large variety of online games. (Dijck, 2013; Biteable, 2020.)

Categorizing social networking sites based on their structure and general functionality is only one side of the coin, as it is also important to explore how different social media sites are actually used by the public. Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy & Silvestre (2011) use a honeycomb model (Figure 3 below) that aims to examine the different aspects of the social media experience from both the user's and from a corporation's or organizations perspective. They argue that in many cases decision-makers are unwilling to formulate strategies utilize the necessary resources to the use of social media partially due to the lack of understanding in the variety types and forms social media exists.

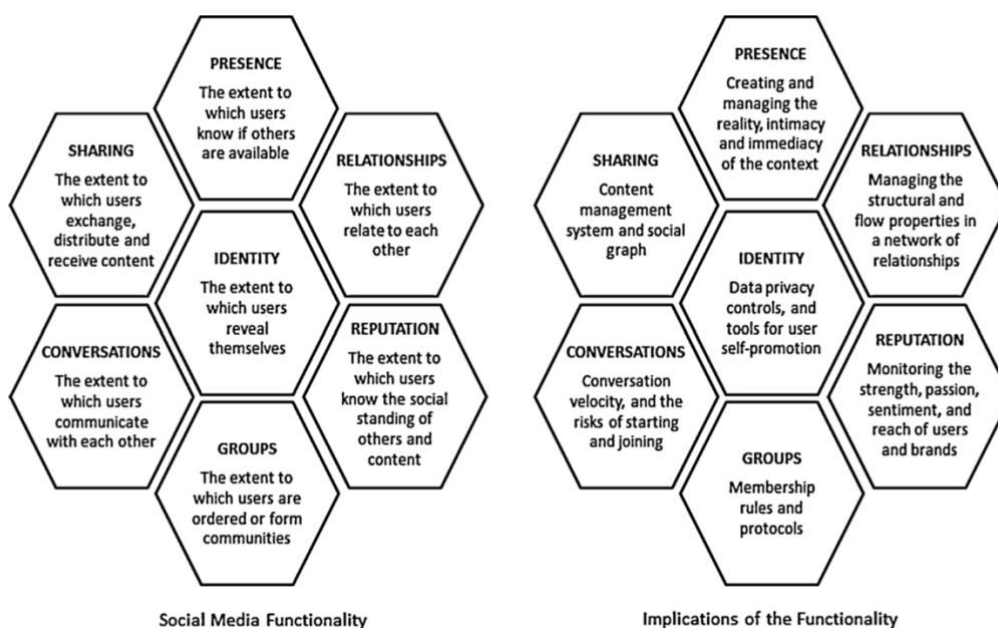


FIGURE 3. The honeycomb of social media. Reprinted from "Social media? Get serious! Understanding the functional building blocks of social media" by Kietzmann et al., 2011, *Business Horizons*, 54 (3), p. 243. Copyright 2011 by Kelley School of Business.

Kietzmann et al. divide the honeycomb into seven parts: Identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation and groups. Each of these aspects affect the way users interact with the platform, each other and organizations active there as well as the way each function should be taken into consideration by an organization in their social media activities. The honeycomb model is accompanied by a guideline – the four C's – which are actionable steps for managers to understand, plan, create, monitor and react on social media in a

way that is effective with that specific social media site and aligns the organization's goals. The first C stands for "cognize", which stands recognizing the surrounding social media landscape, where the organization, its audience as well as its competition operates in. The second C is "congruity" represents the creation of strategies that align with the different functionalities of the social media site as well as the goals of the organization, as well as the setting of suitable metrics to monitor how these goals are met. Third comes "curate", which stands for understanding what type of content is suitable for that site and when it is suitable for the organization to take part in conversations related to it. Finally, the fourth C is "chase", which stands for the continuous monitoring of the social media environment in order to keep up to date with the conversations and other important information on the platform. Additionally, it means continuous development of the organization's understanding of their audience, their competitors and potential future trends. (Kietzmann et al., 2011.) However, the boundaries between different social media types are vague at best, as platforms continue to change and develop by adding features that can drastically change the way the platform is being used (Ortiz-Ospina, 2019).

The scope of this thesis is limited to social networking sites, in the case of this thesis Facebook and Instagram. In addition to the reasons given in detail in chapter 1, one important factor is the public nature of social media, which makes it more suitable for political discourse (Kruse et al., 2018). Furthermore, according to Juholin (2001) already in the beginning of 2000s political elections were seen to be taking an increasingly market-oriented approach in the form of standard marketing tools and strategies like marketing research, segmentation and target audiences. This trend has continued in the past two decades, as new technologies like social media have been quickly adopted implemented by politicians and their teams (Strandberg, 2011). However, it needs to be understood *why* political marketers have adopted social media sites so quickly as a way to reach potential voters in the past decade. This chapter explores the history of social media and looks at the potential reasons for its exponential rise in popularity and adoption by both consumers and organizations alike.

### **2.1.1 From Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 and forward**

Social media sites would not exist if it weren't for the Internet. The era shortly after the invention of the World Wide Web in 1991 is often called the Web 1.0, where communities of like-minded people as well as early businesses began creating infrastructure and communities based on their interests, albeit in a very limited and often read-only way, meaning there was little or no interaction between users. (Dijck, 2013; Yen, Zhang, Waluyo and Park, 2015.) The first online communities were limited by the technology at the time, which did not allow for real-time, two-way communication. Instead, the communities were used for one-way publishing of one's thoughts and content. This began to change with the development of communications technology, the Web 2.0, which allowed for instant messaging between individuals and communities. During the early 2000s

first platforms with interactivity in focus were launched, some prominent examples being the blogging platform Blogger, Wikipedia, Facebook and YouTube. (Dijck, 2013.)

These platforms allowed users to interact with other users, both friends and strangers across the globe, with unprecedented speed and ease. People could freely create groups and gather around a common interest. New platforms were constantly being created with an increasing selection of tools for users themselves to create and share content. Platforms like YouTube (launched in 2005) allowed uploading and sharing of online videos in a time when only a fraction of people even had a smart device that was capable of capturing low-quality images, let alone video. Thus, the Web 2.0. empowered the average user greatly, giving them not only the chance to choose the platforms and the content creators they wish to follow but also the chance to create and share content themselves. (Dijck, 2013.) Some researchers are already discussing the possible next step, Web 3.0, as an extension of the current networks and platform. They estimate that the next step in web technology will address the way information from different sources is linked together through an interface that allows more efficient use of said information. (Yen et al., 2015.) Some also argue that Web 3.0 could address the monopolization of user data from various online platforms to few corporations like Google and Amazon by giving the control back to the individual users (Zonto, 2020).

It is still too early to say how the development of internet technologies and changes in use of online networking platforms will affect political marketing. However, looking back at the rapid rise of social media sites and their effect on communication, change might be just around the corner.

### **2.1.2 Types of content on social media**

As the adoption of social media platforms continues to increase with both consumers and organizations alike, from an organization's perspective understanding what type of content on social media is most effective for getting the audience's attention becomes also increasingly important. (Kim, Spiller & Hettche, 2014; Pletikosa Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013; Sabate, Berbegal-Mirabent, Cañabate & Lebherz, 2014.) Having a sound social media strategy, including using suitable content types, allows the organization to better understand the audience's habits and preferences and increases the likelihood of consumers sharing the brand's content with the rest of their social network (Sabate et al., 2014). While different social media platforms offer various ways of sharing different content, for the purpose of this research Facebook and Instagram will be looked at more closely.

At the time of writing, photos, videos, as well as live video and "stories" that last for 24 hours and then disappear were supported by both Facebook and Instagram. Text-based status updates as well as links to external sites can be posted on Facebook, unlike Instagram, which mainly keeps content sharing on the platform (Chi, 2020; Instagram, 2020). While the specific ways and types of



content sharing have changed and are likely to continue changing on these two platforms, researchers have categorized suggest general content types: Pletikosa Cvijikj & Michahelles (2013) present four types, which are 1) status updates, 2) photos, 3) videos and 4) external links, while Kim et al. (2015) further aggregate them into just three types - 1) text, 2) photos and 3) video. These two categorizations are identical with the exception of "external links" and this type as the time of writing is only applicable to Facebook and in such a limited extent to business accounts on Instagram, that it will not be taken to consideration here. Furthermore, it is suggested that media types can be further evaluated by their perceived level of "vividness" or how visually striking they are (a video is more vivid than a text update) and by their level of interactivity (e.g. asking the audience) (Pletikosa Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013).

There is no simple answer as to what is objectively the best content type on social media, as it is argued that actions such as liking, sharing and commenting are fundamentally different and are based on different variables and require different levels of effort. (Sabate et al., 2014.) Furthermore, what as an engaging piece of content may be very different to the audience than it is to the organization (Kim et al., 2015). Current research suggests that picture content is even more effective than video when the goal is to receive comments and facilitate conversation with the audience (Kim et al. 2015; Pletikosa Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013; Sabate et al., 2014). This is perhaps due to pictures being easier to consume at a glance compared to videos, which makes it more likely for the audience to take the effort of leaving a comment. It is also argued that content that gives benefits or evokes emotions is more likely to result in more in-depth engagement with the content. (Sabate et al., 2014.) Video on the other hand, while highly vivid, appears to be an effective to receive likes and shares, but not in facilitating discussion (Pletikosa Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013; Sabate et al., 2014).

Finally, when it comes to when is the best time to post content on social media, posting during business hours and workdays is likely to increase the number of comments the post receives. One explanation is that during business hours readers are more likely to browse social media on their computers, making commenting in length easier. Consequently, if the goal is to receive likes and shares, current findings show that it is better suited to post content during off-hours. A possible explanation for this that users prioritize their social network over brand messaging during peak hours (Pletikosa Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013; Sabate et al., 2014.)

Overall, success in branded social media communication depends on multiple factors. Not only does the content and media type of the post matter, but also when it is posted. Marketing on social media depends on choosing the right platform, the right media type and fitting content to that specific audience on that platform (Kim et al., 2015). This thinking aligns with the honeycomb model presented in chapter 2.1, which emphasizes the importance of understanding your environment, who your audience is and how can you interact with them in a meaningful way that bring value to both sides.

### 2.1.3 Social media use in numbers

According to a report by Our World in Data (Ortiz-Ospina, 2019), 3,5 billion people out of the 7,7 billion use online services like the internet – nearly half of the human population. The amount of people using social media platforms has risen steadily over the past decade – as seen in Figure 4 below, in 2010 there were less than a billion social media users in the world. By the end of 2020 the number is estimated to nearly triple to 2,96 billion (Statista, 2020a), meaning that one third of the world’s population and two thirds of all internet users across the globe will use social media.

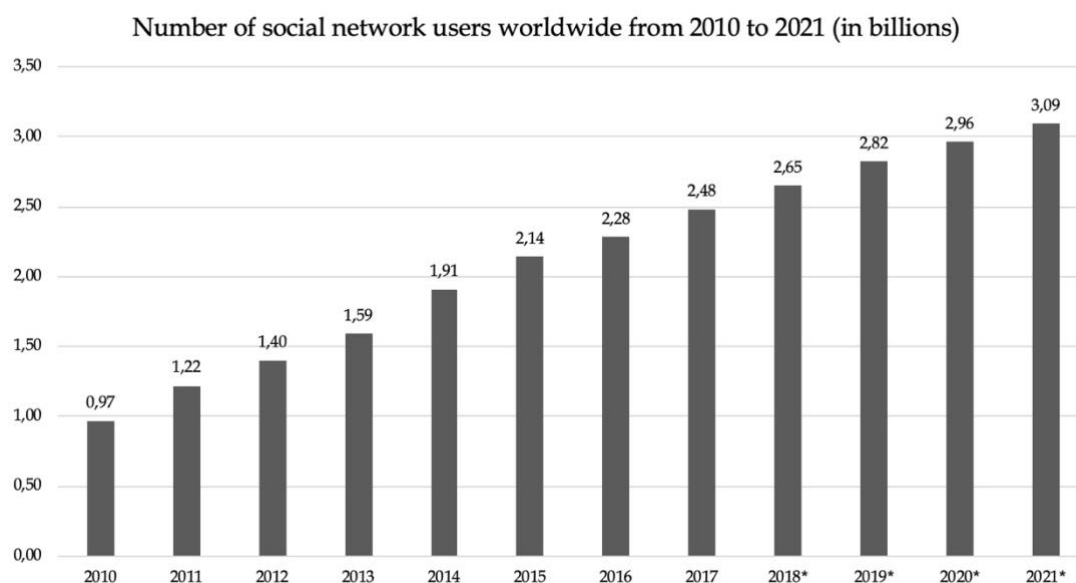


FIGURE 4. Number of social media users worldwide from 2010 to 2021. Adapted from Statista, 2020, retrieved March 1, 2020 from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/278414/number-of-worldwide-social-network-users/> Copyright 2020 by Statista

Of the existing social networking sites, Facebook and Instagram are of special interest for the purpose of this thesis, as explained in chapter 1. As of January 2020, Facebook had over 2,4 billion users worldwide, while Instagram has roughly one billion users, as seen in Figure 5 on the next page.

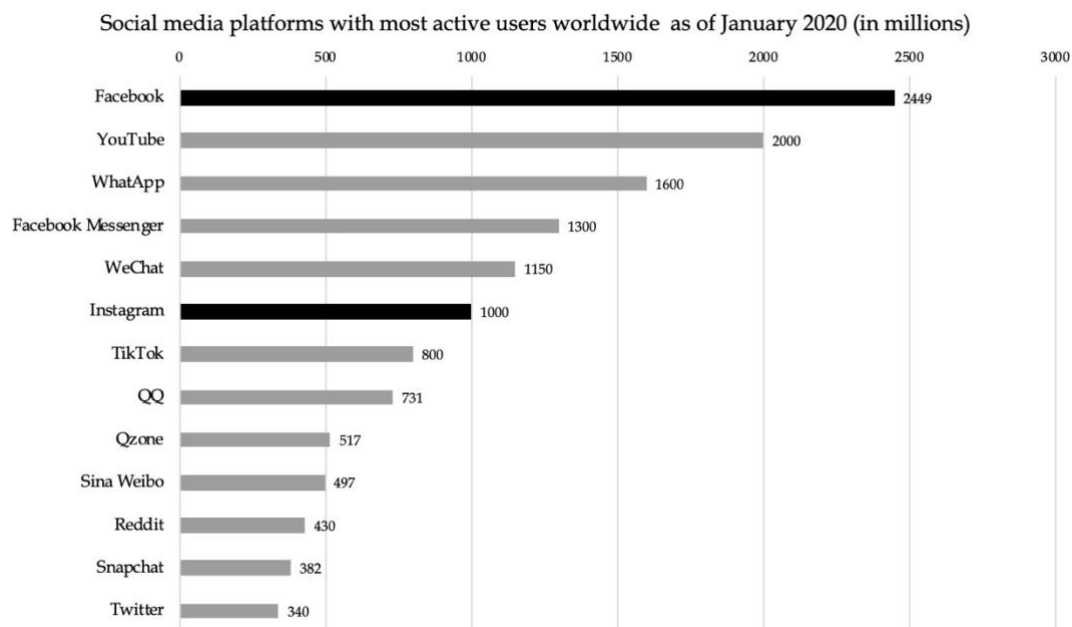


FIGURE 5. Social media platforms with most active users worldwide as of January 2020. Adapted from *Statista, 2020*, retrieved March 1, 2020 from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/> Copyright 2020 by Statista

While various online communities existed before social media, the first platform to reach a million monthly users was Myspace in 2004 (Ortiz-Ospina, 2019). Since then the platform has been dwarfed by giants like Facebook, which as of Q1 of 2020 boasts a monthly userbase of 2,6 billion worldwide (Statista, 2020b), while the latest data available for Myspace estimated its monthly userbase to be only 7,55 million users in February 2019 (Statista, 2020c). While many of the major social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube have existed for over ten years, some of the largest platforms today such as Snapchat and TikTok have emerged much more recently (Ortiz-Ospina, 2019). Some of the new social media platforms also gain users in an astonishing speed; TikTok launched in late 2016 in China and by April 2020 already had 800 million users worldwide (Kemp, 2020).

But the exponential rise of the likes of TikTok is not unique, as the social networking site landscape has shown to be volatile in the past. Platforms like Hi5, Friendster and Myspace were real competitors to the likes of Facebook in mid-2000s, but in the scope of just four years from 2008 to 2012 the formerly mentioned platforms had lost practically all of their market share. (Ortiz-Ospina, 2019).

Furthermore, in the United States 73 % of social media users aged 18-24 use Snapchat, while only 9 % of users aged 50-64 use said platform. Instagram is used by 75 % of users aged 18-24, when the number for users in the 50-64 age bracket is just 23 %. Facebook and YouTube are on average (73 % and 69 % respectively) used by the majority of all social media users, regardless of age. While the adoption of social media has increased in the past decade, the use of social media

is much more frequent for young people. The difference in the “gradient” or the degree of heterogeneity between age groups varies significantly between different social media platforms. While the difference in the use of Facebook between 18-24 and 25-29-year-olds is just 8 %, with Snapchat in the same age bracket the change is already 26 %, showing an even larger gap between users 30 and older. (Ortiz-Ospina, 2019.)

Gender is another factor that should be taken to consideration when marketing to a specific audience. While some platforms are used by both men and women proportionally, like WhatsApp, others like Pinterest and Instagram are more popular with the other gender (41 % of women use Instagram, as opposed to 31 % of men, and 42 % of women use Pinterest, as opposed to just 15 % of men). There are some differences between genders even on the major platforms like Facebook (75 % of women use Facebook compared to 63 % of men) and YouTube (78 % of men use YouTube compared to 68 % of men). Age and sex-related trends and differences vary from platform to platform and they are likely to evolve as existing platforms mature and new ones emerge. (Ortiz-Ospina, 2019.)

Next, the change that might be most visible is in the types of mobile applications that have emerged in the past years, such as TikTok and Snapchat. Digital media like social media sites are being accessed increasingly through mobile devices like smart phones and tablets (Figure 6 on the next page). In the U.S. just 11 % (0,3 hours out of 2,7 hours) of the total time spent on digital media was on mobile devices in 2008, when in 2018 it was already 57 % (out of total 6,3 hours per day). Not only is mobile today the main device-type for consuming digital media, but the daily amount of time spent engaging with digital media has increased significantly by 133 %. This means that many consumers are more likely to be reached through digital media than traditional medium such as newspapers, radio or even TV. As mentioned earlier, the transition to mobile can be seen in the types of applications many younger users have adopted, such as TikTok and Snapchat which exist exclusively on mobile devices. Older platforms like Instagram can be browsed on a computer, but the experience is greatly reduced, and it is possible to create content only through a smart device. (Ortiz-Ospina, 2019.)

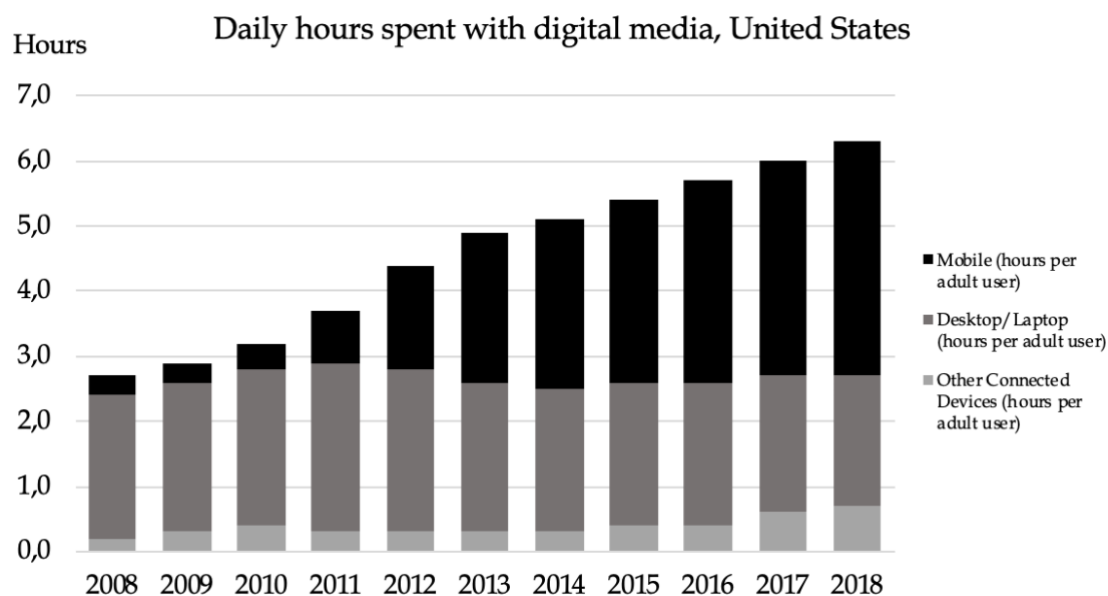


FIGURE 6. Daily hours spent with digital media 2008-2018 (U.S.). Adapted from *Our World in Data* by E. Ortiz-Ospina, 2019, retrieved January 18, 2020 from <https://ourworldindata.org/rise-of-social-media> Copyright 2019 by Our World in Data

Finally, the amount of time spent on social media appears to be much higher in wealthy countries. According to the report this is partially explained by a nearly universal access to the internet, which is especially apparent in countries like the U.S., the U.K. and the Nordic countries. For example, in 2014 in Sweden 96 % of young people aged 16-24 reportedly use social media frequently. (Ortiz-Ospina, 2019.)

Literature on social media usage in political marketing mostly focuses on the U.S. market. Use of social media networks can vary from country to country and a social media marketing strategy for a specific target audience may not be effective elsewhere by default. This thesis looks at the use of social media from the perspective of political marketing, which in the case of national politics narrows down the potential audience. Depending on the candidate, the party and the policy the audience can vary by region, country, city and even by district. As the political campaign in the case study for this thesis took place in Finland, the next sub-chapter discusses use of social media in Finland.

#### 2.1.4 Use of social media in Finland

Finland at the end of 2019 had a population of 5.5 million (Tilastokeskus, 2020). The country has a high internet penetration rate of 90 %, meaning almost all of the population on average use the internet in one form or another. According to the report the trend of increasing mobile use is also visible in Finland, where on average 80 % of those who use the internet daily use it on a mobile device and 98 % of those aged 16-34. (Tilastokeskus, 2019b.)

When it comes to social media, the two most popular platforms in Finland are WhatsApp and YouTube, both with 2.8 million users (68 % and 67 % of the all social media users, respectively) with Facebook being third and Instagram fourth largest (65 % or 2.7 million and 40 % or 1,6 million, respectively). Twitter has 900,000 users in Finland (21 % of those using social media) and the number of monthly users and the activity of said users has increased from 2018. While both in Finland and globally Twitter's userbase is much smaller than compared to Facebook or Instagram, it is often used by politicians, organizations and journalists (Isotalus, Jussila & Matikainen, 2018). Especially Finnish political figures and parties are active on Twitter. Therefore, while platforms like Facebook and Instagram may be more suitable at reaching voters, Twitter plays an important role in connecting with other important groups such as journalists, other politicians and organizations. Additionally, over 900,000 people in Finland read blogs. However, the readers are getting older as younger audiences move to other platforms. (Ponka, 2019.) For the purpose of this thesis the focus was narrowed down to the platforms under Facebook Ads, which are Facebook and Instagram.

The amount of Facebook users in fact decreased by 3 % in 2018, which is explained by the decreasing number of young users (ages 13-38) that are moving to other platforms. The number of older users (aged over 45) instead increased, signaling changing demographics on the platform in Finland. Despite the decreasing numbers of younger Facebook users, most frequent Facebook users in Finland are 18-25-year-old women. 77 % of Finnish women are on Facebook, when the number for Finnish men is slightly lower at 68 %. The Finnish Facebook userbase is slightly female-dominated and in the future might be more suitable at targeting older audiences, as younger users move to other platforms. (Ponka, 2019.)

As stated earlier, Instagram is the fourth most popular social media platform in Finland with 1,6 million users, which increased by 5 % in the last two quarters of 2018 (Ponka, 2019). The age distribution of the Instagram userbase in Finland follows global trends, with more women (62 % of women) using the platform compared to men (47 % of men) (Ortiz-Ospina, 2019; Ponka, 2019). Instagram userbase in Finland is young with nearly all 15-26-year-olds, especially women, being on the platform. User numbers increased in almost all age brackets, with a slight decrease from 2018 in the younger 13, 15 and 17-year-old users, as well in the 27-year-old bracket (as it is not consistent with the surrounding age groups, the accuracy of this change should be questioned). Overall, Instagram in Finland has a growing userbase that is younger compared to Facebook, ranging from nearly 100 % of 16-year-olds to 50 % of 39-40-year-old Finns using the platform and as with Facebook, the majority of the Finnish Instagram users are female. (Ponka, 2019.)

It is important to also understand the reasons why Finns use social media and what type of content they wish to see. The main reason for the majority of users in all age groups (16-89) is friends and acquaintances, which is reported by at least 60 % of users between ages 16-44. Other examples of reasons for using

social media are hobbies, relationships with relatives and buy-and-sell groups. An interesting reason of social media use for the purpose of this thesis also emerges – society and politics. Only a minority of Finns look for politics and societal topics on social media, with no more than a little over 20 % of users aged 16-24 and those aged 35-44 reporting interest in said topic. Therefore, social media in Finland is predominantly used to socialize with loved ones and for free-time activities and from the perspective of political marketing there is a gap between political communication and what the targeted audience is looking for, potentially hindering the effectiveness of traditional political messages. (Ponka, 2019.)

Finally, the marketing trends on Finnish social media are explored. The main four trends in Finnish social media are videos, games and raffles, thought-provoking long-form posts looking at trends and the ability to buy products or services directly on Facebook. While all are not directly applicable in political marketing, they should be taken to consideration in planning stages of a political marketing campaign. Use of video (such as video blogs or vlogs, Instagram and Facebook stories) and posting inbound-style high quality content that is not only directly related to voting for the candidate align more with what the Finnish social media users are looking for. (Ponka, 2019.)

For the purpose of this thesis the users aged 18 and above were of special interest on all platforms. The main reason for this is the legal age requirement to vote which is 18 in all governmental elections, including the EU elections (Finnish Ministry of Justice, 2019). The current literature supports the choice of Facebook and Instagram as platforms to reach young voters in Finland. The audience on both platforms consists of more women than men, with the majority of them being in the 18-26 age range. While the number of users in older age groups is increasing in Instagram as well, it is most prominent on Facebook. According to the honeycomb model by Kietzmann et al. (2011) the main functions of Facebook are identity, conversations, presence, reputation and most importantly relationships – in short, Facebook users mainly use their real names and the platform emphasizes adding friends new friends, thus promoting the creation of new relationships and showing publicly how large your network is. This is supported by main motivations Finns report for social media usage, where the main reason for using the site was connecting and communicating with friends and acquaintances (Ponka, 2019). However, as the report by Ponka (2019) states, the topic of politics is not popular for the majority of social media users in Finland. Still, social media appears to be the best way to reach the younger audience and increasingly the audience over the age of 45. Therefore, the content strategy and the way channels like Facebook and Instagram are used in political marketing should be planned with these realities in mind.

### **2.1.5 Liking, sharing and new rules of social media**

Traditionally in marketing, media content has been categorized into paid, earned and owned media, sometimes called the “media trinity”. Paid media refers to

advertising on traditional forms of mass media, such as television, newspapers and various other platforms. Owned media refers to both offline and online types of media that are created and controlled by the organization. This includes but is not limited to corporate publications, newsletters, reports, websites, blogs and the organization's official social media pages and profiles. Earned media, as the name implies, refers to publicity that is created for the organization by interviews, media releases and other types of editorial coverage by third parties like the national news, business publications and so on. However, the rise of social media has given birth to a fourth type – shared media. Shared media can be described as content that is open to contribution from not only the author, but friends, connections and followers on the platform it has been published in. Majority of social media content fall under this type, as major platforms like Facebook and Instagram do not block commenting or sharing from commercial content similarly to non-commercial content published by individuals. (McNamara, Lwin, Adi and Zerfass, 2016.)

An important characteristic of social media is the minimal amount of moderation on the majority of existing platforms, giving room to organic reactions from the audience. Depending on the content this freedom to react, comment and share can be good or bad. Content that is received well can lead to conversations with the audience, increased visibility and a positive impact on the organization's image. On the other hand, a single post on social media can easily grow beyond the owner's control, especially if it is perceived negatively by the audience. It can be shared beyond the intended audience and the content turned into something the owner initially did not intend. This may even be the case if the original content is deleted, as in most cases what is put on the internet will stay there in one form or another indefinitely. Compared to traditional offline media like print or television, an organization's control on public contribution and comments on shared media is severely limited. (McNamara et al., 2016; Strandberg, 2011.)

New kinds of communication skills are required from organizations to make the most out of shared media. This applies to political marketing as well, where political actors try to get increasingly close to their voters to gain a better understanding of their needs and desires. In the past a politician could leave a rowdy town hall meeting when things got too heated, but today the political discourse online never stops and especially the politicians who are not tech or social media savvy are faced with a new challenging reality. As the consumption of traditional media like newspapers, print and television advertisements reportedly continue to go down, polls indicate people's trust in peer opinions has increased. This goes hand in hand with the increased consumption of social media at the cost of other types of media. (McNamara et al., 2016.)

Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) plays an important part on social media, where practically any content can be shared to other users within seconds. Especially younger female users (aged 18-30) strongly value social connections and the opinion of their peers and celebrities is deemed credible when making buying decisions online. (Djafarova and Rushworth, 2016.) The importance of



earned media in the form of eWOM or online WOM is also recognized by Thornhill, Xie and Lee (2017), who argue that information from a trusted social source could potentially influence consumer opinion and behavior more than owned media.

A question arises whether eWOM and influencer marketing can be applied in political marketing. The 2008 presidential campaign by Obama (Winther Nielsen, 2017) is an example on the importance of word-of-mouth between community members in building a strong brand for a politician. While not as prevalent outside the U.S., political endorsements from celebrities in the form of TV and print ads have been common for decades in United States (Garthwaite & Moore, 2013). Could social media influencers be powerful partners in future political campaigns?

### **2.1.6 Advertising on social media**

*“The growth and increasing sophistication of the digital marketplace has enhanced the capabilities of political campaigns to identify, reach and interact with individual voters”* (Chester & Montgomery, 2017, p. 4)

As mentioned in chapter 2.1.1., since the early days of digital marketing in the mid-90s its core business model has evolved around the continuous collection and monitoring of data from individuals. The users often share either consciously or sub-consciously information on their interests, thoughts and habits, which is collected and analyzed by various organizations with access to that data. As the use of social media has been so deeply integrated to the lives of hundreds of millions and billions of people globally, the amount and quality of data companies like Google, Facebook and Amazon receive on a daily basis is astounding. This data can then be used to create effective advertising content and accurately target it to specific audiences for maximum effect. In the next part of this chapter some of the most important digital marketing techniques are listed that were used in the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign. (Chester & Montgomery, 2017.)

First technique is cross-device marketing – consumers today often use a range of different services on different devices, such as mobile devices, computers, tablets and smart TVs. This phenomenon is called “omnichannel”, where the complete media experience is perceived through a combination of multiple individual services and devices. The authors continue by saying that the easiest way to recognize an individual consumer from others regardless of the device is by them logging on to their user account (using the same e-mail address, for example). The user can also be identified through the use of cookies, their IP address and other identifying data that remains consistent. (Chester & Montgomery, 2017.) This allows also a political campaign to reach potential voters consistently, regardless of the device they are using.

The second technique is programmatic advertising, which stands for the automated purchasing and placement of digital advertising space. This is

achieved through the use of algorithms and computer programs that track the user wherever they go and ensure that the wanted message is displayed to them as consistently as possible. The introduction of programmatic advertising in between 2012 and 2016 elections was one of the largest changes in American politics, as it not only made it possible to reach voters across all digital channels, but it also allowed the creation of real-time digital advertising campaigns that changed alongside the real-life events. (Chester & Montgomery, 2017.)

The third technique is lookalike modelling. While today it is possible to track individuals more accurately, it is also possible to “copy” the most prominent users by creating an audience based on their interests, values and political ideologies. This allows targeting other like-minded users without having direct access to their data or even their consent. Many social media platforms already support this technique either directly or indirectly; Facebook for example has the option to target lookalike audiences on their Facebook Ads platform. In markets where privacy laws are relatively loose, like the U.S, lookalike audiences can be used to complement public voter databases for large and accurate audiences. While in the European Union privacy laws are stricter the use of lookalike audiences can significantly increase the potential audience and reach of a political campaign. (Chester & Montgomery, 2017.)

The fourth technique is online video advertising. Depending on the audience, both short and long videos are highly effective in both traditional and political marketing, as videos are being consumed on mobile devices as well as on computers and smart TVs. While today practically all social media platforms support video, the most popular digital platform for video is YouTube. Through short-form video content the voters can be reached in “micro-moments”, which shape and influence their political decision making. Influencers on YouTube have the largest potential to influence young to middle-aged voters and as discussed in chapter 2.3.4, social media influencers could become as prevalent in political marketing as they have in B2C commercial marketing, which should not be ignored when planning political marketing activities. (Chester & Montgomery, 2017.)

A fifth major technique consists of a combination of psychographic, neuromarketing and emotion-based targeting. Donald Trump’s victorious U.S. presidential campaign in 2016 can be largely attributed to the use of psychographic targeting methods, where users were profiled based on thousands of individual attributes. Through this the campaign found key voter groups that would be most favorable to their political message and by also modifying the message to align better with them. It should be reminded that television advertising is likely to remain relevant, as broadcasters have decades worth of information on viewer behavior and digital broadcasting technology allows ads to be targeted more accurately than before. Using the geographical location of an individual user through geolocation targeting (through IP addresses, GPS and Wi-Fi data, for example) allows for more granular advertising especially in politics, as specific topics can be more influential even on a district level. (Chester & Montgomery, 2017.)

In the U.S. the method of micro-targeting has been used since 2002 to tailor a political message to a specific individual or segment based on the data collected from them (Issenberg, 2019). The data collected online is the combined with information from public voter databases to create even more accurate voter profiles. The methods used in the U.S. cannot be directly translated into other markets, however. While the discussion on online privacy has remained a hot topic for more than a decade, legislation around it varies widely globally. In the U.S., where all the major social media platforms are based consumers have little or no way to stop their data being collected and used when using platforms like Google and Facebook. In comparison the privacy laws in the European Union are much stronger, where privacy is written as a fundamental right to EU citizens. (Chester and Montgomery, 2017.)

The responsible and ethical use of user data in political marketing is crucial for not only in preserving the image of the political actors, but marketing experts alike. Especially in the United States corporations urge the government to keep their regulation minimal and instead let the industry regulate themselves. Self-regulation is argued to often fail to change existing problematic structures and behaviors that benefit the industry. As data collection technologies and the use of social media platforms develop, the discussion around privacy and the use of user data is likely to remain heated globally. (Chester and Montgomery, 2017.) As of late 2019 various social media platforms like TikTok and Twitter stated that they have banned paid political ads on their platforms. These decisions have been largely attributed to the prevalence of “fake news” and the lack of transparency (Perez, 2019; Stewart, 2019). As the importance of social media as a platform for political discourse continues to grow, companies providing these services are under increasing pressure to create clear policies on socially important matters, likely affecting political marketers.

### **2.1.7 Facebook Ads platform**

Various platforms for digital advertising exist, such as Google’s vast digital advertising ecosystem (including Google search, Google display advertising and YouTube just to name a few) and those of Snapchat, TikTok and the like, each offering differing variety of advertising opportunities on their own platform. However, special focus was placed on social media platforms Facebook and Instagram, as they are directly related to the case study used in this thesis. Therefore, the digital advertising solutions offered for these two in the form of Facebook Ads were studied.

Facebook offers a wide selection of services for marketers on the platform. Separated from its actual social media platform is Facebook Business Manager, a web-based control panel where Facebook pages and digital advertisements within the Facebook ecosystem can be controlled. Facebook Business Manager includes various different tools, Facebook Ads being one of them. (Jacobsma, 2019.) Facebook Ads is the main platform where ads for the Facebook ecosystem are created, controlled and monitored. Despite the name, the service can be used

to create and run ads not only on Facebook, but on Instagram (owned by Facebook since 2012), Facebook Messenger (instant messaging app) and Facebook Audience Network. (Facebook, 2019a.) Facebook Audience Network (FAN) is a service launched in 2014 through which ads on Facebook can be shown in eligible mobile apps that are part of the service. (Facebook, 2020.)

Facebook Ads offers marketers a variety of advertisement types, depending on the platform they are aiming to advertise in. As of writing this thesis, Facebook offers seven types of digital advertising within the Facebook ecosystem Feeds, stories, in-stream, search, messages, in-article and apps and sites. (Facebook, 2019b.) Depending on the type of advertisement, it can be displayed on one or more of Facebook's platforms. For example, a feed advertisement can be displayed not only on Facebook, but on Instagram as well. In addition to the different types of ads, the way the ads behave, and report results can be tuned based on the objectives a user sets for an ad campaign, specific ad or group of ads (called an ad group). (Facebook, 2019c.) The performance of Facebook ads is monitored through various metrics, such as ad reach, ad clicks, cost-per-click, ad impressions, ad frequency and conversion rates (Animalz, 2020). In addition, both platforms have a service called Stories. Called Facebook Stories and Instagram Stories respectively, these are a temporary type of content that once posted only lasts for 24 hours. These stories can include pictures or videos and both services include a set of tools to add text, various graphics, location tags as well as external links on top of the picture or video footage. (Facebook, 2019d; Tillman, 2020.) The two services are linked, and the same Instagram Story can be automatically posted to Facebook Stories and both can also be advertised in through Facebook Ads. However, as of writing Instagram Stories is more popular of the two with 500 million daily users (Newberry, 2019) compared to Facebook Stories' 300 million daily users (Aboulhosn, 2020).

### **2.1.8 Effectiveness of social media advertising**

Advertising on social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram is usually characterized by the use of target audiences in order to reach an audience that would be especially responsive to a specific ad. This is usually seen in the form of personalization; the advert and its content will be personalized sometimes even on an individual level based on the audience's perceived interests and desires. (Tran, 2017.) In political marketing the use of targeted advertising, or microtargeting, has become an important part of campaign strategy due to its ability to reach target audiences that would otherwise be difficult or impossible to persuade within the means of the campaign (Kruikemeier et al., 2016).

Overall, current findings show that personalized ads on Facebook can have a dramatic effect on the effectiveness of the ads and how the targeted audience thinks of the ads. Successful personalization of targeted advertising is seen to increase the credibility of the brand, improve attitudes towards it and reduce the amount of negative responses towards the advert. Additionally, the more relevant the message of the advertisement is to the recipient the more

positively it is perceived by the recipient. The previously mentioned benefits can then increase the recipient's intention towards the ad and the brand. (Tran, 2017.) However, whether this effectiveness translates to political content is disputed: According to Ran & Guy (2013), the ability to engage and share content on social media platforms may prove effective in reaching younger voters, who in the past have been found largely uninterested in politics. Kruikemeier et al. (2016) on the other hand argue that audiences for political marketing content would not receive personalized adverts as well, especially when they noticed it was a "sponsored" or paid advert. This led to negative reactions and it became unlikely that the recipients would share the content within their network, thus limiting its reach.

## 2.2 Branding

According to Phipps et al. (2008), branding as a concept has evolved significantly from its initial use in traditional consumer marketing. Phipps et al. state that today not only are products and services being branded, but also people and organizations. Aaker (2010) further describes a brand as a strategic asset and at best a competitive advantage. American Marketing Association (2020, para 1) defines a brand as

*"name, term, sign, symbol or design, or a combination of them intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of other sellers".*

Based on the definition it can be argued that political entities such as parties or candidates fit the definition of a brand. Furthermore, this is true because political actors behave in ways of a brand to consumers (the voters). If one thinks of political parties, each of them has a distinctive name, a logo and a message which they use to differentiate themselves from each other. (Smith & French, 2009.) Consequently, it can be argued that the general theories of marketing and branding theory could also be applied in a political context to an extent (O'Shaughnessy & Henneberg, 2002). When talking about branding, what then is a political brand?

According to Phipps et al. (2008) the political brand of an individual candidate is affected by three variables; the corporate brand of the political party they are affiliated with, the general political climate and their own personal brand. Smith and French (2009) on the other hand argue that the key elements to a political brand are the party, the politician and the policy they drive. Finally, from a party perspective the following six aspects are suggested to be fundamental for a political product or brand; the political party, its policies, leader of the party, candidates, the issues the party drives and finally the services it provides. However, it is argued that consumers could not individually identify these

aspects nor make a decision based on them. (O’Cass, 2003.) Based on the literature it seems that the core aspects of a political brand are the political party, the candidate and the policy. All three have aspects in themselves that need to be taken into consideration in the brand building process.

Furthermore, a brand can be perceived from either an internal or an external perspective. The concept where the brand is seen from an internal perspective is called brand identity. Brand identity can be “conceptualized as the intended projection, formulated and communicated by the brand’s creator” Pich & Dean (2015, p. 1354.) Others describe it as the “internally envisaged aspirations communicated to the target audience” (Pich & Armannsdottir, 2015, p. 2). In other words, brand identity is the internal construction as what the brand is hoped to be understood and seen. The external perspective, or brand image, can then be defined as the mental, emotional and cognitive constructions that one or more individuals attach to a specific brand. Therefore, it can be said that brand identity is the internal image of the brand as its owner wished it to be seen, and brand image is how that message is received by the audience. The external brand image cannot be fully controlled by the brand owner, as the extent to which they can affect the way recipients perceive and process a brand is limited. (Pich & Armannsdottir (2015.) In political marketing, the internal perspective would be that of the political party or candidate and the external perspective that of the audience or the voter (Smith and French, 2009).

For the purpose of this paper the focus was put on the individual political candidate instead of the political party. The two, however, are closely linked especially in European democracies where a system of multiple political parties is common. The individual candidate is even more prominent in a candidate-oriented system such as the one in the United States where their affiliation to a specific political party is less important. (O’Shaughnessy & Henneberg, 2002.)

### **2.2.1 Personal political brand**

The concept of personal branding has roots in the 1997 article by Tom Peters called “The Brand Called You” (Labrecque et al.; Luca, Ioan & Sasu, 2015). As it is with traditional branding of products and services, personal branding aims to crystallize a person’s strengths and unique traits and then communicate them to the chosen target audience. The importance of personal branding stems from the assumption that if one does not take care of their own brand, someone else will and it may not align with the desires of the person in question. Today, platforms like social media offer powerful tools to brand oneself through social media profiles, blogs and websites and the use of search engine optimization can make it more likely for that information to be found by the desired audience. (Labrecque et al., 2011.) While digital mediums offer the unique opportunity to build tailored personal brands that fit different target audiences, this is perceived as a risk to the brand’s authenticity (Labrecque et al., 2011) and in politics maintaining one’s authenticity is seen as extremely important (Armannsdottir et

al., 2019). But are there some personal characteristics that are viewed more favorably than others?

The concept of brand personality assumes that brands can be given a personality that can be described through characteristics like warmth, friendliness or efficiency. One research suggests that *competence, energy, sincerity, agreeableness, excitement, openness, sophistication, ruggedness* and *conscientiousness* are personality traits of a strong political leader. While energy and agreeableness were seen as basic requirements for a political leader, excitement was seen as especially important when aiming to target younger voters. (Jain, Chawla, Ganesh & Pich 2018.) While politicians see authenticity as one of the most important traits that they wish to maintain, it may be suitable to be at least aware of traits that have been found to resonate well with the intended target audience.

However, the focus of this thesis is the internal perspective of the personal brand. The internal perspective of the personal political brand has remained under-researched, as little study has been conducted based on the personal opinions and thoughts of politicians themselves. To make personal political brand building a systematic, some researchers suggest a process consisting of six stages. The politician should 1) assess their current and desired position as well as ideology. As the politician unveiled these two, they should 2) attempt to see the personal political brand from the perspective of various different stakeholders. The third step is to 3) look for a brand mantra that is clear and differentiates the politician from the competitors and create it if none exist. Subsequently, the 4) online and 5) offline presence of the politician are evaluated - the choice of different communication platforms should support building an intended brand identity. Finally, 6) all the previous steps should align with each other so that they can be integrated into a personal political brand that is whole (Armannsdottir et al., 2019; Philpatrick & Cleveland, 2015).

Furthermore, the building process of a personal political brand can be by its internal stakeholders, persons intimately connect to the politician, such as their campaign team. They are especially valuable as they offer emotional benefits. These emotional benefits enable the brand to be more unique and differentiate itself from the competition. In other words, the internal stakeholders of the brand are a direct connection to the voters and other external stakeholders from their perspective and each of the internal stakeholders represent the brand. Organizations such as a political campaign should then perhaps provide their internal stakeholders opportunities to better understand the core message of the brand, which can lead to increased commitment and effective communication of the brand to external recipients. For example, a motivated, well-informed member of a political campaign can more readily communicate the benefits of the political brand (the candidate) to their local audience in a consistent and relatable manner. (Pich et al., 2016.)

### 2.2.2 Branding on social media platforms

For the purpose of this thesis the younger audience on social media, especially those between ages 18 and 30 were of special interest in terms of branding effectiveness. In order to understand how the younger audience perceives branding activities, their habits and behavior on social media are explored.

As a generalization, the older generations that have not natively used social media for most of their lives often use social media to connect and stay in touch with their personal network. In comparison, the main focus for the younger is to receive “likes.” On a deeper level, these digital natives are suggested to have seven functionalities that these younger generations use social media for: for sharing, for establishing their own presence in their social network through visibility, for having conversations, to create an identity, for establishing and maintaining relationships, for being a part of groups and for maintaining their own reputation and observing that of others. (Florenthal, 2019.) Therefore, current research suggests that in order for an organization to succeed with their branding strategy on social media, they need to create value that the audience finds informative and entertaining (Pletikosa Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013). One researcher says this is especially important for the younger 18-30-year-old audience on social media. Therefore, organizations need to ensure that their branding is engaging, informative and by promoting themselves in a way that aligns with the way the audience wants themselves to be perceived. (Florenthal, 2019.)

Another important aspect in personal branding online is authenticity, which is seen as increasingly important on especially social media platforms, where information can intentionally or unintentionally be misunderstood and thus negatively perceived. Authenticity improves the way the message is received as well as the relationships created with the audience. The internet and social media platforms technically allow multiple profiles and “personalities” of a person to exist but managing them without conflict may prove to be increasingly difficult. Instead, it is suggested that in order to build an authentic online brand it would be more suitable to focus on a single, multi-faceted yet authentic presence. (Labrecque et al., 2010.) Suitability of a single authentic online presence in politics seems apparent, as politicians themselves have stated that having an image that is authentic is very important to their overall credibility in the eyes of the voters (Armannsdottir et al., 2019).

## 2.3 Political marketing

Political marketing is an interdisciplinary field, comprised of theories from both political science and marketing, as well as sociology and psychology (O’Shaughnessy & Henneberg, 2002). As its own sub-discipline political marketing is a relatively new entrant, when compared to established fields like



marketing and political science. Perhaps partially due this, the validity of political marketing as a sub-discipline has been challenged and criticized by some scholars (O'Shaughnessy & Henneberg, 2002; Butler and Harris, 2009.) Criticism towards political marketing is discussed in more detail in sub-chapter 2.3.3.

Marketing as a concept is more often linked to traditional business practices than it has been to politics. However, it is argued that selling a political entity such as a political nominee, a party or a policy has more in common with selling a product or service than one would think. Compared to products or services, what politics sell is an intangible, abstract product. It is not immediate, and it cannot be touched. Rather, it is a promise of a more attractive future, whether it is change in legislation, promise of financial prosperity or something else. (O'Shaughnessy & Henneberg, 2002.) Political exchange has also been described as political parties trading ideas and promises for the support of the electorate. In other words, promises of a better future by political entities are the product that are exchanged for support in form of votes in the next election. (Smith & French, 2009.)

It is this exchange that puts emphasis on interactivity – the voter is not a passive object onto which the message is simply projected to. This fundamental characteristic is what differentiates political marketing from propaganda. Where propaganda is didactic (instructive), political marketing is based on exchange where both parties, in this case the political entity and the voter, have to bring something desirable to the table. Therefore, the voter has the power to choose or choose not to support the political entity, depending on what is being offered. It can be concluded that a fundamental task of political marketing activities is to find out the customer's, in this case the voter's, needs and wants. (O'Shaughnessy & Henneberg, 2002.) Ultimately, one definition of political marketing is given on the next page:

*"[seeking] to establish, maintain and enhance long-term voter relationships at a profit for society and political parties, so that the objectives of the individual political actors and organizations involved are met. This is done by mutual exchange and fulfilment of promises."* (O'Shaughnessy & Henneberg, 2002, p. xiii)

In other words, political marketing aims at communicating and promoting the political actors and organizations in a way that both the voter and the politicians benefit from the relationship. With a complex subject such as political decision-making, voters are likely to do whatever makes the decision-making process easier for them. (O'Shaughnessy & Henneberg, 2002.) Traditional mass media like newspapers, TV and radio and digital media like social media platforms can be effective tools to influence voters and their potential should not be ignored. Not only are political messages being seen on same platforms as entertainment, but the way that those messages are delivered is increasingly similar to entertainment (Maarek, 2014). To better understand political marketing today, it is important to know its history. The next sub-chapter delves into how the

concept of marketing in politics first appeared and how it developed from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to present day.

### **2.3.1 From meeting halls to the social media age**

In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century political communication was much what it had been for hundreds of years. The lack of mass communication meant meetings and speeches were the most important form of delivering a political message, and the candidate's skill in giving speeches and their charisma was what won them elections. (Maarek, 2014.) While the previously mentioned skills and especially charisma are still important in politics marketing took a prominent role in the political campaign for the first time in the 1950s in the US. This was the first time when marketing consultants were hired to use strategies and methods developed for commercial marketing to be used in a political campaign. Direct mail marketing and personalized TV spot ads for each of the then 49 states were used, both of these strategies being derived from commercial marketing. (Maarek, 2008.) Since then, especially in the U.S. but more and more commonly all around the world, the use of advertisement agencies, PR firms and marketing consultants hired to find and persuade potential audiences has increased significantly (Chester & Montgomery, 2017) and has even begun to influence the policies themselves and the strategic planning of the campaign before its launch (Maarek, 2008).

Increasingly, politicians learned that by channeling their personal charisma through television and radio they could reach the end customer, the voter, more effectively (Lachapelle & Maarek, 2015). The evolution of political marketing closely mirrors that of commercial marketing, starting all the way from the 1950s to present day. The term of 'mass-marketing' was coined in the 1950s and 1960s and means the use of mass media like the newspapers, flyers and television ads, first used in commercial advertising but quickly adopted by political marketers as well. (Maarek, 2014). Marketing professionals found out that in the 1960s television could be effectively used to reach and influence the 'swing voters', people less involved and interested in politics, who often 'swung' or decided, through action or inaction, who won or lost an election. By focusing on the personal characteristics and charisma of the candidate and speaking directly to the audience through novel technologies like TV, they bypassed the traditional political structures like the political parties that were seemingly becoming obsolete. (Lachapelle & Maarek, 2015.) Mass-marketing was followed by an era of "direct-marketing", where the scope of marketing communication narrowed down to individual people or households through the use of mass mail, phone calls and the surveying. As digital technologies developed, the trend for commercial marketing and political marketing not far behind has been to find their most personal and sometimes unrecognized interests and behaviors. This has been made possible by various tools and technologies that came about with the rise of the Internet from 1990s forwards, such as cookies in web browsers. (Maarek, 2014.)

The incredibly accurate data based on an individual's behavior is called "Big data" and is today commonly used by large corporations to make their digital marketing activities extremely accurate and personalized to each individual (Chester and Montgomery, 2017). Because of big data, it seems political parties have regained some of the influence they lost when politicians skipped them in order to communicate with their audience directly. This is due to their unique position in between the political and public sphere (Lachapelle & Maarek, 2015). For at least the past 20 years the continuous collection and analysis of data on what people browse and when and more recently on what devices has been at the core of digital marketing processes. Companies like Google have built massive global infrastructures that constantly collect data through their various services, such as the Google search engine and the Google ads platform. (Chester and Montgomery, 2017.)

The digital revolution and the vast amounts of consumer data have had an undeniable effect on commercial marketing, but why has political marketing followed suit so quickly? Digital media has been readily adopted for political marketing purposes due to three key characteristics. The first characteristic is speed; whether it is a piece of text or a picture, thanks to the speed of internet services like search engines and social media platforms any message can be submitted and received anywhere in the world almost instantly. The second characteristic is versatility, as digital media allows to use various types of communication to work both together and separately. Messages can be delivered through blogs, websites, forums and messaging applications like WhatsApp. High-quality pictures and video can be captured and sent anywhere in the world with a smart phone and received and interacted with on platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube. The third and final characteristic of digital media is ease of use; digital media allows not only the politicians to effectively communicate to their audience, but allows for dialogic, two-way communication. (Maarek, 2014.)

One of the first times digital media was used in political marketing was in the 2004 U.S. presidential election, where a candidate used a website, a blog and some of the early social media platforms effectively to promote their campaign and collect funds. Following this in 2005 and 2007 results of major democratic votes in France could be partially be attributed to internet blogs, that managed to gain influence in the continuously digitalizing audience. (Lachapelle & Maarek, 2015; Maarek, 2014.) A major step in the development of political marketing strategy was in 2008, when Barack Obama's presidential campaign in the U.S. hired among other digital media experts a co-founder of Facebook to bolster the campaign's digital footprint. During his 2008 presidential campaign Barack Obama gained almost 3.2 million followers on Facebook and close to a million on Myspace. Political campaigns and candidates were now systematically using social media to gain followers and develop their image. In 2012 Barack Obama's re-election campaign was one of the first to use the trends and habits of its online followers through the use of website cookies, creating data points on millions of followers. (Maarek, 2014.) Following the success of Obama's both campaigns, it

is apparent that online digital platforms and the data they provide have major potential in influencing the voters. As political campaigns continue to adopt tools and strategies from the commercial sector, the concept of a fixed campaign period begins to lose its meaning. Companies never stop promoting their products, why should political marketers? The modern instant news cycle that is available twenty-four-hours-a-day pressures political actors to promote themselves not only during election periods but also in between.

### **2.3.2 Permanent campaign**

Especially now in the age of digital online media, political marketing is rarely limited to the short election period. According to O'Shaughnessy & Henneberg (2002) political marketing is fundamentally permanent, as it is continuously used in policymaking by elected officials and parties. Once elected, in order to maintain approval of voters and attract new ones a continuous political campaign is required (Butler, 2009). However, political marketing outside the election period is not just a digital era phenomenon. In the United States presidents like Reagan, Bush and Clinton have actively engaged in marketing activities throughout their terms since the 1980s (Savigny, 2008).

It seems to be a trend that in the past two decades preparation for the next election by major starts started earlier and earlier. In the United Kingdom in 1997, Tony Blair announced a day after an electoral victory by the Labor party that the campaign for the next election starts now (Savigny, 2008). In 2017 on the same day Donald Trump took office as the president of the United States, he began fundraising for the 2020 election (Barabak, 2017). Proponents of political marketing argue that it is not only a tool to win elections, but should be integrated in the governing process itself; marketing allows the politicians to continue interacting with their voters between election periods, improving accountability while also allowing the voters to take part in the democratic process (Savigny, 2008). However, problems may arise if political marketing affects the very creation and implementation of policy itself and thus political marketing and its effect on elections and governments are not seen only as a positive by all. These challenges are discussed in chapter 2.3.4.

### **2.3.3 Political marketing in Finnish elections**

Commercial marketing strategy and techniques have been in use in Finnish politics since the 90s and early 2000s and as such it is not new, social media or even digital media related phenomenon. This was amplified by the "Americanization" of political discourse – campaigns began to center around the candidate and single-issue-agendas and having professionals in the campaign team became increasingly important. (Juholin, 2001.) As such, Finnish politicians have quickly adopted new technologies in political communication and

marketing over the years, from websites to blogs, targeted digital advertising and social media (Strandberg, 2011).

Finland's political system is a multi-party system which is discussed in detail in chapter 3.2 – in short, it has multiple parties of varying sizes and on a wide political spectrum. As such, it is argued that the internet has leveled the playing field, allowing for smaller parties and candidates to gain visibility more effectively and thus compete with the larger, more established parties (Strandberg, 2009). Traditionally in communication and marketing the largest benefits go to the early adopters, and politics are not an exception. The rapid rise of social media platforms in the past decade and the powerful examples set by American political campaigns of Obama and Trump have taken majority of the population and politicians online – as such, competition on social media is amongst politicians for views and followers in Finland is high. (Strandberg, 2011.) In the early days of social media, the very adoption of a platform could have made the image of a politician more youthful and modern, however today that may no longer be the case. Especially the younger audience uses social media and other online services constantly – thus being present is more of a necessity rather than a novelty. The quality of content thus becomes increasingly important in order to get the attention of younger voters (Leppäniemi et al., 2010)

#### **2.3.4 Criticism towards political marketing**

Political marketing as a science and practice has faced criticism from some scholars. While challenging a new discipline is justified to ensure scientific rigidity, some criticism is linked to questionable marketing activities carried out by organizations and individuals, both in and outside politics (Butler & Harris, 2009). According to O'Shaughnessy & Henneberg (2002) part of the research community is strongly of the opinion that political marketing as a concept is moot and should not be involved with political science. Savigny (2008) even argues that political marketing undermines democracy and leads to voters becoming disconnected from actual politics.

This disconnection from actual politics has had two consequences. First is the depoliticization of politics, where the campaign aims to focus at the swing voters, who are seen as most influential towards the outcome of a political campaign. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, swing voters are generally less politically inclined, thus requiring a message that is less political. As the focus of the campaign narrows down to reach these swing voters, it is more difficult for the general audience to connect with the watered-down political message of the campaign. At worst this can lead to campaigns being populist, catering to the general hopes and fears of the targeted voters instead of the actual policy that is being driven by the political actor. Outside elections this focus on swing voters can affect the kind of policy that gets made; difficult and complex topics may be avoided, as they are deemed unpopular from the voter's point of view and are thus of lesser value. The other consequence highlighted is the personalization of political communication. Instead of focusing on the political issues and policy,

the campaign instead focuses on the personal attributes of the candidate like their physical appearance, natural charisma or activities in their private lives. (Maarek 2014.) "... The personalities of the front runners become the main reason for casting votes, rather than their political programs or their campaign themes...". (Maarek, 2008, p. 4). Especially in the western world, both in the United States and Europe this has been apparent in newspapers, TV and more recently online on digital platforms like social media. This personalization has had a side-effect where politicians are treated close to celebrities. Not only are their exploits being widely publicized, but politicians know that giving the audience and news outlets something to talk about ensures that they and their campaign receives awareness. (Maarek, 2008.) Furthermore, politics and the traditional marketing process may be fundamentally incompatible. Political marketing may attempt to 'materialize' politics as something that can be acquired and consumed and once it has served its purpose or is unsatisfactory, it can be discarded and replaced. It promotes individualism and discourages long-term commitment to decisions and policy (Savigny, 2008). Political actors who solely rely on marketing to build their communication and let it even dictate the policy they create may run the risk of having their very capabilities in politics be questioned. By using strategies and methods created by commercial marketing in a political campaign and by aligning oneself with the rules and realities of these media platforms may also run the risk of losing control of the image and brand that has been created, further depoliticizing the audience. (Maarek, 2014.)

It is clear that the ethics and the effect marketing theories and practices have had and will continue to have on politics is a complex topic. This thesis challenges the argument that political marketing is of little value in field is politics – on the contrary, the presence of marketing in politics is very real and has been for decades (Maarek, 2008; Maarek, 2014; Chester & Montgomery, 2014). American Marketing Association (2019) in its statement of ethics says that all marketers should "foster trust in the marketing system" and their work should be built on the core values of honesty, responsibility, fairness, respect, transparency and citizenship.

This thesis looks at the role of Facebook and Instagram advertising from the perspective of social networking sites, branding and political marketing. It is apparent that the rise of Web 2.0 and consequently social media has had a tremendous effect on political marketing and the political branding process of candidates and political parties alike. The aim of this thesis is to understand the role of Facebook and Instagram in the personal political brand building process. The analysis of the results will especially look at how theory on political social media advertising and the perceived effectiveness of different types of media and content compares with the views of the case campaign's internal stakeholders. Furthermore, the concept of permanent campaign is of interest, as social media would seem like an effective platform for continuous communication and branding efforts. The next chapter presents the research approach and the steps taken to collect the data for this thesis and presents case campaign chosen for this thesis.

### 3 METHODOLOGY

This chapter introduces and explains the methodologies on which the thesis is built, the approach that is taken to structure and conduct the data collection process as well as how the data is then analyzed and compared to existing literature in both social media networking, branding and political marketing. The focus of this thesis is on paid advertising on Facebook and Instagram through the Facebook Ads platform, as the majority of time and resources spent in digital channels during the election campaign were specifically on these two platforms. Thus, the Instagram and Facebook advertising and its role in the personal brand creation process were of special interest for the purpose of this thesis.

#### 3.1 Case study and action research

To answer the research problem and the subsequent research questions, the research method chosen for this thesis was a single case study with an action research approach. A case study can consist of one or multiple cases (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008) and often studies a particular phenomenon in a particular setting (Adams, Khan & Raeside, 2014). Additionally, a case study can be very useful when the topic being researched can only be studied effectively in its natural setting or when it cannot be easily quantified (Johnston, Leach & Liu, 1999). As the goal of this research was to better understand the role of the Facebook Ads platform and how paid advertising through it on Facebook and Instagram affects building a personal political brand, the scope of this thesis was limited to a single case study, which was introduced in detail in chapter 1.4. A case study approach was fitting, as it allowed for in-depth study of the personal political brand phenomenon in a limited setting. This thesis aimed to gain insight on the internal views of the individuals involved in making both strategic and practical branding decisions, further supporting the chosen research approach.

As the activities of the political campaign organization continued after the parliament elections, the results of a case study approach may produce more actionable results for the future. According to Johnston, Leach & Liu (1999, p. 203) "in consumer research, the vivid, personal, and concrete nature of case study evidence has been found to be more persuasive than statistical findings ". Any potential changes or improvements that can be made into the branding process are therefore more likely to be influential in a lasting way when presented in a qualitative form compared to numerical, quantitative feedback.

As to why the approach of action research was chosen, the main reason was the participation of the researcher in the marketing activities of the case study campaign in the spring of 2019. Action research, or participatory action research is used to describe research, where the researcher participates in the actions being studied along with the research participants (Tracy, 2012). As explained by

Eriksson & Kovalainen (2008), action research is not exactly a research method, rather than an approach for the kind of research that benefits from in-depth participation in the research topic and creating relationships with the other research participants (team members).

### **3.1.1 Author's role in the case campaign**

The author of this thesis was part of the political campaign and responsible for managing and coordinating the campaign's marketing team, consisting of six volunteers. The marketing activities consisted of both the offline and online marketing efforts before and during the campaign period from January 1<sup>st</sup> to April 14<sup>th</sup>, 2019. Thus, the author influenced the performance and decisions made in planning and creating of the marketing strategy, branding and the marketing materials. Because of the in-depth involvement in the case being studied, the author gained deep understanding of the processes as well as the perceptions of different team members before, during and after the campaign period, enabling a better position to gain a holistic view of the personal political brand creating process during the campaign. This supports the choice of action research as an approach, as one is the access; depending on the organization, access to participants and information may be limited, unless one is part of that organization (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008).

The position of the author enabled unique access to a large quantity of rich marketing data as well as the willing participants who were part of the campaign team in the spring of 2019. As such, the information presented about the case campaign in the next chapter that isn't explicitly referenced to be from external sources is the recollections and knowledge of the author themselves. Because of these circumstances, it was suitable to conduct single case study with an action research approach. As the scene for the research has been set, the next chapter discusses how the data for the research was collected, processed and analyzed.

## **3.2 Case campaign**

The case study chosen for this thesis is a single election campaign during the Finnish parliament elections in the spring of 2019. The main reason for choosing this specific campaign was because to the author was part of the marketing team of the campaign as head of marketing. This gave access to in-depth information and data as well as the general attitudes, expectations and understanding of the internal stakeholders of the campaign. The role of the author in the campaign and its effects to the research are discussed in more detail in the next chapter. Additionally, the campaign in question offered an internal perspective into the political branding process of a single candidate in the Finnish parliamentary elections. Furthermore, the campaign heavily implemented social media and other forms of digital media in its marketing, thus touching multiple



points of theory in social networking sites, branding and political marketing that are extremely current in today's digital age and thus it provided a suitable environment to compare current research literature with practice. Next, the modern Finnish political system is briefly discussed, as it provides necessary background information on how the system works and thus explains certain choices made in the campaign structure. Finally, the case campaign and the candidate that are presented.

The Finnish political system is a multi-party and is relatively fragmented. Throughout the years the Finnish political system has remained relatively stable and its core has consisted of three main political parties with various smaller and fringe parties: The Social Democratic Party, the Centre Party, and the National Coalition Party. (Carlson & Strandberg, 2005.) However, today a fourth party, the right-leaning Finns Party has gained significant electoral success and has since 2011 been one of the largest political parties in Finland (Oikeusministeriö, 2019). In the Finnish system the role of the individual candidate is often more important than that of the political party they represent (Strandberg, 2013). This results in personal campaigns that focus on the individual candidate and the fundraising, events and other campaign activities are often driven by volunteer support groups (Leppäniemi et al., 2010).

The candidate is a young official that is a member of the Centre Party in the electoral district of Central Finland. The Centre Party is a moderate, centrist-liberal political party established in 1906 and has in its past been a party that especially drives the matters of agricultural communities (Keskusta, 2020). The candidate of the case campaign has a long history of political activism and had attempted to get elected to the Finnish parliament once before in 2015. The candidate had successfully been elected as a member of the Jyväskylä city council in 2017 and showed interest in running for the parliament a second time in 2019.

At the time of the campaign the candidate was under thirty years old, and thus could be considered a young candidate in the standards of Finnish politics, where the average age in the 2019 election was 46,9 years (Tilastokeskus, 2019a). The candidate also considers themselves as relatively modern, therefore the core themes for the campaign were a combination of conservative and progressive themes: the topics included agriculture, schooling, physical and mental well-being, among others. These topics were used to form target audiences, each based on specific characteristics such as geographic location, social status, profession and so on. Social media advertising and communication had already been used in the previous parliamentary and city council elections and the experiences and crude data from those campaigns were used as the basis for the campaign themes mentioned above.

The campaign topics were mainly aimed at the younger audience (18-30-year-olds on Instagram and 30-65-year-olds on Facebook), while some, such as the senior care and social and healthcare services reform, were aimed also at the older voters. The campaign targeted especially young adults with a higher-level education living in the central Jyväskylä region, as it is an active student city with both a university and a university of applied sciences. The younger audience was

chosen as the main target also because of the younger candidate, thus making connecting with them more natural. In addition, the candidate had already a relatively established social media presence from the previous campaigns, especially on Facebook and Instagram. Based on initial campaign research these two platforms were again seen as good platforms to reach the specified target audience in the 2019.

As it is common in Finnish politics, the campaign consisted only of volunteers. However, the campaign team members were specifically invited and chosen to the team due to their expertise in fields that supported the campaign. For example, many team members worked in various roles in marketing, had in-depth understanding of the Finnish political field or had for example experience in organizing events. Overall, the campaign team had some experience in an election setting and was well prepared to use social media platforms effectively in marketing and communication.

The main goal of the campaign was to get the candidate successfully elected to the Finnish Parliament. In the time leading to spring 2019, the Centre Party's support had been in a national downward trend, which meant that while the candidate had a good reputation as a potential challenger to the current incumbents, success in the elections would still be challenging, especially as the campaign had a relatively modest budget and could not brute-force an electoral success. Therefore, the focus of the campaign was to get the most out of the campaign social media and digital advertising, especially on Facebook and Instagram, both of which had shown potential in previous elections. This way the well-defined target audiences could be reached as cost-efficiently as possible online, while still leaving some resources for traditional media such as live events, print and outdoor advertising.

### **3.3 Data collection: Semi-structured interviews**

Interviews are a useful tool when the phenomenon being studied is complex or sensitive. Therefore, for the case chosen for this thesis, interviews were the natural method for collecting data. The semi-structured interview approach was chosen, as it allows for deeper and unexpected information to emerge, further supporting the results. (Hair, Wolfinbarger, Money, Samouel & Page, 2015.)

TABLE 1. List and description of semi-structured interview respondents

Respondent	Role in case campaign	Interview type	Interview length
R1	Candidate	Skype	55 min
R2	Marketing team member	Skype	47min
R3	Political planner	Skype	1 hour 14 min
R4	Marketing team member	Skype	56 min
R5	Marketing team member	Skype	1 hour 1 min
R6	Marketing team member	Microsoft Teams	1 hour 19 min
R7	Campaign manager	Microsoft Teams	1 hour 32 min

The questions for used for all interviews in this thesis can be found in Appendix 1 and the list of each interview is presented in Table 1 on the previous page. The participants for the interviews were chosen through purposive sampling which is a form of convenience sampling. Convenience sampling means choosing participants based whatever is most suitable based on the availability and suitability of the potential participants as well as the resources and timeframe of the research. Furthermore, purposive sampling stands for choosing participants that best meet a specific purpose. (Hair et al., 2015.) The chosen respondents were all part of the candidate's 2019 Finnish parliament elections campaign team. Each of them held various positions from the candidate themselves to campaign manager, political advisor and team member. This sample represented a large portion of the whole team, thus giving a credible account on the overall views and thoughts of the internal stakeholders in the team on the research topic. None of the team members worked on the campaign full-time, not even the candidate themselves. All respondents were actively in the work-life on their respective fields, and only two worked in marketing, thus potentially having in-depth experience on branding beforehand. However, all respondents were chosen and asked to join the campaign team due to their past experience and what the candidate personally knew from them. The professional background of the respondents was varied; the candidate at the time of the campaign worked in a managerial role in a governmental ministry, while others had experience in local politics, marketing or had an entrepreneurial background. As the respondents were of varying age and social class, the diverse background of the respondents gave grounds to expect the results of the interviews to be equally rich and varied.

The data for this research was collected through seven semi-structured interviews that were conducted through Microsoft Teams and Skype video calls between 16<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> of March 2019. As explained in the beginning of this chapter, the interviews were semi-structured, with the questions 1 to 7 derived from the first research question *"how can the role of Facebook and Instagram advertising in the personal political brand building process be described from the perspective of the brand owner and internal stakeholders?"*, aiming to answer the research question and its sub-questions. The final three questions 8 to 10 were derived from the second research question *"what are the special characteristics of advertising on social media networking sites that contribute to building a personal*

*political brand?*”. However, as the interview was semi-structured, additional follow-up questions were asked from participants depending on their answers and how the discussion evolved during the interview, enriching the interview data.

All of the interview discussions were recorded with the permission of the participants and the recorded answers were further complemented by notes from the author. The interviews were conducted in Finnish, as both the interviewee and all of the respondents were native Finns. This made the discussions as natural as possible, enabling a relaxed interview environment where important information was not left unsaid due to a language barrier.

The data collected through the interviews was stored securely behind a password both offline and online as to be in line with the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) decreed by the European Union in 2018 which requires individuals to have a certain level of control over their personal data (European Commission, 2020). First, all respondents were on record asked whether they agreed to be interviewed and recorded and that their answers could be used for the purpose of the research. As such, only the answers of consenting respondents were used for this research. Second, upon the request of the respondents no other identifying information other than their role in the campaign is revealed in the answers. As such, quotes from the interviews have been scrubbed of potential identifying information. Furthermore, the secondary data from Facebook Ads platform which is analyzed in chapter 3.7 shows only general performance data of individual advertisements and does not have identifying information of any individuals who may have seen them during the campaign. In the next chapter method of analysis is introduced, and the reasoning for choosing that specific method as well as the subsequent steps of analyzing the empirical data.

### **3.4 Analyzing data through thematic analysis**

Thematic analysis was chosen as method of analysis for this thesis, as it is especially suitable for junior researchers to be used in qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This is due to its straight-forward design, allowing for the collected data to be analyzed in a rich and detailed manner and by providing a systematic structure and steps for processing even a large data set (Nowell, Norris, White & Moules, 2017). It is generally accepted that a thematic analysis includes six main steps, each with their own subsequent sub-steps which are as follows; 1.) familiarizing with the data, 2.) generating initial codes, 3.) searching for themes, reviewing themes, 5.) defining and naming themes and 6.) producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017).

Thus, the process of thematic analysis starts by first immersing oneself in the collected data, one excellent way of which is by transcribing verbal interview data, as is the case for this thesis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The interview data

consisted of Microsoft Teams and Skype recordings of individual interviews. Depending on the respondent some interviews had video enabled, while others did not. For the sake of unifying the interview data, only the audio of all interviews was taken into consideration during the transcribing process. Transcribing means the process of writing down what is said during a verbal interview, whether it is conducted face-to-face or for example as a video call, as it was the case for this thesis. Transcribing for this research was done in a simplified manner by writing down and clarifying the core meaning of each answer, instead of writing it down verbatim. It was decided that as all seven interviews were conducted in Finnish, the transcribing process was consequently done also in Finnish.

Next, in order to analyze the transcribed interviews in a scientific manner, the contents were coded (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Coding means going through the empirical data, in this case the transcribed interviews, sentence by sentence in order to label the answers by topic or another generalized characteristic (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). All of the interview data was coded using the same steps and logic, ensuring equal attention and the consistency in the coding process. In this step of the process the language was switched from Finnish to English, thus the codes written for each sentence were in English. Quotes from the respondents that represented the findings well were translated from Finnish to English and are presented in chapter 4. Otherwise translation was kept to a minimum and the actual coding and theme building process was done from start to finish in English.

Once each of the interviews had been coded, duplicates were removed, and similar codes were unified as one and codes that had little representation in the data set or where otherwise incompatible with the final themes were left out. The remaining codes were then analyzed for patterns and connected meanings – thus the next step was to group similar and linked codes into initial themes. A theme encapsulates essential meanings from the interview data in a way that is connected to answering the research questions. In order to constitute as a theme, the responses should show patterns through multiple instances across the whole data set. (Braun & Clarke, 2006.)

These initial themes were created based on the perceived type and the interconnectedness between codes that seemed to have similarities or showed a unifying pattern. The next step was to further refine the initial themes by removing potential overlaps combining similar codes and themes and even discarding those that do not meaningfully contribute to answering the research questions. Once this step was completed and the chosen themes were found to align with each other and no codes could be combined, moved or discarded, a visualized map of the meaningful themes found from the interviews was ready for analysis. This is by some researchers called a thematic “map”. (Braun & Clarke, 2006.)

Once the thematic map had been created, the data within each theme was analyzed in a detailed manner. At this stage further refining can be done within the selected themes if necessary, and sub-themes can be identified that clarify the

structure of a complex theme. Two important aspects of this step were to identify the core narrative and meaning of each theme, as well as to give them a descriptive name that translated the contents of that theme to the reader in a clear and succinct way. (Braun & Clarke, 2006.) The initial themes and codes within were given multiple passes to ensure duplicates and those that lacked enough data were removed. Nowell et al. (2017) suggest that themes should be analyzed and processed at least twice before they are considered final, to ensure enough time and focus has been given to each code and subsequent theme. At the end of this stage each theme had a distinctive name, a detailed analysis that described its contents, where it fits respective to the other themes as well as how it works towards answering the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

For the purpose of this thesis six main themes were identified and they along with their possible sub-themes can be found in the finalized thematic map in Appendix 2. These themes were then covered by the final thematic analysis report. The goal of the thematic analysis report was to give a “coherent, logical, non-repetitive, and interesting account of the data within and across themes” (Nowell et al., 2017, pp. 10-11). Compelling quotes and excerpts from the collected empirical data were presented to support the conclusions made in the thematic analysis report. Overall, the goal of the report is to prove the validity of the research, as well as the credibility of the findings in relation to answering the formulated research questions.

In addition, the unique position of the author within the chosen case study offered an opportunity to enrich the findings and compare the internal views of the interview data to the data available in the Facebook Ads platform. Therefore, the choice was made that the interview data would be compared with secondary performance data of the campaign adverts during the campaign period. This combination of qualitative primary data (interviews) with quantitative secondary data (Facebook Ads) is called mixed methods research, MMR for short (Planko & Ivankova, 2016).

The use of the mixed methods approach is especially suitable in this thesis due to the added depth to the research findings and because MMR is typically used in case study research (Adams et al., 2014). In short, comparing the results of the paid advertising campaigns through Facebook with the interview answers can indicate whether the Facebook Ads data aligns with the expectations and opinions of the campaign team on what constitutes as effective political advertising. The results of the Facebook Ads data are presented and analyzed in chapter 4 and the conclusions based on both the interview and Facebook Ads data analysis are presented in chapter 5.

## 4 RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

In this chapter the results of the semi-structured interviews are presented as well as the analysis based on the findings. The analysis follows the structure of the thematic map presented found in Appendix 2. The results of the interviews are then compared with the Facebook Ads advertising performance data in chapter 4.3 to see how the themes of the thematic map compare with the themes arising from the secondary advertising performance data. The performance data of the advertisements that ran during the campaign period from 1<sup>st</sup> of January till 14<sup>th</sup> of April through Facebook Ads is looked at in order to determine what type of content was most effective in building the candidate's personal political brand. Determining what constitutes as success in brand building from an advertisement's performance data is difficult and not within the scope of this thesis, so only a simple comparison between the best performing Facebook and Instagram ads and the themes of the thematic map is made, is presented in chapter 4.7. Conclusions drawn from both the interviews, the Facebook Ads data and the comparison of the two are represented in chapter 5.

### 4.1 Strategy, goals and resources

During the interviews it became apparent that majority of the respondents saw strategic planning of activities, the mapping of available resources (both budgetary and human resources) and how those resources can be used most effectively towards the goals set during strategic planning. This theme is subsequently divided into two sub-themes, "long-term planning" and "time & resources".

#### 4.1.1 Long-term planning

Strategy and planning arose as a topic with all respondents during the interviews for this research. The respondents stated that strategic planning is necessary in multiple ways in order to effectively and successfully do personal branding for a politician. In the respondents' answers this included brand strategy and consequently communications and content strategy – how the brand should be developed over a longer time period and what type of communication and content would help reach the desired goal most successfully and efficiently.

*"(Facebook and Instagram advertisements) are a useful tool in long-term planning. When you think about an elections campaign you can divide how the brand and story is built over multiple months. Where to begin and how it develops along the way towards election day." (R4, marketing team member)*

While to some of the respondents “long-term” meant the election campaign period and the goal of winning the election of spring 2019, three respondents also stated the importance of thinking about long-term goals beyond just the elections. They stated that if successful, branding should not stop at the end of the elections but continue afterwards to maintain the built brand but to also develop it further. Finnish members of parliament once elected serve for four years, until the next parliamentary election. One respondent felt that the branding efforts would be somewhat “wasted”, if the efforts stopped after the election period ended. Another expressed that branding should be constant and not connected to whether it is the election season or not.

*“(Branding) has to be continuous, not just during the elections or Easter or the summer holidays when there’s time. All marketing connected to branding has to be a part of everyday activities... There should be a content strategy for all communication that the candidate does; for the daily Instagram Stories, video blogs and election communication in general. How do they support my long-term goals that I want to achieve and help me build the image I want?” (R2, marketing team member)*

The call for continuous branding and long-term planning beyond the election season can be associated with the concept of permanent campaign in political marketing literature, which was discussed in more detail in chapter 2.3.2. According to the interviews, however, there should be a distinct difference in the branding activities during elections and outside the elections. According to one respondent during the time between elections the branding efforts should be “less intense” and should rather focus on promote the work that the candidate does in the parliament, thus validating their election and the support of the voters. Two other respondents also say that outside the election period marketing and branding should be about the work that’s being done in the parliament and that the candidate is “there to work”. Two respondents go as far as saying that politicians have a responsibility to keep the voters that elected them updated on what’s going on, further supporting continuous communication with the target audience. Majority of the respondents including the elected candidate themselves, see political branding as a natural extension of the political campaign, from where the brand is developed further. However, according to the interviews the approach during and after elections should be different: during elections branding should focus on the candidate and their personal characteristics and topics that resonate with the chosen target audiences and between election seasons the communication should focus on the “work” being done in the parliament by the candidate. This is further supported by the benefits social media platforms offer, as described by the respondents, especially the ease-of-use and open access for both candidates and the target audience. The characteristics of social media platforms from the perspective of personal political branding are discussed in chapter 4.4.



One respondent emphasized the successful end result of the case campaign being attributed especially to strategic planning, as it allowed to structure branding activities and content ahead. This enabled the branding to be effective towards the defined target audiences and left time and resources for monitoring and fine-tuning based on audience reactions, engagement and feedback to branding activities.

*“In my opinion (our campaign) is a good example (of building a personal political brand): it was planned as a team, although the process was led by the candidate. The corner stones of the campaign were thought out well ahead and how the campaign is paced all the way to election day. There was the common thread, which channels to use, what to promote and what the general image was.” (R4, marketing team member)*

The interview responses mention platform strategy, which to different respondents meant different things. Others mentioned the importance of knowing what kind of content works on certain platforms, in this case Facebook and Instagram, while one respondent said choosing to use certain platforms already brands the candidate in a certain way. This is to say that different social media platforms are seen to promote a certain type of identity for the user. As seen from the social media user demographics in chapter 2.1.3, Instagram userbase at the time of writing is younger compared to Facebook, and this general view of demographic divisions between Instagram and Facebook were held by majority of the respondents.

*“When you want to reach people 18 to 50-year-olds... (social media platforms) are the tools where (branding) is done cost-efficiently... In my experience (Facebook user demographic is older), yes. There are younger users as well, sure, but the majority are more old and adult users... Instagram is where younger users and 18-year-old go to.” (R5, marketing team member)*

*“No age group should be down-played, but the age profile is certainly younger, when talking about digital communications, especially on social media.” (R7, campaign manager)*

As mentioned earlier, others saw platform strategy as what type of branding and types of content are most effective for the personal political branding process. The two platforms in the focus of this research, Facebook and Instagram, were seen to have some distinct differences content-wise. While both platforms support both video and pictures, on Facebook the responses stated that marketing content and communication should be more text-based and that the platform can be used to explain topics in more detail and in longer form, with the tone-of-voice being more matter-in-fact. In comparison Instagram was seen as mainly visual and more relaxed compared to Facebook.

*“In my opinion on Facebook a post can be a bit longer, if we talk about the written part along with a ... video or picture. There (the text) can be longer, have more narrative and fill in the background more ... On Instagram in my opinion the message has to be visually interesting ... it has to be very simple.” (R1, candidate)*

Interestingly, the candidate themselves saw Instagram as the platform where content should be more “stylized”, while rest of the respondents saw Instagram content more relaxed, focused on emotions and “being in the moment”. The respondents stated that part of a communication strategy was to ensure that all brand stakeholders have a common understanding of the tone-of-voice and style of the personal political brand. This is only to say that even with extensive planning, such as that which took place during the case campaign, conflicts in views like the one above can happen, further highlighting the importance of well-timed strategic planning amongst the stakeholders taking part in branding activities. The types of content the respondents felt were most impactful for the personal political branding process are discussed in more detail in chapter 4.5.

#### **4.1.2 Time & resources**

The topic of resources, both in time and in campaign funds arose with majority of the respondents as an important factor affecting the marketing campaign and the subsequent branding activities. One respondent stated that when contemplating whether a specific social media platform is suitable and worthwhile, it should be considered whether it the best use of the resources available.

The amount of resources can vary widely between election campaigns, from bootstraps approach of a lone candidate to fully professional campaigns outsourced to marketing agencies with tens if not hundreds of people involved. In Finland the budgets for parliamentary elections have increased significantly in the past election cycles, with the budget for elected candidates being on average 40 000 euros and the increase in communication channels used requiring more resources (Yle Uutiset, 2020). Majority of the respondents agreed that social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram are seen as worthwhile additions to political campaigns and as effective tools in reaching certain audiences and achieving a level of interaction not possible with other platforms. However, the interactivity, fast pace and 24/7 communication cycle are seen not only as an opportunity but also as a challenge.

Next, two respondents stated that a characteristic of Facebook and Instagram that helped the campaign use its resources effectively was the ability to schedule messages, pictures and video in advance through a unified platform, in this case Facebook Ads. Scheduling allows for the desired content to be set to be published to the target audience at a set time and day and can be done days, weeks or even months in advance. In the case of Facebook Ads, it is a unified platform for managing and publishing adverts and posts for both social media platforms and the platform was described in detail in chapter 2.1.6. As the

respondents stated earlier in chapter 4.1.1., having a content strategy that maps out the development of the brand through the campaign period is important for a consistent personal brand building process to take place. The ability to schedule content in advance seemingly would support this strategic goal as well.

*“At least I feel that ... when the advertising can be done through a single app, it did save time.” (R1, candidate)*

*“... You can build pre-scheduled and pre-targeted adverts for people and drive them to content and to get impressions that we want at a certain time.” (R4, marketing team member)*

It is important to remember that while social media and digital channels had an extensive role in the case campaign, it still extensively used traditional methods of campaigning, such as street campaigning, events, print ads and television. All this requires resources, either in the form of man hours from the candidate or the campaign team or through bought services. Whether these traditional channels are needed at all in the political marketing setting is discussed in chapter 4.4.2. The respondents in the research highlighted especially the need for human resources in the form of campaign staff. It was highlighted that as the style of communication on social media is constant, participation needs to be carefully considered based on the resources available during and between elections.

*“It takes resources to be present (on social media) and monitor what’s going on. You can run into all kinds of interaction, also negative. People expect that you are present and answer comments, so this should also happen. You can’t use a channel and then not be present, if there is a conversation. So, there are risks, whether you have the necessary resources to commit to it.” (R4, marketing team member)*

Thus, the way one is present on social media is seen to affect the brand image being built there, just being there is not enough, the candidate needs to actively take part. For example, if part of the brand strategy for a candidate is to promote them as someone who can be reached out to whenever on social media, the candidate and the possible extended team must be prepared for it, otherwise there is a conflict between the brand image and reality which can alienate the audience. Two respondents stated that even if a communication strategy has been made, each message had to be vetted by the candidate in one way or another. Should this be done regardless, or could this have been avoided by trusting the communication plan? Having the candidate check each advert and message can defeat the purpose of having a team of multiple people, as each decision needs to wait for one single person. Using the resources available effectively is clearly seen as a challenge, which may be further amplified by the trend of increasing campaign budgets and wider use of different communication channels in modern politics.

*“Human resources are a real challenge. When talking about political branding or marketing, the politician themselves needs to be very much present so the message matches the product, in this case the politician. So even if you had human resources, it takes the time of the candidate anyway.” (R1, candidate)*

Three out of the seven respondents brought up resources as an important variable. Especially for the case campaign and many smaller campaigns like it, the lack thereof. Therefore, it becomes apparent that additional hands and expertise are likely to improve the branding process during a political campaign, even on social media despite it seemingly making communication easier. As discussed later in this chapter, it may take some time until digital media like social media completely replaces traditional ways of campaigning such as live events, print and TV ads, so resources cannot be wholly committed to social media activities just yet. In order to use social media platforms effectively to build a personal political brand that seems authentic and approachable, there needs to be enough interaction to make true on the given brand promises. The candidate thus needs to be aware of the time and monetary requirements of social media before committing.

*“On this level (personal brand building), could not have been done alone... Having a team or even just one extra pair of hands is necessary, so you have time to do enough along all the traditional activities. You have time to monitor, react and refine the social media marketing based on what works and what doesn't. When the election day is getting close there's a lot you can learn on what works and what doesn't, and I don't believe there would be time to do that alone.” (R4, marketing team member)*

## **4.2 Candidate's personal characteristics**

Communicating the characteristics and personality of the candidate were considered important by the respondents. The fit between brand identity (internal view of the brand) and the brand image (the brand as seen by the audience) was considered crucial for the effectiveness of creating a successful and authentic personal political brand. This was seen not only important for the political election campaign to succeed, but in order to build a strong and uniform brand for the candidate upon which to build further long-term. The candidate themselves (R1) highlighted that this was even more so the case should one get elected, as was the case for the candidate I question.

*“As an elected representative maintaining a brand becomes harder, as there is more attention and the brand has to match the truth... Because of that it's very important to be honest about the kind of brand you build... A completely*

*manufactured brand will be destroyed completely or there's a risk of a miss-match."*  
(R1, candidate)

*"The (personality and brand) have to align. As live events are part of (the campaign) it would be awkward, if the person ends up being completely different (as advertised)." (R5, marketing team member)*

*"You might be able to get elected by creating a certain brand, but the actions that follow or the lack thereof lead to next elections being a lot harder if it becomes apparent that there is a clear miss-match between the person's brand and actions."*  
(R7, campaign manager)

The relationship between the internal brand identity and the external brand image was discussed in chapter 2.2. The audience builds their perception of a brand based on what they associate with it and in order to build a brand that stands the test of time it should reflect reality (Barbu, 2016). The views of the interview respondents support this as seen above. Facebook and Instagram have functionalities that facilitate personal political branding, yet it requires diligent planning and adequate resources for the branding to remain true and consistent long-term.

Overall, Facebook and Instagram were seen as fitting platforms to communicate desirable traits of the candidate to the target audience. The candidate's approachability, motivations, principles and relatability among others were traits that the respondents argued can be effectively be communicated through social media. This can be linked to communication strategy, discussed in chapter 4.1.1. as well as knowing the target audience, discussed in chapter 4.3.2.

According to the interviews the effectiveness of how well these traits can be communicated and whether the audience see them as representing the candidate is partially based on the social media skills and expertise of both the candidate and their marketing team. The threshold for immediate one-on-one dialogue on social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram is extremely low, putting the candidate as well as the team to the test on a daily basis, likely many tens of times, even more depending on the scale of the campaign and the candidate. The candidate in the case campaign was a relatively young candidate, with a history of active social media use. They had an intimate understanding of the functionalities of both Facebook and especially Instagram, which they used on their free time organically. One respondent stated that the candidate's natural use of social media helped the campaign tremendously, as the candidate themselves also had a low threshold to use social media to maintain and build their own brand image as approachable and relatable.

*"The candidate did two things on social media: he was consistent in his social media behavior throughout the campaign and had the energy to take part in*

*conversations and answered questions. Basically, he was constantly present.” (R6, marketing team member)*

While presence on social media was deemed important, more important was again consistency in the way that presence realized. For a young active candidate social media may be a natural platform whether they are in the middle of an active election campaign or not. In comparison, according to the respondents, a candidate that is less naturally inclined to use social media can build their brand just as effectively on social media by having the expertise and understanding in their campaign team. While hands-on social media presence by the candidate themselves may be superior to a social media presence ran by a professional marketing team, it might still be a better alternative than branding a candidate as approachable on social media, when in reality that is not the case.

*“(Bernie Sanders) ... is in my opinion an example of a candidate, that themselves may not be a social media native and is well over 70-years-old. First of all, he has had a political message that resonated with a younger audience and in order to reach that audience, you have to be where the young people are, in this case Instagram” (R3, political planner)*

*“(Sauli Niinistö) ... has branded himself as a sort of fatherly figure and as someone who is easily approachable. I think it’s a good example of successful (personal political branding). I could make a bet that it’s in no way planner or long-term, it’s just the way he is as a person.” (R6, marketing team member)*

One respondent mentioned the democratic U.S. senator Bernie Sanders, who ran as the candidate for the U.S. presidential elections in 2016 and again in 2020, while another said that a good example is the President of Finland, Sauli Niinistö. In their opinion both have a strong social media identity, despite themselves either not being active on social media or to a limited extent. Both have a team of social media experts doing all or part of the communication, but the way it is done is consistent, transparent and approved by the politician themselves.

Of all the characteristics mentioned by the respondents, the most important in personal political branding according to the interviews was credibility. Credibility based on the interviews is built from the candidate’s behavior and characteristics such as their background and experience. In addition, they mention that credibility comes from consistency and authenticity.

However, none of the respondents said that social media like Facebook or Instagram could be used independently of other marketing channels to build and maintain credibility. One respondent, while saying that social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram are important especially in reaching the younger audience thought that the older audience may see social media as “fluff” and less credible and because of that there is a need to use traditional channels such as print, TV and live events as well. The relationship between social media

platforms and traditional media in relation to personal political brand building is discussed in chapter 4.4.2.

This is an interesting finding, as the general opinion of the respondents was that Facebook and Instagram are important platforms especially for reaching younger audiences, but should be used complementary with other, more traditional marketing channels such as print and outdoor ads, TV and live events. Two respondents stated that traditional media and outdoor advertising are especially important for credibility, as showing up in multiple different channels increases the audience's exposure to the candidate.

*“Poster and outdoor advertising in bus stops, for example. In my opinion it gives a certain credibility to the candidate and the candidate can get a sort of a ‘celebrity status’, get them into people’s conversations and coffee room talks ... (It) shows to a certain audience, that this guy is serious, that he is credible and might even be elected ... For now, I think that Facebook and Instagram cannot be used to build credibility in the same way among the mass audience ...” (R3, political planner)*  
*“Social media might sometimes be still perceived as too light, as ‘fluff’ ... So other channels could possibly support credibility ... so the image won’t be too one-sided.” (R5, marketing team member)*

### **4.3 User data**

As explained in chapter 2.1.6, Facebook Ads platform offers an extensive set of tools to create target audiences based on demographics, consumer preferences and other interests. Target audiences are talked about in more detail chapter 4.3.1. The way analytics affect the overall political marketing and branding process, according to the respondents, consists of three aspects: access to user data, monitoring the performance of active adverts and posted content and creating and adjusting target audiences based on the user data and ad performance. As such, this theme was divided into two subthemes: “Access to & use of data” and “Targeting & monitoring”.

#### **4.3.1 Access to & use of data**

Majority of the respondents highlighted the importance of data in their interviews as to why Facebook and Instagram could play a role in the personal brand building process. As discussed in chapter 2.1.5, online advertising as existed since the beginning of the internet era in the 90 and the earliest banner ads on websites and the role of data collected based user preferences and behavior has only increased throughout the years, which is discussed in more detail in chapter 2.3.1. A respondent highlights that one important difference of

the Facebook Ads platform is open access to the performance data – it is freely available to anyone who wants to use it.

*“Getting information on how the audience reacts to a political message is nothing new, but today it’s available to everyone. In the past it has cost thousands of marks (to get access), and can still cost thousands, but it’s available.” (R3, political planner)*

In comparison print adverts and outdoor advertising offer virtually no feedback on how many people saw the advertisement and whether they were part of the target audience. While the type of print publication and the location where outdoor advertising is posted may give some rough estimates on the type and amount of audience being exposed, it cannot be compared to the data offered by digital platforms such as Facebook Ads.

However, access to all this data does not automatically turn it into results and votes to the candidate in the election. The topic of human resources was discussed earlier in chapter 4.1.2 and from the perspective of advertising data, the need for expertise in understanding and interpreting that data seems important for platforms like Facebook Ads to be used effectively. As one respondent stated in their interview this technical expertise can also be bought from external companies, but what cannot be bought so easily is the understanding of who the target audience is and what type of content and message resonates with them.

Therefore, it seems that modern political campaigns have the opportunity to increasingly use various effective tools such as Facebook Ads and its powerful monitoring and targeting tools to effectively reach their audiences. However, it becomes apparent that this also requires skills that traditional politicians or their campaign teams may not have. The need for data analysis and social media advertising expertise within the campaign team was strongly visible in the interview responses.

While access to the user data on platforms like Facebook and Instagram may be easy and even free, the access to expertise that can make educated actions based on that data is more limited. Especially for campaigns and candidates with limited resources, using their budget effectively is crucial – yet getting the needed expertise to take full advantage of social media user data could be out of reach due to budget constraints or the inability to recruit said expertise pro bono.

#### **4.3.2 Targeting & monitoring**

In addition to the raw data Facebook Ads offers, it has tools for turning that data into target audiences and targeted advertising. As explained in more detail in chapter 2.1.6, existing followers can be turned into target audiences based on the demographic information, preferences, interests and many other variables they have given about themselves in Facebook and Instagram. In addition, the use of



look-alike audiences enables the advertiser to reach new audiences with similar characteristics as the existing audience. The ability to create target audiences and target advertising was the most often mentioned feature of Facebook and Instagram in the interviews. They were used extensively in the case campaign from the start, and the success of the campaign was attributed to this data-oriented approach by many of the respondents.

*“When talking about paid advertising, social media can be used in two ways: you talk to those who already are your followers, or you consciously take your message to the people you want to be your followers. The fact is ... that even if you communicate to your existing audience, only a fraction of them will see your message ... You can never reach everyone, but you can definitely reach more than with other means, such as a newspaper ad, for example.” (R6, marketing team member)*

Before the campaign began in January 2019, time was spent to identify topics of political discourse that were especially important in the electoral district the candidate would be campaigning in. As explained in chapter 1.4, the candidate was a member of the Centre party, which is a centrist-liberal party with roots in agrarianism and traditionally has had strong support in agricultural communities, which in Central Finland there were many of. The core campaign themes presented in chapter 1.4 were used to form target audiences, each based on specific characteristics such as geographic location, social status, profession and so on. The audiences were fine-tuned during the campaign to ensure the intended target audience was reached as effectively as possible.

*“As an example, the data we received from the advertising during the last spring’s campaign influenced what content we emphasized. So, it gave us information that wasn’t otherwise available and without it our marketing would have been in some ways misaligned, so it’s quite a major thing, actually. The information we got might have had a large effect on our candidate getting elected. The margins between getting and not getting elected were very small in the past election.” (R3, political planner)*

As mentioned by the respondent above, Facebook Ads also had tools to monitor both adverts and organic content posted under that Facebook Business account. This was highlighted by practically all of the respondents as an important strength of Facebook and Instagram – the ability to get in-depth and real-time feedback on how the adverts and content perform through quantitative data. These findings support that political marketing has closely followed in the footsteps of commercial marketing as discussed in chapter 2.3.1 and the adoption of a data-oriented approach in the case campaign was visible in the interview answers. The respondents stated that the ability to see what kind of content works for that specific target audience through likes, comments and other engagement metrics helped the campaign understand its audience better over

the duration of the campaign – which resulted in more accurately targeted content that was more impactful and resonated better with the target audience. According to one respondent monitoring and analyzing the performance of the advertisements and organic posts is as important as the content themselves.

*“ ... the type of paper ad that gets attention can cost hundreds of euros, up to 500-1000 euros ... In skilled hands you can get so much more done with a targeted advertisement, compared to a traditional print ad.” (R3, political planner)*

*“A paper might have a large distribution, sure, but how many people actually see the ad, nobody can verify. On social media, on the other hand, you can accurately see how many people have seen it and whether it has led to some action.” (R6, marketing team member)*

*“Targeting is a really good thing ... You can define which message goes to which audience. This way campaign euros go exactly to the right place and you look and see and learn how the message resonates. (You can) then spend time and euros more effectively in next (advertising) campaigns ... The results you get and what you can do and test on social media is more accurate.” (R4, marketing team member)*

The campaign team held a strong belief overall that targeting on social media advertising was not only more accurate than in traditional media channels, but also more cost-efficient. They saw that an allocated marketing budget could be used much more effectively on social media to reach the wanted target audience effectively. The goal of advertising is to promote and make the target audience be aware of the brand, in which the respondents felt the Facebook and Instagram reached this goal more effectively.

Targeting advertising to a specific audience, monitoring the performance of the ads and making necessary changes to ensure the advertisement euros are spent as effectively as possible can be linked to both strategic and resource planning, which were discussed in chapter 4.1., both of which were deemed extremely important to the personal political branding process. It becomes apparent that social media advertising through Facebook Advertising can, with right expertise, be a cost-efficient and highly effective way of creating a personal political brand to the desired target audience as well as to reach new similar audiences. None of these are necessarily dependent on a large campaign budget, rather skillful and effective use of a platform’s capabilities through expertise and understanding of the target audience following a consistent long-term strategy.

## 4.4 Social media versus traditional media

The respondents saw distinct differences between the use of different social media platforms, especially Facebook and Instagram for the purpose of this thesis. In addition to features and functionalities, the respondents felt that also the type of content that was most effective varied between the social media platforms. The perceived benefits and potential risks of both platforms are also discussed in chapter 4.4.1. Social media platforms, however, were only part of the overall marketing process. Traditional media was seen to still have a specific role in the personal brand building process, which was explored in chapter 4.4.2.

### 4.4.1 Characteristics, benefits & potential risks of social media

All respondents saw Facebook and Instagram as important channels especially in reaching specific types of audiences. In addition to perceived demographic differences between the userbases of the two social media platforms, they felt that while both platforms shared some functionalities as well as how they are used, there were also distinct differences in how they worked. In addition, the respondents saw distinct differences in what the content for each platform should be and what supports personal brand building most effectively. The type of content that the respondents felt was effective on social media is discussed in more detail in chapter 4.5.

All the respondents felt that Instagram was clearly the social media platform with the youngest audience. In comparison, the respondents were equally unified in Facebook audience being somewhat older. This reinforces the current literature on social media platform demographics in both Finland and globally, which was discussed in detail in chapter 2.1.3.

*“In my opinion (Facebook and Instagram) are the number one platforms when you want to reach the 18-50-year-old audience ... (On) Facebook are 50-60-year-olds ... Facebook has the slightly older audience and Instagram has a bit of both, but especially the younger ones.” (R5, marketing team member)*

*“... Targeted advertising on Instagram is clearly for the younger audience, under 35, even under 30-year-olds.” (R3, political planner)*

The respondents generalized that Instagram can be used to reach the young audience, whereas Facebook is used to reach their parents and older relatives. Two respondents however emphasized that it is important to be aware that the audience demographic in a specific social media can change and shift, as it has done in the past. This is supported by current literature in both global and Finnish social media use, discussed in chapter 2.1.2 and 2.1.3: the average age of a Facebook user has risen as younger audiences move to platforms like Instagram, Snapchat and TikTok. As new platforms emerge, the shift can be

surprisingly swift and should be taken to consideration when making long-term strategy and committing resources. One respondent suggested that focus should not be on specific platforms, rather the target audiences. Therefore, the desired target audiences should be monitored, and advertising and communication targeted to the platforms where they are. Based on past trends and platform development, change in platform usage and even types of content may change, which should be taken in consideration.

*"There is a ton of different platforms out there, old ones die, and new ones come out ... There's no intrinsic value to be on in all possible channels, if it doesn't create value for the candidate ... Maybe Facebook for the older audience may still be relevant in the next election, but Instagram might be 'so last season' for the younger audience, so they have to be found on other platforms. Will it be TikTok, or has it too gone out of fashion by then? Changes are really fast." (R3, political planner)*

Additional details from the demographic background of the potential audience on either platform did not emerge during the interview, thus it can be assumed that factors like education or job status are not a separating factor within the target audience. However, this could be an interesting venue for future research. Next, the features and characteristics that the respondents found important in either one or both platforms are discussed. First the overall characteristics are discussed, after which platform-specific features that emerged are explored.

As an overall difference, Instagram was seen as more of a visual platform, where most effective content was visually striking and simple. While each Instagram post can have a description text, the main focus is to be on the picture or video. In comparison, the respondents felt that content on Facebook, while also visual, can has emphasis on written text, through which the post can be more in-depth and can explain the motivations and background of the topic discussed.

For Facebook, the main features that the respondents found most important in brand building and general marketing communication was the ability to write longer text-based updates. Text, pictures and video can be posted on both Instagram and Facebook, but Facebook as a platform supported text better compared to Instagram. In addition, on Facebook posts can include links to external websites and even files can be uploaded for viewers to download. Linking to external sites or other applications on Instagram is only through Instagram Story-function and only once the user's Instagram account is verified or have a certain number of followers, meaning the access to this feature is limited. How important the ability to link to external locations varied between respondents, but in general linking followers to the candidate's webpage or blog was seen as useful.

*"I think on Facebook the message can be a bit longer, if we talk about the text part next to a video or picture. It can be longer, have more narrative and in some ways explain the background. Although it is important also on Facebook, that the*

*picture or the text or preferably both together, get the attention and focus immediately.” (R1, candidate)*

As briefly stated earlier, Instagram was seen as a more visual platform, where content was compact and above all visual, being either pictures or videos. The choice for posting visual content on the platform was not so much a strategic one, rather a technical one, as the content on Instagram had to be either a picture or a video with text being optional, while the opposite was true on Facebook. However, the visuality of Instagram was seen as a positive feature, which made it a natural location to bring out the personality and positive characteristics of the candidate.

*“On Instagram in my opinion the message has to be visually interesting, in a way that the picture has stopping power. And if a political message or brand is connected to it, it has to tell something about the person. For example, if they’re sporty, determined, strong, or a political leader somehow. Or if there’s a political message, it has to be very direct, incisive and clear ... It has to be very simple.” (R1, candidate)*

Both Facebook and Instagram also have a Stories service, which was described in more detail in chapter 2.1.6. Out of these two services, only Instagram Stories was mentioned by respondents during the interviews, and this reflected how the service was used during the 2019 campaign. The candidate used their personal Instagram account as the official outlet on Instagram, and their Instagram Stories was linked to the candidate’s Facebook account and had the feature enabled where their Instagram Story was automatically posted on Facebook Stories. Thus, Facebook Stories was technically used actively during the campaign, but this was due to it mirroring all the content posted to Instagram Stories, which should be noted.

The functionality of Instagram Stories was in general seen as useful by the respondents. The candidate actively used the feature in their private life and thus using it along with Instagram as a platform in general was natural for them. According to them Instagram Stories was especially suitable in showing the reality of the everyday life for the politician, which helped them establish a relationship with the target audience.

*“In my opinion the regular Instagram post is the most important, so a permanent post. But right after that Instagram Story, because it can tell so much about the personality.” (R1, candidate)*

Overall, Instagram was seen as the more impactful platform out of the two during the campaign according to the respondents. This may be due to the candidate’s own natural activity on the platform, which made his posts and updates more credible to the existing and potential new audiences. The main target audience for the campaign, young adults aged roughly 18 to 30-years-old,

fit the demographic make-up of Instagram userbase as discussed in chapter 2.1.3, adding to Instagram's suitability as a branding platform for the campaign.

Besides platform specific features as mentioned previously, the respondents mentioned multiple characteristics and functions that apply to both platforms. A largest differentiator to traditional media like print, or even websites and blogs was the interactivity offered by both platforms – updates could be liked, shared and commented on, thus further enriching the initial post and potentially spreading it to even a large audience through the audience members' personal social networks.

*“Definitely the lower threshold for making contact (is an important feature). The candidate comes closer to people and the target audience. You can react, ask, post or send a direct message to the candidate. If you want to ask, challenge or criticize or something else, social media offers an easier platform for dialogue.”*  
(R4, marketing team member)

*“Valuable feedback comes in likes, how many times the post has been opened, how many times a webpage is visited through a paid ad – it's all important information on brand building, what kind of material we should create, as in, this is the style of topics people open and listen to, so more of this.”*  
(R5, marketing team member)

The ability to interact was seen as an important way to create a relationship with the audience. It allowed communication beyond just the paid advert or initial social media update – the conversation could continue and expand in the comment section, which was visible to anyone who came upon the ad or post. In addition to the public dialogue members of the target audience could at any time send a private message either through Instagram or Facebook and the candidate would likely answer in short order, as was the case in the case campaign. This is supported by existing literature in political marketing – the increasing emphasis on dialogue and two-way communication over one-way advertising was discussed in chapter 2.3.1. In addition to relationship-building, according to the respondents the engagement or lack thereof acts as an indicator on whether the content is interesting and emotion-evoking for the target audience.

Another feature that was mentioned by the respondents that is increasingly available in different social media platforms was live video feeds. Live video feeds were twice during the end portion of the campaign. They were advertised beforehand on both Instagram and Facebook and were Questions & Answers events where the audience could ask questions through the live feed chat, which the candidate would then answer and discuss on in real time. The respondents had varying opinions on the usefulness of live video. While others felt it was a great opportunity for additional interaction with the target audience, one candidate was less enthusiastic.

*“I have (done a live stream) a couple of times and have made it a permanent feature, this kind of a live, 45 minutes of live. (We had a live) even during the campaign – basically a live session like this can to an extent replace meeting citizens on the street. I see it as quite a good function, because it reaches new kind of people.” (R1, candidate)*

*“Personally, I haven’t looked into live content in more detail, in my opinion live content is always boring as hell. All webinars, live streams, I don’t consume any live material myself. The content just isn’t fine-tuned enough to be worth watching.” (R2, marketing team member)*

On paper live video has features that may seem useful in building a personal brand – increased interaction through live video brings the participant and presenter closer, which enables interaction similar to a face-to-face meeting. However, using a live feed requires additional technical skills, as well as the understanding of the platform, the audience and its suitability for the topic being discussed.

The feature seen as the most important across both social media platforms was again the ability to target advertising and content to specific audiences. Target audiences and targeted advertising were discussed in more detail earlier in chapter 4.3.2. Most often it was compared to traditional media, such as newspapers, television and outdoor advertising. At first glance it would then seem that digital media and especially social media is superior to traditional forms of offline media in every way. However, the respondents felt that even in today’s digital world traditional forms of media still have a specific part to play in the personal brand building process, which will be discussed next.

The respondents also stated that social media has risks associated with the personal brand creating process, which should be taken into account. Overall, it seems, the perceived risks are often linked to the same functionalities that when used right, help build the personal political brand. Where the ability to have in-depth dialogue with the audience can be used to build strong relationships, it can be equally used to ruin one’s reputation in a blink of an eye. One characteristic of social media that was mentioned by multiple respondents was its quick pace. Communication is fast and trends come and go. As one respondent stated, scandals on social media could grow exponentially faster than in other social media platforms. This was partially attributed to the ability to quickly share a piece of content with one’s social network as well as to how the social media algorithms work and pick up content that quickly receives multiple views, comments and shares and shows it to even a wider audience. However, they also stated that due to the before-mentioned high tempo of social media communication, these scandals can also be over more quickly than anticipated.

Another potential risk the respondents saw in social media in general was the general lack of control over the marketing content as well as the discussion linked to it. Once posted, users on platforms like Instagram and Facebook can freely comment on any update or advert visible on their wall – this can be either positive or negative and fully public to rest of the audience. One respondent

stated that the type of discussion in the comment section of a post can reinforce further action of same type. This notion is further supported by the fact that the risk of losing control of the narrative has been discussed in political marketing literature, shown in chapter 2.3.3.

*“When doing (social media) advertising on a large scale, there’s the risk of showing the advert to people who simply cannot be won over, which might result in comments that can be very negative at times. When you show posts with negative comments, it can collect more of them, which may cause a negative trend. But when the targeting is done correctly, there’s a possibility of a positive trend in the comment section. It’s the sentiment that sticks in people’s minds, when looking at the big picture.” (R6, marketing team member)*

Some of the risks, especially those related to control, were partially attributed to social media not being owned by the brand owner. Two respondents brought up the differences between owned and shared media, where social media is generally seen as being the latter. The types of media are generally divided into paid, earned and owned media and it is suggested that social media falls under a fourth category – shared media. The types of media and their defining characteristics are discussed in chapter 2.1.4.

*“... When you use Instagram or Facebook, you’re at the mercy of their algorithms ... and not on your own terms. If you want some message to go through, the algorithms of these big American companies decide which messages get the most attention ... Facebook and Instagram are good platforms to those, who don’t have a strong owned media. But if you want to have credible communication, you have to have your own, dedicated media, for example a webpage...” (R2, marketing team member)*

*“... the most valuable content that we created was too often in the wrong place. When the candidate wrote, had an opinion piece or had a column and such, it was always somewhere else other than their own webpage. This in a way undermined our ability to promote those important gestures at moment when they were most hot.” (R6, marketing team member)*

When a piece of content is on another platform, such a news outlet or some other third-party site, the external link on for example Facebook cannot be monetarily advertised due to content being on a third-party platform. In addition to the potential lost visibility on the social media platform due to the inability to “boost” the content, any potential traffic to that link also goes away from the candidate’s platform. Should the content such as blog posts or other important political communication be on owned media, such as a webpage, the visitors could be channeled to additional content that support the personal branding process of the candidate. This way the visitor’s user data can also be used to build more accurate target audiences for more impactful marketing and branding.



*“... When there’s different (types of content), others are targeted to people with children, others to the elderly, or some other target group. Those that visit your content can be made into different target audiences and when the next piece of content comes, for example to people with children ... you can ensure that the target audience sees that content.” (R6, marketing team member)*

Staying relevant on social media and avoiding and managing risks was seen as hard work and thus required both resources, skill and understanding from the candidate and the team to do so effectively, which is supported by the implied importance of human resources and expertise that was discussed in chapter 4.1.2.

#### **4.4.2 Relationship between traditional and digital media**

When asked about the role of social media in the overall personal branding process during a political campaign, majority of the respondents stated that social media alone was not enough to effectively create and maintain a personal political brand. The trend was that the role of social media was seen to increase, as it had throughout previous elections according to the respondents. But traditional media like print, outdoor and TV advertising were seen to have a distinct role in the overall branding, especially in creating credibility, as it was discussed in chapter 4.2. According to the interviews traditional media platforms still have value in brand creation and in some ways “elevate” the candidate to a more serious contender.

*“I believe that for example a TV ad impresses both a 16-year-old, as well as a 40 and 60-year-old viewer. It still has its own power. In some ways unearned, but it has its own status. Even TV advertising isn’t what it used to be, but in people’s minds it does elevate the statues of the candidate somewhat.” (R3, political planner)*

Therefore, especially for a new candidate that may not have such an established brand as compared to a sitting representative looking to be re-elected may still find value in traditional media. The choice of media platforms was also seen to represent the candidate. As discussed earlier, a younger candidate’s target audience is more likely to use social media and as such a candidate that is themselves older or targets an older audience may find traditional media still effective in brand building.

However, one aspect that continues to be in favor of social media and digital media in general is the ability to collect far more accurate data on the target audience and how the advertisements and brand messaging have reached the audience and what impact it has had. Especially for a campaign with a limited budget cost-efficiency may be far more important, thus advertising platforms where the effectiveness of the marketing budget spent can be monitored and analyzed accurately may be tempting in more ways than one. Ultimately,

traditional media is still seen as an important part of the overall marketing mix of a political campaign, even to a younger candidate in order to build their credibility as a politician.

#### 4.5 Content marketing characteristics & goals

As discussed in chapter 4.4, the respondents felt that Instagram was a more visual platform compared to Facebook, although the respondents felt in the latter text should also be accompanied by visual elements, such as pictures or video. As stated earlier, posts can on Instagram can only be made with pictures or videos at the moment, which naturally makes it more visual as a platform. Video was seen as the more impactful type of media over pictures. However, both were seen to have their benefits.

*“I would say that video works better ... But the challenge with videos is that the content and quality have to be on point. Pictures might be a bit easier to take, don't require as many resources and time as video. I think that's the biggest difference.” (R1, candidate)*

Both pictures and video were used during the campaign, and one important piece of content that was used throughout the campaign was a 1-minute long campaign video, which was filmed and edited internally. The candidate and the core team before the campaign started felt that a professionally filmed and edited campaign video that clearly communicated the core themes of the candidate was important in multiple ways – it would boost the credibility of the candidate through high production value, clear message and extensive repetition in digital channels, as well as regional TV during peak hours.

*“It has a lot to do with psychology, because a person's buying decision starts with emotion on a physiological level. In the candidate's campaign we succeeded in exactly this and what I'm most proud of myself is the campaign video, as it evoked emotions and carried (the campaign) really well.” (R6, marketing team member)*

In addition to the campaign video, a set of photographs were taken of the candidate in various locations and poses, which were then used to create templates for various campaign messages. These pictures were high quality and specifically made for each social media platform so they could be edited and used quickly. Therefore, majority of the marketing activities both online and offline were highly visual and both pictures and video were used extensively in marketing during the campaign. While the main brand marketing footage was professionally taken and edited, one respondent highlighted that one benefit of social media, especially Instagram, is that content there can generally be more relaxed.

*“Not everything has to be advertising agency-level, even though quality plays an important part in the larger scale of things ... But in between there’s room for selfie-camera videos, which work really well on Instagram.” (R4, marketing team member)*

These pictures and video that were taken “in the moment”, during events and when the candidate went for a jog or was doing groceries were seen as a humanizing factor that brought the candidate closer, making them a normal human being. The fact that the candidate was used to using both Instagram and Facebook likely contributed to the content being more sincere, thus helping to create rapport with the audience.

Therefore, the overall marketing mix of the campaign consisted of high-quality core content that was circulated on social media, the candidate’s web page as well as regional TV that according to the respondents helped in increasing the credibility of the candidate to the wider audience. The more casual content on Instagram, Instagram Stories and Facebook also played an important part in humanizing the candidate and in bringing out their personal characteristics, interests and even imperfections. Again, the production and quality of the marketing material during the campaign was linked to available resources, which were discussed in chapter 4.1.2. Filming and editing of the marketing content were done largely with the resources and know-how within the case campaign team. This allowed for the campaign budget to be spent very effectively on promoting the content instead of paying for it. This further highlights the importance of expertise within the campaign team, which can help in using the campaign budget more effectively.

*“If all the work capable people made work pro bono during this campaign would have been done through traditional media or an advertising agency ... you could have added 20,000 € to the overall campaign budget.” (R3, political planner)*

While the topic of this thesis is to explore the role of paid advertising in the personal political brand creating process, the respondents highlighted that while paid advertising can be an effective tool in reaching the target audience and in even growing it, they felt that organic content and the quality of that content was seen as more important. This was stated to be the case especially outside the election season, although some respondents saw paid advertising even then somewhat useful.

*“... not as much paid advertising but presence and communication, there should be more of that. Paid advertising should be looked at critically, especially if everyone starts doing it. People will get fed up, if they get sponsored content from every candidate, which can then turn against you. Being constantly present (on social media), interactivity and reactive content, that we definitely need more of.” (R4, marketing team member)*

Based on the interview answers a generalization can be made that paid advertising is seen as an effective tool to reach and grow audiences during an election and in certain cases outside the election. However, most of the content should be organic on both Instagram and Facebook. As mentioned by earlier in this chapter, the everyday content on both platforms helps humanize the candidate by bringing out their personal characteristics and interests. As discussed in chapter 4.4.1, creating a relationship with the target audience was seen as important. The respondents argue that this can be best achieved through interesting topical content.

## **4.6 Future trends affecting political branding**

Certain future trends emerged either explicitly or implicitly during the interviews, which are presented in this chapter. First are trends associated with social media platforms – their future development, userbase and functionalities that may affect personal political branding activities in the future. Second are the trends associated with the democratic political system, and how effects personal branding on social media platforms may affect it, as well as how perceived developments in politics may in turn affect political marketers and personal political branding.

### **4.6.1 Trends affecting social media platforms**

As discussed in chapter 4.4.1, the social media landscape was seen as somewhat volatile, and the respondents felt it is a real possibility that the successes achieved in social media marketing and personal branding during the 2019 campaign may not be reached with the same activities in the same platforms. The changing landscape in social media is supported by current literature and was discussed in detail in chapter 2.1.2 and can mean that once the next major election comes along in Finland in four years, things are likely to be quite different and the use of social media by candidates and their campaign teams could be the norm on a much deeper level than it is today.

Another topic that was brought up during the interviews was changing legislation and rules on social media platforms. As mentioned in chapter 2.1.5., in 2019 prior to the U.S. presidential elections of 2020 certain platforms took different stands on political advertising and influencing on their platforms. Facebook for example stated that they would not interfere with even with false political advertising, as long as it did not break any laws. On the other hand, during the same time Twitter and TikTok banned all paid political advertising, limiting the ways political actors could promote themselves on said platforms. This can have a major effect on political marketers and political branding, if suddenly some activities are restricted or outright banned. Changes in legislation and rules can result in other platforms becoming more attractive than others,

while also forcing political marketers to come up with new innovative ways to reach their target audiences.

The respondents also stated that digitalization continues to affect political marketing. While younger audiences have traditionally adopted digital solutions such as social media quickly, larger and larger portions of the older audiences that often are the most active voters are also adopting social media. Therefore, the audiences that have been traditionally spoken through traditional media such as print and live events, can perhaps in the future be engaged with through social media. This may affect the overall marketing mix of a political marketer, depending on the target audience they are after. Candidates that have been comfortable with traditional media may now be presented with a situation where they and their team need to learn new skills and find a way to establish their brand on social media.

The final trend that emerged was that social media's credibility as a platform for political discourse is seen to be increasing. While some of the respondents felt that social media by some audiences is still seen as "fluff", as discussed in chapter 4.2., the trend on this might be changing. Whether it means that a candidate can purely focus on social media and whether political discourse shifts there from traditional media, such as blogs and opinion pieces on newspapers remains to be seen.

*"Culturally something interesting is happening. When you read newspapers and their news, quite often you run into a government decision and what is the source? Twitter ... I'm not saying it's uncreditable, but ... I find that a very interesting thing that the source is on social media. We are reaching some sort of a turning point on where the political discourse is taking place." (R7, campaign manager)*

#### **4.6.2 Trends affecting the political landscape**

As already discussed in chapter 4.1.2 in more detail, the respondents felt that political marketing will continue to become more professional. As campaign teams become better in using the data available, their knowledge and understanding on their desired audience will become more in-depth leading into targeted communication and advertising that can be more fine-tuned on a granular level than ever. However, this also means that the competing candidates can do the same, thus pressuring campaigns to hire experts and marketing professionals to ensure their competitive advantage, driving the professionalization of political campaigns even further.

Another interesting topic one respondent brought up was the rise of extremism on social media. Previously, in order to have their message published in newspapers and other publications, the content had to be first accepted by the paper themselves. According to the respondent these parties were gatekeepers of sorts, ensuring a certain level of decency in published content, which in turn forced political actors to possibly tone down their policies and communication to get published. In the age of social media, especially on platforms that decide not

to moderate political discussion or advertising, as discussed in chapter 4.6.1 the respondent says that this allows these marginal groups to reach their extremely narrow target groups effectively, which might not have been possible in the past.

*“As (social media) is to a large extent unregulated, it allows for the types of social phenomena to rise in Finland that has not occurred in decades or at least a century. There are ... self-declared Nazis, but it also enables the survival of companies or movements with very narrow target audiences. This can be a good thing to a majority of people in Finland, as before they didn't have a channel to get their message across. Social media has made this possible, and this is topic of large public debate.” (R3, political planner)*

As such, this is linked to another topic that arose from the respondents, stating that social media has an equalizing effect on political discourse. As discussed in chapter 4.3., one benefit of social media platforms has been the equal access not only to the platforms themselves, but also the advertising performance data and user data of their target audiences. This according to one respondent can make the political landscape more dynamic, as political movements can rise quicker due to the open access to audiences and the potential to effectively get their message across with the tools available. At the same time, it can mean that old established political institutions become less relevant and weaken, should they be unable to justify their continued existence. However, the open communication on social media may run the risk of leading to some of the negative developments mentioned in chapter 2.3.3. The two main effects of these were depoliticization and personalization of politics, where other characteristics become the topic over policy, such as the personal charisma and characteristics of the candidate themselves.

## **4.7 Campaign's Facebook & Instagram ad performance**

In this chapter the results of the best performing Facebook and Instagram adverts that ran for the case campaign are presented. The results are then compared with the findings presented in chapters 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5 and 4.6. While some Facebook and Instagram adverts ran before the January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019, those are omitted for the sake of clarity. The candidate officially announced that they will be running for parliament on January 1<sup>st</sup> and the election polls closed on April 14<sup>th</sup>, thus only the advertising between this time period will be analyzed.

A total of 36 individual adverts ran during this time, some of which were shown both on Facebook and Instagram, while others were only shown on one of the platforms. The advertising during the social media ad campaign were divided into five overall categories: videos, pictures, external links to for example the candidate's webpage or blog, invitations to campaign events and invites to like or follow the candidate's campaign page on Facebook and/or Instagram. For

the purpose of this thesis the performance of an individual advert was based on the overall views it received during its run, as the main goal of the paid advertising was to increase the visibility of the candidate within the target audiences to whom that specific advert was aimed at. The ten best-performing adverts are presented in Table 2 below.

TABLE 2. Case campaign's best performing adverts on Facebook Ads

<b>Advert name</b>	<b>Views</b>	<b>CPC</b>	<b>Reach</b>	<b>Advert type</b>
Campaign video 1 min FB	46 747	0,03 €	19 247	Video
Picture (engagement)	29 723	1,03 €	6 547	Picture
Campaign video 1 min IG	27 583	0,05 €	9 179	Video
Campaign website redirect 1	26 282	1,68 €	7 750	External link
Facebook page likes	22 180	3,77 €	9 552	Likes
Event invitation	21 336	8,33 €	7 550	Event
Picture (clicks)	19 284	1,95 €	945	Picture
Campaign website redirect 2	16 762	1,17 €	5 575	External link
Campaign video 10 sec FB	13 799	0,02 €	7 744	Video
Campaign website redirect 3	12 838	0,32 €	8 048	External link

Based on the data in Table 2 the best performing advert during the campaign period was the 1-minute version of the campaign video by a large margin, which received significantly more views and had a higher reach than the next ad. Third best performing ad was the Instagram version of the 1-minute campaign video ad. Overall, out of the best-performing campaign ads three were videos. What is important to note that all the adverts that were not videos used pictures, thus the ads that performed the best were highly visual overall.

It is difficult to estimate based on the paid advertising data whether it directly affected organic growth of the follower counts on both social media platforms. What can be stated, however, is that Facebook Ads advertising reached 68 672 unique individuals on both platforms, which is roughly 50 % of the total audience of 140 000. While a direct comparison to traditional forms of media cannot be on ad performance and reach, what is apparent is that for social media advertising through Facebook Ads real-time data is available, while for traditional media it is not.

In addition, the CPC or cost-per-click for videos was significantly lower during the campaign compared other types of ads, meaning the audience was more willing to click ads that were in video form. Cost-per-click is a metric that tells how much each individual click cost based on the budget assigned for that ad, with lower being better. The CPC for all the top-performing video adverts shown in Table 2 is between 0,02 € and 0,05 € which is significantly lower than all the other advert types on the list. For example, compared to picture ads that

are also visual have a CPC of 1,03 € and 1,95 € – a difference of 192 % and 190 % in price respectively.

Video adverts appear to be both more popular and more cost-efficient. In addition, the campaign managed to reach roughly 50 % of the overall target audience of 140 000. The ad performance aligns well with the interview findings. In chapter 4.5 majority of the respondents felt that video was the most effective type of media to be used in both Instagram and Facebook, which the placement of both Facebook and Instagram version of the 1-minute campaign video on the list in Table 2 supports. The high percentage of the target audience reached during the campaign also supports the interview findings, where one of the most important characteristics of Facebook and Instagram was the ability to create target audiences and targeted advertising, discussed in chapter 4.3.2.

Based on the alignment between the Facebook Ads performance data and the interview findings it is apparent that the campaign team understood the potential benefits of Facebook, Instagram and the Facebook Ads platform well. It also shows the importance of a professional campaign team with digital marketing, branding and social media advertising expertise and that has a good understanding of the type of content that can be effective for a specific target audience. Now that the results of both the interviews and the Facebook Ads campaign are presented, the next and final chapter discusses conclusions that were drawn from the findings of this chapter.



## 5 DISCUSSION

The purpose of this master's thesis was to increase understanding on how paid Facebook and Instagram advertising can be used in building a personal political brand and this chapter discusses the conclusions and contributions of the research. The discussion based on the findings of this thesis is divided into two parts – first, the theoretical contributions are presented, after which the managerial contributions are discussed. Finally, the limitations of the research are discussed and potential topics for further research are explored.

### 5.1 Theoretical contributions

The first research question that was derived from the research problem for this thesis was *“how can the role of Facebook and Instagram advertising in the personal political brand building process be described from the perspective of the brand owner and internal stakeholders?”*. It was found that Facebook and Instagram advertising are seen as valuable additions to the overall marketing mix of a political campaign by the internal stakeholders.

Smith & French (2009) argue that political brand relationships are maintained through personal relationships, with an increasing amount of that activity happening online. The findings of the thesis align well with this statement, as majority of the respondents found the relationship between the candidate and the audience important and that both Facebook and Instagram as platforms encouraged and facilitated interaction and relationship-building. The use of visual content through pictures and videos was found to bring out personal characteristics of the candidate in a positive light, further humanizing them and helping the relationship-building process.

Continuing the personal branding activities outside the election period was seen as a natural continuation of the campaign and social media like Facebook and Instagram were found to be especially suitable for it. It was seen that the candidate had a relationship with the audience and an obligation to meet the expectations that had been set during the campaign in the form of promises and campaign themes. Thus, continuing branding activities by communicating with the audience was seen as steps to fulfill these promises. At the same time continuing the personal branding activities will help keep the candidate relevant until the next election period. This aligns with existing literature on the permanent campaign discussed in chapter 2.3.2 and reinforces the notion that it is likely an aspect of political campaigning and communication that is here to stay for the foreseeable future.

The second research question was *“what are the special characteristics of advertising on Facebook and Instagram that contribute to building a personal political brand?”*. It was found that the most important characteristic of Facebook and Instagram

advertising through Facebook Ads was the ability create said target audiences by having access to user data such as demographics, habits and interests. The role of Facebook and Instagram advertising was seen to be effective in reaching and influencing specific online target audiences, with the main differentiator between target groups being age. On Facebook the audience was 40 to 65-year-olds and on Instagram 18 to 40-year-olds.

The ability to monitor the performance of previously mentioned target audiences was another key characteristic, as compared to traditional media, the Facebook Ads platform gave access to the type of advertising performance data that was not available for traditional media like print or television. According to Thornhill et al. (2017), marketing on social media has three distinct differences compared to traditional media: existing and new audiences can be targeted more effectively, the audience and their decision process and engagement with the brand and marketing content can be tracked and monitored and finally the audience response can be more readily use to improve brand communication in the future. All three factors were strongly supported by the interview findings. Kruikemeier et al. (2016) state that targeted, personalized communication on social media platforms has become an integral part of campaign strategy in political elections, which is also supported by the overall performance of the case campaign and the factors that led to it, major ones being targeted communication on Facebook and Instagram.

All in all, advertising on Facebook and Instagram appeared to positively affect the personal branding process during the case campaign in the spring of 2019. Kruikemeier et al. (2016) state that a large portion of Facebook users often do not notice an advert being “sponsored” or a paid advert, thus treating it like any other piece of content on the platform. No pattern emerged during the interviews of parts of the audience perceiving paid political advertising on Facebook or Instagram negatively, thus the empirical findings are in line with literature on this matter. However, Kruikemeier et al. also suggest that once the audience do notice that an advertisement is sponsored by the candidate or a political party, they were less likely to share the content in their own network. This did not become apparent from the findings of the interview or the social media advertising performance data. The findings are more in line with Tran (2017, p. 1), who stated that “... ‘personalized experiences’ are associated with a number of benefits, for instance, reducing customer’s resistance against the ad ... and improving brand awareness”. During the case campaign response to and engagement with the specific content aimed at that target audience was good, and the topic of political election was not seen as a challenge by the respondents nor visible in the advertising performance data.

This thesis aimed to increase the knowledge on the role of Facebook and Instagram advertising in building a personal political brand. The results show that theory remains conflicted on whether or not paid advertising contributes positively to a personal political brand, increasing the candidate’s credibility and the likelihood of the audience choosing to vote for them. The secondary data from Facebook Ads showed that social media advertising, especially in the form of

video, reached the target audience well and the respondents in general stated that paid advertising complements the personal brand building process. However, majority of the respondents emphasized that they thought organic, non-sponsored content is more important in building a credible, successful personal political brand for a candidate and in order to build strong relationship with the voter base. This aligns with findings of Armannsdottir et al. (2019), where politicians felt that one of their most important characteristics was authenticity and they would do their best to maintain or improve it. This in turn supports the findings that when a brand is seen as authentic, it improves the audience's perception of them and the relationship between them (Labrecque et al., 2010).

The setting of a Finnish parliamentary election offered an interesting alternative to existing research, which as shown in the theoretical framework of this thesis is largely dominated by research based in the U.S. or UK. However, it seems the "Americanization" of political marketing applies well to the Finnish setting as well, where the existing literature from the past decade has mapped an image of increasing focus on candidate-centered campaigns with professional marketing and communications experts using strategies often comparable or identical to commercial marketing, such as segmenting and targeted advertising. The findings of the interviews support this notion, as the respondents saw that this is a natural development and quite literally a requirement in order to be competitive in today's political elections in Finland. This development may have been enhanced by the high adoption rate of high-speed internet, mobile devices and social media. The strict privacy laws of the European Union may slow down the transformation of Finnish and European politics, as currently the private data of EU citizens cannot be accessed on the same level as the U.S. without their consent. However, the largest social media platforms today are owned by companies in either United States (Facebook, Instagram and YouTube) or China (TikTok), where privacy protection of an individual citizen is significantly weaker. A popular online joke states that "*the biggest lie on the Internet is 'I have read and understood the terms of service'*" which may soon change how information of EU citizens is used in both politics and commerce alike, as people continue to consent to unread terms of service, subsequently giving their browsing data. As such, the landscape of Finnish political marketing during and outside elections already resembles that of the U.S. in many ways, in both the social media habits of the audience, as well as the campaign strategies used during governmental elections. What the role of social media communication and brand will be in the next big governmental elections in Finland remains to be seen, but should its adoption follow current trends, the role is likely to be significant.

## 5.2 Managerial contributions

The findings of this thesis raise several points for managers making decisions in various political marketing decisions, especially in building a personal brand and running an effective digital marketing campaign on social media. Having a clear strategy for the chosen target audiences enabled the case campaign to use the resources they had in their disposal cost-efficiently. The ability to receive real-time performance data on the social media advertising campaigns enabled the campaign to make changes based on the feedback, which subsequently enabled the campaign to learn from the audience over time, leading to content that resonated better with the audience. In addition, the Facebook Ads platform enabled a long-term planning and scheduling of content, with the possibility of updating and changing the content when necessary. The cost-effectiveness of social media advertising became apparent in the performance data presented in Table 2 in chapter 4.7.

Facebook and Instagram were not seen as a complete end-all solution that could replace other platforms and traditional media at this time. In addition, the two platforms were both seen as effective channels to promote the personality of the candidate but in distinctly different ways – Facebook was seen as more official with suitability for in-depth content with focus on policy, whereas Instagram was seen as more simple, visual and focused mainly on the candidate's personality. Social media and traditional media such as print and outdoor advertising were seen as complementary to each other and to have distinct roles in creating visibility and building credibility for the candidate, which could not be achieved by any of the individual marketing channels alone. However, as older generations continue to adopt social media, this may change by the next parliament elections. Either way, managers should be aware of the relationship between social and traditional media and be aware that a rich media mix consisting of multiple types of channels and platforms appears to remain a strong choice for personal brand building in a political campaign.

Managers are also encouraged to use pictures and video that were the main types of content posted on Facebook and Instagram during the case campaign. They were found to support the personal branding process well, as they related emotions and personal characteristics of the candidate well, which differentiated the candidate from the competition and it encouraged relationship-creation between with the audience, positively impacting the campaign. Therefore, the rich media types on both platforms that combine video, pictures and text had a major impact in building and maintaining the candidate's personal political brand. The relationship-building is further enhanced by the interactivity of both platforms, which enables both public and private two-way dialogue between the candidate and the audience. This combined with the ability to engage through liking and sharing the content can make the relationship between the candidate more intimate, bringing the candidate closer and helping to relate an image of the them being "one of us".

All in all, Facebook and Instagram advertising can have a role in reaching the 18-65-year-old Finnish audience that use social media actively for information and as means to stay up to date in local matters, such as politics. It enables marketing resources to be used effectively and efficiently and provides information in the form of user and performance data to improve branding activities further. Facebook and Instagram advertising works most effectively together with traditional forms of advertising to reach the widest possible audience and to increase the credibility of the candidate. Continuing branding activities outside the election period was seen as a natural continuation of the established political brand. As such, Facebook and Instagram which both encourage continuous dialogue and communication are seen as platforms that are well-suited for this. In addition to the theoretical contribution, the summary can effectively guide the actions of managers in future political marketing activities.

## **5.3 Limitations and future research**

### **5.3.1 Limitations of the research**

Nowell et al. (2017) state that the analytic credibility of a research depends on how coherent the main argument is and how data is used to support the main points in a convincing manner. While the study was carried out by following well-established methodology for qualitative research, it may still be subject to certain limitations that are discussed in this chapter.

It should be noted that the interviews were conducted after the election campaign successfully ended. This may have caused the interview answers to be more aligned with the performance data, as success of the campaign may have reinforced or altered initially held beliefs. Should the campaign have ultimately failed to elect the candidate to the Finnish parliament, the perceived effectiveness of social media advertising could be different. As such, more case studies are needed from varying backgrounds, as discussed in the next chapter. In addition, although majority of the main campaign team was interviewed, some individuals could not participate due to varying reasons. Thus, the interviews are not completely representative of the opinions of all the internal stakeholders.

While a single case study is a valid research approach, the results of this research reflect only one candidate of a specific political and demographic background. Therefore, it should be noted that the findings of this thesis may not be transferable to political marketing campaigns or studies. The call for more case studies on the matter is discussed in detail in the next chapter.

The thesis studied the internal perspective of the personal political branding, which as a topic has remained under-researched. Therefore, there were few comparative studies and theories to reflect in the research. As such, the research was mainly exploratory and aimed to increase the understanding on

what the role of social media advertising in personal political branding process could be. This will be also discussed more in the next chapter.

The creation and development of a personal political brand has much to do with the candidate's personal characteristics that relate to the values and attitudes of the audience on an emotional level, thus making qualitative research a well-reasoned approach. However, as briefly discussed in this thesis, the personal brand creation process through social media advertising can be subjected to in-depth quantitative analysis based on the performance data available on platforms such as Facebook Ads. As such, the performance data was analyzed only on a surface level, limiting the impact the findings might have had on this research.

### **5.3.2 Suggestions for future research**

Firstly, the scope of this research was limited to the internal perspective of the personal political branding process. As such, this research studied only one side of the branding process and studying the audience and their perceptions of personal political brand building through paid social media advertising could be of great interest.

Secondly, the transferability of the results could be improved by additional case studies in different political environments, as well as in different cultures with varying social media use habits. As stated earlier, the internal perspective of personal branding remains under-researched, therefore more studies on it and especially the role of social media advertising are needed.

Thirdly, Facebook and Instagram were chosen as the focus of this study, but they do not constitute the whole of social media. Advertising platforms like Google and social media platforms like Twitter, Snapchat and TikTok are used in varying degrees across the globe, thus their potential use for personal political branding could present various research topics for future studies. As these platforms are strongly characterized by influencers, could they be a powerful partner in communicating political messages to certain audiences in the future? Little to no research can be found on the use of influencer marketing in politics, which may be an interesting venue for future research.

It should also be noted that majority of interaction on social media between individuals and brands alike is generally organic and not through paid advertising. The importance of organic, quality content in personal political branding was voiced strongly in the interviews for this thesis and it was stated that it facilitates relationship-building and helps to build the candidate's credibility. Studying the relationship of personal political branding through organic content and paid advertising would create a more holistic understanding of social media platforms and their potential for personal political branding as a whole.

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## APPENDIX 1 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTION SET

Preliminary information given and asked by the interviewee prior to the interview:

- Tell the reason for this interview and that it will be recorded and ask the respondent to agree audibly on the recording
- Tell that the results will only be used for the purpose of this thesis and published information will be anonymous
- Ask for the name and campaign role of the respondent

### Question 1

Could you describe what a personal political brand is in your own words?

### Question 2

Do you find political advertising on social media, especially Facebook influential?

*Interviewee explains the background Facebook Ads platform to respondents who wish it before the following questions.*

### Question 3

Can Facebook Ads (and Facebook and Instagram advertising) be used to build and develop a personal political brand in your opinion?

### Question 4

Where do you see Facebook Ads (and Facebook and Instagram advertising) in the overall process of building a political brand, including offline advertising like newspapers, posters and so on?

### Question 5

Do you associate any cons or challenges to personal political brand building on Facebook or Instagram?

**Question 6**

Are there any examples of good personal political brand building on social media that come to your mind? What did they do that made you have this opinion?

**Question 7**

What is your opinion on personal political brand building on Facebook and Instagram outside election season?

**Question 8**

Do you think there are special characteristics or features on social networking sites like Facebook or Instagram that contribute in building a personal political brand in your opinion? Are the characteristics unique to social media platforms you mentioned?

**Question 9**

Are some of these characteristics in your opinion more important than others?

**Question 10**

Would you describe all of these characteristics positive, or are some of them neutral or negative?

## **APPENDIX 2 THEMATIC MAP BASED ON INTERVIEW RESULTS**

- 1. Strategy and goals**
  - a. Long-term planning
  - b. Time & resources
  
- 2. Candidate's personal characteristics**
  
- 3. User data**
  - a. Access to & use of data
  - b. Targeting & monitoring
  
- 4. Social media versus traditional media**
  - a. Characteristics, benefits & potential risks of social media
  - b. Relationship between traditional and digital media
  
- 5. Content marketing characteristics & goals**
  
- 6. Future trends affecting political branding**
  - a. Social media platform trends
  - b. Political landscape