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Finnish Parliamentarians’ Experiences and Utilisation of Social Media in Political Communication

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Abstract

This study sheds light on how social media has permeated to political sphere, examining parliamentarians’ subjective experiences of social media in relation to their way to communicate. The study explores, how social media affordances are utilised in the processes of communication, and also how social media can restrict parliamentarians’ due to its functionalities. Adapting a qualitative approach, the study uses nine in-depth interviews with Finnish parliamentarians as its empirical material.

To explore social media affordances, understanding of social media and its functionalities becomes essential. Concepts of programmability, connectivity, popularity and digital storytelling are applied to explore and describe the ways the parliamentarians on the interactive processes of political communication use social media. The concepts, described as social media affordances, are depicted in political communication practices. The study explores them in the light of policy-making processes and agenda-building processes, considering social media’s implications in the light of deliberative communication and collective-decision making.

The findings indicate that parliamentarians are benefitting from social media with several ways. Foremost, social media enhance parliamentarians’ representation and visibility on different medias. Social media is also recognised in political influencing, initiating political discussions and hence, utilised for societal virtue. The findings thus demonstrate that social media’s individuating elements are recognised and responded differently among parliamentarians. Furthermore, the research results show that whereas parliamentarians may be benefitting from social media, it is also considered to disrupt their workspace, bringing out a recognition of time as a resource. Even as social media can be said to be permeated to the political sphere, traditional news media remain central for parliamentarians. The parliamentarians seem to operate under a turmoil of the old media and the new media.

Keywords: social media, political communication, qualitative research, social media affordances, democratisation, social media logics
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1. Introduction

Less and less we can find those who belittle social media. I belittle Twitter. But if someone today refuse to use social media has chosen a way to destruction. (Marco)

The citation above is one of the interviewee’s view of social media’s role in politics. Internet and digital platforms have permeated to political communication and it is apparent that a great deal of political discussion happens online. In politics, media representation and social media are often associated with campaigning purposes, somewhat disregarding online political communication outside the election periods. Digital media enables fast and accurate communication, interaction, and self-determination that political parties –and politicians, can make use of (Chadwick, 2017; Dahlgren, 2009). The US presidential election in 2008 kicked off the academic interest and the hype continued after comprehension of how micro targeting can be successfully carried out in social media platforms, as the Facebook Cambridge Analytica demonstrated. (Filimonov et al., 2016; Lundby, 2009).

Research on Facebook and social media as electoral tools has initiated a wide variety of studies focusing on the utilisation and vote-maximising practices through the adoption of social media (f.ex. Filimonov et al., 2016). The studies have mainly harvested activities for quantitative analysis during election periods, indicating a broad spectrum of strategic communication practices (see f.ex. ibid; Enli & Skogerbo, 2013; Kaid & Strömback, 2008). Recent studies have suggested that the instrumentality of different social media platforms has affected politics and political communication beyond campaigning (see f. ex. Chadwick, 2017; Filimonov et al., 2016; McNair, 2012:xviii). Thus, social media is not only an electoral tool. The way social media has permeated politics sheds light on the changes that appear in the politics, changing the way how politicians perceive political communication and the ways it reaches decision-making processes.

It can be argued that what remains to be explored is not so much social media as a campaign tool but social media as a changing element in the established communication practices recognised in political communication. The changes, that appear in the technological field influence institutions and institutional settings (Chadwick, 2017; Lundby, 2009) of which the impact can be detected within different interactive processes: mediatisation, democratisation and politisation (Chadwick, 2017; Dahlgren, 2005; Karvonen, 2010), and within three social actors: the media, the politics and the citizens (Chadwick, 2017; Schulz, 2004; Dahlgren, 2005; Karvonen, 2010). The present study
utilises politicians’ perspective and examines how social media is utilised in political communication among Finnish parliamentarians.

Taking Finland as its specific case, this study with qualitative methods examines social media adaption from the parliamentarians’ perspective, investigating social media’s role in political communication. Hereby, this study enriches the scarce qualitative research at the given academic area. The structures of social media technologies shape how people engage with digital environments (danah boyd, 2010). Understanding social media functionalities sheds light on the social practices online, facilitating the comprehension of parliamentarians’ utilisation of social media in their ways of communicating (Dijck & Poell, 2013; Klinger & Svensson, 2018; Wilhelm, 2000). By means of this, the study aims to see how social media has permeated the political communication field among Finnish parliamentarians. The study furthers the academic discussion of the given topic (see f. ex. Chadwick, 2017; Filimonov et al., 2016; McNair, 2012) examining social media’s appropriateness in the political field. An examination of the parliamentarians’ perception of social media will help us to study how parliamentarians utilise social media in their daily practices, further enlightening understanding of social media’s significance in the political field.

Considering the aim of the study, this study attempts to generate an understanding of how social media has permeated political communication and is adopted to parliamentarians’ daily activities. To be able to detect the overall aim of this study, this study poses to following specific research questions:

RQ1: How are the social media affordances recognised and utilised by the parliamentarians in their communication practices?

RQ2: What challenges do social media affordances pose to parliamentarians in their way of communicating?

The study will shed light on how social media and the logics of social media practices have permeated to the field politics and how parliamentarians’ subjective experiences of social media
appear in the interactive processes of communication. Adopting McNair’s (2012) definition of political communication, this study departs from the understanding of political communication as “communication undertaken by politicians and other political actors for the purpose of achieving specific objects” (McNair, 2012:4). To be able to examine how social media may operate in the use of parliamentarians, this study posits itself under three academic disciplines: politics, media and communication, and ICT, to depict social media in the context of political communication. To be able to answer to the posed questions, the study adapts a qualitative approach as its research method and investigates the social and technical functionalities of online platforms in the interactive and social processes of communication.

The study starts by presenting social media in relation to mass media in academic empirical and theoretical research and continues by presenting social media’s operational aspects. In the emerge of internet, political communication has entered a phase where it struggles between older media and newer media logics (Chadwick, 2017). Thereof, media and its technological affordances, play an important role when attempting to understand how social and political actors adapt to (social) media for their different functionalities. Here, we will talk about social media affordances. Affordances are understood as the objective’s properties that show the possible actions users can take with them (Dijck & Poell, 2013). In this study properties are presented as social media affordance integrating technological as well as social elements to its presentation. Political actors mobilise to advance their values and interests according to the affordances in this interplay of old and new logics. In the interdependence of technological and social actors, the actors operate interdependently with other social and technological actors in interactive exchanges. The agency of the actors becomes relevant in the interactive processes giving pertinency to other actors, the citizens and the media, operating together with political actors (Chadwick, 2017).

These adaptive processes where political sphere adjust to media’s functionality are explained with the theory of mediatisation (Lundby, 2009). Normative view of mediatisation of politics, display the processes in a negative light perceiving mediatisation to be undemocratising at its core (Srömbäck, 2008). Social media is seen to emerge to the interplay of media and politics, mitigating
the normative assumption of mediatisation. Social media is recognised for its deliberative elements, giving possibilities for civic interaction but it is also argued to retain the existing social structures (Chadwick, 2017). Thus, how social media is operated among the parliamentarians will shed light on how mediatisation may be seen in the scope of this light. In mediatisation, media logics are used as theoretical backdrop presenting elements of the structures and systems media bears with them.

Politisation thereof, focuses on the policy-making processes and the engagement of a political discussion under given elements. Social media enables individuals’ and collectives’ to pursue their values and interests within different but interrelated media, simultaneously empowering and disempowering the actors (Dijck and Poell, 2013; Meyer, 2002; Wilhelm, 2000). Politisation allows to further the discussion to agenda-building processes, shedding light on how the parliamentarians may utilise social media for agenda continuing the discussion to personalisation of politics. Moreover, democratisation offers an angle to consider political communication and social media affordances from a collective point of view, in reference to media systems synthesis with socioeconomic structures (Dahlgren, 2005). This will be developed further in the discussion section.
2. Background and existing research

Research on political communication has occupied an important position in the academic field of media studies and political studies for a long, developing perspectives and theoretical frameworks established to the research fields. The increasing use of social media for political purposes has expanded the academic research by generating a range of empirical research and investigation in the given research areas. The literature falls under a broad scope of *mediatisation of politics* and is dedicated to the studies on political communication. This part of the study contextualises the given research problem in relation to the contemporary shifts in the field of political communication in social and scientific interests. The reviewed researches are thus dedicated to the field of media and politics, giving an emphasis to the empirical findings and results of the relevant literature. The literature of political communication discerns three predominant perceptions to study politics and media: the citizens, the media, and the politics, utilised in this study (Chadwick, 2017; Karvonen, 2010).

I start by giving a brief background to the emergence of social media for political purposes, continuing with a brief background of the Finnish electoral system and its relational importance to the current study. This study does not explore the Finnish political system as such and hence, more elaborated discussion of the Finnish political climate is left out from this study. Furthermore, I continue with reviewing literature indicating media’s functionality and its use in political communication, classifying the literature under three themes of *relay function*, *semiotic function* and *economic function*, adapted from Schulz (2004). The interconnectedness of these aspects is evident and results to overlapping findings. Although this study is classified in media studies, aspects of political science are inevitable disclosing the interconnectedness of the two fields and the approach this study has taken.
2.1. The emergence of social media for political purposes

Social media’s phenomenality in politics, and in other parts of societies has been striking the past decades. In 2011, 90 percent of the Finnish electoral candidates were on Facebook during the parliamentary election (Strandberg, 2016). Thus, only 40 percent of the country’s internet users were registered to social media platforms, indicating that electoral campaigning cannot be claimed to have been happened in social media. Electorates’ social media accounts were either the candidates’ own personal Facebook pages or their campaign support group’s production for the election period (Strandberg, 2016). Strandberg finds out that candidates’ appearance in social media has increased between 2011 to 2015 (ibid.). The increased social media presence is argued to be partly a consequence of Barack Obama’s extensive social media campaigning in the presidential election 2008, resulting in taking office (Kalsnes, 2016b). Development cannot be analysed or reasoned unambiguously, and differences in the use and adaption are observed within the candidates. Social media has taken an established role as an election tool, and its contemporary role is recognised widely within the arena of political communication, political coverage and political engagement (Strandberg, 2016; McNair, 2012).

Starndberg’s (2016) longitudinal study concerning Finnish electorates’ and candidates’ social media behaviour and changes on the behaviour actuates towards candidates’ more active use of social media. Whereas the use of social media by the electorates or candidates is not anymore posed due the economic reasons, the change is reckoned on the social resources, such as age and education that are more influential on one’s use of social media. Though the ambiguous findings, Strandberg (2016) argues that social media is not a prerequisite for a successful campaign – campaigning and citizen’s interest to follow politics happen also outside the online spaces– suggesting that the political sphere takes place both online and offline beyond campaigning (Strandberg, 2016:95-116). Additionally, Filimonov, Russman and Svensson (2016) and McNair’s (2012) argue that politics and political discussions are not relevant only during the election periods. If an offline activity is reckoned important outside the election period, so is the online activity. Borg, Kestilä-Kekkonen and Westinen (2015) forecast in their rapport that social media will become more
important for the voters also outside the election campaigns. They primarily consider it a positive development for political communication (ibid.).

### 2.2. Importance of the electoral system

The majority of research conducted in this field are from the western democracies, hence the western social media and political systems are deriving the discussions (Kaid & Strömbäck, 2008:6-7, Karvonen, 2010). Enli and Skogerbø (2013:758) argue that the parliamentary system of a country affects the way social media is used among politicians or in the political systems. The focus displayed on social media depends on the electoral system a country has adapted: party-focused or an individual-focused (Enli & Skogerbø, 2013:758; Kaid & Strömbäck, 2008:6-7). Finnish parliament system is party-focused, however, the elections focus on single candidates. In contrast to many other countries, which use the party-list system, for example the Nordic countries (Enli & Skogerbø, 2013), in Finland, a vote needs to be given to an individual candidate, who represents a party. The party does not assign an order to the candidates. The voting is determined through a localised closed list. The given votes pooled to the party determine how many seats the party will get in the parliament and the ones voted to the parliament are calculated proportionally depending on their representational area and the party success. This type of system emphasises a singular candidate, determining the relation between the candidate and the citizens to be more important (Gustafsson, 2016; Karvonen, 2010). Karvonen argues that since Finland is a consensus democracy and the differences in ideologies between parties are minimal, individual representation of a candidate and their persona becomes more emphasised (Karvonen, 2010). The closed list voting system entails the same.

According to Enli and Skogerbø (2013), Finnish election system could then, potentially point towards individuals’ increasing representation in social media. Furthermore, it could point towards electorates’ tendency to vote according to individual character over a party focus. However, voting behaviour is not that unequivocal. A report on electoral involvement in Finland indicates that the increasing trend on candidate focused politics has stagnated after almost 30 years of upturn (surveys from 1983 to 2007) (Borg et al. 2015:26,30-31). Thus, the divergences, in general
electorates have voted rather evenly on parties and individual candidates. A statistically significant observation was made in 2011 parliament election (Borg et al. 2015:32). The upturn of the far-right party True Finns had an impact on the general party-focused voting behaviour in the 2011 election. Voters of True Finns have a tendency to vote for the party rather than a single candidate, indicating the significance in the study (ibid.). These differences and findings indicate the ambiguity of political nature and how individual as well as country’s societal aspects and thus, the electoral system, effect on voting behaviour and comprehension of political communication.

2.3 Relay function

Relay function refers to what it describes to – to transfer messages over distances through to channels or storage capacities. There are two ways through which the transferring is made: direct and indirect functioning (Schulz, 2004). In this part of the literature review, I aim to highlight the functionality of social media and how interactivity one of the grounding aspects of social media, is studied and perceived by political actors. Schulz (2004) explains the aim with transferring messages is to bridge social, cultural and spatial distances between individual and collective actors. Direct transferring refers to the technical means of telecommunication, and indirect by the production of a public sphere.

Schulz (2004) refers to mass media, and mass media as a space where users can rather freely, though filtered, articulate and share their own interests and opinions. He recognises the emerging “new media” to have similar functionalities as mass media has, but with an increasing focus on self-determination and interactivity. Interactivity proposed by Schulz (ibid.), is recognised by many other scholars studying political communication on internet (Jackson & Lilleker, 2011; Larson & Kalsnes, 2014; Vergeer et al 2013). Bridging or participation, is often referred to interactivity, which as a concept, is reflexible and depends on the researchers understanding. Interactivity is thus emphasised as an essential function of social media (Eloranta & Isotalus, 2016, Dijck & Poell, 2013). From a political science perspective, Coleman (2005:190) argues that internet makes the communication between politicians and citizens more authentic and transparent for three reasons: it enables a new kind relationship of trust, creates multiplied networks for representation, and offers
citizens new public spaces for self-representation eventually enhancing deliberative democracy.
Scholars as described above, often emphasise the interactive element of social media, however,
how this element appears in practice is not as clear as the empirical findings in the next section
demonstrates.

Politicians, communication officers, as well as campaign strategists emphasise interactivity in their
campaign strategies (see f.ex. Kalsnes, 2016b). Despite the potentiality social media offers for
interactivity and thereafter for politics, previous studies have shown parliamentarians’ reluctance
(or lack of technicality or understanding) to make use of it. Janssen and Kies refer social media as
“decentralized communication of many-to-many” (2005) or “one-to-many” as Skovsgaard and Van Dalen describe (2013). Findings of Skovsgaard and Van Dalen’s (2013) study of Danish parliamentarians’ social media use under an election campaign indicates in favour of the abovementioned. During adaption of social media, parliamentarians emphasised elements of interactivity and responsiveness of the platforms, and referred to these elements as normative elements of democracy, indicating parliamentarians’ optimistic view of social media. Despite of the interactive elements, Skovsgaard and Van Dalen (2013) found that the correspondents performed mainly one-way communication at the studied platform, Facebook, which was used to compensate the lack of attention in press media. Findings by Larsson & Kalsnes, (2014) indicate towards similar results of Swedish and Norwegian parliamentarians.

Similarly, with the colleagues above, Klinger’s (2013) findings on Swiss parliamentarians’ use of
social media emphasise the platforms’ use for broadcasting purposes and electoral propaganda,
despite their deliberative and interactive potentiality. In their comparative study of the UK’s
parliamentarians’ use and adaption of Twitter, Jackson and Lilleker (2011) argue that Twitter was
mainly used for self-promotion though the reciprocity of the platform was acknowledged.
Published content promoted parliamentarians professional position or their dedication to the work.
They further propose that Twitter may be assisting, or its use may be a symptom of an enhanced
emphasis on individualism as opposed to party collective. They could however not find traits for
Twitter’s use for strategic purposes. The study detected that the most active Twitter users were
women and younger parliamentarians, which aligns with Gönlund & Wass’ findings of the Finnish electoral candidates (2016).

Larsson’s and Skogersbø’s (2018) quantitative study offers the closest empirical contribution to this study, as it focuses on the use of social media between the election periods indicating the importance of social media for communication. They analyse Norwegian local politicians’ adaption of social media in relation to their use of other media channels, focusing on the periods between elections. The findings indicate the respondents’ embracement of platforms’ interactive elements, additionally indicating that women and less experienced politicians were more likely to use social media. Researchers suggest that the findings should be viewed with a certain scepticism, especially regarding the findings of reciprocity, considering that the data may be biased towards the most desirable or prestigious answer, which in this is reciprocity and interactivity (2018). Furthermore, the study suggests that social media and traditional media, both, play an important but different role for local politicians implying the differences of logics behind mass media and social media, as media scholars have suggested (Dijck & Poell, 2013; Klinger & Svensson, 2015; Lundby, 2009). Adapting politicians’ perspective, the study indicates that social media is not only an electoral tool but is considered an important communication channel for local politicians. Due the quantitative approach, the study limits its interesting findings to the predeveloped explanatory variables, which may overlook some insights of the use of social media by parliamentarians focusing on more generalisable findings of social media’s importance for local politicians.

The reviewed studies have shown that the deliberative functions that social media and internet are believed to offer have not really reached the capacity of deliberative political communication from the politicians’ perspective attributing to the pragmatic reality. Most of the studies have had their focus on election periods, which they have examined with mixed methods or quantitative methods (see f.ex. Filimonov et al., 2016; Kalsnes, 2016b; Larsson & Skogerbø, 2018, Skovsgaard & Van Dalen 2013). A number of studies have included a comparative element in their research design comparing an interview material, of the party’s campaigning managers (Kalsnes, 2016b) or of the politicians (Enli & Skogerbø, 2013), to the parliamentarians’ actual use and activity on social media.
to detect disparities in the strategies and the actions. Whereas these studies bring a valid contribution to the research field, these studies have focused on the election campaigns and thus treated social media particularly as an election tool and a part of campaign strategies. Alternatively, the studies have focused on quantitative elements, analysing the content distributed on social media according to the candidates, their positions and characteristics (Filimonov et al., 2016; Larsson & Kalsnes 2014; Lilleker & Jackson, 2011).

The qualitative findings indicate that the functionality and elements of internet and social media are acknowledged by the communication strategists but the quantitative findings demonstrate that the adaption does not fulfil the theoretically acknowledged purposes and the findings reflect towards economic aspects, which will be developed in the next section. Research on interactivity outside the election periods or from qualitative perspective is still rather unversed, calling for a study that can shed light on the changing elements social media offers for political communication and an in-depth comprehension of platforms’ interactive elements. The limited focus on qualitative studies indicate a crucial gap in the literature.

2.4. Semiotic function

Semiotic functions refer to the content of the messages, the written and unwritten words of messages encoded and formatted for human perception and information processing (Schulz, 2004). The content of the messages is often respectively interpretive to the culture or society the message is formatted to represent the reality (ibid.).

In political communication, research of media content has attained a lot of scholarly attention and it is generally related to the research of personalisation of politics. Altheide and Snow (1979) argue that messages are shaped and formatted in all media according to a specific media logic following the requirements of production routines and presentation genres, meaning that media is in the core to shape culture and society. Personalisation of politics refers to a changing focus from parties to politicians, and from issues to personas (Karvonen, 2010). These changes are reflected to the decline of issue politics and issue-based voting behaviour by the public, indicating that people may
increasingly focus on individuals over parties and their collective interest, or on politicians’ personal characteristics over their policy interests. This may ultimately lead to a situation in which power relationships in politics and societies are decided on the basis of the individual characteristics of politicians (Adam & Meier, 2010; Karvonen, 2010).

Longitudinal studies have examined the historical trails of personalisation which are widely connected to two predominant ideas: firstly, to the changes in politics, which are referred to societal structural changes emphasising the rise of individualised market culture and modernisation period (Bennett, 2012; Holtz-Bacha et al. 2014; Van Aelst et al. 2012). In sociological terms, it is reflected to weakening of traditional ties and moving towards individualised worldview and uncertainty (Holtz-Bacha et al., 2014). These ideological spectrums are also recognised by other scholars (see f.ex. Vergeer et al. 2013). Secondly, personalisation is reflected to the changes in journalistic and media systems, which are reasoned through the historical technological developments, conveying television as the main instrument for personalisation. Other factors such as the pervasiveness of media in political processes and, respectively as for changes in politics, market-driven orientation of media industries is reckoned to change the media systems (Bennett, 2012; Enli & Skogerbø 2013; Holtz-Bacha et al., 2014; Strömbäck, 2008).

Political science research recognises personalisation of politics having a long history, rejecting personalisation of politics to be solely an aftermath of technological developments such as television or internet. Full-fledged image campaigns are discovered to be taken place already at 1840 at the US presidential elections and the relevance of “political personae” is recognised to have had its importance throughout the history of politics and political presentation, emphasising the charisma and charismatic leadership (Fransworth & Lichter, 2009; Van Zoonen & Holtz-Bacha, 2000). Yet, the rather coherent reasoning for the personalisation claims, the empirical findings from the field, are obscure.

Karvonen (2010) argues that the broadness of the term and the absence of an exact definition of personalisation has created complexity over the issue and its research, not less methodologically, leading to a variety of approaches adapted in empirical studies. The changes in focus are recognised
from three different areas of politics—the voters, the media and the political actors (Holtz-Bacha et al., 2014; Karvonen, 2010). In the context of personalisation this means that: the voters may increasingly vote based on personal traits of the politician; the media may increasingly focus on the individual politician with an expense of coverage of the parties and institutions; and the political actors may emphasise themselves and their personality traits rather than the party and its ideologies in their strategic communication strategies (Karvonen, 2010; Van Aelst et al., 2012). Previous studies of personalisation thesis have mainly focused on the media’s perspective examining the ways how media presents politicians within the two propositions (Hermans & Vergeer, 2012; Isotalus & Almonkari, 2014). As with many other empirical studies, studies of personalisation are situated for election periods.

From parties to people

Changing focus from meaningful aspects to trivial is in the core of personalisation theory. Politicians are argued, in order to attract the media, to emphasise the candidates’ or politicians’ presentation independently from the party. This aspect is often studied from media’s perspective, examining if the attention given to candidates actually increases in the media compared to the attention given to parties. Studies have almost solely utilised mass media’s perspective of the given issue.

Strömbäck and Kaid in their editorial edition of “The Handbook of Election News Coverage Around the World” (2008) examine parliamentary candidates’ election coverage in print media in different countries. They detect the factors that shape the content of election news in the context of personalisation. They identify a general trend that indicates that the news coverage is moving from parties to individuals and issues to persona in election campaigning (2008:1-16). That said, the degree in the country level differs. Karvonen (2010), has also examined personalisation traits and in contrary to Strömbäck and Kaid, his results were modest. He too focused on the western parliamentary contexts, and without denying the traits of personalisation of politics in parliamentary democracies, he concludes that, with few expectations, there is no clear evidence for personalisation of politics. Both of the studies focused on print media during election periods, but
online campaigning and internet in political communication was acknowledged as an emerging field and important contribution from a democratic perspective. Strömbäck and Kaid (2008) thus argue that, a sheer appearance of internet is not believed to assure an efficient role in political processes. As in Sweden and Canada, where they found out the internet penetration to be high, its role in political processes was considered limited (2008:430).

Holtz-Bacha, Langer and Merkle (2014) conducted a comparative study of the personalisation in German and the UK, focusing on the news coverage during election campaigns. They examined also the factors that influence to the degree and nature of personalisation in different settings. They found that little of the personalisation trails could be attributed to different electoral systems, but rather to the different characteristics of the press market, highlighting the importance of socio-political elements. The finding implies that the context plays an essential role in studies of personalisation.

Kim, Scheufele and Shanahan (2005) give an attempt to study the voters’ behaviour in relation to personalisation traits in political communication. They refute the common belief of electoral campaigns, even with parliamentary government systems, regarding persona of the candidates. Candidate or persona-oriented presentation does not necessarily have to mean a loss on normatively more significant issue-focus or party-orientation in campaigns. They reckon several shortcomings when studying electorates’ voting behaviour, but found examining the US presidential election that all the information related to the candidates foster the constituencies’ knowledge of the candidates’ positions and therefore contribute to issue voting. More important was the electorates’ devoted attention to the news media than the news media’s content of the candidates. This reflects to the idea that certain elements in election campaigning do not necessarily overrule the normative reference of issue voting nor mean a loss of issue politics.

From issues to characteristics

King (2002) argues that studying personalisation in regard to the voting behaviours challenges the normative standpoint, which regards voting based on rational and informative voting. He argues
that the existing research points in the direction that candidate orientations have not gained in importance over time, and that personalisation is far less important than it is believed. In summary, the results of elections in the United States, the UK, France, Germany, and Canada from 1960 to 2001, show that there is no linear trend towards more personalised election outcomes. He focused on candidates’ (presidential or party leaders) personal characteristics such as “their physical appearance, their native intelligence, their character or temperament, and their political style” and concludes that “the almost universal belief that leaders’ and candidates’ personalities are almost invariably hugely important factors in determining the outcomes of elections is simply wrong” (2002:216).

Quite similarly, Graham, Jackson and Broersma (2014) detected in their study of British and Dutch parliamentary candidates’ use of Twitter in personal context may potentially strengthen the relation with voters by creating a sense of closeness. The extent to which such behaviour spreads was remained to be seen. This was also recognised by Vergeer, Hermans, and Sams (2013). They argue that presenting an attractive image on social media, politicians may decrease the psychological distance between the politicians and their potential voters, bridging the gap between the political elite and the citizens, which is a reflective to relay function discussed earlier. As the studies demonstrate, presenting politicians’ personal characteristics may not be as detrimental and the debate over the issue continues (Karvonen, 2010; Vergeer et al. 2013).

Techniques, used in media’s way to present politics, are now recognised more in the way politicians’ present themselves in media. These techniques are recognised through user-generated content and the increasing focus on internet research. Storytelling technique is one technique the scholarly field has adopted recently. Prior (2018) examines how storytelling techniques could be adapted to represent a parliament within the political sphere, and to indicate its relevance to citizens’ mediating between the citizens and the governance whilst engaging in political sphere for more democratic means. In absence of empirical findings, he concludes how storytelling technique represent “a form of engagement that is especially conducive to a modern political landscape characterised by citizens who exercise self-actualising forms of political action and expression, and
establish subjective meanings independently” (2018:91) suggesting a further research to initiate from. Without focusing solely on personalisation as a subject, this study attempts to gain valuable knowledge from the politicians’ side, initiating discussion of how parliamentarians discern personalisation means in their own representation.

As storytelling techniques, personal characteristics or political relevance can be emphasised with visuals (Prior, 2018; Filimonov et al. 2016). According to Lass (1995), over times, images have gained significantly more cognitive foundation among citizens. “Visuals are assumed to have a strong influence on attitude formation and public opinion, as well as on political motivation, participation and action” (Müller et al. 2012:311 cited in Filimonov et al. 2016). Filimonov, Russman and Svensson (2016) who are the few that have studied politicians’ communication on Instagram state that: “The image the parties were presenting leaned toward personalization with a strong presence of top candidates in their postings.” They examined how Swedish parties used visuals in their election campaigns on Instagram. Findings indicate that social media is used to manage an attractive image of the candidates emphasising candidates in a political or professional context and fostering constituencies’ knowledge about candidates’ positions to gain viewers’ attention (Filimonov et al. 2016). Relationally to Lass (1995), Filimonov, Russman and Svensson (2016) argue that picture-centred social media platforms constitute an important role for visual communication of politics and that citizens increasingly learn more politics through visuals. They suggest longitudinal or cross-country studies to depart from this knowledge and investigate how political actors adapt, use and perform on Instagram in the ever more visualised world. That said, personalisation and visual communication through social media is touched upon in this study to continue the discussion of visual communication. In the visual communication studies, as largely in the studies of personalisation, the focus is on the electoral constituencies examining the candidates’ representation in the media –print or social. As demonstrated in this section, traits for individual focused campaigning are recognised, but the factors indicating them are disparate and need further contextualisation.
2.5. Economic function

Economic function refers to the feature of mass communication to make use of technology. Historically, this is related to the emergence of different technological developments from radio, to television and internet, which has enabled a huge output production at low unit cost, making the messages accessible and affordable for ‘the masses’ (Schulz, 2004:93). The economic and technological evolution produces new information resources in a way that it proliferates new information resources continuously. “Communication arouses interest and increases the demand for messages.” (Schulz, 2004:93). This means that messages provoke reactions giving rise to further messages which concludes to a self-reinforcement of media system, particularly in the case of social media (ibid.). In mediatisation, this is explained with dependency theory.

Economic function can thus also be related to dependency, posing additional uncertainties and challenges for the politicians and users as they need to adapt to the changing media environment, by being active and responsive. The uncertainty of social media was recognised as a potential threat to parties and individual politicians (Kalsnes, 2016b). Whereas, reputation is considered particularly important for politicians and political candidates, Kalsnes (ibid.) proposes that as social media are becoming more and more common in online politics, politicians and political parties need to act more carefully online. In the changing media environment politicians need to work now also as news editors in order to limit the risk of offensive online behaviour that may harm their reputation. Mass media increasingly picks up stories to report news from online platforms meaning that a single Facebook or Twitter post may attain large media attention. Whereas news media’s attention is desirable in general reputation, nasty Facebook comments or embarrassing pictures are not desirable news stories for the politicians and feared among the political parties as Kalsnes’ (ibid.) findings point out. The loss of control in social media is not only related to citizens’ actions online but to politicians increased publishing possibilities, uncontrollable by the parties or anyone else (Kalsnes, 2016b).

Social media brings additional costs to the parties. Costs are related mostly to time resources but also to social media guidance, both of which aim to effect algorithms ameliorating the visibility of
an account or a post (Kalsnes, 2016b). Whereas social media enables a huge output with a low production costs, users’ dependency on technological platforms and their functionality determinate their utilisation of the platforms. Findings of Filimonov, Russman and Svensson (2016) exemplify how politicians make use (at least partly) of platforms offering visual communication possibilities making a message (or a picture) more accessible and affordable to wider audiences. Furthermore, the variety of findings presented in previous section of relay function demonstrate that social media is widely recognised tool especially for electoral purposes –disseminating messages and gaining voters’ attention– steadily gaining its established role in political communication in general.

Furthermore, the question of resources becomes vital. Even as from the surface, online platforms seem to be accessible, and self-determining platforms, they follow the basic economic principles to make a profit and are regulated with policies from global to company’s level, mitigating single users’ role in the platform (Schwanholz & Graham, 2018:2-3).

As reviewed literature propose, media and politics are closely intertwined and political communication is fundamentally social but interdependent on media’s functionality. Empirical studies offer mixed findings of the mentioned. The mixed findings are the results of different and obscure definitions of the concept (Holtz-Bacha et al., 2014; Rahat & Sheafer, 2007) and the differences and challenges in methodological issues (Strömbäck 2008). The changes in media and technological developments are considered process-oriented, and many distinguishable features under which the media operate and mediatised politics are recognised are described accordingly.

Many studies employed a political science perspective focus on election periods and discuss the proximity of communication tools and strategies for electoral success with quantitative methods. Media and communication studies have predominantly examined political communication from media’s perspective analysing the adoption of media logics when reporting on politics. Many empirical studies have adapted an approach, which analyses politics and social media through campaigning strategies concluding that campaigns have become more or less permanent in politics (see also Fliminov et al 2017, Strandberg, 2016; McNair, 2012:xviii). The heavy focus on elections gives less relevance for further studies to adapt an election-based time-framed studies or relevance
for studies focusing on online political communication outside of election periods (see f.ex. Enli and Skogerbo 2013; Prior, 2018; Strandberg, 2016). Existing literature has rather univocal approach tripping often to a normative understanding of mediatisation, or examining an electoral success of candidates through the deployment of online strategies (Holtz-Bacha, 2014; Filimonov et al., 2016), further motivating the approach of this study. This study contributes to the scarce field examining social media’s relevance beyond an election tool, constructing an understanding of its substance from parliamentarians’ perspective, an approach often overlooked in this academic field.
3. Theoretical Framework

Theoretical framework is comprised of two branches, one disseminating media and the other politics. The type of theorisation enables me to elaborate theoretical concepts on a broader understanding of political communication and relating to the intertwining of actors, systems and contexts, while presenting them in process-like form indicating their interdependency. To study parliamentarians’ perceptions of social media and to understand the utilities and restriction of social media, a comprehension of social media’s operationalising elements becomes essential. Furthermore, in order to be able to analyse and examine social media usage in parliamentarians’ perspective, an understanding for the groundings of political communication becomes important.

I start with a discussion of media logics, which departs from presenting mass media logic (Althiede & Snow, 1979; Lundby, 2009; Meyer, 2002) as a base for evolvement of social media logic presented by Dijck & Poell, (2013) and Klinger & Svensson (2014). The scholars that are referred to shed light on the platforms’ operational objectives, which are connectivity, programmability and popularity (ibid1; ibid2.). To include a perception of social media’s user-generated functionality, I have included digital storytelling as a concept, which indicates the relevance of content in online political communication (Couldry, 2008; Dahlgren, 2009; Prior, 2018). These four concepts are referred as social media affordances, which are used to understand the operational aspects of social media in the interactive processes of mediatisation, democratisation and politisation. These concepts and processes that guide the analysis and empirical material in analysing how social media is understood within these processes, eminent in political communication as the empirical material demonstrates.

Mediatisation pursue the discussion of media and politics and the theoretical debate of media logics. Whereas mediatisation is not a new theoretical approach, social media has brought complexity to commonly deployed normative understanding of mediatisation, requesting medias’ undemocratising consequences (Lundby, 2009; Strömbäck, 2008; Chadwick, 2017). Thereof, I present Chadwick’s view on hybrid media system, which combines the mass media logic with the more recent media logics of emerging media system that forms the practices of interaction between...
different actors in media system drawing away from the theory of mediatisation (2017). This view attempts to understand the interdependency of different logics in an action, and also interdependent actors’ operation recognised in political communication.

I will further move on to discuss on classic democratic theories and democratic communication to present how media and politics are understood at the classical concept of democracy and how social media may enhance horizontal communication (Meyer, 2002; Morey et al, 2012; Dahlgren 2005). Additionally, challenges internet and social media pose to democracy are discussed through Wilhelm’s view of digital democracy (2000). I continue to present the political processes in the light of political logics, referring to the opposing but interdependent views of media and politics. Concept of agenda-building and personalisation of politics are also presented, enriching the discussion of the content in political communication.

3.1. Social media logic

Media logic has been used as the means to explain media’s influence in other social institutions and actors in society, especially politics (Lundby, 2009). Theoretical approach to social media logic is rather recent and traces back to Altheide and Snow, definition of (mass) media logic first in 1979. They state that media logic (as singular) is a set of principles cultivated in and by media institutions permeating to every public domain dominating their organising structures, transforming of our social and cultural life through media.

In the core of mass media logics are presentation and newsworthiness, which frame the media events as a continuous flow determined by editorial strategies (Dijck & Poell, 2013; Strömbäck & Esser, 2009). Socioeconomic changes, such as commercialisation is argued to have affected to media logics eroding the boundaries between news and advertisements, fact and opinions, public services and commerce. Adaption of commercialisation culture also meant that the mass media products were turned into commodities, and media’s role was justified mainly through sale figures (Meyer, 2002). In political communication, mass media is argued to deploy these techniques when
presenting politics, concluding to a limited and simplified presentation of political reality (Dahlgren, 2009; Meyer, 2002; Strömbäck & Esser, 2009; Strömbäck, 2008).

Whereas mass media logic is grounded to the idea of broadcasting, social media logic is grounded to the idea of fast-paced and user-generated content, which are built on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 (Dijck & Poell, 2013). In the core of social media logic are access, participation, reciprocity, and many-to-many as well as one-to-many communication (Jenkins & Thorburn, 2003). Klinger and Svensson (2014) summarise difference of mass media logic and social media logic for the production of content as follows: “information in mass media is selected based on news values, while the logics behind posting on social media platforms are instead guided by authors’ selection of information that is of personal interest to them.” (2018:4656). Considering the logic of social media, we can recognise how an understanding of political communication and McNair’s (2012) definition follows Klinger’s and Svensson’s (2014) comprehension of social media logic, emphasising “the personal interest” of users – and specific goals, as could be added from the comprehension of political communication. Social media lowers the threshold for (civic) participation through its independency as a medium (Swart et. Al, 2018).

This study adapts Klinger and Svensson’s definition of social media as “online platforms where users can generate content, organize and access information in databases, inform and be informed by a network of selected others, which also becomes the general framework for presenting and interpreting information.” (2014:5). Thus, adapting the interactive elements of social media. In addition to this user-friendly recognition, internet and social media is understood to function, not solely under the practices of users, but in the interplay of the users, technologies and commercial strategies (ibid.) tracing back to the discourse recognised in the mass media logic. This broadens the understanding of social media to include practices of self-regulation, constant updating, speed, and connectivity but also processes of newsgathering, production, storage, editing, and distribution (Klinger & Svensson, 2014; Klinger & Svensson, 2018; Dijck & Poell, 2013).

Social media platforms afford interactivity and push for constant updating in fragmented publics but as in any media technology, social media also has characteristics that both enable and restrict
media in their production, processing and presentation of the content (Klinger & Svensson, 2018). Klinger and Svensson (2014) discern that increasing use of social media platforms in political campaigning and political communication has brought some changes to the nature of political communication, to which they offer a set of functionalities of the logics according to which mass media and social media perform. Withdrawing from the technological determinist perception, Klinger and Svensson (2014) by acknowledging the differences and overlaps of the logics, consider social media different from mass media, hence, its logic, but not incontrovertible better or more democratic than mass media. As we have now understood media technologies appear with drawbacks, the next section presents elements that constitute the features, which actors in political communication online can utilise and are restricted to.

3.2. Social media affordances

McLuhan pointed out that it is impossible to analyse or theorise social and cultural change without focusing on how people and their communication and interactions are affected by the media that they use (McLuhan, 1962 cited in Lindgren 2017:7). The expansion of social media platforms is seen as a part of broader network culture that was defined by affordances of web technologies modifying information and communication manners (Lindgren, 2017). Both older and newer media do operate on technological platforms, indicating that all such logics are somewhat dependent on the limitations and possibilities of the technology (Lindgren, 2017; Dijck & Poell, 2013) and the platforms we make use of. By focusing on the affordances of social media, we can adduce them correspondingly for the study scope and reflect to Earl and Kimport’s definition of ‘technological affordances’ as “the actions and uses that a technology makes qualitatively easier or possible when compared to prior like technologies” (2011:33).

In this study, I refer to social media affordances, presenting the embedded elements not only by their technological functionality but also in relation to social actions according to which political communication operates. The artefacts of programmability, connectivity, and popularity assembled by Klinger and Svensson’s work of network media logic (2014) and Dijck and Poell’s (2013) work of social media logic are presented. Together, these conceptualisations point out the technological
characteristics and properties of social media that attend to information distribution and social activities. Some elements concern more of the content and its circulation and distribution and some emphasise the audience and their role. Furthermore, I present the concept of digital storytelling by Couldry (2008) and Prior (2018) to emphasise the social artefact of the content.

Programmability

Such as medial logic, social media adhere the notion of programmability, or datafication (Dijck et al. 2018:32). Whereas mass media uses programming to manage audience’s watching experience to a continuous flow, in social media, programming is referred to sites’ technological mechanisms that steer user experiences, content, and user relations via platforms, referred to algorithms. Users can create content to a specific platform steering information streams while site’s owners may steer users’ contribution by tweaking the platform algorithms and interfaces to influence data traffic (Dijck & Poell, 2013:5). Power of algorithms are recognised in several scholarly fields. In communication studies, algorithms are referred to affect to our lives in different ways and on several levels as they can make certain things visible and hide others.

Additionally it can turn all the user interaction to data which can further be analysed, used, stored, and even sold (Dijck et al. 2018:32), as the Facebook Cambridge Analytica scandal in March 2018 demonstrated. Due to this scandal, social media has lost its innocence in the eyes of broader audience. Social media enables two-way traffic between users and programmers. This means that the users can shape the algorithmic mechanisms by manipulating the coded interaction by massively retweeting, liking, or sharing some content online. Hence, the programmed central agency the platforms have, users also retain agency. Programmability is thus hard to analyse partly because algorithms are proprietary and hence, kept secret and partly because they constantly evolve adapting to follow changing business models and user practices (Bucher, 2012; Dijck & Poell, 2013). These practices, from both sides, contribute to the unpredictable nature of social media.
Connectivity

Connectedness has played a significant role with the emergence of social media platforms. It refers, in its simplest form, to the users’ ability to connect and share with each other and further to connect with content. Dijck and Poell (2013) argue that even if human connectedness or ‘participation’ is still a valid part of social media's logic, a more encompassing and accurate term to capture this element of logic is connectivity. In social media, information can reach a large number of self-selected like-minded others but not a general public or ‘masses’ as with the antecedent. Surely, with social media, one may also reach large audiences and even larger audiences but unlike mass media, it usually depends on online catalysts, rather than gatekeepers, that may ameliorate in the distribution of the content (Klinger & Svensson, 2018). Schwanholz and Graham, (2018) argue that more importantly, rather than attracting a large audience, especially in political communication, internet enables the users to attract the right audience. If the actors proactively and collectively identify the most effective ways of using their social media platforms, they may engage with and connect with the citizens and stakeholders more efficiently.

Though users may connect with others holding their agency themselves, the ‘platform apparatus’ too exists. As understood from programming, platforms may not only influence on what we see in social media but also how we are connected to content, other users, and advertisers online. Dijck and Poell assert the mutual power of both agencies arguing that social media logic “enables human connectedness while pushing automated connectivity.” (2013:8).

Automated connectivity enables automated personalisation. This means that the platforms may calibrate the online content algorithmically by connecting “users to contents, users to users and platforms to users, users to advisers, and platforms to platforms” (Dijck & Poell, 2013:9), connecting the users with likeminded people, preferred items or individualised taste. In political discussion, this connective action is related to the customisation to assemble like-minded people together (Smith, 2017), colloquially referred as filter bubbles. This type of connectivity is particularly important from democratic point of view as it delimits the citizens’ exposure to altering viewpoints steering the like-minded people together exploiting the idea of political logic (Meyer,
2002; Morey et al. 2012). Contrarily, some people appreciate the gesture of platforms offering them content and connecting them according to their individualised taste (Dijck & Poell, 2013).

Popularity

Popularity as an element of social media logic, was already divulged with mass media logic, to push more ‘likeable’ people to become media personalities and accumulate mass attention with filtered content (Dijck & Poell, 2013). Popularity is one of the pervasive principles of social media. Popularity is understood in the line with the feature of programmability. Platform agencies can boost or filter people, things, and issues that are most popular, more likeable, and more relevant to the users and to already popular actors who gain more visibility, and lift the visibility of negative cases as they are believed to activate a large number of users too (ibid.).

Users may themselves engage in concerted efforts to lift some people’s visibility with social buttons –like-buttons, sharing mechanisms, retweets, that ‘endorse’ specific post on social media platform. But popularity boosting is a two-way traffic and platforms, by assigning particular algorithms, influence people’s and things’ visibility within themselves (Dijck & Poell, 2013; Klinger & Svensson, 2014).

The increasing social media appearance is amplified by print media’s action of reporting the post or a tweet, which is further reinforced by people through social buttons. While the users and the platform agencies may boost some influential individuals’ appearance on social media, journalists and print media can do the same by treating online platforms as a public relation tool (Dijck & Poell, 2013; Chadwick, 2017). These platform metrics, which measure people’s appearance in social media are increasingly accepted as ‘legitimate standards’ demonstrating the hybridity of social media and mass media, and the acceptance of online platforms’ establishment (Dijck & Poell, 2013). This way of influencing entangles with a broader cultural and social arena as mass media and social media logics increasingly define the popularity of issues and the influence of people to which different institutional discourses and counter-discourses engage in to make their logics more pressing (ibid.).
Digital storytelling

Digital storytelling is a recognised technique in media logics and in political communication. “Storytelling, moreover, represents a form of engagement that is especially conducive to a modern political landscape characterised by citizens who exercise self-actualising forms of political action and expression, and establish subjective meanings independently.” (Prior, 2018:91). Storytelling refers to self-narrative, individuals’ own experiences, which functions as a catalyst to understand others and capture people’s attention. Storytelling as discussed in mass media logic, is recognised technique in all media (Dahlgren, 2009; Meyer, 2000), but through digital platforms, more and more people have begun to seek out ways to articulate themselves, also in political sphere (Couldry, 2008). Digital storytelling includes features distinctive from oral storytelling. Online narratives can be presented solely as a picture, video, animation, or with a mix, limiting the length of texts, or adjusting the files and texts comfortable to be read from different technological devices. Pictures and motional pictures can also be used as a reinforcement of a message and capture people’s attention (ibid.).

Couldry (2008) argues that digital storytelling as a practice is important because it operates outside the boundaries of mainstream media institutions even though it may work on the margins of such institutions. In that way, digital storytelling challenges historical storytelling role of journalism and engages in democratization through the possibility of participating and engaging in. This is considered beneficial for more transparent and self-actualising presentation, detached from the overreliance of the mass media’s information distribution.

Digital storytelling is recognised especially for marginalised or minority groups’ appearance and presentation online (Couldry, 2008). Politicians cannot be referred as marginalised group, but their dependency on news media and media representation, and the opposing ways logics of media and politics work, may be challenged with these techniques, circumventing the traditional journalism eliminating the ‘middleman’ (Couldry, 2008; Dahlgren, 2009). Prior (2018) argues that parliament, through a means of storytelling techniques by representing themselves to citizens and representing citizens to themselves, may construct a representation which is conducive to engagement principles
and prospective audience, hence, legitimising the representative democratic system and engaging in democratisation.

The concepts above frame the social media affordances. As this study analyses media logics in the realm of political communication, the elements imbedded in social media affordances are pivotal in understanding how political communication is formed or can be formed within the contemporary political sphere. The exposure to or adaption of social media logics do not explain all the transformation in our society, but is discussed in relation to political communication which the next section dwells into.

3.3. Mediatisation

Mediated politics

In the 1960s, the television becoming a standard item in Finnish people’s homes was a turning point for the media landscape. Since the 1990s, the evolvement of internet has perpetuated into the lives of ordinary people expanding the media landscape further. Television was commonly underestimated by the political elite, and still today is difficult to argue whether the television changed the presentation of politics compared to traditional press (Strömbäck, 2008). By the same token, internet has been challenged for its deliberative and factual manners (Dahlgren, 2005; Dijck et al., 2018:32; Earl & Kimport, 2011; Wilhelm, 2000). The 21st century seems to be an end of a television era (Schulz, 2004) and start of the new. The processes of changes, that have occurred in the media and politics during the past decades are described with the concepts of mediation and mediatisation.

“Mediated politics refers to a situation in which the media has become the most important source of information and vehicle of communication between the governors and the governed.” (Strömbäck, 2008:230). This understanding refers to the dependency that the citizens as well as political elite hold for the media to gain information and knowledge of each other, the policies and the trends in the society. Meaning, that media mediates between the citizenry and the political
institutions, instead of focusing on political communication per se. Mediated politics is understood rather as a descriptive and static concept, which refers to a comprehension of media as the most important intermediator between the people and the political actors (Schulz, 2004; Lundby, 2009). I see this descriptive understanding of mediated politics useful per se, as media does, indeed, in its all forms mediate between the citizens and the political actors, but this definition neglects as Schulz (2004) argues, the understanding of social processes and agency (Dijck & Poell, 2013), which in the current era of internet have become more relevant in understanding media. Thus, perception of mediatisation becomes more relevant as it addresses the social processes and the interdependence of the actors as described in the next section.

Mediatisation of politics

Mediated politics refer to media’s supremacy to govern politics, mediatisation thereafter refers to a general tendency in which almost all parts of society are affected by media (Klinger & Svensson, 2014:3). Mediatisation, as developed by Friedrich Krotz (2009), Winfried Schulz (2004), and others focuses on a particular transformative logic in which media plays a key role in the processes of social change. Media is considered to influence the way social reality is defined, how politics are presented by the economically accommodate media organisations and how the media bridge spatial and temporal distances of human communication capacities (Schulz, 2004). Mediatisation is seen as a meta-process and the interconnection between technological change, communication change, and sociocultural change, extending media’s influence in a society (Krotz, 2009; Schulz, 2004).

In politics, mediatisation refers to social and political actors’ way to adapt to media logic by changing the way politics occur in mediatised society, altering the interceptions of people, institutions, and societies. Meyer (2002) points out that in the most extreme case, media change the ontology of politics by changing what is counted as political action. That is, every political action is required to be explainable and defensible within media formats. In a democratic context, mass media is regarded as the provider of appropriate and evaluative political information equally to citizens. In a more mediatised society, in which societies and institutions are intervened more
and more to media logics, information distribution would not be as impartial longer (McNair, 2012; Meyer, 2002; Lundby, 2009). But even if mass media do not occupy the whole of the public communication, they still do contribute tremendously to its shape and are a central part in its making (Meyer, 2002).

Mediatisation has a rather negative connotation when it is classified as media institutions’ supremacy in a society determining the political reality (Schulz, 2004; Strömbäck, 2008). Meyer (2002) emphasises broadcast media in the theorisation of mediatisation of politics. Internet in reference to politics and political communication has attained an established role, but perceived differently. On one hand, internet is seen to increase citizen participation and hence, legitimise the representative democratic system. On the other hand, it is recognised to reinforce the existing power structures of political and economic actors through the affordances imbedded (Klinger & Svensson, 2014).

Media logic is used as means to explain media’s influence on other social institutions and actors in society. Some scholars argue (f.ex Couldry, 2008; Lundby, 2009) against media’s governing rule in societies, denying media exposure as justification for all heterogeneous transformations in society. The definition and understanding of mediatisation is often heavily affected by empirical understandings of the concept but the inadequate definitions researchers have adapted has resulted to mixed findings of the empirical studies and further to normative-empirical perception of mediatisation (Strömbäck, 2008; Schulz, 2004, Lundby, 2009). Couldry (2008) for example, problematises especially the idea of one single type of media-based logic to supersede other (older) logics across the social space transforming social or cultural contents in one particular way. He argues that mediatisation occurs due the undeniable transformations media bears to contemporary life and to cultural and social processes, which are especially recognisable in politics (ibid.). Considering the focus of the functions of social media in communication processes, the understanding of mediatisation as social processes defined by Lundby (2009) and Couldry (2008) is useful. Internet is a medium inevitably growing next to or into the traditional news media, evoking a subsequent amount of studies considering political communication in the digital era.
Lundby (2009) argues that the ‘new’ digital tools are recognised to expand the repertoire of media, making media available for different purposes, emphasising the patterns of social interaction. He argues that one should move from further subsuming media-saturated societies with ‘media logic’ and thus, from mediatisation per se, but should move towards recognising a number of media capabilities that expand social interactions. Continuing from Lundby (2009), Klinger and Svensson (2014) argue that, media logics and political logic are coexisting logics that operate interdependently influencing one another. This grounds on Chadwick’s (2017) theorisation of hybrid media system which coevolves media logics, mass media and social media, for one emerging system under which all social actors, also politics interplay and influence.

Chadwick argues that compared to the dominant understanding of a mass media logic by Altheide and Snow (1979), media environment today is far more diverse, fragmented and polycentric to be based upon aforesaid. Chadwick explains hybrid media as not only “the interactions that determine the construction of media content but also how these interactions take place across and between different older and newer media” (2017:25). Meaning that in politics, political actors appear in the interplay of old and new logics operating to advance their values and interest in the interdependence of technological and social actors. These technological and social actors appear simultaneously in the interdependence with other social and technological actors constituting hybrid networks which they then seek to exploit. This understanding becomes relevant, especially when adapting an approach, which detects parliamentarians’ views on media and reviewing back to the dependable relationship of politics and media as understood from the reviewed literature.

Chadwick (2017) emphasises that the range of sources of information we are exposed to and can engage in are essential in political communication. With digital communication tools, alternative and competing sources distinct from mass broadcasting may occur representing political life according to their own interest and values (Klinger & Svensson, 2014). Furthermore, digital communication tools refrain from the idea of passive audience dominant in mass media logic, and move towards a model of increasingly diverse sources of audience that may play an instrumental role in production of content. This means that internet becomes central for “horizontal
communication” of civic interaction possibly challenging established power structures in political communication. An element, also emphasised on social media logic (Jenkins & Thorburn, 2003; Klinger & Svensson, 2014).

Swart, Peters and Broersma (2018) align with Chadwick’s view proposing that the interaction of old and new media logics shapes the media landscape. They view it from the journalistic side and argue that the changing media logics leads users to adopt the habits concluding to a re-ritualisation of public connection practices. In the interaction of new and old media logics, they argue that the public connection practices do not happen solely through journalism anymore but through news of people’s social networks. “While news users still seek togetherness, self-presentation, and control through news…the interaction between traditional and new media logics forms many novel patterns of engagement to fulfil these that are more diverse, less distinct, more utilitarian, and increasingly facilitated through people’s social networks” (Swart et al., 2018:196) and through other non-journalistic alternatives. This implies that parliamentarians, too, share the same possibility to engage in public connection practises –as every other citizen– through social networks.

I understand media and politics intertwined, and draw my understanding of their interplay from Lundby (2009) and Chadwick (2017), arguing that media and society are continuously evolving, reciprocally influencing one another. Politicians and political parties are migrating to social media platforms, not only for electoral campaigns but for permanent use. Entangling mass media logic with social media logic blends to existing socioeconomic changes under the evolvement in which political communication occurs. From this point of view, I draw further to discuss democratisation and politisation. Hence, there is little doubt that social media would not be changing the media and communication landscape in which politics appear.
3.4. Democratisation

Classic democratic theory

In core of democracy is, as classical theories of democracy define, discussion and decision-making (Meyer, 2002:3). Pluralistic democracies, which many western societies represent, including Finland, are based on the rule of law sharing a range of crucial and similar characteristics such as basic human rights, popular sovereignty and a display of other institutions (Meyer, 2002).

Classical theories of democracy as mentioned above include a certain mode of communication. Participation in political dialogue is essential and appears important in party democracy (Meyer, 2002), which refers to Finland’s form of participatory democracy. Party democracy offers the party members and non-members, through (public) political communication, a possibility to influence in decision-making in an institutional setting. Thus, mass medias role in and for democracy is to make political information and evaluation available for all citizens through public communication (Meyer, 2002).

Furthermore, “Democracy is not possible without a functioning political public sphere that puts the individual in a position to decide and act autonomously” (Meyer, 2002:1). Public sphere, drawn from Habermas (in Meyer, 2002; Dahlgren, 2005) considers publics that exist as discursive interactional processes and engages in talk with each other. The mechanisms of engagement are in the core of understanding of deliberative democracy (Meyer, 2002). A lead to democratic outcomes derive from engagement in discussions that explicitly involve discursivity, agreement and disagreement (Morey et al. 2012).

Deliberative internet

Whether, internet has an impact on the public sphere, has been the focus of many researchers for about a decade now (Dahlgren, 2005). Dahlgren argues that internet brings a number of obvious positive consequences pluralizing and extending the public sphere. Online platforms lower the threshold for civic participation through its independency as a medium (Swart et. Al, 2018). They
offer a forum in which the user can create content rather freely and without intermediators, and hence create new voices in political communication, new modes of political engagement and extend political communication through horizontal civic communication and vertical communication between citizens (Dahlgren, 2005). Further translated into collective actions (Wilhelm, 2000).

According to deliberative theorists, the mechanisms that lead to democratic outcomes derive from engagement in discussions that explicitly involve disagreement rather than from discussions that involve people we may only generally disagree with (Morey et al. 2012). They mean that a simple encounter with a person who shares similar or dissimilar candidate preference, partisanship, or political ideology does not guarantee expression of agreement or disagreement, respectively, and may not be particularly useful for democratic perspective. Even though engagement, is the consequential element here, as understood from platforms connective automatisation element (Dijck & Poell, 2013), it does not facilitate for these deliberative discussions if only exposed to like-minded people (Morey et al. 2012).

Much of internet’s deliberative possibilities are recognised through social media affordances understood to be embedded to the systems themselves –that are engagement, connectivity and self-generalised content (Klinger & Svensson, 2014). Communicative character of the political discussion does not always promote the civic ideal, hence, its contributions to democratic formation cannot exclusively be assumed (Dahlgren, 2005; Wilhelm, 2000)

Digital democracy

Anthony Wilhelm in his book Democracy in digital age (2000), discusses under a classic democratic theory, the current challenges democratic societies are facing with the currently used and designed digital and communication technologies. Wilhelm poses a counter-argument to technological determinist views of internet that resonates with McLuhan’s (1962: 8) vision, which states that ‘[t]he new electronic interdependence recreates the world in the image of a global village’ where the ‘entire human family’ is sealed ‘into a single global tribe” (cited in Lindgren,
2017:46). He presents the obstacles, a robust public sphere faces with the emerging digital and communication technologies. His book is written almost two decades ago, but the approach Wilhelm has taken engages in the theoretical discussion accurately. He presents four challenges, which together with Dahlgren’s (2005) visions, shed light on the challenges societies face under digitisation today.

First is the “barriers to entry a digitally mediated public sphere”. Wilhelm (2000) refers to resources and skills, as barriers for entry and activity online. Strandberg (2016) argues that economic resources are not a general barrier for internet use as it was before. However, skills, and as Wilhelm expresses, “communicative and critical thinking” (2000:6), are recognised skills for effective participation for debates online and public sphere discussions. Semiotics play an important role when interpreting a message and thinking critically. Semiotics are thus, nothing new in the communication studies (Schulz, 2004). One could, however, argue that under the era of user-generated content, self-reflective storytelling practices and platforms’ algorithmic games, critical thinking is, equally important if not more.

The second challenge relates to the first, and poses the worry to ensure accessibility to essential services that are increasingly digitised to all the citizens in a democratic society. That is, fair and just accessibility to political information distribution and deliberate communication, as emphasised in political logic and by classic democratic theorists (Wilhelm, 2000). One’s responsivity to media messages differs in diverse ways depending on receivers’ sociocultural interaction and interest in politics. Politically uninterested citizens are still at least to some extend exposed to politics and political system through media texts, which in this case, have a decisive role in shaping their understanding and opinion of the political world. Considering the discussion above on media logics, this would imply that the passive respondents are exposed to political content, not in terms of its own inherent logic, but (social) media logic (Meyer, 2002:2). As Klinger and Svensson (2014) argue, internet is seen from two perspectives regarding participation –first being understood to increase citizen participation and second, it being recognised to reinforce the existing power structures of political and economic actors through the technological affordances they carry and
perception of ‘platform agency’ (Dijck & Poell, 2013). Meaning that citizens may through social
networks and internet be exposed to diversity of information or due platforms’ automated
connectivity be exposed only to one type of information determined by the algorithms.

Thirdly, Wilhelm mirrors to Castells (1996) referent of “the rise of network society” which
questions digital tools’ possibility to replace the methodical pace of democratic decision making
from quality discussions in civic spaces to something else. This can be further reflected to a
theoretical frame of personalisation of politics, and the importance of content, discussed later.

Lastly, he discusses the disappearance of the public sphere under the pressure of market forces that
out, this can also be considered from a broader perspective. He argues that whilst internet is
becoming integrated with the established system of political communication challenging the
existing power structures, internet hinders democracy. Despite internet’s deliberative nature,
Dahlgren problematises media industries synthesis with neoliberal order by possessing the spaces
in which the political communication likely appear, constricting and weakening the formal political
arena, and thus affecting negatively to democracy. Additionally, Dijck and Poell, (2013) argue that
social media functions at least partly under media industries possession. Furthermore, Wilhelm
(2000) suggests that for democratic control and legitimacy, political and social actors should
rethink how one sees and acts to restore or remain public sphere also in online environment.

3.5. Politisation

Political logic

Political logic can be conceived as opposed to media logic (Meyer, 2002; Strömbäck, 2008). The
substantiality of political logic lies in the collective and authoritative decision making and
implementation of political decisions. “This includes the processes of distributing political power;
the process of political deliberation, bargaining, and decision-making; the processes of
implementing political decisions; and the question of power as it relates to ‘who gets what, when,
Power is an integral and inevitable part of politics, and becomes especially distinguishable through elections for partisan and individual dimensions. Ideologies and value systems are also a vital part of political processes steering the suggestions of how different societal problems and issues should be addressed (Meyer, 2002: Strömbäck & Esser, 2009:213-214).

Gustafsson (2016) argues that parliamentarians often face conflicting demands, as they not only need to build a strong individual position in their parties (as they are competing with other parliamentarians and in the elections with candidates) but also need to be loyal to the party. Politicians want to achieve things, their parties want votes, and while politicians work to fulfil these goals, they also work to fulfil their personal goals in their political career. Building support among members of the party district becomes important for parliamentarians to carry out their parliamentary work for the next term or work towards their personal political goals (ibid). It necessitates travelling around local party chapters, which is deeply established into Finnish parliamentarians’ work throughout the parliamentary terms, not only during the election periods (“kansanedustajan työ” n.d.) and communicating their political objectives (McNair, 2012).

Whereas power and policies are both inevitable parts of society, so is communication. Media is in an integral part of forming political reality, and consequently political actors need to take the media into consideration (McNair, 2012; Meyer, 2002; Strömbäck & Esser, 2009). The logic of political process for political communication implies certain standards of how the media should report about politics presenting the event according to relevant features of political logic (Meyer, 2002), meaning that in the societies that are increasingly mediated, this creates tension between media logic and political logic (Strömbäck & Esser, 2009:215). The scholars refer to mass media in their writings, and thus, social media and internet offer another channel that politicians can utilise to enhance their role in political sphere.

Social media enables a communication that breeds over the election districts, and can be targeted particularly to a certain niche through online platforms’ connective technicalities (Dijck & Poell, 2013). Due to its nature, social media enables individuals to articulate themselves through self-
narratives-techniques of digital storytelling- to capture people’s attention through their subjective experiences, leaning towards personalised way of communicating politics.

**Agenda building**

Agenda-building refers to the process by which actors aim to affect the issues stated in public agenda. Social media has become a regularly used source for political news reporting—contributing to agenda-building processes—letting non-journalists’ elites to affect traditionally understood media’s determination of agenda-setting processes (Kalsnes, 2016b). By challenging media’s gatekeepers’ role in choosing and deciding which information and stories should get attention through social media, parties may try to ‘define’ their valued story, and if the angle is considered interesting enough, mass media may give the blog post, the Facebook update, or the tweet its wanted attention. To create a catching angle, parties and parliamentarians may use techniques such as storytelling to better attain mass media’s attention or audience’s attention for the political issue. This also relates to Swart, Peters and Broersma’s (2018) notion of social networks, and their ability to facilitate public connection practices, which can be now obtained through non-journalistic means.

Mediatisation theory, as explained before, offers an understanding according to which political actors adapt to practices of media logic, for which social media offers a channel through which it can be done independently. We can thus argue that social media offers another channel that political actors can use to influence the public agenda, possibly independently or through traditional media.

**Personalisation of politics**

A crucial concern in all democratic systems is the linkage between citizens and decision makers. It shows how the interests and attitudes are communicated between them, and how the decision-makers are held accountable for their actions as representatives. Many scholars agree that political parties are the key unit for establishing this linkage (Dalton et al. 2011, Gustafsson, 2016), which is also in the heart of political logic (Meyer, 2002). However, general societal changes, such as the erosion of the class-based society and technological development in communication have changed
the role of political parties. Parties are recognised to have less control over political communications (Dalton et al. 2011; Gustafsson, 2016), which has led scholars as well as parties themselves to reconsider the importance of individual representatives. The increased importance of individual politicians at the expense of political groups such as parties is also referred as personalisation of politics (Rahat & Sheafer, 2007; Adam & Meier, 2010).

Political personalization is a “process in which the political weight of the individual actor in the political process increases over time, while the centrality of the political group (i.e., political party) declines” (Rahat and Sheafer, 2007:65, also Karvonen, 2010:4). This is related to a decreasing acquaintance of party centred communication, resulting to an importance of individual representatives, related to a decrease of democracy for two reasons (Adam and Maier 2010:213). Firstly, it would indicate, for irrationally informed citizens, based on their individual achievements and opinions, to move further from the collective participatory decision-making the classic democratic theorists emphasise. Secondly, moving “from topics to people”, politician’s personal characteristics would be reckoned as a political character, focusing on politicians personality traits with an expense of the party and its ideologies (Karvonen, 2010; Van Aelst et al., 2012). This poses an interesting recognition to Finnish electoral system, which can be argued to emphasise individual candidates or parliamentarians through its closed-list voting system.

Democratic decision-making postulates that a voter must have ample information about current political issues and the competing political parties in order to be able to come to a rational voting decision (Meyer, 2002). Bennett (2012) argues that in politics, personalising one’s personal values are argued to determine individuals’ engagement to politics, party and ideology decreasing popularity of those aspects. The same could be considered as a prerequisite for general knowledge of contemporary political events.

On the other spectrum, personalisation is connected to an increased interaction between citizens and politicians, bringing these actors closer together and thus, enhancing democracy as Vergeer, Hermans and Sams (2013) suggest as per their empirical findings. Theoretical debate of the
implications of personalisation to democratisation is currently taking place and proposes towards both spectrums (Karvonen, 2010).

Bennet (2012), refers to neoliberal ideologies and personal freedom as underpinning aspects for personalisation of politics. He argues that individuation as a social condition is a product of widespread social fragmentation influencing the variety of participation landscapes, to which especially younger generations are connected to. For the scope of my study, this can be considered from the parliamentarians’ side and reflected by the idea of consumerism and marketing of politics to independent voters (Bennett, 2012), which social media – through its self-generalising methods – permits individual parliamentarians to do. It is a perspective, several studies have considered when examining the personalised focus of the politics by media’s way to present parliamentarians through election campaigns (Karvonen, 2010; Vergeer et al, 2013; Holtz-Bacha et al, 2014).
4. Methodology

In this chapter, I will present the methodological approaches that I have made use of in my study. I start with discussing why a qualitative study is the best for my research and then explaining the use of interviews and the process of conducting the interviews. Furthermore, I will continue to the coding procedure and discuss how I made use of qualitative content analysis in my research. Moreover, I will discuss about the ethical aspects and my positionality together with the limitations of the study.

4.1. Methodological choices

Regarding the choice of methodology, the study will be based on qualitative research methods. Considering the posed research questions, to be able to grasp and interpret people’s perceptions, it would be challenging to have other than a qualitative approach for the study. I have chosen to use solely interviews as my research method to gain understanding how social media impacts on Finnish parliamentarians’ communication. To obtain insightful material regarding the perception of how social media is utilised and perceived as an everyday communication mean, will be the best gained with qualitative research methods. Furthermore, in order to attain a boarder understanding on social media affordances in the interactive and social processes of communication, theoretically informed analytical conclusion will produce a broader understanding of social media’s affection in (the manners of) political communication.

There are no thorough qualitative interviews conducted with this manner and this study will complement the methodological trend in digital political communication research which has marginalised qualitative methods (Karpf et al., 2015; Lomborg & Bechmann, 2014). Empirical studies, as mentioned before, have often adapted quantitative approaches examining online activity and online performance on the use and evolution of social media platforms. These large-scale studies are vital to capture and analyse activities on social media platforms over time, across topics, and on populations that thrive there (Lomborg & Bechmann, 2014). However, what cannot be scraped from the platforms themselves is the data of the user intentions and motivations, or
perceptions and experiences. These aspects must be investigated through other methods than quantitative data registration, which this study aims to do.

4.2. Generalising interview studies

Brinkmann and Kvale argue for qualitative studies generalisability (2015). In political studies, context is crucial (Karvonen 2010; Strömbäck & Kaid, 2008) inferring to problematic understanding of generalizability of scientific knowledge production. Adapting to constructivist comprehension of knowledge production, this study, basing on Brinkmann and Kvale (2015), understands social knowledge as socially and historically contextualised comprehension of social world. Knowledge is produced through one’s perception, experience and interpretation of social reality influencing the reproduction of knowledge. This two-way perceived knowledge-production and interpretation conceive my reflections and understandings of the social reality corresponding to the parliamentarians’ understanding. As mentioned before, the study does not aim to produce empirical generalisable findings but to theoretically complementing understandings and thus, attempts to provide generalisable understandings of the constructions of social reality within a context of online political communication.

This said, analytical generalisation of the findings is for the reader to judge whether they are relatable in another setting (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015:297). The study’s analytical generalisation suggests the obtained findings construct an understanding of the social reality to the extent of the studied subject.

4.3. In-depth interviews

Qualitative in-depth interviews of the current parliamentary politicians in Finland are the primary empirical material of the study. In-depth interviews aim “to achieve both breadth of coverage across key issues, and depth of coverage within each” (Legard et. Al 2003:148) with a full and unbiased account. Ekström and Johansson (2019:102-103) argue in their book “Metoder i medie- och kommunikationsvetenskap”, that qualitative interviews do not primarily even aim for depth in the material and compared to, for example psychology, media and communication studies, have a
different approach to the material. However, considering the descriptive approach of this study takes, reflecting to the in-depth interview methods seems more justifiable. Ekstörm and Johansson (2019) separate qualitative interviews from in-depth interviews though the methods share similarities. Ekström and Johansson (ibid.) argue that qualitative interviews aim to reach to the different dimensions of the phenomenon studied and see beyond the obvious to the interviewees’ thoughts, reflections, values and norms, thus referring to the same elements recognised in in-depth interviews (Legard et. Al, 2003), a description adapted in this study.

The approach allowed for a general structure, yet for a free discussion on whichever topic the interviewees preferred to develop. The primary focus on open-ended questions allowed iterative probing, that is essential to achieve the depth for understanding the participant’s perspective (Legard et. al 2003:152). The interview questions were initially divided into three main themes: knowledge and experience of social media, opinions on social media and attitudes towards social media. The structure was purposively set to guide the discussion from its different stages but the division varied following the natural flow of the interviews. Within the knowledge and experience part, the aim was to understand how and where the respondents positioned themselves in the digital culture and as social media users and how were their experiences of using social media. The second stage allowed for freer discussion on the recent political events in Finland and also allowed to reflect on political influencing, publicity, reciprocity and transparency as evoking topics of using social media. Furthermore, attitudes towards social media were observed through the narratives that the respondents used to explain their own positionality in (digital) political communication field and social media’s role in political communication. All the interviews started with a free description of the respondents as politicians and their reflections on media’s role in their work. This helped me as the interviewer to understand the political, social and cultural relationships of the studied phenomenon better and contextualise the respondents in relation to the phenomenon.
4.4. Material access

Selection of interviewees was intended to include – but not to be limited to – age, sex and party representation, overlooking the respondents’ social media activity. This was considered important, as the aim is to construct an understanding of what thoughts, concerns and hopes social media generate within the parliamentarians, not limiting to the activity levels on social media. This was a deliberative decision I made after getting more familiar with the field. It turned out that there are hardly any parliamentarians in Finland that are not to be found on at least some social media platforms.

I believe that limiting the respondents according to their social media activity may be favouring for example, with studies examining political campaigns on social media. But as this study aims for a broader understanding, limiting the respondents according to their activity would not follow the purpose of the study correspondingly. Material collection was thus, carried out with purposive methods with limited criteria.

With a tip from an acquaintance working as a party chancellor, I started approaching each party’s general secretaries to help in securing responses to my queries. With this method, I only managed to get an appointment with one interview with one party. With two other parties, I kept contact with the party’s chancellors who helped me to reach their party’s representatives suggesting for possible interviewees. Acknowledging that by accepting suggestions from ‘a party insider’ may have affected in the respondents’ selection, however regarding the occupied politicians and the challenge of gaining access to elite source (Ekström & Johansson, 2019), I accepted every cue.

Thereafter, I started to reach out straight to politicians and their assistants. Depending on the party size, I emailed each of the representatives of a party, or some of the representatives considering the age and sex as determining factors. My aim was to find participants from different ages, representing different sexes and different political parties to have a broader outlook on their opinions and perceptions and to detect similarities and differences. Ideally, that would have meant one or two representatives from each party, concluding to eleven to sixteen interviews. Due to recent changes with the parliamentary groups¹, I decided that the representation of each party was
not necessary but the aim was still to have a broad spectrum between respondents’ representational ideologies. In total, I ended up contacting 78 representatives out of 200 representatives from all ten parties and conducted nine interviews representing six different parties. Respondents represent ages between 30s to 70s, with 6 male and 3 female representatives from first term politicians to political veterans.

The interviews were held within a two-week period, of which eight were conducted face-to-face and one via telephone. All the conducted interviews are available in voice recording formats, from which they are transcribed and anonymised into written format. Each interview lasted approximately one hour (50 to 75 minutes) except one interview that took place only for 25 minutes due the sudden changes in the respondent’s schedule. Apart the one carried via phone, all the other interviews were conducted at the respondents work environments.

Interview settings may also affect to the interview (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). From the eight interviews, three were conducted in private conference rooms, one in the respondent’s private office, and the other three in the parliament cafeteria, among which one when the cafeteria was closed. The fact that two of the interviews were conducted in semi-public space, in the parliament cafeteria, may have affected to the interview situation and the interviewees willingness to develop discussions. The limited access to parliament cafeteria however appeased the interview situation. Interestingly though, these respondents were more disinterested in the anonymity element in the beginning of the interview but made sure at the end of the interview that their anonymity was held in the study. Regarding of the richness of the content of the discussion, I do not consider the material to be any or more valued compared than the material conducted at the enclosed spaces. Differences on how the respondents referred to their colleagues with names or certain positions were noticed, this however did not seem to be dependent on the interview setting, rather related on the respondents’ personal characteristics.
4.5. Material analysis

The material is analysed by using qualitative content analysis. Qualitative content analysis is commonly used for analysing textual material and serves the best purpose for this study. Ekström and Johansson (2019) emphasise interviewer’s openness to catch the perceptions, definitions, and descriptions the interviewed have on the conditions being studied as it will further be reflected on how the interviewer refers to the existing ideas, theories and analytical perspectives to discover new phenomena. To discover new phenomena and build on the existing theories and findings is in the core of qualitative analysis. Ekström and Johansson propose the interviewer, within the frame of their research question(s), to see outside of the box and look for something they might not acknowledge or recognise already from previous as this may lead to the core of qualitative analysis (2019:121-122).

Analysis happens in several stages. The tentative analysis happens already after the first interview is conducted. Thereupon, it depends on the interviewer’s preferences how they proceed (Ekström & Johansson, 2019:122). I attempt to follow Hjelm, Lindgren and Nilsson’s three-steps-process in the analysis process, which they adapted from Miles and Huberman (1984) (Lindgren et al., 2014:33-34). The process is spiralling in a sense that the steps are intertwined and paralleled. One starts with general and overall coding of the raw material, continues with meticulous thematisation or systematisation of codes and material, to finally summarise the material applicable to be used as a starting point to the analysis (Lindgren et al., 2014:33-37).

I started the analysis process during the transcribing process with small comments and notion, after all the interviews were conducted, adding one pre-step to Lindgren’s model. Coding was done by going through the material and categorising it to some preliminary analytical categories to reduce the data in order to identify the most central features in the material (Lindgren, 2014:37). As this study bases its material solely on interviews, coding process was not only emphasised in the time distribution but also as a method. Interviews were coded together with the interview questions to contextualise the analysable material. Coding was repeated as a process of re-coding or as an iterative process. Many segments were coded with several codes to identify different elements that
I found the segment to be representing (Lindgren et al., 2014:38). Coding was carried out with a help of a software MAXQDA, which is a tool used for qualitative and mixed methods research. The software functions as a management tool for material analysis and aids in the construction of a more systematic analysis. The software enabled me an easy way to modify and edit the codes and further systematically work with categorisation.

To present the coded material, I continued with thematisation. Thematisation enables the researcher to find connections, patterns, categories between the codes to find focal and trivial points to engage in. Thematisation as a step, is to sort the material but it is also pivotal step of the analysis. The goal of thematisation is to be able to present the theme in a declarative manner to explain and deepen the understanding of the phenomenon studied further, substantiating and specifying categorises as they become more abstract in a theoretical level. Through the coding process, different type of social media practices was recognised, such as, actions on social media (information distribution, targeting audiences, information gathering, audience exposure), concerns (such as behaviour on social media, time management issues, data protection), and pursuits with social media (visibility, mass media attention, re-election, discussion stimulation). Hjelm, Lindgren and Nilsson (2014) argue that when the researcher assesses coding and thematisation to suffice, they move forward. It is seldom a researcher who feels the coding process to be complete but it is more often, they argue, that she, he, or I face the resources of time or finances diminishing forcing to move forward. Mirroring to Glasers and Strauss, they emphasise researcher ability and also requisite, in the process, to return back to the data and verify one’s conclusions and findings to avoid weakly substantiated conclusions (2014:41, 82-83). That is also important for researcher to critically reflect on their study and their role throughout the whole study.

4.6. Remarks on Validity and Reliability

In-depth interviews are the best method to gain deliberative and comprehensive understanding about the impact of social media on parliamentarians’ communication. In this way, the study contributes to the scarce knowledge of parliamentarians’ experience and perceptions of social media in political communication. Validity, here, is understood as appropriateness of the material,
tools, and selected methods in relation to the research questions (Ekström & Johansson, 2019). Furthermore, I understand reliability to be the degree of trust in one’s material collection and analysis, and one’s ability to replicate one’s study. This is indicated by being as transparent as possible and explaining the material collection and analysing process in great detail (Ekström & Johansson, 2019).

There are some main points that need to be addressed here. Firstly, to base a research solely on one kind of material, in this case interviews, need to be addressed. Hancké stresses the importance of the researcher to not only rely only on one type of data but to “triangulate the insights you obtained during the interview with material that supports what you found” (2009:104). Meaning that researcher should use other independent material to support the interviews findings. However, when considering that the scope of this study and its non-generalisable attempts from the findings, I do not consider it necessary. As the aim is to construct an understanding of and describe digital political communication with narratives, I do not consider for example, comparable studies examining the social media strategies to actual enforcements to be essential for the scope of this study (see f.ex. Larsson & Kalsnes, 2014; Kalsnes, 2016b; Skovsgaard & Van Dalen, 2013). Thus, I am aware that using only one type of material may conclude to one-sided findings but also considering the time and length limitations including the two other elements to analyse the digital political communication – for example the voters’ or the media’s perspective, I would have ended up to a process exceeding the frames of master thesis.

Secondly, as this study focuses particularly on parliamentarians and their subjective experiences, in-depth interviews serves best to attain the scope of the study. This allows me to examine their practical use of social media, their reflections for its use, and how they see themselves and political sphere appearing in social media platforms.

Furthermore, considering my own position in the study and in the interview situation, I am aware that some of my questions may have been considered leading due the specific example given prior to the question (see appendix, question 12), as asking the interviewees to reflect upon a particular event. Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) argue that follow-up questions or interviewer’s responses to
The interviewee’s reflection may also influence the obtained material by enhancing or decreasing the reliability of the material. They argue that especially politicians are professionals in warding off leading questions, and thus, instead of the one exemplified question, my aim was to approach the interviewees with a broader perspective to avoid a dismissal of questions and rather enable for focusable follow-up questions. This was also important in the interview situation for me to avoid any occurrence of prejudice based on previous interviews. The findings are reflected on my own comprehension and interpretation of the material, which deciphers my understanding of the studied subject.

4.7. Limitations

The aim is to study politicians’ perceptions social media in political communication, and because my study took place in a specific geographical location, Finland, in a specific political and media context, the findings of the study may be difficult, if not impossible, to generalise to other political contexts. Context is crucial in political communication, whether related to a political system, technological system, technology adaption or media systems. Generalisability also leads to the delimitations of the study. Due the narrow scope and approach, the study is limited for its transferability and generalisability of findings. However, I will argue that to some extent, the empirical evidence posits towards some theoretically generalizable possibilities which previous studies support, as I will address in the conclusion. Situating my study to social processes that are prevailing and appear universally, I believe that this study may shed light on structures we can detect elsewhere and thus develop theoretical ideas and findings to better understand the relationship of social media and political influence within the context of democratisation.

Furthermore, anonymity generated some limitation to the collected material. I assume the material to be richer and more comprehensive if the anonymity of the respondents was ensured. This, however, simultaneously posed delimitations to my study as some parts of the discussions were to be masked for the anonymity reasons, and moreover some opposing or supporting reflections were eliminated from the material and thus dismissed from the study.
4.8. Ethical consideration

This study will mostly ethicise the empirical material and the collection procedures. Participants were informed and aware from the first contact that they were asked to participate in a research study, and were reminded about this in the interview situation. The interviews were conducted in 2019 during the weeks 8 and 9 in Helsinki, one additional interview on week 14, and one interview was conducted via phone on week 10. The interviews were transcribed to an anonymous format during the following weeks and all the interview material is stored on a safe and protected computer, to which only I have access to. The quotations were carefully considered and verified by the respondents (the one’s who asked for it), and if necessary, they were modified to convey the message the respondents aimed for.

The material is analysed and presented anonymously, as I do not consider identity of the politician pertinently to pose the purpose of my study. Additionally, I believe that anonymity protects the objectivity of my study, so neither the parliamentarians or me, could utilise the situation in improper ways. I considered anonymity to protect the reliability of the interview data, but for the most, I propose the anonymity to be instrumental for freer and more transparent interview situations with the participants. I think that by anonymising public persons, I make sure that the parliamentarians’ identities do not upstage the material and findings in its totality, furthermore ensuring that all the interviewees are regarded with coincident attention. I chose to identify the respondents with nicknames that indicate the participants sex and the other regraded information to humanise them and ease the reader. When it comes to interviewing, there is a risk of respondents’ exaggerating or understating claims, despite of the interviewer’s attempt to express neutrality in the situation and with the questions (Ekström & Johansson, 2019). Face-to-face conducted interviews thus diminish the risk of interviewees painting the truth as the situation is rather private and the non-verbal communication may be detected (Ekström & Johansson, 2019). Because of that and especially, to facilitate the interview situation for myself I aimed to conduct all the interviews with face-to-face manners, which except for one, was arranged.
Furthermore, language pose an important contribution to the study. All the interviews were conducted in Finnish, according to the respondents’ and my mother tongue. The use of native language facilitates the conversation during an interview, which is why all the interviews were conducted in Finnish (Ekström & Johansson, 2019). I believe that language also ensured the respondents’ comfortability to take part in the study, even though they were aware of thesis language to be English. My proficiency in both language, Finnish and English, allowed me the possibility of using one of the languages in the material collection ensuring the validity and reliability of the empirical material and the material analysis in this study. Assuring the material determination, I do acknowledge that some words or local phrases used in the interviews may be open to interpretations in translations.

One notable thing is that there will be national elections held in Finland in the mid-April, which may have had an implication to the material. This was mainly noticed in cases, which the respondent got distracted by strategic discussions or speculations of the upcoming election campaigns. It is thus uncertain whether this would have happened if the elections were not oncoming. However, as the study aims for a broader perception and no material was collected from any social media platform, I did not consider this as an operative factor but it will be reflected within the analysis.

4.9. Introduction of the parliamentarians interviewed

As the interviews are used as a main reference to the analysis followed, the interviewed parliamentarians are presented in a clearer form. All the interviewed people were representatives of the Finnish parliament during a spring 2019 when the study was conducted. Due to anonymity reasons mentioned before, descriptions that could disclose the identity of the interviewee are masked – from geographical locations to family situations and party identification. Some of the interviewees represent the same party and even though the obscureness of the -individual versus party- focused election system, party representation in Finnish politics is focal. Thus, the party affiliations are not considered in this study, due the scope of this study, I do not consider to a recognition of political affiliation to pose additional relevance to the findings. Furthermore, it
amends the anonymity of the interviewees. Interviewees are referred with made-up nicknames that indicate the participants sex. Furthermore, I have designated the parliamentarians within the age groups of parliamentarians under 40 years old, 40 to 60 years old and over 60 years old.

Alisa has been a representative for several parliamentary terms and is over 60 years old.

Anton is a first term representative and under 40 years old.

Elsa is a second term representative, with a long history in municipal politics. She is between 40 and 60 years old.

Henrik is a first term representative and under 40 years old. Henrik has been politically active in municipal policies and youth policies.

Joel is a first term representative and between 40 and 60 years old. He has been active in the municipal policies for longer.

Marco is a second term representative and has been active in the municipal policies before elected to the parliament. He is between 40 and 60 years old.

Mikael is a second term representative and has been active in politics for a longer time. He is between 40 and 60 years old.

Rita is a first term representative and is between 40 and 60 years. She has been active in the municipal politics for a long.

Victor has been a representative for several terms. He is over 60 years old.
5. Analysis

5.1. Social media as a political tool

Less and less we can find those who belittle social media. I belittle Twitter. And if someone today refuses to use social media has chosen a way to destruction. (Marco)

The quotation above, is Marco’s, one of the interviewee’s, reflection of the usage of social media in politics. His expression indicates the essential role social media has in the political field, referring that a disregardance of social media would be damaging for politics.

“Do you consider social media as a political tool?”, was a question posed to all of the interviewees. The responses varied from bewilderment of the posed question, to amusement of the simpility of the question and to slight irritability of such hypothesis. I did not include any specific perception of what is a political tool, in the question formulation, or how it should be reflected upon, which enabled me in the interview situation to ask for further elaboration without steering the discussion to any direction.

It is, it is. It is not only a political tool, but tool for many other things; it is tool for communication, for entertainment, and especially, especially it is for communication between people. But then of course it is a tool for politics too. (Marco)

I asked Marco to develop on his view and he continued discussing politics in a broader sense.

Well, what is the purpose of politics in general. Well, to deal with common issues, and well maybe it is not for that, but in [political] campaigning its relevancy has pronounced. And will be even more pronounced in the future. But it [social media] is not only for election campaigns, it is also to highlight your own politics: what have you achieved, what issues are at stake, and so on. Well, that is kind of eternal campaigning, that kind of action, but that is the meaning and purpose it [social media] has. (Marco)

Communication and media representation are inevitable parts of politics (Meyer, 2002), and with the posed question I aimed to bring forth the interviewees opinions about social media within the sphere. As an immediate response, eight of nine parliamentarians perceived social media as a political tool. The further the discussions went, the more obscure social media’s role in politics and its role in political communication became. I regard it to be a cause of my broad question
formulation which I also consider to be an asset when attaining more conscientious reflections from the interviewees.

Alisa compared social media to any type of media giving social media a heavy political clout. Others reckoned social media permeating political sphere foremost, because of it is reckoned advantageous for campaigning.

It is [tool for politics], of course, like all other media are political tools, what else would it be. (Alisa)

Heavy emphasis on elections was recognised among all the interviewees. Social media was associated with politicians’ ability to regulate their own appearance in online, referring to social media’s fundamental element to operate on the user basis (Dijck and Poell 2013; Klinger & Svensson, 2014).

For parliamentarians’ it [social media] probably is to justify certain political decisions, or then argument against them. And it, of course, it reflects to your own political views of why do I resist this argumentation. But then during elections it is of course about the new candidates promoting themselves, bringing themselves front and building their political profile, maybe that is it. Promoting and supporting your political profile. (Elsa)

It is, it is [a political tool]. Parliamentarians do politics there [on social media], especially now under elections, which is a reminder itself when holding a seminar for the candidates that one cannot activate their online profile only two months before the elections, but you need to appear there all along. (Mikael)

The different perceptions can be understood from Elsa’s, Alisa’s, and Mikael’s views. Elsa’s reflection relates to political logic (Meyer, 2002). She refers social media as a channel through which one can indicate his/her own, or possibly the party’s perception of a certain political issue. Hence, steering the views of how different societal problems and issues should or could be addressed in a society. The idea proposes towards more communicative political culture (Meyer, 2002). Media forms political realities and through democratic political communication political power and ideologies are presented in a clear and fair way offering the public grounds according to which they may form their political perceptions (Meyer, 2002; Strömbäck & Esser, 2009). In a mediated society, as understood, media may overlook the premises of political logic, which creates tensions between the logics, forming incomplete perceptions of politics. Social media and internet
are considered to challenge the practices under which mass media operate (ibid,1; ibid, 2). Elsa’s response can be understood to correspond the tension of media logic and political logic, proposing that with social media one may oppose these logics bringing forward alternative or more deliberative views than mass media allow. Hence, participating to more democratic political communication or simpler, enhancing parliamentarians’ representation for their own benefit independently from media (Strömbäck & Esser, 2009; Gustafsson, 2016). In this sense, Elsa’s view corresponds to the first proposal, to communicate one’s political ideologies and values to support or oppose, the occurring decision-making processes. In addition, her reference to ‘promote and support your political profile’, can be understood as a way to utilise social media affordances for one’s own advantage through identity building or agenda-building (Kalsnes, 2016b), which she recognised apparent especially during elections, as Gustafsson (2016) too, argues. This notion repudiates the sole idea of democratic political communication that political logic entails, focusing on the importance of individual representation and personalised content (Bennett, 2012). Furthermore, considering McNair’s (2012) definition of political communication, one could argue Elsa’s view to correspond the premises of his notion, social media to actuate one’s political objectives. Elsa proposes social media to be used for both purposes: political reasoning and building one’s political profile, particularly emphasised during election periods.

Mikael’s focus is on campaigning. He referred social media use, as well as Marco did, to a continuous campaigning used by politicians and parliamentarians. Their reflections also relate to the recent empirical findings, which emphasise that campaigning for parliamentary candidates is not only important prior elections, but goes beyond that (Filimonov et al, 2016; McNair, 2012), for which social media may play a role. Findings perceive that one’s appearance on social media during elections, does not necessitate a successful campaign (Strandberg, 2016:95-116) as campaigning happens also outside the election periods, incessantly. These findings strengthen social media’s role in political communication throughout the parliamentary terms.

The answers above reflect to interviewees vision of whether social media is perceived as a political tool, or not. Mostly reflecting to their own experiences on the use of social media, interviewees
also observed the use from their colleagues’ perspective. Marco considered the question in a broader sense referring to the origins of politics, arguing that social media does not fulfil the purpose of politics per se, relating to the collective decision-making processes (Lasswell, 1950). He sees social media to appear through its other dimensions – connecting people (Dijck & Poell, 2013) and for entertainment, but corresponds with Elsa’s view, to use social media for highlighting one’s own political profile.

From the answers, individual emphasis on social media becomes quite clear. Alisa lone refers to social media as any other type of media. Mostly, social media is emphasised as a part of election campaigning, consolidating the significance of campaigning as a part of parliamentarians’ work and social media’s importance of that matter. The emphasis on elections can be a by-product of the election spring in Finland during the writing process of this thesis and the interviewees self-reflection to their campaign processes. But social media’s dominant role in campaigning and as campaign tool, can also be detected from the heavy emphasis of previous researches has conducted in the field, which these findings could support (see f.ex. Holtz-Bacha et al, 2014; Filimonov et al. 2016; Vergeer et al, 2013; Strömbäck & Kaid, 2008). Thus, importantly, Elsa referred campaigning to be political influencing itself as running for parliament is political influencing. Election promises and party’s ideological affiliations appear through campaigning (Gustafsson, 2016) and can be related to political opinion-building, as she reckons.

More precise with his wordings, Victor rejected social media to be considered as a political tool, he referred social media to be a tool used for politics and political opinion-building. He argued that social media may not fulfil the purpose of political tool, and problematised the use of social media in a broader sense.

No, it is in-between. As if, it [social media] is a tool, then it is subjected to something. But if it is in-between, it finds its role in between the citizens and the politics. And now, as we can see, sometimes it [social media] gets a role so that it acts as a horn of the government, and the horn of the parliament. Well…more like the horn of government, and that is not good. And sometimes you can find [from social media] different alternatives [for truth] as there must be in the pluralistic system but sometimes they are presented with such dilettantish superficiality. So that they do not clarify or address the issues extensively, and still they are told as the truth. In quotations marks, the truth. And this is the challenge. And that happens too much. (Victor)
As can be understood from citation above, Victor saw the challenge on being subjected to one-sided ‘truths’ of politics. He explained how parliamentarians’ ideological affiliations become apparent in political discussions, pointing out why it is especially important to be subjected to ‘many truths’ and hence, many opinions. The problem derives, as Meyer (2002) explains, from the premise that citizens are exposed to a one-sided information, or false information, shaping especially politically uninterested citizens’ understanding of the political world, concluding to distorted political realities. In contrast to internet’s early days, internet is not considered only to be beneficial for political communication anymore, but considered to reinforce power structures between the economic and political actors (Klinger & Svensson, 2014). Victor’s response pays attention to citizens exposure to news through social media. People retrieve news from social media which may be reconstructing the distorted political realities formed by mass media, to another type of distorted reality (Reuters, 2018; Schulz, 2004), still possibly formed by an unjust information is someone “claims to know the truth” of political world.

The discussion can be diverted to social media affordances to understand this from the role of platform agency. Platforms have the ability to push certain things –already popular things as government reportages– for more visibility (Dijck and Poell, 2013). This could propose, that platform functionalities push, the already popular government content on social media for more visibility, it being algorithms that form people’s perceptions of politics. Unfortunately, the context did not disclose whether, Victor referred to news organisations reporting of government issues on social media, or on public discourse, or the government representatives own reporting per se. The response thus revealed frustration towards the superficial manners established on social media and among the users.

In sum, understanding social media as a political tool or a tool used for politics, is enhanced. Social media is emphasised for campaigning purposes, but the strong emotions and reflections indicate that whereas social media is established in political sphere it has not taken its place uncomplicatedly. Social media’s purpose in political communication is obscure. The findings propose that the sole idea of democratic political communication that political logic entails, is
repudiated with social media’s focus, and use on, individual representation and campaigning purposes (Bennett, 2012). Thus, one could apply the discussions of the role of social media to serve the purpose of political communication per se. McNair determines political communication as “communication undertaken by politicians and other political actors for the purpose of achieving specific objects” (McNair, 2012:4). Social media can be considered to operate as a medium through which these objects can be achieved, in this case to build one’s political profile and campaigning.

5.2. ‘The Messrs of Twitter’ and ‘The political arena of Facebook’

Facebook and Twitter were the platforms referred by all the interviewees. These platforms phenomenality in the political sphere cannot be argued against. The interviewees acknowledged that Twitter and Facebook appear differently in the political sphere and are thus utilised differently. Facebook is particularly recognised to be used to connect with the citizens, voters and audiences, as the ‘ordinary citizens’. From all the responses, Facebook was considered as the eminent channel to connect and reach for broader audiences, whereas Twitter was used with most parts for a public discussion with colleagues and the media professionals. The interviewees separated the platforms quite distinctly by their user groups as can be recognised from the responses.

Well yeah, on Twitter, but not really on Facebook. It is the channel for me and my followers, and Twitter is the channel for colleagues […] [Twitter] is maybe a channel to build your peer-to-peer credibility. (Joel)

Facebook, it is the political arena of social media, it is Facebook. […] Twitter is kind of elitist media, it is journalists, and politicians and lobbyists who are present [on Twitter] […] And it may be different in other constituencies but if I think of my own constituency, the ordinary citizen is not on Twitter. (Henrik)

Most distinguishable difference of Facebook and Twitter is their different user bases. Colloquially Twitter is referred as ‘elitists media’ and constitutes a social medium for public figures and celebrities (Nordheim et al. 2018). Facebook’s popularity for political communication can also be seen from the perspective of user volumes. In Finland, there are more than double the number of users on Facebook as there are on Twitter (statista, 2018), making the user group distinctly smaller on the last mentioned. Limitedness of the number of users is not directly narrated by the interviewees, but the recognition of the user profiles is distinct as mentioned.
Common folk is not on Twitter, they [common folk] may read later from print media what the Messrs of Twitter have said. (Marco)

As referred earlier, Marco ‘belittles’ Twitter, downstating Twitter’s role in political communication as he considers Twitter to neglect the “common folk” from the discussions. As the recent researches point out, economic factors do not barricade one’s access to online deliberations, but the change is reckoned in social resources (Strandberg, 2016; Wilhelm, 2000). This, according to Marco’s understanding, could demonstrate one’s professional position, on “the elitists Twitter”. Rather than focusing on social resources, Rita, addressed the viability to retain oneself from discussing politics on Twitter.

Personally, it has been clear to me that it would be a complete misuse of my time, if I would spend my time arguing about something with my colleagues on Twitter, relationally to my voters for example. So that I need to find a way to discuss about that exact issue with them [colleagues] elsewhere, physically, so that we can share our understandings where our opinions collide. But of incorrect information, if I find incorrect information, I usually want to correct that but I don’t surrender to kind of witty and smart argumentation [on social media] and I think one needs to be careful with doing that. […] I think it is essential to consider subjectively and recognise the active users and understand how you, yourself fathom it [the active functioning] in relation to democracy. (Rita)

In contrast to Rita, Mikael sees an active communication with colleagues’ desirable and important, instead of ‘waste of his time’ as Rita refers to.

Every day, the communication [with colleagues on social media] is continuous. There [on Twitter] are some more active users, and then some more silent users, and colleagues could be more active, but I think that many thinks that there are too many politicians and journalists and too little voters [on Twitter].

(Mikael)

From these point of views, the purpose of using social media, and in this case Twitter, for political communication differs among the parliamentarians. A more niche user base of Twitter is emphasised by all the interviewees, inferring that the use of different platforms is more deliberate. The political atmosphere of Twitter is highlighted and the parliamentarians consider it to be more likely to gain recognition among colleagues and build their political profile within their field of professionalism, referring to journalists and other political actors on Twitter.
I have experienced Twitter to be a kind of a platform to, kind of, well to promote yourself. When you appear on Twitter, journalists will know that this kind of politician exists, and represents and runs for certain things and similarly some unions may recognise that. (Henrik)

Henrik proposed Twitter to be a channel to maintain politically important relations and build new networks for political appearance. An active Twitter appearance may also attain attention in the mass media concluding to an enhanced visibility on both channels. Henrik, as well as Mikael, proposed that the most desired outcome of a social media activity is print media’s recognition of it. Additionally, Henrik discussed of how parliamentarians’ profiles are detected on Twitter and that due his Twitter appearance he has been offered an expertise status on TV talk shows and radio shows to discuss on certain political issues at stake. Twitter has thus enhanced his political profile in different ways. Henrik and Mikael both argued that recognition on several media channels brings broader visibility which is desirable.

Anton considered the discussion on Twitter to be rather limited due to the limitedness of the users. Elsa, on the other hand argued that the limitedness of constructive discussion on Twitter, she refrains from actively using it. Relationally to Rita, who considered the discussion with colleagues to be to some extent waste of her time, Elsa referred to fake profiles and anonymous tweeters who purposively misunderstand any argumentation. She considered this to contribute negatively on bringing fort the government goals and having constructive discussions of the political issues.

No, I don’t respond, because I don’t like that there are all these fake profiles on Twitter or anonymous scribblers and I don’t think the… the discussion does not build the government objectives in any ways and it might at the end just be like mischief. So, why waste time to the kind of mischief, which is based on fake profiles’ discussions that passes the subject of the topic. (Elsa)

As the responses demonstrate, Facebook and Twitter are the prominent platforms used by parliamentarians. By acknowledging the platforms different user groups, the interviewees can be said to utilise the platforms differently. As detected, the purpose to use Twitter differs among parliamentarians, likewise are the beneficialities of the use perceived differently. Mikael and Henrik highlighted the possibility to connect with certain audiences or users on Twitter.
(Schwanholz & Graham, 2018) and used Twitter to attain recognition or initiate discussion with more specific user groups. Rita, Marco and Joel considered the discussion on Twitter to be rather limited due the absence of voters and ‘ordinary citizens’, implying that Twitter is not pursued for direct connection with citizens. Facebook was considered as a platform for everyone and for the voters, distinguishing ‘the Messrs of Twitter’ and ‘the common folk of Facebook’. From the nine interviewees, eight have a Twitter profile and all have a Facebook profile or some even two – professional and private.

5.3. To target the right user base

Instagram as a social media platform is not considered as prominent channel in political communication among the interviewees, as are Facebook and Twitter. Instagram’s role is thus argued to grow especially in targeting and approaching younger generation as Rita, Henrik, Anton, Joel and Mikael considered. On Facebook and on Twitter, parliamentarians recognised the different users according to their professional status, on Instagram the users were recognised within the distribution of age. Interviewees who use Instagram, considered Instagram to attain different audience targeting the younger generation who are absent on Facebook.

Presently, Instagram was considered more as ‘a feel-good platform’ as Joel referred to, where the interviewees and their colleagues’ could share pieces of their private life. On Instagram, the discussions and representation were from the most parts kept away from politics. Henrik argued that political credibility does not appear on Instagram and that political discussion are ought to happen in other social media platforms. Neither did he consider Instagram to be compelling for print media diminishing the possibility of print media to source someone’s Instagram profile or post. Thus, he saw Instagram to bring limited benefits in the political manner and reputation as print media’s recognition of Instagram is small. This argument will be further developed in the later part. Henrik summarised that, a selfie with a political caption on Instagram does not indicate the same credibility as a tweet. Anton, Joel and Henrik shared similar views of Instagram. They referred Instagram to be a medium through which one may peek into someone’s everyday life, distinct from persons political relevance.
The responses differ slightly from the earlier findings of Filimonov, Russman and Svensson (2016) who argue, that Instagram is used on political campaigning to manage an attractive image of the candidates in a political or professional context. Whereas an attractive image will most certainly be considered politically contextualising, interviewees did not highlight this per se. Joel described his use of Instagram to be more unconsidered, even as it could be considered to be also very considered. He uses Instagram to reveal bits of the everyday politics, communicating his whereabouts and political events, utilising social media functionalities of self-regulation – deciding himself of the content he wants to publish, constantly updating – publishing the content of ‘his whereabouts’, and connectedness – using a right platform for the exact content (Klinger & Svensson, 2016). Furthermore, managing his image within a political context, even as not politically relevant.

Rita agreed Instagram to be a keyhole to users’ private life, but she considered Instagram to also be a channel for politics. She argued that “a storied Instagram presence” may as well initiate political discussion and that under the era of visuals, visual presence will gain more and more recognition. Her recognition follows the empirical findings of Couldry (2008) and Filimonov, Russman and Svensson (2016) who argue for the increasing emphasis of visuals in politics further detecting parliamentarians increasing use of Instagram. Additionally, Rita’s understanding of ‘storied presence’ relates to Prior’s (2018) view of political actors’ utilisation of storytelling techniques, which he argues to possibly enhance the public engagement.

The findings infer the interviewees’ recognition of the platform differences and their user groups. Rita’s use of different platforms seemed to be quite systematic, as she herself recognised it too. Other interviewees considered their use of social media to be based more on ‘habits’ or ‘on the mood and feeling’. The references to activity can be understood within the frames of agenda-building (Kalsnes, 2016b) and the functionalities the social media platforms offer for the users (Schwanholz & Graham, 2018). Despite the unsystematic recognition of the use, actions of precise and deliberate social media behaviours can be detected from the parliamentarians’ reflections to their publishing cycles and premediated content. The considerations of the platform’s expediency determine the content published for many interviewees. Whether the individual’s’ aim is to attain
attention from ‘the elites’ Twitter is used. Whether the aim is to build their position among ‘the masses’ an active Facebook appearance is held. Or whether the aim is to gain recognition within ‘the younger generation’ Instagram is availed. Considering the type of demeanour refers to rather deliberate use of social media platforms than a casual use based on ‘mood and feeling’. Thus, the differences of the audiences in the platforms may already be so deeply rooted to the parliamentarians’ understanding on social media, that their performance and actions appear as established casual habits.

Online platforms, for the large parts, were understood as a mean for communication and as a broadcasting channel. Through these channels the parliamentarians can share information of their political achievements, opinions, and inform their audience of the upcoming political events they are partaking. Social media was compared to be a ‘new way’ of distributing newsletters, just a faster and more efficient way to use resources. Whereas some interviewees recognised social media to be a supplement for the traditional ways of communicating (e-mail, local newspapers, and speeches), others argued social media to have partly replaced the other ways of communicating, especially when encountering their supporters and possible voters.

I would say that there are two big arenas where to face the voters and they are the aunties at the market squares, they still do exist but then there is the other folk which is more in social media.

(Henrik)

5.4. Personal characteristics as editorial pieces on women’s magazines

For the most parts, interviewees referred to personalised news media from the mass media’s perspective. Anton, Marco and Alisa related personalisation to the editorial pieces written of parliamentarians in women’s magazines, referring to ‘published stories in women’s magazines’. Mass media’s way to personalise or present parliamentarians in media was not considered to differ from the way the parliamentarians present themselves on social media. Marco considered social media to actually democratise parliamentarians in this sense, as the content produced on social media is self-generated and self-regulated in contrast to regulative media institutions.
Well I don’t see women’s magazines problematic, but, well I see that the problem with women’s magazines is how they are so selective of whom they write articles of and of which party’s candidates they write about. They [women’s magazines] don’t write articles of women from our party, or their married life, or their wardrobes are not written about, it is always the certain people who are picked to the headlines. And Facebook is unbiased, everyone can show their wardrobe in Facebook. (Marco)

Notably, to get picked up to the editorial pieces is desirable and from Marco’s reflection one may detect that the content itself is not that dubious but media’s way to favour the parliamentarians or parties is more problematic. This can be seen to relate to media logics. Whereas the focus is on the content and issues, or as in this case on people “as commodities” editorials follow the idea of economic functionalities with the given content according to which media operates (Meyer, 2002).

Strömbäck (2008) recognises aspects of simplification, personalisation, visualization and stereotypisation to be common elements to present politics in media. Stereotypisation as Marco explained and personalisation via women’s magazines as Marco, Alisa and Anton referred to, can be argued to be recognised through the interviews. Simplification was also detected, as discussed above in the part 5.10 Cava vs Champagne – social media in relation to print media. Social media was thus not considered to intensify the habit of personalised presentation, quite similarly as previous research on political science has concluded (Fransworth & Lichter, 2009; Van Zoonen & Holtz-Bacha, 2000).

Slightly aberrantly from others, Henrik and Anton recognise the difficulty to draw the line between ’the private me’ and ‘public me’ on social media. The interviewees explained the content of one’s private life attain more publicity influencing positively to their visibility on social media, and motivating them to share more personal content on social media. This aligns to Dijck and Poell’s recognition of social media logics (2013).
Well, I have this, there is a pressure to do it, because when you publish a picture which is, or a picture or a video on social media which is personal you will get much more attention for it, much more attention compared to a something that considers political substances. For example I have a Facebook post saying that “it is very important to finish the reform of healthcare and social welfare services during this parliamentary term, and then it can be retouched in the next term.” And rather little [of likes] maybe like some dozens of likes and that is a practical example. […] And then if you publish a picture, like, well for example when I published a picture, which was actually also taken from hustings but it was not evident from the picture. And I took a picture in which I was petting this dog and it had its tongue sticking long from its mouth and it was like immediately, puff several hundreds of likes. (Henrik)

The interviewees experienced even some guilt of publishing more personalised content in social media at the expense of political content. Yet, colleagues did not highly regard this action.

Joel and Henrik argued that social media is a keyhole to your everyday action demonstrating transparently and accurately what parliamentarians work entails. Showing your persona, according Rita, reveals also the values and ideologies the person holds, eventually mirroring to their political presence and decision-making analysis. This could imply that one could build their political agenda also through their social media presence of their private life. Mikael, on the other hand argued that social media presence is a part of one’s identity building, and is not necessarily more transparent or pure online, considering that the transparency requirement is challenging for parliamentarians. Alisa problematised also the possibility of politicians to build a certain political image, which may actually oppose the persons political identity, in contrary to Rita’s understanding. Alisa thus argues, that it is not a consequence of social media but exploitation of media in general.

These findings correspond the previous research of Jackson and Lilleker (2011) and Filimonov, Russman and Svensson (2016) who argue that representation on social media is used to manage representatives attractive image. Similarly, the findings indicate that traits of personalisation are recognised but they appear modestly and not necessarily due to social media itself as Karvonen (2010) detected and political science research has recognised (Fransworth & Lichter, 2009; Van Zoonen & Holtz-Bacha, 2000). However, media’s or social media’s focus on personal characteristics was not really a concern of the parliamentarians. The individuals own boundaries to represent themselves and their lives, was considered more problematic and difficult, perceiving self-regulation actually negative to this matter.
Sometimes it seems like Facebook takes a very superficial stance on how the world works and how people operate in it, like now I’m taking a piss and now I’m ready. And yes, in such, [information distribution], we need to have a right as well.

My Facebook pages do not say that now I’m taking a piss and now I’m ready, no. I always communicate issues. They may look boring outside as I don’t really use pictures but as long as people read and I get hundreds of like and thousands of visitors, well it works. (Victor)

Social media can be said to amplify individuals’ representation (on social media) from its technological aspects and nature, how it is built to be used and constructed. Focus on social media, is in the user, which emphasises the individuals’ subjective views, stories and opinions over a certain issue (Dijck and Poell 2013). Even as the content per se would not be problematised, and will always be dependable of the representation as Victor referred, the interviewees saw the individualised focus in contractionary to pluralistic democracy, drawing away from collective actions.

…well yes, I see negativity in the ‘me’ politics, and I think it [social media] seem to produce that. Politics are strongly based on ‘we’ sprit, and no one in this world achieves something alone […] And maybe there is a controversy in that, as social media is kind of [individualistic] and if one is then not able, in a certain situation, to distinguish the objective in a discussion and start to talk about themselves in a situation where it is purely silly. And party, as in the most parts of politics, cross the party lines and [is based on] multi-party cooperation, in a democracy like Finland in which we have eight parties in the parliament and the municipality in which we don’t even have government and opposition, the ‘we’ perspective is a premise for all action. (Rita)

Additionally, Alisa explained how during one election campaign she was approached by several electorates who said to be contemplating between her and her colleague to whom to give their vote to. The two candidates represent parties that oppose each other with their ideological affiliation and thus their political views. The electorates had explained to Alisa their voting decision to be based on their assessment to give a vote to ‘a wise person’. In contrary to Alisa’s experience and Rita’s understanding, Marco, and Elsa argued that each politician is so strongly identified to their party and their party politics so their appearance beyond the party-frame is not recognisable. They did not consider one’s presence in social media to attenuate party function, or conflict with individuals’ presentation over the parties’ as Gustafsson (2016) proposed to happen easily.
Theoretically, personalisation of politics is perceived with two ways: changing the focus from political issues to personal characteristics or form parties to individuals, both normatively considered detrimental to democracy (Rafat & Sheafer, 2007; Van Aelst et al., 2012). Social media elements are increasingly related to these claims of agitating the focus of political communication to other things. This can be seen partly as penetrated functions of social media technicalities (Couldry, 2008; Dijck & Poell, 2013) and altering behaviours of individuals’ adopted storytelling methods (Prior, 2018). Interviews indicate also obscure findings. Whereas, both perspectives of personalisation were discussed and acknowledged, more mutuality was observed within the first proposition. Thus, undemocratising consequences were not detected from the first proposition and for the second, responses varied.

For the second proposition, one could also consider the structure of the electoral system of Finland and the recognition of party and political collegiality, to matter. The Finnish electoral system can be seen fundamentally individualising as the voting processes follow the closed list system (Karvonen, 2010; Enli & Skogerø, 2013). This was also noted by Henrik, Anton and Joel, and mentioned by Rita. They explained, the importance of individual’s profiling due the individualised focus of the electoral system, which social media can be argued to promote due its way of functioning. Social media’s functionality is fundamentally based on individualised content creating and if social media is not seen amending collective actions, it may be seen to establish the focus on individualised parliamentarians. Bennett argues that individuation (2012) as a social condition is especially recognised among younger generations, which he recognises to be an underpinning aspect for personalisation of politics. Interestingly to Bennett’s recognition, it is the representatives of the younger generation, who recognise the aspects of personalisation of political more profoundly and also reflected to the ‘fan cultures’ and popularity aspects of ‘Instagram pods’ as the section 5.7. The importance of visibility indicates.
5.5. In-house communication

In-house communication and parliamentarians’ way to use social media platforms for internal communication was brought up in the interviews. Social media was mostly referred for external communication, most likely due to underlying themes with the posed interview questions. Despite this, social media’s role in internal communication was brought up by several interviewees proposing its importance in in-house communication. Facebook groups and WhatsApp, an online messaging platform, were appraised for their usability and accessibility during meetings and conventions. Platforms functionality to send direct messages enable the parliamentarians for “an ad hoc consultation” or a quick response to sudden queries in conventions. This facilitates party’s ability to form a common position as their response for a sudden query, as Mikael exemplified. Different internal online groups were recognised also by other interviewees. Online communication groups were considered favouring the parliamentarians and easing their internal communication. This recognition demonstrates social media’s fundamental idea of fast-paced and user-generated interaction (Dijck and Poell, 2013). One can further apply this to the recognition of party democracies in relation of individualised and party focus. For this notion, social media offer technical functionalities, which enables the parliamentarians to connect and construct a collective position without a physical convention enhancing the collective decision-making for party politics, even with sudden queries.

5.6. Two sides of filter bubbles

Connectivity, as Dijck and Poell (2013) explain, inherits a flipside that is embedded to the technological functionalities of online platforms. Platforms connective automatisation to bring like-minded people together (Smith, 2017), is perceived differently according to the interviewees. Victor, as referred earlier, brought up one-sided truths in online environments, when discussing on social media as a political tool. Similarly to Victor, one’s exposure to one-sided information is a mutual concern of Alisa, Joel, and Rita. They considered the contemporary political atmosphere to be somewhat relational to social media presence perceiving it harmful for democracy in a broader
sense. Alisa argued social media to strengthen the connection of like-minded people as it exceeds the geographical dimensions of physical spaces.

Marshall McLuhan presented the idea that television will turn the world to a village, because it brings events from around the world to living rooms. Inspired by this I have been thinking that in a way social media makes it possible to form ‘villages’ which are not dependent on geographical locations. […] But then social media has also created a new forum for fights between the villages … Professor Elina Haavio-Mannila studied the village fights of old times, and she came to the conclusion that the village fights strengthen the social cohesion within the villages, when you go and fight against the guys of the neighbouring villages. So maybe the current village fights that take place in social media are sort of the same thing. Now we talk about filter bubbles which may be kind of similar thing. The cohesion inside the bubble is constructed by other means, and there the social media plays a role. (Alisa)

In contrary to these views, Marco saw the bright sight in automated connectivity. He argued that social media eases citizen life by surrounding them with like-minded people.

Those are good things. Even though they [filter bubbles] are always resented and feared to encircle people to their own little circles from which they would not accept to see the surrounding world. But for god’s sake, that is great if you do not need to see the rest of the world. […] And, of course decision-makers and people in certain positions need to look and examine world from different angles, but not a regular person, why would a regular person need to see the differences in issues. Their life will be much easier if they do not need to look at the things that distress them. They can be with like-minded people for their whole life so their life will more likely to be happier. (Marco)

Despite the benefits Marco noted in automated connectivity, he considered it to be important for him and people in his position to be exposed to number of sources and perspectives, in order to be able to observe, analyse and discuss political issues intricately. Parliamentarians quite drastically contrasting opinions refer how differently, the platform agency, constructing filter bubbles and automated connections can be perceived as Dijck and Poell (2013) recognise. In political communication, automated connectivity infers the concern expressed by Meyer (2002) and Wilhelm (2000) of passive recipients. Conceiving that passive recipients form their political understanding according to the content they are exposed to, would in this situation imply that one’s political understanding would be relational to the elements of (social) media logic (Meyer, 2002) or the platform agency. Both, restricting the space where political deliberations occur (Wilhelm, 2000). The concerns and the contentment of automated connectivity may also signify the
interviewees deep understanding of social media’s increasing role as a news distributor (Reuters, 2018). This can also be detected from Victor’s consideration of media in corpore. He discerned media to be essential for democracy as it enhances political transparency operating as “an analyst, valuer, and critic” offering most importantly extensively information to its consumers. With social media, he saw the controversy at its way to create spaces for one-sided information deducing social media to be a channel from where information is attained. Elsa, likewise, emphasised the importance of source criticism on social media, as beard in mind, the content on social media follows different logics than journalistic news media (Dijck & Poell, 2013; Klinger & Svensson, 2014). These viewpoints may also be apprehended to suggest for ever so passive recipients and parliamentarians’ concern of internet or social media to become the mediator between the citizenry and political institutions (Strömbäck, 2008).

5.7. Algorithmic games

Events of Facebook Cambridge Analytica, the US presidential elections in 2016, and additionally the UKs Brexit referendum were brought up as intractable consequence of social media by Alisa and Rita. Data, algorithms, and external power that is ‘out of our hands’ was observed by the interviewees, not only in creation of filter bubbles, as discussed earlier, but in a broader sense (Dijck and Poell, 2013) for ethical discussions. Societal understanding and reference to datafied and programmed society is requested to be “the next big [ethical] discussions” as Rita refers to. Social media, through the abovementioned events, was recognised to carry elements that were harmful in a broader perspective subverting the discussion of someone’s phenomenal representation on social media or polarised discussions on online platforms. Programmability as Dijck and Poell (2013) refer is problematic in a democratic perspective.

…these ethically questionable ways of influencing, I suppose this to be the next big discussion we will in the coming years have, and that is good. And I think that might change a lot of things, I believe that to be a game changer […] We will all demand more transparency of our data, how it is utilised, and we can already see lot of movements towards this aspect and I consider it to be a very positive shift. (Rita)

Mikael, Rita, Elsa and Alisa brought up the ethics of datafied content and argued that media and research should increasingly focus on these aspects and recognise the platforms position and
ethicality within the occurrences. Datafied content and platform agency were recognised to restricts users and their action on social media. Marco referred the platforms possibility to restrict the users with moderating and censoring the content online. This he considered to be problematic from the user’s perspective.

I wish that social media would let a thousand flowers bloom. Reasonable people do understand what is right and what is wrong. Let’s not turn into big brothers, like Orwellian societies. (Marco)

Thereof, both argumentations can be understood to reflect to platform agency’s ability to convert everything into a data, which they may use, store, and sell further (Dijck & Poell, 2013). From democratic perspective, media industries can be understood constricting and weakening the formal political arena by possessing, what we consider a space for political communication. Social media or the platforms possessing the intermediators’ role as a moderator, censoring individuals content as Victor refers to, or moderating large dataset for opinion (re)construction as Rita and Alisa exemplified, are both problems constructed by the programmed functionality of social media (Dijck & Poell, 2013; Klinger & Svensson, 2014).

5.8. The importance of visibility

The findings indicate that despite the age, party affiliation or other characteristics of the interviewees, popularity and visibility on social media are relevant. Victor, Alisa and Rita who in general problematised more social media, also amplified their own visibility on social media and their social media appearance. What is interesting here is the parliamentarians’ perception of the quantifying elements of social media –the comprehension of likes, shares, and retweets is vital.

…as long as people read and I get hundreds of like and thousands of views, it works for my needs.

(Victor)

Yes, yes. Of course, it [the likes] matters. I would not do it otherwise, because it takes your time as well and it is then taken from something else. But well, compared to the time put into it [social media] it is incredible effective, like if you would put the same amount of time and the same amount of people to encounter there on the streets, it would be impossible. The discussions it breeds are sometimes totally crappy but still for the most parts it does serve you right. (Marco)
As the citations above indicate, if enough visibility is obtained from social media, it serves the parliamentarians. As Gustafsson (2016) argue, building support among members of the party district is important for parliamentarians to carry out their parliamentary work for the next term and direct them towards their personal political goals, which can be improved with a larger visibility and wider recognition on the media.

But the drawback is that, parliamentarians ultimately, or not ultimately, but a big part of this job is to be re-elected. And parliamentarians do lot of things to remain parliamentarians, and one recognises that it is more beneficial [for the parliamentarian] to make a noise on social media than to sit in the parliament and give an opinion of something at nine o’clock in the evening. Not to mention to sit and toil in the committee room behind closed doors without any public attention, then you get the urge to sweep away from the core of [policy] making, to tinker around on social media. But interesting to see where it will lead…(Henrik)

Henrik’s view follows Gustafsson’s (2016) understanding of the notion of re-elections. Thus, in contrary to Gustafsson, Henrik does not recognise the conflicting demands of a party and an individual parliamentarian, but recognises the conflict with collegiality in general. This discussion will be further touched in the section 5.9. Personal characteristics as editorial pieces on women’s magazines and 5.11. Social media at an expense of politics. The first section, discussing of the individualised focus in online political communication and the latter examining social media’s adaption as a forfeit for other resources.

Popularity in social media was also referred to fan culture, when interviewees reflected to likes on social media. The references were not of themselves, still some of the interviewees wanted to remark the number of their own followers to make a reference point or to point out their presence on social media to me. Parliamentarians with large groups of followers were considered to hold a distinctive political profile. ‘The popular parliamentarians’ were recognised to be present on social media with a strong self-actualising forms, discernible in storytelling techniques (Prior, 2018), further displaying their political values and ideologies through their social media presence.

To be an agent and be exposed to platform agency is in the core of understanding popularity functioning on social media platforms (Dijck and Poell 2013). Popularity on social media functions in two-ways, in which ‘rich feeds richer’. The findings suggest that parties do push the
parliamentarian towards behaviour in social media that enhances the parties’ and the parliamentarians’ visibility and popularity on social media platforms. The interviewees described social media trainings and the general recommendations they get from the party communicators to emphasise social media functions that ameliorate one’s visibility on social media, also considered as “ad hoc – functions”. Henrik, Mikael and Anton who discussed this functionality of social media referred to the functions, which enhance one’s visibility on social media with a slight hesitation, making clear that this type of action is recognisable in every party’s social media action – not only theirs. They also referred to internal ‘Instagram pods’ or ‘engagement groups’ (Chan, 2019; Määttänen, 2019). These are smaller strategically organised groups within the party frames, which deliberately and systematically boost each other’s social media presence by liking or sharing each other content, hence boosting their and their colleagues’ media presence. The two-way functionality of social media becomes rather evident through described actions. Not only referring to online action, Henrik argues that parliamentarians’ interpersonal relations and the party’s general team spirit can be extrapolated from their social media behaviour. This refers that offline behaviour does not fully differ from online behaviour, nor from popularity aspect.

In regard to this matter, distinctions in the answers were more clearly related to the interviewees’ ages than on other detected themes risen from the interviews. Even as this may not be substantial for the entity, but interesting. The recognition of technological affordances potentiality and functionality was emphasised within the younger parliamentarians. The partition was the same to recognise the distinction of platforms different operationalities in the sense of user groups.

Social media was recognised stimulating policy-making processes, not only through enhanced visibility, but enabling parliamentarians or candidates to build their political influence and hence raise awareness of the issues they are running for. Even as the quantifying elements are relevant also in this context, it is reflected more as a positive note: how through social media one can distribute the content to the right audience (connectivity) and attain their attention (popularity) to further catch the mass media’s, or larger audiences’ attention to get an idea, or blog post to become a political deliberation and further a political query.
5.9. Cava vs Champagne – social media in relation to print media

Overall, parliamentarians emphasised mass media’s role in politics. Media’s and politics’ relationship was referred with ‘dependent’, ‘too important’, and ‘schizophrenic’. Many interviewees expressed the relationship of media and politics with rather negatively connoted phrases, demonstrating the tricky almost ‘love-hate –relationship’ they have with media, as Marco summarised. Whereas media’s attention is desired, the parliamentarians referred it to be intimidating, as the frame media choose to present of parliamentarians, is only one to guess.

Well I have this kind of, well I cannot say a love-hate relationship, because hate is not a correct word for it, but maybe a fear-attachment relationship. Fear is also exaggerated, but it is always bit intimidating to see how they [media actors] react to this, and how will that thing go…but media are needed. We need to have it [media], and I think it is particularly good that media are present in the parliament. (Marco)

Well it is kind of profane [relationship], particular relationship. Both parties [politics and media] know that they are handing over something or giving up on something [values], but still want to do it because it also serves themselves. (Henrik)

These opinions reflect to Meyer’s (2002) understanding of the conditions for appropriate political reportage. The dissatisfaction of media’s way to report politics and parliamentarians, relates to media’s way to adopt elements of media logic. Media are recognised to report events with simplifying manners, addressing only ‘the easy’ subjects and dismissing reportages of algorithmic games or electoral influence, as Alisa argues. A disregardance of the ‘wholeness’ of a phenomenon or an event, relates to the two prominent mass media logics –newsworthiness and skewed presentation (Meyer, 2002; Strömbäck, 2008), according to which Henrik experienced media to operate. Marco recognised similar occurrences with media’s functionality. Some exceptions for ‘self-respected’ newspapers were stated, but in all media’s highly important role in politics were problematised from parliamentarians’ perspective.

Political logic and media logic are generally considered as opposing apprehensions (McNair, 2012; Meyer, 2002). Whereas media logic operates within its own rules and is strongly influenced by economic structures and commercialisation, political logic within the understanding of communication is based on the recognition of just and equal distribution of information, appraising citizens right to judge and analyse politics according to the information shared (ibid.). These
theoretically opposing doctrines as the findings indicate, are as dependent as it wields. Media needs political content to present and form political reality and politicians need media to present themselves and their politics to the public, as Henrik detects. Mass media’s consequential role is a challenge for parliamentarians.

Well, the relation of media and parliamentarian, how to put it… both need each other, but media’s importance have pronounced especially recently because it defines the agenda. It defines what issues are important this week, it determines what are the election themes, it is not parliamentarians who decide upon that, it is the media. And, in my opinion, how the parliamentarians can take back the authority to determine the prevailing agenda is the biggest challenge the parliamentarians face. (Mikael)

Mikael argues that politicians hardest challenge is to get back the power to determine the political agenda, which is contemporary framed by the mass media. Public agenda, which was used to be politically determined, as Mikael argues, is now set by the mass media and followed by the political actors. As strong connotations to media’s agenda building were not recognised by the other interviewees, though similar undertones were identified by Marco and Henrik. Media’s way to report and frame political issues according to their own interest was not considered to necessarily, or always, to serve parliamentarians or the political issues as desired by the political field.

From a historical perspective, Victor could detect the changes in media more optimistically. He sees the change in media’s role. As media in its all forms is not only a broadcaster but “an analyser, a reviewer and a critic”, exposing the audience not only for one truth but several, from which we can draw our own conclusions from. Typified by social media. Victor’s comprehension could be considered to apprise social media for supplementing the media field. Social media is considered as a channel where one may freely and (rather) independently express their (political) opinions (Klinger & Svensson, 2014; Jenkins & Thorburn, 2003). For this practice, social media is recognised by all the interviewees. With the ‘disregardance’ of wholeness or ‘skewed presentation’ apparent with media logics (Dahlgren 2009; Meyer, 2002; Strömbäck & Esser, 2009), parliamentarians experience social media to aid reforming media’s agenda. The findings indicate that in political communication social media is considered beneficial especially in two situations, wherein mass media is questioned.
Firstly, situations in which editorial media have not raised a certain issue to a public discussion, social media is recognised as a channel through which the parliamentarians can raise awareness of a particular issue. These particular issues correspond to interviewees personal political interests or their electorates interest (provincial issues for example) to attain publics and possible even mass media’s attention. From a democratic perspective, this is perceived to broaden discussion and introduce altering perspectives to mass media’s simplified or biased reporting of a certain issue, as mentioned above (Meyer, 2002; Chadwick, 2017).

But I have made an actual deliberative decision on that [how to use social media], as we can endlessly discuss the daily politics, the topics which the journalistic political media and politics too, often and mostly live on. But then you can make an active decision and focus only on your own themes and kind of larger perspectives, and like I try quite actively to consider what would be meaningful for a certain group of people and try to stimulate discussion through that rather than focusing on issues everyone’s talking about. Kind of even go even past those [topics]. (Rita)

Social media, by the interviewees, is recognised as a channel to bring forth the agendas the politicians themselves are running for, either to attain a small niche that mass media would not recognise or put forth an opposing or alternative opinion to amend mass media’s reporting – referring to agenda-building (Kalsnes, 2016b) as Rita explains.

Secondly, social media was recognised a useful tool for user-generated responses to adjust skewed reporting or headlines media produces. User-generation, is in the origins of online platforms ideologies and technologies (Dijck, 2013), which are particularly praised among some of the interviewees. Henrik summarised it accordingly:

I do not need to repeatedly ask for a response to anywhere [on print media] because I can write a long post for example on Facebook that this [reportage] was a spoof and these claims are not correct. There is a factual mistake 1, factual mistake 2, and factual mistake 3 was this, additionally when I was called to the interview I was told the topic was about this, but it was about that. And I think that is, for a Finnish parliamentarian the biggest strength of social media. You will always have the survival kit and you can always tell your exact opinion and be heard. (Henrik)

Additionally, Marco referred to user-generated content producing from media’s restrictive perspective.
Traditional media do not give any possibilities for oneself. Except under the elections you could choose the picture to be use, but traditional media it does not allow for that [actuating news], at all in practice. And sometimes you may send all kind of newsletters and what not and they [media] edit it to fit to their preferences. (Marco)

Mass media is recognised eminent for politics and political communication, and whereas it can now be challenged with social media, mass media exist powerfully. Internet’s fast-pacedness referred by Henrik was also emphasised by Elsa.

Then you can at least react immediately, print media will be appeared after a week. (Elsa)

Not only to amend mass media’s reporting as described above, social media is recognised to be a platform through which one can easily argument the contemporary political events, societal phenomena or governmental decisions which addresses the whole society. Some interviewees experienced participating to a political discussion to be expected behaviour by parliamentarians (Joona, Joel and Antti). They recognised type of social pressure to address certain prevailing and especially societally distressing occurrences on social media. This was recognised as a type of responsibility they hold as parliamentarians to give a statement of a certain issue, of which social media enables one to do, apart of one’s geographical appearance (Dijkc & Poell, 2013; Klinger & Svensson, 2014). Dissentingly, whilst recognising the expectations, Rita said to perform against the grain and focusing more on her own agenda and what the party is running for. For these above-mentioned practices, social media is recognised for its user-friendly affordances that allow for self-regulative operation. Additionally, we can propose that, again, as we understand social media to be based on the user-generated operationalising, we may see the practices and the purposes for the use of social media to differ among the users –and among the parliamentarians.

Social media, at the time of its emergence was welcomed by technological determinist with open arms, to amend the way how politics are presented in mass media, moving towards more democratic ways of communicating (Klinger & Svensson, 2014; Jenkins & Thorburn, 2003). The findings indicate that social media’s role is more obscure than that. All the interviewees emphasised how they can, with social media initiate a discussion or give an opinion of the occurring
contemporary events without mass media’s intermediators. Yet, for political representation mass media is vital and its attention is desired, as the discussion below shows.

In social media, you can get huge amount of attention, and report on issues, and manage your own thing but it is still social media. Proper edited media has still a certain role as being the high-end of the media...It [social media] has become as strong, but still, I argue that there is a difference. Let’s say that Cava is sparkling wine and champagne is champagne, I use that as an example. Fine cava can be much better than a bad champagne but champagne is still champagne, and in that sense editorial media has, in my opinion, a certain role in the eyes of people, and a higher value. (Henrik)

The findings support the understanding of Skovsgaard and Van Dalen (2013), who regard social media and internet supplementing traditional media, referring social media as a channel to broadcast opinions and attain a possible absence in mass media. With social media’s increasing role, Twitter and other online platforms are more increasingly used as public relation tools by mass media (Dijck & Poell, 2013; Chadwick, 2017). Parliamentarians aspiration to gain the named attention. Here, Chadwick’s (2017) reflection to hybrid media becomes essential. He emphasises the importance of, all media, and their intermediating roles in political communication. The findings indicate that parliamentarians use social media within this hybrid system (Chadwick, 2017), as a broadcaster or a representative depending on how they consider to best gain further notion by mass media. This indicates that a sole focus or recognition, on one channel is not sufficient for the parliamentarians.

In turn, it must be added that the parliamentarians emphasised print media’s presence in political communication in their own experience, but they also recognised that print media’s presence is not always fundamental for politicians. Some of the interviewees brought up singular cases, in which parliamentary candidates with their vast social media presence have been elected to the parliamentary. This indicates that even though print media is important for the parliamentarians interviewed, they reckon that representation on mass media is not necessary, predicting that social media’s role will only be intensified further in the future –especially in campaigning.
5.10. Online and offline communication

Political representation can be built and emphasised in different ways. As discussed before, social media enables self-regulative impression management that differs from any other kind of media channels (Couldry, 2008, Dijck & Poell, 2013; Klinger & Svensson, 2014). Gustafsson (2016) argues that parliamentarians are competing against their own colleagues in order to carry their parliamentary work, or work towards their personal goals. This is done by building their support within their districts or among the potential voters. Parliamentarians with their personal contribution may build their support by traveling around their local chapters, which in Finland is a constituent to parliamentarians’ weekly schedule, as the parliamentarians are to be found from their local districts every Monday attending to local affairs (“Kansanedustajan työ,” n.d.). This is not constituency inferred as campaigning, but the face-to-face encounters in local chapters were emphasised substantial especially during the election periods by the interviewees, which could point towards concerned.

I was interested to understand how the parliamentarians perceived the weekly encounters at their local constituencies in relation to encounters online. Face-to-face encounter is fundamentally based on one-on-one encounter and thus pose an interesting element when considering communication on social media that enables an interaction with one-to-many and one-to-one (Jenkins & Thorburn, 2003).

I would say that there are two big arenas to face the voters: the aunties at the market squares they still exist but then the other folk is on social media. (Henrik)

It makes it easier to take part to [political fairs], you are connected in real time to someone of whom you would have otherwise needed to travel dozens of kilometres to meet at some political fair and then queue there with others. (Marco)

Well, it is difficult to comment … I am not necessarily sure [whether the manners change]. Well distributing information also on events that happen live is so much easier via Facebook than before, and advertising that way does not cost nearly as much as ads in newspapers…so well I am not sure. But if someone has obtained that kind of research finding… but I my gut feeling just would not suppose something like that as a default. (Alisa)
As the findings demonstrate one-to-many and one-to-one encounters are both essential and achievable through ‘the two arenas’. Face-to-face encounters are considered important, and are often referred aside of social media presence. Social media is reckoned more as a supplement to other kind of communication. Presence and activity on social media are more related to offline presence as it denotes for same type of self-representation as physical encounter but in online environment. Social media is independent from mass media and more effective than face-to-face encounter as one can be connected ‘in real time’, with ‘more folk’ and with ‘less costs’ through social media. Henrik refers to the two arenas for encounters: market squares and social media, which are recognised by other interviewees too.

The importance of face-to-face encounters were questioned by Anton and Joel. They contemplated online and offline encounters in the future emphasising social media’s cost-effectiveness. Mikael referred to the same reasons, but argued that the political arenas in Finland differ so much geographically, that online and offline environments are not really comparable. He recognised that whilst on some areas it may be unfavourable to hold physical hustings, in some areas it is still the arena where one meets the voters, as proposed also by Henrik. Again, the focus was on the voters, suggesting for the parliamentarians’ attend to be re-elected (Gustafsson, 2016). In relation to offline encounters, the parliamentarians emphasised, that one may communicate the information of an offline event also on online allowing the event of gaining more recognition and being more cost-effective to the parliamentarians and their parties than press advertising. Possibility to post, present and tweet content as they prefer and as frequently as they wish was appraised. Once again, giving appreciation to the very basics of social media logics and user driven content (Dijck & Poell, 2013; Klinger & Svensson, 2014). This supports the previous findings pointing that social media is for the most part used for broadcasting objectives (Skovsgaard & Van Dalen, 2013; Klinger, 2013). Yet, social media is not considered to replace face-to-face encounters and whereas its role is prominent, it is conceived with reserve as Alisa points out.
5.11. Social media at the expense of politics?

The discussion of social media as political tool, proceed to a discussion of social media’s functionality in political decision-making. How and which ways social media may enhance political sphere, was perceived varyingly. Here, I also detected that the interviewees experienced social media to have two pragmatic elements which affect fundamentally to parliamentarians’ ways to adapt social media to their communication practices.

Rita considered the collective and authoritative implementation of policies to be in the heart of political decision-making, recognising social media’s possibilities for that. Withdrawing from too optimistic views, she discusses it with reservation emphasising systematic and strategic actions one can amend on social media. She shared an example of how she in her own use has benefitted from social media, indicating that one may raise public awareness through social media. A blogpost’s visibility can be ameliorated with other social media channels, which in a best scenario, may lead to a political query and be further heard in the parliament convention. Content on social media provoke reactions and increase the demand for the messages, which may, like Rita explains, be beneficial for the parliamentarian initiating the discussion but also commence political processes (Dahlgren, 2005; Meyer, 2002). This is also recognised by Elsa.

Every decision-making precedes discussion and issue orientation, and that orientation before the decision-making is relational to communication. So, it [social media] does have an implication to the process, it starts first with the idea, then comes the discussion and then the act. (Elsa)

Alisa and Mikael bring in examples of their own too. Alisa describes of how one of her Facebook posts got “limitless of shares” and was reported nationally after the post was noted raising lot of public inquiry online. In this case, social media was recognised for its connectivity to capture the attention of the right audience leaving the online environment to hasten the message further (Dijck & Poell, 2013). Furthermore, this could propose an act of horizontal communication, especially if citizens involvement is emphasised (Chadwick, 2017; Wilhelm, 2000) as it was on Alisa’s example. Rita emphasised that through social media one can stimulate discussions but as she and other interviewees suggest, interactivity on social media with citizens is low. The responses imply
that social media is used to sense and initiate political inquiries through citizens’ reactions, yet dismissing the fundamental understanding of citizens engagement as deliberative theorists suggest (Morey et al. 2012; Wilhelm, 2000).

These examples posit social media into decision-making processes, and as Victor articulated, as a tool for political actions. Yet, it seems unlikely that social media alone would actuate decision-making processes, deliberation is required on a wider scale. Hence, recognition of print media is emphasised. Whereas social media enables for direct and ‘pure’ opinion-building from the users, contents’ popularity is amplified with print media, at least in reference to parliamentarians’ experiences, indicating the intertwinedness of medias and the hybrid system (Chadwick, 2017).

Social media advantage parliamentarians reporting, aids with political inquiries, and possibly enhances one’s political visibility, as understood from the interviews. Yet, hindrances of social media are also acknowledged by the interviewees. Despite of considering social media as possible space for politics, Rita does not consider reciprocity on social media to be as beneficial for parliamentarians and for policy-making processes, dismissing internet’s possibility to create deliberative vertical communication with citizens (Dahlgren, 2005). That is as she sees social media partly to attract parliamentarians’ focus at the expense of politics.

Well, the biggest contradiction I see [in the use of social media] is the use of time and what drives people for actions. And I think that time is the prevailing question, because we all have the same amount of time to use and we live in a very complex world and the political questions we have today and should tackle are very complex […] and if these [questions] are not the prior one, but the focus is on social media discussions, in sense interesting and relevant discussions, we are in a way breaking down the idea of representative democracy little by little. […] So, now we have these five or six channels and they can, and you can use them as much as you want. But still the fundamental perception of what your [parliamentarian] job is and entails has not changed. So, if these channels start to lead how you do your basic work tasks, then I think it is a problem. (Rita)

What leads parliamentarians work, is a fundamental question and the core to which political logic and classical democratic theorists rely on. Collective decision-making processes are in the core of the theorisations (Meyer, 2002). Social media’s purpose for parliamentarians and politics was contemplated also earlier. Marco stated that politics purpose in general is to “deal with common issues” and that social media is “maybe not for that”. Whereas, social media is, as discussed above,
important and relevant for parliamentarians attaining an established role in communication, it does not appear unproblematically.

The problem is, at least for me, that when I have a felicitous tweet or a blogpost or something equivalent I start to follow too actively on how people react to it, when I should be doing something else at the same time. (Mikael)

Time as a resource and the focal point of one’s work, are considered challenging in the realm of social media, and referred by all the interviewees.

…Well I cannot say how the work was before, but quite a large part of parliamentarians work or things that are in parliamentarians’ thoughts relates to considerations of how to communicate this issue, and how to tell this, and how this should be narrated, how to react on this, and how to comment on that…so…I wouldn’t parallel us to communication agencies but quite big part of it [their work] seems to correspond to that. [Big part of the] capacity and energy goes to communication which isn’t necessarily a positive thing.

The job is very fast-paced and hectic and it feels like an unreasonably lot of your worktime goes to [considering of how to] communicate the message and too little time is spent on the content of the message. It feels that easily the actual job and orientation in practice [is not the emphasis], there is not enough time for it because it feels like all the focus and all the indicators that defines your work focus on observing of how much decibels you can make when tooting the messages forward [in social media]. So, from that perspective, maybe not the best development but it is so hard to not to go along with it. And the world is full of indicators that evaluate parliamentarians and evaluates [their] visibility and then the success is then counted according to number of media hits, and likes, and social media presence and then the focus is easily on a wrong thing. (Joel)

As a drawback to social media’s democratising elements, Henrik refers to be the pressure of re-elections that may start to lead parliamentarians’ actions in the political sphere. As cited already earlier, Henrik argues that lot of parliamentarians’ actions are comparable to polls.

…and one recognises that it is more beneficial [for the parliamentarian] to make a noise on social media than to sit in the parliament and give an opinion of something at nine o’clock in the evening. Not to mention to sit and toil in the committee room behind closed doors without any public attention, then you get the urge to sweep away from the core of [policy] making, to tinker around on social media. (Henrik)

Henrik refers to a temptation to put more focus on social media to attain the needed attention of voters. Whilst Joel sees communication on social media as expected and to some extent fundamental part of parliamentarians’ work, he also recognises the abovementioned. As understood from before, visibility is in the core of parliamentarians’ actions –again– and is related to the ways social media functions: speedily, accurately, and if desired, selectively. The responses also imply
parliamentarians’ importance to remain on voters’ prospects. This infers the ‘continuous campaigning’ one’s presence on social media alludes, as Marco and Mikael referred earlier, corresponding to the findings of previous studies (Filimonov et al., 2016; McNair, 2012).

Social media is referred as an established tool for political communication. Discussions of resources became relevant from the interviews. Time of a resource turn into one of the core themes at the interviews. Concerns of how the time is used on social media and for which purposes, were emphasised. Yet, the use of social media was not as systematised as the posed concerns could imply. Joel and Rita discussed of their timely schedules but due social media’s way of functioning as “a constant fizz” – constantly updated, speedy, and connective (Klinger & Svensson, 2014; Dijck & Poell, 2013) it is not as easily scheduled. Communication and broadcasting on social media are not scheduled to the parliamentarians’ days, but continuously present, as Mikael exemplified, or continuously in mind, as Joel pointed.

Maybe one should do exactly like that, schedule time for it [to operate in social media] and then not use it during other times. But it doesn’t work like that for me, for me it appears as a kind of continuous fizz in the background. For example, now as I continue to a next committee meeting so I use my laptop and I follow continuously what happens on Twitter even though I’m at the meeting, so that I’m there but not always present. (Mikael)

Do you see a controversy in that or does it pose…(Me)

No, because everyone else is on their laptops too. (Mikael)

Thus, we are drawn back to the core of classic democratic theory and the purpose of politics. What drives for the actions and what issues are in the core of parliamentarians’ way of using social media, are essential questions. Social media, due its functionalities, enables a use that differs remarkably from mass media, ameliorating parliamentarians’ individual representation on social media in several ways. The findings propose that in the core of political communication is the parliamentarians’ possibility to create content independently, simultaneously indicating that media representation and visibility are in the core of politics. Interviews indicated that more and more of parliamentarians’ time is devoted to their self-representation and views on social media, extracting their focus from other issues present in the political field.
6. Conclusion

Reviewing back to the study scope, this study sheds light on the ever so fascinating discussion of political communication and the emergence of social media in the field of political communication. Moreover, the aim of this study was to understand how the parliamentarians perceive social media in their everyday communication, constructing an understanding of social media’s role in political communication. More precisely, I examined social media’s functionality from its operational perspective, shedding light on its affordances according to which social media may be utilised by parliamentarians. As the findings detect, social media has an important and established role among the Finnish parliamentarians’. Whereas social media is fundamental for individual parliamentarian, its role in the field of political communication is obscure. Furthermore, the study posed two more specific research questions according to which the study answers.

According to the first RQ1: How are the social media affordances recognised and utilised by the parliamentarians in their communication practices? The findings indicate that social media is used and utilised by the parliamentarians in several ways. We can argue that social media has an established role in the Finnish political sphere. But we may also argue that social media may not be used as systematically and deliberatively to be relational to agenda-building purposes per se (Kalsnes, 2016b). The findings though indicate, that parliamentarians benefit from social media with several ways, foremost enhancing their representation and visibility on different medias.

Functionalities of the social media platforms were recognised among the parliamentarians but also functionalities between the platforms. Social media enables the users to connect with the exact user groups and due their deliberative decision the parliamentarians can utilise this functionality. Through the different platforms, parliamentarians may reach out either to their voters on Facebook, their colleagues and journalists on Twitter, or the younger generation on Instagram. The recognition of different user groups determines also the content the parliamentarians favour and produce on each platform. The findings point out that whereas the three mentioned platforms are currently utilised in political communication, aiding the parliamentarians to achieve specific
objects (McNair, 2012), Facebook appears prominently as the political arena where ‘the masses appear’. The more networked society obliges the politicians to adapt to the online platforms in order to ensure their representation in media (Chadwick, 2017).

Furthermore, the analysis shows that the parliamentarians are currently posited in the interplay of social media and mass media, influenced by the intertwined and distinguishable logics of both medias (Dijck & Poell, 2013; Strömbäck & Esser, 2009; Meyer, 2002). In this turmoil, the parliamentarians operate to favour the deliberative politics but also their personal goals, trying to ensure their reelection for the next parliamentary term. Parliamentarians’ amend their possibility to be presented on print media with social media logics fostering their political profile and visibility enhancing their success and personal goals. However, social media is not only used to amend mass media’s reporting, but assisting the parliamentarians to raise their own voices independently from mass media.

Additionally, the findings strengthen the insights of previous studies indicating that the representatives who already have an abundant political representation in a society to not regard social media as a necessity, but rather as an add-on. Relational to their established political position. Respectively, the parliamentarians that had less established position emphasised social media’s role in politics in general. This indicates towards the findings of Larsson and Skogerbø (2018) arguing that less experienced politicians are likely to use social media more actively. Though recognition that one’s age or gender may posit differences in social media use was not quite detected on this study as the earlier studies have pointed out (Jackson & Lilleker, 2011; Larsson & Skogerbø, 2018; Gönlund & Wass 2016).

Social media, due its fast-paced and user-friendly format is utilised in situations in which mass media report an unfavourable article on a particular political issue or a skewed editorial piece of a parliamentarian. For that, social media may be used as a channel to response to the news article without needing to publish an opinion piece to print media –which may be published, or not. Furthermore, the findings indicate that social media may be used for agenda-building, aiding the
parliamentarians to sense the political atmosphere among the citizens detecting which issues stimulate interest and discussion on social media platforms.

In regards of the second research question RQ2: *What challenges do social media affordances pose to parliamentarians in their way of communicating?* We can detect that as a by-product, social media has elements that challenge the parliamentarians in its use. Furthermore, proposing that for parliamentarians’ social media does not appear incontrovertible better than mass media but different, hence its logic, as Klinger and Svensson (2014) propose.

Social media has permeated to parliamentarians’ way of communicating, posing series of concerns on its way of functioning. For the most, appearing in the particular use of social media—and time as a resource. Social media enables the users to be present continuously, pushing for constant-updating and availability on the platforms enabling the parliamentarians to appear “active” on social media. This means that parliamentarians may comment on every political issue apparent on social media on their own social media sites, which they feel expected to do. This creates a demand for political communication that departs from the mass media’s way of functioning, mirroring to social media logics (Klinger & Svensson, 2014; Jenkins & Thorburn, 2003).

In social media, the politics, the voters and the media, are present accelerating the demand of content creating and self-reinforcing cycles that feeds itself (Schulz, 2004). Whereas this indicates towards more inclusive sphere for the actors, the findings show that parliamentarians are not actively engaging in the discussion with the citizens. Acknowledgement of social media affordances especially for their connective and interactive means are noted, but interactivity is rather marginally utilised as previous studies also indicate (Kalsnes, 2016b; Larsson & Kalsnes, 2014). The findings show that interactivity on social media may result to a wasted effort, as the time used on social media extracts the time used for other affairs, deriving from fruitless discussions with colleagues or anonymous disturbers. Here the opinions thus collide. Different user groups appear on different social media platforms and how the user groups are considered to utilise
the parliamentarians vary and can be considered to pose a challenge or be benefitted by the parliamentarian, regarding on their subjective experiences.

As understood, the challenges social media pose are for the most parts related to resources and the purpose of using one’s scarce time on social media. Findings also indicate that individual presentation may be enhanced with more personalised content. As the analysis show this was considered slightly challenging among the parliamentarians. Moreover, this was also seen to permeate the already individualised electoral system of Finland. Emphasis on personal opinions, views and perceptions at the cost of, not necessarily the party as personalisation theories claims, but at the cost of politics more general was recognised.

Individual focused electoral system challenges the parliamentarians to operate conceiving their actions’ beneficility for re-elections. This proposes why visibility and popularity on social media—and print media—are important. Social media has an important role but as understood it supplements mass media. The findings suggest that social media alone is not considered enough. Beyond the election periods, print media appears eminently as a credible medium through which parliamentarians may gain visibility, considering the intractable relationship of media and politics to be insurmountable.

Ethics and the problematic relation to one’s personal content as discussed before, are recognised as counter elements to the affordances online platforms are built upon. As Klinger and Svensson (2014) argue, one should not consider social media incontrovertible better from mass media, the findings indicate the same. In sum, social media has an ambiguous role among the parliamentarians and while assisting parliamentarians with broadcasting, agenda-building, internal communication and political profiling, social media appear with hindrances. Parliamentarians may utilise social media with the best way by regarding it as a supplement for print media. The findings suggest that whilst social media assist parliamentarians for more independent utilisation in the form of communicating it also affects the very ideal understanding of their work, scattering their workspace.
7. Discussion

This thesis delves into a very fabric of Finnish parliamentarians’ perception of social media in their communication and reaps corresponding outcomes with new and original findings. This thesis participates the research field of online political communication, particularly, with its qualitative findings broadening the understanding of online political communication. Due the quantitative elements, the previous researches have not managed to detect comprehensively the motivation and utilisation of parliamentarians’ use of social media. This study touches upon the main elements detected on online political communication, discussing on representation, agenda-building, resources and the interplay of medias, in the very appreciation of social media affordances. I believe this study to contribute with a rich qualitative material to the research field of online political communication, examining parliamentarians use and experience of social media in communication. Drawing from theoretical implications from the fields of ICT, media and communication and political science, we can detect that information and communication technologies provide the capacity to create a sphere(s) where communication appears separately from mass media and seemingly uncontrollably, and for which the parliamentarians need to contribute with their personal attributions.

Yet, individual contributions can only contribute with limited answers to the complex phenomenon studied. In this respect, I cannot claim these exact argumentations to be recognised in other contexts, for example in other countries with different political systems. Thus, in a broader relevance, we can further the discussion.

For the most parts, the findings indicate that parliamentarians find themselves in the turmoil of mass media and social media, under which they aim to operate by generating a befitting representation of themselves and their politics. This yields for a further observation of Chadwick (2017) recognition of hybrid system and the intertwinement of media logics. People are increasingly retrieving their news from social media (Reuters, 2018) and media institutions are increasingly using social media platforms as public relations tools (Dijck & Poell, 2013; Chadwick,
This suggests that parliamentarians operate in this interplay of social media and mass media, to obtain their own goals, acquiring recognition form both spheres and from both user groups. These actions deviate the parliamentarians’ resources to domains that are not recognised in the core of political logics (Meyer, 2002). Understanding that social media portray an ever-increasing role in political communication, we can suggest with an understanding of social constructivism that these social realities, in which the parliamentarians operate, occur also elsewhere. The findings suggest that in the changing environments where technological developments and social processes occur, the actors operate interdependently in the turmoil of these processes attempting to preserve the very understanding what their work entails.

The deviating empirical findings of previous research of personalisation of politics (Karvonen, 2010; Strömbäck & Kaid, 2008) are interpreted to follow mass media’s logics. The findings of the analysis indicate that social media do not play decisive role on personalising politics or parliamentarians. Mass media’s role for that matter was emphasised. Thus, showing one’s persona or private life on any media was not necessarily considered problematic but (un)favourable outcomes were recognised with varying degrees. On one hand, personalised representation was considered to attain more visibility and gain acknowledgment through different media channels, displaying one’s ideological values. And on the other hand, the individualised focused was considered to deem collegiality in the decision-making processes towards personal focus and opinion-building, challenging the core to understand politics.

In this interactive process of personalisation and sharing, parliamentarians are adapting to the organisations and spaces under which the platforms occur, meaning that the technologically-enabled communication processes are also saturated by media organisations possession, questioning the platforms and the users’ independency (Lindgren, 2017). We have learned, that the platform agency holds the power in distributing, circulating and connecting all created content, leaving the individual users partly handless in its way of operating. Due the continuous changes and algorithms proprietary, which are working under the platforms economic functionality that we are all deemed to (Dijck & Poell, 2013; Dahlgren, 2005), individuals and groups in smaller circles
still operate partly unconsciously and partly consciously under this regime. As we have also learned from this study. In this way, we cannot quite claim that online platforms allow for more direct communication than print media, as the intermediators occur in every platform. That is experienced especially on how the politicians are given instructions and tips from the parties’ communication managers to use certain elements or tricks to gain popularity and visibility in online platforms, in order to trick the ‘platform agency’ and gain more recognition.

Furthermore, the democratising elements of social media in relevance to democratic public sphere (Habermas) and its reflexibility, offer a broader understanding of online political communication. Parliamentarians aim for popularity and maximised visibility on social media somewhat neglecting the idea of political ‘collectivity’. They adopt social media’s foregrounding aspects of self-actualising and individualisation. These elements are reflected to the changes, internet has brought to political sphere. The power of technological automated personalisation for filter bubbles, and one-sided exposure of information and other type of externalised power, was recognised, not only through influential elites of Finland, but through other societies, nations and corporations’ way. Furthermore, the possibility during the datafied time to amend data and utilise it with different societally unfavourable manners was recognised. These concerns, ethicise social media in political sphere grasped by the parliamentarians interviewed for this study.

Limitations of the study

The limitations of the study, are pose for its ungeneralisable findings due the narrow scope and contextualisation to a particular context of Finland. Due the richness of the empirical material, I sometimes felt overwhelmed of the material and hence, the limitations of time, and length of the thesis pressed me for decisions that may have not served the empirical material in a best possible way. I regard the broad theoretical scope to hinder the analysis of the material, as the closely intertwined field of media and politics, in the context of political communication overlaps significantly attaining abundance of recognition and materialisation of theoretical concepts.
Additionally, I understand that the methodological choices may have limited the study. This was observed at the interview situations where my position as a digital media student and a Finnish citizen were noted. Interviewees hold, all, a very high position in Finland and quite unforeseeable, in some situations my place as “a young digitally savvy media student” was remarked. This became eminent when the parliamentarians proposed their inactivity on social media platforms or their decision to restrain from specific social media practices, arguing their proficiency in media practices in other ways. I do not, however, consider this to affect to the findings of the study remarkably, as with more elaborative discussions, I consider the study to gain more on its relevancy and material than limiting it.

Furthermore, to interview politicians or parliamentarians may bring a deficiency to the validity of the research. That is, as parliamentarians are considered, even when participating to a research study, to also be talking to the voters and the citizens, presenting themselves in a desired light. By anonymising the interviewees, my aim was to diminish the risk of obtaining skewed or biased material. Even as this cannot be assured, the richness of the material and interviewees’ desire to respect the initially agreed anonymity security refers to the validity of the material.

Suggestions for further research

For the further research on social media and political communication, I bring three suggestions for further research goals, based on different perspectives raised from the findings of this study.

The findings indicate that social media through its affordances is established in the field of political communication and recognised as an important tool for parliamentarians to make use of. With utilities, as we have learned, appears hindrances. The particularity of time as a resource, offers a reference point, which calls for further research. Social media and internet as time consuming ‘mediums’ have attained a relatively little scholarly focus (Malita, 2011) and for the most parts reviewed by periodical journalistic pieces. The findings of this study propose that social media may be used as an expense of politics, attaining excessive amount of time and resources of the
parliamentarians’ work. A further research could focus particularly on time, as a resource of parliamentarians, and explore it further.

The second perspective encourages for more qualitative research, participating to the findings of social media’s individualising means, further enriching the research on online political communication from parliamentarians’ perspective. A research in another context than Finland, could bring in interesting findings of electoral system’s affection and contribution to individualised focus on social media appearance, this study and Enli and Skogerbo (2013) touched upon.

The third perspective is based on more optimistic utilities of social media and suggests a further research to examine how parliamentarians or politicians through social media may successfully achieve to bring forth a parliament convention and commence on political actions. This particular perspective would enrich the research of social media logics enhancing the comprehension of social media affordances’ utilisation in political communication.
8. References


Coleman, S. (2005). New mediation and direct representation: reconceptualizing representation in


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Appendix

In this appendix, the interview guide used to conduct in-depth semi-structured interviews with parliamentarians, is presented.

I started the interviews with a short description of my study and my interest to the topic. I described briefly that the aim of the interviews was to construct a view and an understanding of how social media is perceived by the parliamentarians in political communication, and how they themselves use social media.

Furthermore, I confirmed that recording was accepted and explained how identity will be considered in my study.

**General**

Q1:  
   a) Can you give a free description of yourself as a parliamentarian?
   b) How would you describe your main responsibilities as a parliamentarian? (range of responsibility)

Q2:  
   How would do you describe media’s role for you in your work as a parliamentarian?
   a) Broadcast media?
   b) Social media?

Q3:  
   What is the best way to communicate with citizens?
   a) What communication channels do you use to communicate with citizens?
   b) Are there some issues you consider when communicating a message, if so what?

If we consider political communication online, time to time, political discussions or comments on social media gain lot of offline attention by media and political actors. Couple weeks ago, The Constitutional Affaris Committee withdrew the constitutional amendment proposal in a last minute for its shortcomings in the “inquiry law”. The withdrawal of the law sparked a large media and public attention because the proposal has been the focus of the parliament term
affecting largely to the national healthcare and social welfare services. Media did not focus solely to the withdrawal of the law but to the reasons for the withdrawal. The parliamentary system was criticised for using outsourced power due to the withdrawal as shortly before the withdrawal two constitutional experts Juha Lavapuro and Martin Scheinin openly criticised the shortcomings of the amendment on Twitter. On media, this criticism was connected to the withdrawal of the proposal. Not focusing too much to the overall reasons of the withdrawal but more on social media’s role in this discussion. On print media discussion of how social media may be, by this way, used to influence parliamentarianism was initiated. Discussions of externalised power were also presented.

Q4: What thoughts this raises?

Q5: Is social media a political tool?

**Social media**

Q6: Do you use social media?

*If yes,*

Q7: Which social media platforms do you use?

a) Why do you use these particular platforms?

b) Do you manage you accounts self?

- If not, what are your views on "authentication requirement”

c) How would you describe your actions when posting something on social media, (what issues you consider)

*If not,*

Q7: Is it a conscious or unconscious decision to not to use social media?

- Have you ever had any social media accounts?
Aim and purpose of social media if using or not

Q8: How would you describe your use of social media in political context?
Q9: Is social media established/recognised channel for political communication?
   a) Is it recognised in resources (financial, time)?

Q10: I read a book “Eduskunta” by Anna Kontula (2018), in which she discusses and analyses the conflicts in the (Finnish) parliamentary from an insider’s’ perspective. She explains the parliament system to have innumerable number of unwritten rules, especially when it comes to collegiality and loyalty for one another according to which the parliamentarians often act in accordance with. Kontula refers to offline actions, but do you recognise similar collegial loyalty to appear online?
   a) Do you engage in discussions with your colleagues online?

Q11: Are there alignments set from the party, for social media activity or behaviour?
   a) What are the issues emphasised in those/in social media trainings?

Q12: Social media enables the users to share content rather independently and self-regulatively at the user’s own pages, at least without broadcast media’s intermediators. Media researches have examined media’s way to personalise political communication and political events, presenting them in a light that opts to focus on parliamentarians’ personal characteristics and private life instead of political issues, referring to personalisation of politics. On the other hand, this is seen to bring the parliamentarians closer to the citizens by humanising them and on the other hand it is seen to harm political discussion drawing the focus to apolitical things. Social media enables the users to regulate the content themselves.
   a) What are your thoughts about sharing personal content online (in a political context)?
   b) On the other hand, personalisation of politics is also referred to draw the focus from party politics to individual parliamentarians and individualised politics. Does this initiate some thoughts?
Q13: Do you think political discussion happens online?

Q14: From social media platforms, especially Twitter is criticized to have turned into a platform for political elite. What are your thoughts about this?

Q15: Considering one-to-one interaction and interaction on social media. Parliamentarians in Finland have a constituency day each Monday, to maintain the relations and responsibilities with constituency. Social media is time-efficient and gives possibilities for reconfiguration of many physical manners. What is your view of the importance of face-to-face encounter within this context?

Q16: What creates political engagement with the public? Or where do the political discussion with citizens occur?

Q17: Are there any concerns you have of social media in the political context?

Is there anything you would like to add?