Social Media as a Marketing Tool & its Impact on Politics

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Nowadays, social media is becoming one of the most popular forms of communication. People spend their time online on these networks discussing, sharing and experimenting. These new channels have also drastically changed the marketing world. Indeed, more and more businesses use social media as a marketing tool.

This thesis will give insight into the actual situation of a constantly changing and evolving topic: social media marketing. Indeed, just being on social media is not enough to really benefit from them; one really needs to understand how to use them in order to make this presence a success. First, social media will be discussed on a general level. Then, the research will focus on how to use social media in politics.

The research will be divided into two parts, in order to reach the two main interest groups. First, quantitative research will be conducted, through a survey made available to participants. Then, qualitative research will be conducted, by interviewing several politicians and political parties in two different countries. Then, the results will be compared first with each other, and then with the literature reviewed.

The main results have raised new concepts and issues. Citizen's expectations are totally different when they are on social media than when they advertise to specific target groups through the mass media. They are searching something different, such as honesty and transparency. They are active on social networks with the hope of getting new perspectives and different points of view. They are more critical and wish to get new opportunities that mainstream media cannot offer.

The purpose of this thesis is to get an update of the situation at a general level, but as well to compare people's expectations and reluctances with the actual practices of politicians and political parties on social media. This is intended to help improve their digital marketing and campaigning on these networks.

Keywords
Social media, Marketing, Communication, Politics

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1.   Introduction

"Technology and social media have brought power back to the people."
Mark McKinnon, American political advisor.

1.1   Background

Social media is rapidly becoming one of the most widely used forms of communication. Consumers of all types are frequently using social media to instruct themselves about products and services, network, find vendors and post jobs. Your company might be missing out on opportunities by not being an active part of the social network.

Social media has drastically changed the way people communicate with each other and share information. Technology is connecting people. Social networks (or social media) are the places where social interactions happen. Social media marketing is the new way to use that technology to build strong relationships, and attract new customers through friends sharing with friends.

I have chosen this subject, first of all, out of personal interest. It also appeared interesting, as it is a trendy topic, and constantly evolving and becoming more and more crucial.

Social media and digital marketing is such a vast matter, it would be impossible to give a general study applicable to any kind of business. That is why, in order to get relevant results, I have decided to focus my research on social media in politics. Again, mainly out of personal interest.

1.2   Thesis objective

The objective of this thesis is to give an updated study about social media for marketing purposes. It is important to make a study based on updated material, as it is a very fast growing and changing topic. This study will give a clear idea of the actual situation and of the trends. It will give a better understanding of the social media and their use.

I will focus on social media and their use in politics, and study for what purposes they are used by politicians and political parties. I am also interested by how they exploit them. I will investigate from users' side as well, to understand why people follow politics on social media, and what their expectations are. I will conduct a research on both sides, a survey for the members and an interview for the political parties / politicians. The objective of this research is to bring concrete examples, objective information and new perspectives on that topic, and compare it with the literature currently available.

The main questions to be solved in this thesis go as follows:
 – How to use the social media as a successful marketing tool?
 – What role do social media play in politics?
 – Do people use social media to follow politics? What are their expectations?
 – How do politicians see the role of social media?

1.3   Limits

This thesis will not discuss the actual marketing plan or the strategy, and will not discuss how to implement marketing activities.
This thesis will more focus on getting a better understanding on the topic, and therefore, make better use of social media in order to get the most benefits from it.

1.4 Thesis structure

I will start by discussing social media at a general level, to give a general knowledge and understanding on what is the actual situation. I will examine the place of social media on nowadays communication and marketing landscape, describe their beneficial aspects, and explain all the changes that it implies, on businesses sides but also from customers' sides. Then, I will define what the real place of social media is and how to implement and integrate it in one's marketing activity.

After reviewing all this, I will direct my study towards the world of politics, and discuss the place and the impacts of social networks in this sector. A quantitative research will be conducted with survey concerning social media in politics. This survey will be made available to people following politicians and political parties on Facebook. I will also ask for a short interview different political parties and politicians. Then, I will observe and analyze the results and compare with each other, and then with the literature studied previously.

2. Social media marketing in action

This chapter will discuss the evolution of communication, and how social media became an integral part of our lives. Then, it will define the role of social media in business, and what are their impacts.

2.1. Introduction to social media: Definition

Social media can be defined in many ways. For example, according to Susan B. Barnes (2008, 21) social media is "Simply stated, software that enables people to interact with each other and build social networks that increases social capital." .

Social media are not only interactive. The interaction, in this case, refers to connecting people with applications. "Social", means that customers are connected with each other.

In the end, social media communication is really just word-of-mouth powered by technology.

2.2. Evolution in human interaction: From direct to mediated communication

"People want to interact with one another. We are a social species. Solitary confinement is, after all, a punishment."

(Building Social Web Applications, Gavin Bell, 2009)

For so many people, daily life, as much as on a personal than professional context, involves interpersonal communication mediated by technology. We buy, we sell, we share, we make experiences, seek for answers to our questions, and we keep in touch with each other, all by the help of mediated communication. We all call and write to relatives, friends, work partners via phone, e-mail, Skype and so on. Some search a

partner on online dating site. Some book a flight through an airline company's website. The list of our everyday life activities which has become mediated by technology is vast. People do not have to be standing in the same room to be able to communicate. There are no borders anymore. You can communicate with someone next door or thousands of kilometers away from you.

"Communities are not a new concept. People have existed in communities since before we started to farm the land. What is recent is the ability to form communities that are geographically distant and entirely interest-led".

(Building Social Web Applications, Gavin Bell, 2009)

These new technologies have challenged the more "traditional" media, and changed once again the definition of what is really interpersonal communication. They are seen as communication facilitators, as they add new possibilities of communication, but they also change radically the way we think about communication itself, the way how people interact with each other. "Communication is less about creating contained and controlled messages (as in the old marketing) and more about creating compelling environments to which people are attracted." (Marketing to the Social Web, Weber, 2009, 39)

In the past, information was a luxury revealed to some selected people. You had to accept what you were told (unless you had some kind of connections). Your only hope was to "ask around" to the closest people around you, i.e. family, friends, colleagues, or any kind of people you know. Nowadays, a lot of information is reachable, even from home, and on many kinds of devices. With the media at our disposal, we can expand our knowledge and understanding of the world faster and more effectively than ever. As Larry Weber (Marketing to the Social Web 2009, 15) claims " The social web will become the primary center of activity for whatever you do when you shop, plan, learn, or communicate. It may not take over your entire life (one hopes), but it will be the first place you turn for news, information, entertainment, diversion- all of the things that the old media supplied."

The major difference between the traditional mass media, such as television and radio, and the digital media, such as computers and internet, is the concept of interactivity. Susan B. Barnes (2008 ,15) defines interactivity as the process of communication which enables two people to directly exchange personal messages in a mediated context. Indeed, we do not "watch" the internet as we watch television. Internet users *live* with the internet (Communication Power, Castells, 2013). The traditional "mass communication" had evolved to "mass self-communication". The media adapts to you, and not anymore the contrary.

The web has already changed completely mass media. Radio, newspaper and television have been transformed by the digitization of media and news.

"Teenagers […] do not even understand the concept of watching television on someone else's schedule. They watch entire television programs on their computer screens and, increasingly, on portable devices. So, television continues to be a major mass medium, but its delivery and format are being transformed as its reception becomes individualized.

(Castells, 2013)

The CMC (Computer-Mediated Communication) enables new ways of communication. "Initially, researchers hypothesized that the lack of physical co-presence would lead to the exchange of impersonal and hostile messages, but, the opposite was discovered to be true. It has been observed that people will type their most intimate thoughts into the computer (Whittle, 1997)", explains Susan B. Barnes (2008, 19), as the feeling of privacy will encourage people to open up in a "non-private" environment.

> As Susan B. Barnes describes, observations of a virtual community (Barnes, 2001) revealed four reasons why conditions of attendance in internet communities are conductive to personal relationship development.
> - First, people can choose when to disclose information about their age, sex, and race.
> - Second, people voluntarily communicate with each other and conversations can easily be terminated.
> - Third, people can put their best foot forward by carefully editing their replies.

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- Finally, people have the ability to hide defects, including physical handicaps and shyness.

(Mediated Interpersonal Communication, Barnes, 2008, 19)

This shows how the personal well-being of people on the internet will also affect how motivated will they be to get involved and stay active. As Gavin Bell (2009, 36) explains "*Warmth* and a *sense of belonging* might seem like odd terms when to use when describing the Web, but are key constituents in terms of how social interactions form and develop".

2.3. Social media marketing and its benefits

Dave Evans (2010, 7) describes social media marketing as "Social media marketing – properly practiced – seeks to engage customers in the online locations where they naturally spend time. By comparison, social business picks up on what they are talking about and what they are interested in and connects this back into the business where it can be processed and used to create the next round of customer experiences and hence the next round of conversations."

He also considers the term "social" as referring to "the development of connection between people, connections that are used to facilitate business, product design, service enhancement, market understanding, and more" (Dave Evans 2010, 10).

To understand the importance of social media and its impacts on the marketing sphere, here are some revealing numbers:

- "Social media now constitutes 14% of all online ad spend" (Businessinsider.com, 2012)
- "86% of marketers stated that social media is important for their business" (socialmediaexaminer.com, 2013)
- "89% of marketers stated that increased exposure was the number one benefit of social media marketing" (socialmediaexaminer.com, 2013)

To understand fully the real benefits of social media, Yasmin Bendror (business2community.com, 2014) lists the definitive advantages as follows:

- Increased exposure
- Increased traffic
- Developed loyal fans
- Generated leads
- Improved search ranking
- Grew business partnerships
- Reduced marketing expenses
- Improved sales
- Provided marketplace insight

(Why Social Media Is So Important to your Business in 2014, Yasmin Bendror, 2014, Business2community.com)

This shows us that, social media are simple marketing tools, to raise awareness your company. Nowadays, they became much more than that marketing is more than just advertising. It englobes activities such as human resources, customer care, product development, and any kind of companies related operations.

2.4. The new role of the customer and engagement

We will define as "customer" any person on the other side of the business transaction.

"As people take control over their data while spreading their web presence, they are not looking for privacy, but for recognition as individuals. This will eventually change the whole world of advertising."

Esther Dyson, 2008 (Social Media Marketing – The next business engagement, Evans, 2010, 9)

The direct customer's involvement into the marketing activities came naturally with the development of social media marketing. The term of "engagement" take a whole new sense. Indeed, in the traditional media we have a linear relationship A → B (Company → Customers) where the customer was just a "viewer", whereas, on the social web we have a virtuous circle where the customers are an active link and are fully participating to the creation and development. As we will demonstrate, the companies are entirely profiting from this process, where the customer insights are transformed into useful ideas and business processes.

Social media has given the opportunity to customers to express their feelings and opinions on open, social environment (internet). Customers, and so, by extension, any of the stakeholders, are showing their interest and desire to help. Their suggestions might generate the improvements and innovations that you company needed. These individuals have a real interaction and experience with your business, so they are probably in the best place to know how you might ameliorate. This contribution and engagement becomes, therefore, essential to make social marketing successful.

Dave Evans (2010, 7) describes the results of customers' feedback as such:

Consider the following, all of which are typical of the kids of "outputs" a customer or business partner may have formed after a transaction, and will quietly walk away unless you take specific steps to collect this information and feedback:

- Ideas for product or service innovation
- Early warning of problems or opportunities
- Awareness aids (testimonials)
- Market expansions (ideas for a new product applications)
- Customer service tips that flow from users to users
- Public sentiment around legislative action, or lack of action
- Competitive threats or exposed weaknesses

(Social Media Marketing – The next business engagement, Evans, 2010, 7)

The companies need to place efforts so that the participants become and stay involved in the care of the community. People must be encouraged to establish relationships, so that the ideas and information will be enfolded. The actions of "friending, "fanning" and "following", linking people to each other, will ensure the survival of the community.

There are four listed aspects of personal motives for social engagement online (Bell, 2009):

1. *Anticipated reciprocity.* This means that people will be more motivated to commit if they can be sure that they will have something in return. It builds trust.
2. *Sense of reputation.* People are eager on being recognized as unique individuals.
3. *A sense of efficacy.* Contributors are interested in seeing the positive results to which the interactions lead.
4. *Attachment.* This is the feeling gotten from belonging to a community. People feel like they are a part of something and can self-identify them to it.

Even though the actual trend on the social web is coming more towards identity than anonymity (people want to be recognized as unique individuals, important to your business, they want to know that "it happened to ME"), anonymous (negative) comments can have a serious impact. You have to identify who you are talking to in order to raise an appropriate response. For example, you will need to figure does it come from competitors trying to attack your credibility, or from actual unsatisfied customers. As Dave Evans (2010, 37) says, "Knowing who is talking about you (and not just what they are saying) is fundamental to understanding and then optimizing your processes to produce the conversations you want, and addressing and correcting the processes that drive the conversations you'd rather not see".

It can also have a counterproductive effect. Indeed, if the customer is not satisfied of your company, he can as well share his experience online, which will have the opposite effect as wanted. By sharing a negative experience, it will influence potential new customers' experience, even before it actually happened.

Because the customers are now more vocal and conscious about their own power, it has caused a deep change in companies' needs in pleasing them, as it can put their reputation at stake.

How to make your customers engaged?

"Customer engagement (CE) is the engagement of customers with one another, with a company or a brand. The initiative for engagement can be either consumer-or company-led and the medium of engagement can be on or offline."

(Wikipedia.org, 2014)

Dave Evans (2010, 15) divides the engagement process in four steps:
1. Consumption
2. Curation
3. Creation
4. Collaboration

The very first step in the engagement process is the *Consumption*. This is the elementary starting point where the customer is "consuming" information. At this point of the process, there is no social interaction yet.

The second step is *Curation*. Dave Evans (2010, 17), is describing curation as "the act of sorting and filtering, rating, reviewing, commenting on, tagging, or otherwise describing content." There is an interaction between members and the content, but also between members themselves. Curation is, therefore, a fundamental action to support. It will make the customers to become active members, and then, it will create a community. To reach this, it is important to get people *Friending*. Indeed, just as in real life, relationships are the pillars of any social interaction. As Dave Evans (2010, 31) claims, "people create relationships to exchange value, at some level, with the others in and through that relationship". The community will, therefore, become bonded and will evolve into a social entity.

Afterwards comes naturally the step of *Creation*. Unlike curation, the members are required to actually bring something new to the community. To encourage creation, you need a plan, and you have to provide the maximum of tools and help, to make is as easy as possible for your members. For example, create a contest where everybody can participate, by, for example, uploading a picture. It is as simple as that. People like to share and to be recognized for what they have done, and feel that they contributed to something bigger.

Ultimately comes the *Collaboration*. This is the ultimate step where "Social Business" takes its real significance. People's participation becomes an integral part of your productions process.

These four steps of the engagement process shows how your customers can, from simple readers, become creators and collaborators. The engagement drives innovation. And remember, your customers want to help, and they are generally one of the biggest sources of advice you have got.

2.5. Advantages of social media and its effectiveness

Dave Evans (2010, 32) "Working together – versus alone – almost always produces a better-end product."

Dave Evans (2010,23) tells also that "one of the immediate benefits of a social media program is gaining an understanding of what people are saying about your brand, product or service (listening); analyzing what you find to extract meaning (social media analytics) that is relevant to your work; and then developing a response program (active listening)". What makes the social web so important is that it enables organizations to have dialogues more efficiently and less costly than ever before. On social media, you can make people say what YOU want. The web is also very different from the traditional "one-way" (company to consumer) marketing, in a way that it is about

delivering useful content, at just the exact moment that a buyer or potential buyer needs it, instead of appealing the masses.

Once you gain a critical following, the organic (unpaid) reach becomes much easier. "Advertising on social media is still much cheaper than any other form of advertising, and you get a higher and much more tangible ROI (Return on Investment)." (Ymarketingmatters.com, 2014)

Indeed, the social web has opened an exceptional opportunity for to advertise for a fraction of what big-budget advertising costs. But even though social media is very cost-effective, it is becoming imperative to allocate a budget for social media advertising, especially since Facebook declared that the organic (unpaid) reach is falling short. There is indeed a clear decline in the number of people businesses reach with their posts. Now Facebook is advising marketers to pay for getting more reach, as Cotton Delo explains "marketers are told they should consider paid distribution "*to maximize delivery of your message in news feed*." " (adage.com, 2013)

In order to measure the real effectiveness of your presence of social media, you should track the results. By analyzing it, it will give you the data that you need to upgrade your social media engagement and make better marketing decisions. The measurement will also build a certain acceptance within your organization, beyond the marketing department's limits. It is really important, as companies are not always ready to allocate real human and financial resources for Social Marketing.

"Be on top on what's working in your social media and online marketing efforts so you can continue doing the same, or make adjustments to get better results." (Yasmin Bendror, Ymarketingmatters.com, 2014)

You can measure the results and the success of your presence of on social media by using Analytics tools. Social media analytics measure results on social media channels, including the increase in followers (or fans), likes, shares, and engagement. One of the best ways to track your efforts is by setting up an account with Google Analytics.

"Google Analytics is a service offered by Google that generates detailed statistics about a website's traffic and traffic sources and measures conversions and sales. It's the most widely used website statistics service. The basic service is free of charge and a premium version is available for a fee. Google Analytics can track visitors from all referrers, including search engines and social networks, direct visits and referring sites. It also tracks display advertising, pay-per-click networks, email marketing and digital collateral such as links within PDF documents."

(Wikipedia.org, 2012)

There you can take a look at very important metrics, such as the number of visits, returning visitors, visit duration, visitors' location, search engine traffic, referral traffic, mobile visits, and social metrics and conversion rates. It also has an "Activity stream" option, which shows in real time how visitors are talking about your website on other social networks.

You can also use Google Analytics to measure and track your e-mail marketing campaigns. Indeed, e-mail remains an extremely reliable and profitable channel, with an immense reach to bounce. It would be very inadequate not to have it as an active part of your marketing mix.

2.6. New media as a PR tool: Online Relationship Management (ORM)

In 2011/12, *Public Relations Society of America* defined PR as "A strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics."

Sandra Duhé (2007, 147) state that researchers studying the effectiveness of public relations strategies have found that the internet has great potential for following the interpersonal, two-ways symmetrical model of public relations far more than any other medium (Elliot, 1997; Marken, 1998).

In the old rules of marketing (pre-web), advertisement and public relations were disciplines which were independents from each other. They were operated by different people, and had distinct goals and strategies. The web had radically transformed those rules, and companies must adapt to become "web enabled" and gain the most of it.

Even though media are still critically important for many organizations, PR is no longer just communication with them and wait that they tell about you. Now, a good PR also means that you have the possibility to reach buyers directly. The web grants direct access to information about you and your products (through blogs, online videos, news releases, and other type of web). The internet has made public relations public again.

How do organizations use the social web to communicate and manage their reputation?

"First and foremost, Public Relations practitioners need to realize that managing the media is no longer an option. The media is now anyone with a cell phone, a laptop, a digital camera, or a tape recorder"

(Katy Delahaye Paine, New Media and Public Relations, Duhé, 2007)

Online Relationship Management is essentially the net result of effective integrated marketing. It is earned more than created. Unlike the traditional PR campaign or ad, on the social web you are generally not the one who will start the conversation. It does not mean that you cannot be a part of it, but it means that you will have to invalidate the arguments which work against your interests.

Indeed, with all the benefits that social media provides, also come some risks. By placing your company on social media, you also expose yourself to a certain amount of "threats". For example, you will have to accept and deal with criticism, and most importantly, publicly prove your organization's desire to take accountability and wiliness to correct its mistakes. You have to learn to deal with this issue, as even if you do not start dialoguing with unhappy customers, they will attack your company

anyway. Ignoring negative comments is one of the biggest communications mistakes you can make. Allowing critical comments on your site will also built trust. Indeed, when visiting, customers will feel that they can believe all the good comments about your organization, if they can see that you are transparent enough not to ban the critical ones. As Larry Weber (2009, 29) claims, "In the traditional communication model, your organization controls content creation and distribution. In the social media world, you have little to not control over content or distribution."

From now on, the brand value is determined by the customers (by, for example, rating on customer reviews), depending on how highly they will recommend your good / service, and the content is nowadays more a mix of marketer and user-generated (customers AND potential customers). As Larry Weber (2009, 99) states: "Branding is the dialogue you have with your customers and potential customers. The strongest the dialogue, the stronger the brand; the weaker the dialogue, the weaker the brand". This new marketing vision also recreated such a strong importance of the customer word-of-mouth, which is called nowadays "viral marketing", which you have no control on.

2.7. Which social media for which purposes?

When involving your company on the social media, you have to carefully consider which ones are the most suitable to your line of business. Indeed, as Josh Cline explains (Theclinegroup, 2014) "Each social network is a communications channel that can reach different audiences with different needs and desires." Context is essential. There is no need to sign up for every existing social media channel. Preferably excel at one or two, but which are the most relevant to your line of business.

For example, if you have a "classic" B2C business, you have to concentrate your efforts on the most actives networks, where people spend more time, exchange more with each other and share more, such as Facebook or Twitter.

Facebook is the biggest social media channel which "can be thought of as the "social home" for your business on the Internet. It's a place people can go to leave a message, browse through business products and photos, or chat with you online." (ymarketingmatters.com, 2013) However, Twitter is not a popular channel to communicate with your friends of family, but it is very useful to reach people you actually people you want to communicate with. It is a very efficient way to connect with your customers and vice versa. Twitter can be extremely viral, so your presence will definitely be rewarding.

If you have a more "visual" type of business (for example fashion or cosmetics related), you might also have to consider channels such as Pinterest, YouTube or Instagram.

On the contrary, B2B business might put more efforts on their LinkedIn profile "Clearly Facebook dominates in the B2C space (67% of marketers select it as their Number-one choice) However, in B2B, LinkedIn and Facebook are tied for number one at 29% each, while blogging and Twitter play a much more important role for B2B marketers." (Socialmediaexaminer.com, 2013) You must go where the customers are.

For example, Samuel Scott (Theclinegroup, 2013) defined 5 crucial questions to be answered when planning your strategy:

1. What mediums are popular on the targeted social channels?
2. How will the content be aligned with our branding, positioning, and messaging?
3. How will the content be used to achieve our business and marketing goals?
4. What are our capabilities to produce quality pieces of that content?
5. When should we publish and promote the content?

The answers to these questions will depend on the company, its business goals, and its selected social networks.

(Theclinegroup, 2013)

The social web has this considerable advantage that customers will be more open to be targeted, as they have made the choice to display themselves and their behavior, because they feel more in control. Marketing does not feel to them anymore as something intrusive, especially if it concerns something that customers want.

Whereas nowadays it is common knowledge that B2C companies will use and benefits from their presence on social media, but what about if your company operates only B2B actions? Is it necessary to care?

"Take the old business cliché of the three keys to success in business: "Location! Location! Location! " While the saying is typically used in a B2C context – for restaurants, clothing stores, and such – the same lesson applies in the B2B world: Go where the customers are." (Theclinegroup.com, 2014)

For B2B businesses, the most outstanding social network to focus on is LinkedIn, for the simple reason that this particular network is rigorously targeted on business. For example, whereas on Facebook, people will share personal related content, on LinkedIn you will mainly find business related content and news. That is why we are more receptive to business communication when consulting LinkedIn. On Facebook for example, we will be more likely to ignore anything related to B2B business. This does not apply to B2C and consumer products, where Facebook is a decisive network. We will show how B2B can benefit from their presence on social media.

Isobel Tetchner (Linkhumans.com, 2014) lists the advantages of social media for B2B businesses as follows:

1. SEO (Search Engine Optimisation)
2. Lead Creation
3. Connections with Employees
4. Peer Pressure
5. Education

First of all, a good and simple reason for B2B businesses to also be present on social media is to boost and maximize your presence on Search engines. Social media are becoming more and more important as SEO signals, and search engines such as Google are always renewing how they rank websites. Being active and being talked about on the social media sphere will assure you a better place on page rankings. Getting a good place on those page rankings is very important as: "92 percent of those who use search engines say that they are confident about their searching abilities; more than half, 52 percent, say they're "very confident" " and "68 percent of users say that search engines are a fair and unbiased source of information" (Weber, 2009, 156). Moreover, potential customers will have easy access to your social media pages, which is another reason to keep your activity always up to date and with pertinent info: "Remember that simply posting fresh content automatically moves your site up in the organic search ranks. When you don't keep improving your site with fresh content, you sink in the results because other people are coming in with new stuff" (Weber, 2009, 159).

"Remember: Google+ is Google, which means great search engine results for your business! If you have a Google+ Page and someone searches for your business (despite if they follow you or not), your Google+ Page and its most recent posts will be displayed on the right side of their personal search results."

(Ymarketingmatters.com, 2013)

Moreover, "Search Engine Marketing" is quite outstanding, as unlike many other type of marketing, it does not "interrupt", like for example advertisements on television. Ads are everywhere around us. They are not only annoying for the consumers, but also became quite irrelevant and ineffective. On the contrary, Search Engines are just providing you with content that you are actually looking for.

"A lead is a potential sales contact - an individual or organization that expresses an interest in your goods or services." (Techtarget.com, 2007) As social media continues to grow with, for example " over 240 million active monthly users on twitter, over 1.2 billion monthly active Facebook members and over 300 million users on LinkedIn"

(Tetchner, 2014), this is the ideal way to connect with your existing and potential customers. Already back in 2011, 1.8 billion leads were established through LinkedIn. The percentage of B2B leads generated through social networks is divided as follow:

- LinkedIn : 80.33 percent
- Twitter : 12.73 percent
- Facebook : 6.73 percent
- Google+ : 0.21 percent

(Business2community.com ,March 17, 2014)

Another study confirms that LinkedIn is the major lead creator social media, and is "277 percent more effective for lead generation than Facebook & Twitter" (Salesforce.com, 2014).

Social media is as well a good place to connect with your employees and, for importantly, for your employees to communicate with each other. This creates a community spirit on the inside and will give a good image of your company on the outside. There are many ways to show your employees' bounding with each other and their commitment. For example, a smart one would be to create a special hashtag referring to your company, and use it on different kind of posts on different platforms, like on Facebook or Twitter.

Thanks to social media, B2B businesses can also learn about their industry and have access to all kind of information about their competitors and their actual situation. For example, you can easily take a look at their customers' feedback and see what their position in comparison with yours.

On the contrary, you can also use social media to educate people outside your business. Depending on your position on the market, you will have a certain amount of information and ability that others will not. If you use social media to share your

knowledge (for example, on Facebook or Twitter), millions of people will have access to it. So this is a great opportunity also for B2B businesses to promote themselves.

2.8. Social media as a part of the marketing mix

The use of social media alone is not enough. It cannot replace the overall marketing strategy. They must be an integrated part of the rest of the marketing activity, and other channels must still be a part of the mix. The "traditional" marketing principles are still important. Marketers are still doing what they have always done, only nowadays via new channels. No social media outlet can work as a vacuum. It is better used as a new tool supporting already long-established platforms, such as company websites, newsletter, sponsorships, and more. It is important to remember that all the channels are linked. For example, e-mail newsletters can encourage "following" on social media, and vice versa. The company's profile on LinkedIn can boost people to click and visit the website. All these actions also benefit to the search engine optimization.

"To use the phone effectively, one must speak effectively. To use social channels effectively, one must create and promote content effectively" (Theclinegroup.com, 2013). This comparison demonstrates that just being on social media is not enough. To be efficient, they should be used in an agile way, in order to build a long term success. Deal with social media as you would with any other marketing initiative, by taking a strategic approach and by preparing carefully a plan. Establish your strategy and plan defining your goals, audience (Who is your audience? Which languages do they speak? Who are they following on Twitter? What are their interests? And how can you influence them?), budget and resources.

How to integrate your social media activity?

To reach their maximum potential, more and more businesses are seeking ways to integrate the component of their social media activity. Social media is not an end to itself, but it should work hand-in-hand with your other marketing and PR activities.

Companies should accredit a social media representative that is reliable. Indeed, one of the advantages of social media is the capacity to connect with and personalize your company. Depending on the purposes, select a person that will match better your target audience (for example either the sales leader or the client service leader).

The Cross-Media Alliance

A very elementary way to ensure that all your channels are supporting each other is to include on your platforms (such as websites, blogs and e-mail newsletter, but also on paper ads) "share" and/or "follow us" buttons, or even "send to a friend" to make people spread the word. Traditional media advertising and direct marketing can also be used, if these efforts are also focused on sending people to your web community. Every printed ad must include your URL.

Use also social media to expand the influence of already existing marketing operations. For example, if you have an ad campaign on television, post it to Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn and include a link to a YouTube video clip of the commercial. Share a link on Twitter about your latest paper or case study. Create a Facebook event to invite people to your next seminar. Post updates from your company announcements and press releases.

One important aspect of merging social media with traditional marketing is to track from where new clients contact you. You can do that by running analysis (for example on Google Analytics) but also by simply asking people directly how did they found you.

Consider social media as a new tool in the toolbox. Be aware that they are, as described by Yasmin Bendror "no longer "*nice to have*", but "*must have*" for your business." (ymarketingmatters.com, 2014), so it is important to allocate human and financial resources for that matter.

3. Social media and politics

This chapter will discuss the impacts of social media on politics, and will examine why they are used by politicians and political parties, and to what extent they became an integral part of political campaigning.

3.1. The impact of social media on politics

Social media are nowadays used by many different kinds of organizations, in many different fields. Politics are no exception. Social media have increasingly been embraced by politicians, activists, and social movements as a new way to communicate and reach citizens that they could not interact with.

"Personal communication via Social Media brings politicians and parties closer to their potential voters. It allows politicians to communicate faster and reach citizens in a more targeted manner and vice versa, without the intermediate role of mass media. Reactions, feedback, conversations and debates are generated online as well as support and participation for offline events. Messages posted to personal networks are multiplied when shared, which allow new audiences to be reached."

(Epthinktank.eu, 2014)

The most important networks concerned are mainly Facebook and Twitter, as Facebook is the main channel where people communicate with each other, family, friends, and Twitter is more about reaching people that you want to communicate with and gets updates from.

"Today, sites like Facebook and Twitter are used for everything from instantaneous messaging to organizing activists, even while the more digitally savvy candidates are trying to leverage widely-read pop culture sites like Buzzfeed to create viral content that offers a level exposure that was once unimaginable."

(Minnpost.com, 2014)

"66% of those social media users—or 39% of all American adults—have done at least one of eight civic or political activities with social media." (Pewinternet.org, 2012) The Internet is seen as an advance in communication between citizens and elected politicians, with the growing access to information, the chance for feedback, and transparency. As Dahlgren (2009, 190) explains "The open and accessible character of the net means that traditional centers of power have less informational and ideational control over their environment than previously" (Social media and democracy, 2012, 43). This new type of communication also gave birth to new approaches in politics, known as "e-democracy". This includes e-governance (accessing online information and public services) e-participation (expressing your opinion online), and e-voting (the possibility to vote online).

Internet increases the competition. As it is a cheap medium, newer and smaller parties and other movements can benefit of the internet to raise their visibility. Other media, like television and printed press still have great power, but it is not as abundant and focused on people's personal tastes and needs. On a general level, internet has an impact on democracy.

3.2. To what end social media is used in politics?

By partisans

Social media provide new ways to stimulate citizen engagement in political life. Internet is used by partisans to promote and share political material, and post their thoughts on political issues, for example on Facebook or Twitter: "They allow like-minded voters and activists to easily share news and information such as campaign events with each other. That's what the "share" function on Facebook and 'retweet' feature of Twitter are for." (USpolitics.about.com). Internet is also used to encourage others to vote: "35% of social media users have used the tools to encourage people to vote" (Pewinternet.org, 2012) and to follow politicians and candidates.

Let us take Finland as an example. A research (Loader & Mercea, 2012, 139) shows information on how Finnish citizens have used internet the last four years. Out of this research came three political activities:

"To sign a petition is also the most common activity among those using the Internet as a medium for political participation. Almost 30 per cent of the respondents state that they have done this at least once during the four years prior to the 2007 parliamentary elections. The second most common political activity is to use the Internet to discuss political matters, which 15 per cent have done. To use the Internet in order to contact political decision-makers can be considered as the most demanding of the three, since it involves the articulation of specific demands in order to achieve a political outcome. We still find that this activity has been performed by more than 10 per cent during the last four years"

(Social Media and Democracy, Loader & Mercea, 2012, 139)

These results indicate that a big part of Finnish citizens are using the internet for political intentions.

By Politicians

Social media is a great tool that has brought more power and voice to people. Political leaders, candidates and parties can also benefit a lot from it. The interactive nature of Social media can help them to refine their program to respond better to people's expectations.

Politicians and candidates also use social media to reach voters, and especially the younger generations. The new trend is to connect directly with voters as "friends", for example on Facebook. It is also very common to, instead of, or in addition to do campaign on TV or radio, to create and publish commercials for free on YouTube. Social media have stimulated younger voters, and it has had a deep impact on elections. President Obama was the first politician to use the power of social media during both his two successful campaigns.

"According to *The Nation*, 13 million people signed up for the Obama campaign email list, more than 5 million "friended" Obama on Facebook, 2 million joined MyBO (an online organizing site where people could sign up to support the campaign as a volunteer), and more than 1 million people subscribed to campaign text messages on mobile phones."

(The New Rules of Marketing and PR, David Meerman Scott, 2010)

Indeed, among world leaders, social media has become a tool for digital democracy. The "Twiplomacy 2014 study" reports about the most followed world leaders on Twitter:

"The new prime minister of India, @NarendraModi, just surpassed the @WhiteHouse in fourth place and is likely to have more followers than Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono next week. However, he is still far behind Pope Francis (14 million followers between his nine language accounts) and @BarackObama with more than 43 million followers."

(Huffingtonpost.com, 2014)

Another fact to confirm the importance of social media as a tool for politicians: Back in 2007, during the French presidential elections, social media had a strong effect on the outcome and the victory of the Centre-right UMP party's Nicolas Sarkozy. Indeed, "over 40% of Internet users reported that conversations and other activities on the Internet had an effect on their voting decisions." (Nicolas Baygert, 2009). He also claims that the victory of the UMP is also closely related to the fact that, in comparison with the other parties, was very advanced in terms of e-marketing. With a 1.5 million Euro budget, UMP has focused its strategy in order to seduce the audience with the use of new technologies.

Being active on social media is also a good way for politicians and political parties to ask for feedback from voters. It can be a beneficial thing, but only when it is well-handled. Many campaigns have hired employees to monitor their social media channels, but banning all the negative and unflattering comments is not probably the best way to ensure a mutual trust. A well run campaign will face the public disregarding whether their feedback is positive or negative.

Politicians and parties should also understand the importance of citizen journalists (bloggers, podcasters, and video bloggers). These persons can be more influent than "traditional" journalists, and might be followed by thousands of people.

3.3. The limits to digital campaigning

As we described earlier, social media has to be an integrated part of the marketing activity, as they are not sufficient on their own. As social media such as Facebook and Twitter are adapting themselves to your interests, it can easily become apolitical if you do not have special interest in politics:

"The Pew study found that more than a third of adult Twitter users who are uninterested in politics saw no political content at all on Twitter. If you rely on social media, it is possible to completely miss a political event as important as a national election."

(Washingtonpost .com, 2014)

Social media can also have counter effects. For example, it can limit a politician's message: "Once something is posted, the conversation belongs to social media's users and can take on a life of its own." (Lasvegassun.com, Phillips, 2014).

This shows that social media has become very important in the political sphere. It has empowered citizens, to make their voice heard. On the other side, it has become very beneficial for political parties as well. However, one has to be careful when using social media for political matters, as it can has some counterproductive effects. It must also be a part of your political activity, but without neglecting other media and more "traditional" channels.

4. Research

The purpose of this research is to get feedback from the two main groups concerned by the use of social media in politics: partisans (or anybody interested enough in politics to follow it on social networks), and politicians/ political parties.

The wished outcome of this study is getting a better understanding of the actual position of social media in the political life.

4.1. Research methods

The goal of this research is to identify how political parties use social media, and what do people are expecting on their presence on those networks. To find out, I have decided to ask them directly.

The research is divided in two parts: A survey, for members and partisans (following politics on social networks), and interviews, for political parties and politicians. I have decided to narrow it down to two European countries: Finland and France. These two countries and both members of the European Union, but they are also historically and culturally very different. I chose them because they are the countries that I know the best: My home country, and the country I am living in.

4.2. Survey

The purpose of this survey is to reach the part of the population who follows politics on social networks, and get answers about their habits and their opinions.

This research consists in nine short questions (cf. Appendix 1.). I chose to build the survey on SurveyMonkey (Surveymonkey.com, 2015) as it is a very clear and efficient program. The instructions to establish the survey itself are very simple. Once it is

ready, it is easy to share it on different kind of platforms, and the results are analyzed in percentages and graphics.

The survey has been translated into Finnish and French, in order to motivate people to answer in their native language, and so get a maximum of answers. Then, it has been posted on several different political parties and politicians' official Facebook pages. The target group of this research is anyone following politics on the social media, particularly on Facebook, as the survey was essentially posted there, on official pages of political parties and politicians. To make the results more meaningful, the survey was posted on two different countries, and on many very different political affiliations. The goal is to get a maximum of answers, to analyze the data quantitatively, and understand what unify these people beyond their differences, such as nationality, age, and political views.

The survey, named "Social media and politics" was created on January 20th 2015, and posted on parties and politicians' (Finnish and French) official Facebook pages. It obtained in a few days' time a very satisfactory amount of answers.

The Finnish version of the survey ("Sociaalinen media ja politiikka") has been posted on the major political parties' and politicians' official Facebook pages. It obtained a result of 40 answers. The French version ("Médias sociaux et politique ") obtained a result of 43 answers.

4.3. Interviews

These interviews' goal is to contact different politicians or political parties, and ask them their opinion about the use of social media in politics. This research will help to discover if their practices matches viewers' expectations, and their thoughts expressed through the survey.

This interview consists in seven questions (cf. Appendix 2.). I have decided to narrow it down to this amount, in order to focus on the main issues, and to make it not too tedious to answer, as the targeted groups are very busy persons.

These questions have been sent by e-mail to different political parties and politicians, in Finland and in France. I have found their e-mail addresses on the parties' websites. The purpose of this research was also to ask various people working in politics the same questions. The data was analyzed qualitatively. The idea of this research was to get the point of view of this particular target group, to compare it with the survey results, to see if they already do understand what citizens expect from following politics on social media.

5. Results

The goal of this research was to ask directly the concerned groups (citizens following politics on social networks, and political parties/politicians), in order to get concrete and objective answers on the matter, and compare the results with each other and with the above empirical findings.

5.1. Reliability of the results

"Reliability is the degree to which an assessment tool produces stable and consistent results" (C. Phelan and J. Wren, 2005-06)

This research has revealed itself very reliable. Indeed, it has been observed during the survey and in the interviews as well that, regardless of their political affiliation, their age, or their nationalities, many answers were consistent. The respondents and interviewees have not only validated the topics and issues covered during the literature review, but they have been very coherent when bringing up their opinion.

The survey's respondents have expressed repeatedly their opinion and many answers where surprisingly similar. This proves that not only this research is reliable, but it also drives us to consider that most people, despite many criteria, in the end, are searching for the same thing when using social media. In the same spirit, we will also notice that the interviewees (politicians and people working for political parties), despite their affiliation, share some perspectives.

By the variety of the respondents and judging the similarity of their answers has convinced me of the reliability of this research. Moreover, I consider as strength that even while having similar perspective, different individuals were able to bring up their own experiences, wishes but also fears. It made my research richer.

As it will be exposed and discussed later, the most interesting part of this research was to compare the coherence of the survey's respondents' (citizens who follow politics on

social media) answers with the interviewees' (politicians or people working for a political party) remarks. We will see that politicians and political parties could really benefit from this research, and it really gives better insights on citizen's expectations.

5.2. Survey

In Finland, more than half of the respondents of the survey belonged to the "between 18 and 30" age group. It was also noticed that greater the age is, less respondents we have. In France, even if the main age group was as well between 18 and 30 (37%) it was interesting to notice that the second most important age group was 40-55 years old (over 34%), followed closely by 31-40 years old (around 20%).

The right-wing partisans were the most active in France (45% of respondents), followed by left-wing (33%). "Centre" and "other" orientation was, on the contrary, not very represented (4, 5% and 16, 5% of answers). In Finland, on the contrary, interesting to notice that, when asked about their political orientation, more than half of the Finnish respondents (over 51%) define as belonging on "other", whereas around 30% consider themselves from left-wing, 15% from right-wing and only 2,5% from center. This can be explained by the cultural difference. Politically, French people usually belong to the same wing the most of their (adult) life. They define themselves and their political orientation through a specific party. The candidate and/or the head person of the party do not matter so much. People are faithful to their party and rely to them. The ideology that the parties convey is the most important. In the French language it is also expressed so, most people will use the name of a party to talk about their political orientation and even the person they vote for. They will still say that they vote for a specific party, not for a candidate. They are very committed to their party's ideas, no matter who represents it, whereas Finns are more sensitive to the person's personality and the individual speech.

3. Mistä saat tietoa politiikasta?
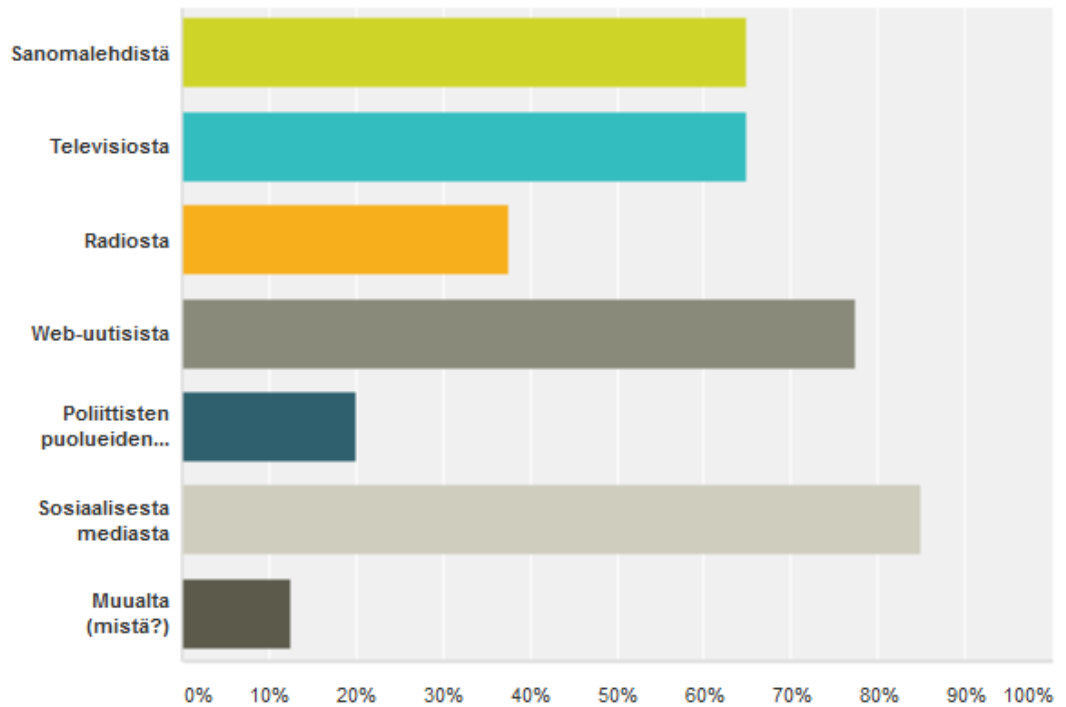
Answered: 40   Skipped: 0

Figure 1. "Where you do get information on Politics?"

This chart (figure 1.) shows that Finnish people who look for political information on social media (as the survey was posted on Facebook) also inform themselves through other media. The first place except social media where they get information is web press (77, 5%). Printed press and television, come on the second place equally. They both obtained 65%.

Par quels médias vous informez-vous sur la vie politique française?
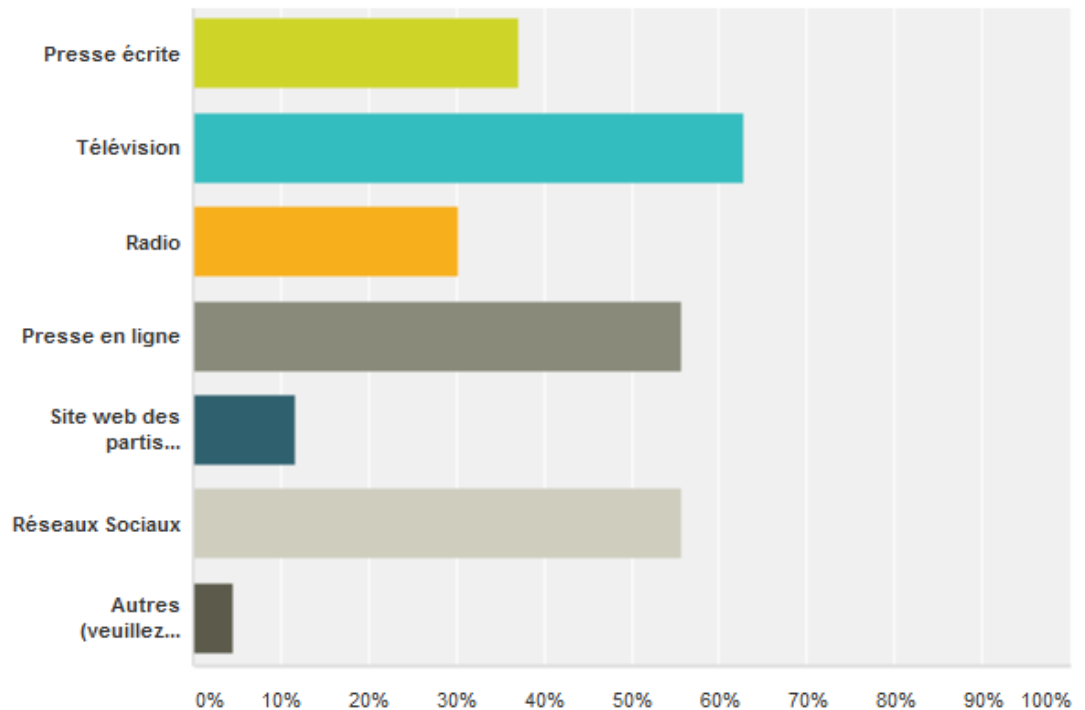
Answered: 43   Skipped: 0

Figure 2. "Where you do get information on Politics?"

On the contrary, this chart (Figure 2.) shows that in France, the most important medium is still television (over 62%), followed closely by web press (almost 56%). On the contrary to Finland, where 65% of people still seek for political information through printed press, in France it seems that this medium have less influence as only 37% of the respondents picked it as a medium where they seek information related to politics.

When asked about what type of person are they following on the social media, it appeared that Finns are obviously more interested in following specific politicians (over 47%) than political parties (only 18%). However, 34% of them also confirm following both of the above. In France, more than half of the respondents (56%) indicated following both political parties and politicians on social networks.

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In both countries, the second most important social network (after Facebook) where people follow politics is Twitter (over 33% of the Finns and 36% of the French). YouTube comes third in both countries, which shows that it is a reliable medium. Surprisingly, Finns also follow politics on Instagram (over 13%). It was something not expected. Is it the beginning of a new trend?

When asked about activities performed on these platforms, it appeared that many people are just following social media in a passive way (45% of respondents from Finland and 63% of respondents from France). However, it seems that the main activities performed on social media are to discuss and share content. Indeed, 45% of the Finns asked admitted that they have at least once discussed on those pages, and 40% of them also share content. In France, both these activities are at the same rate (26%). It appears that in Finland, there is more control of the social media. Indeed, over 32, 5% of the Finns asked have talked to the owner or the person in charge, whereas only 10% in France. This might be explained by the difference of population between these two countries: 5, 4 million inhabitant in Finland and over 66 million in France. Obviously, greater is the quantity of people active on the social media, harder it is to control and answer personally to each comment or question. This will be also demonstrated during the interview part of the research.

Qu'aimez vous dans le fait de suivre la vie Politique sur les réseaux sociaux?
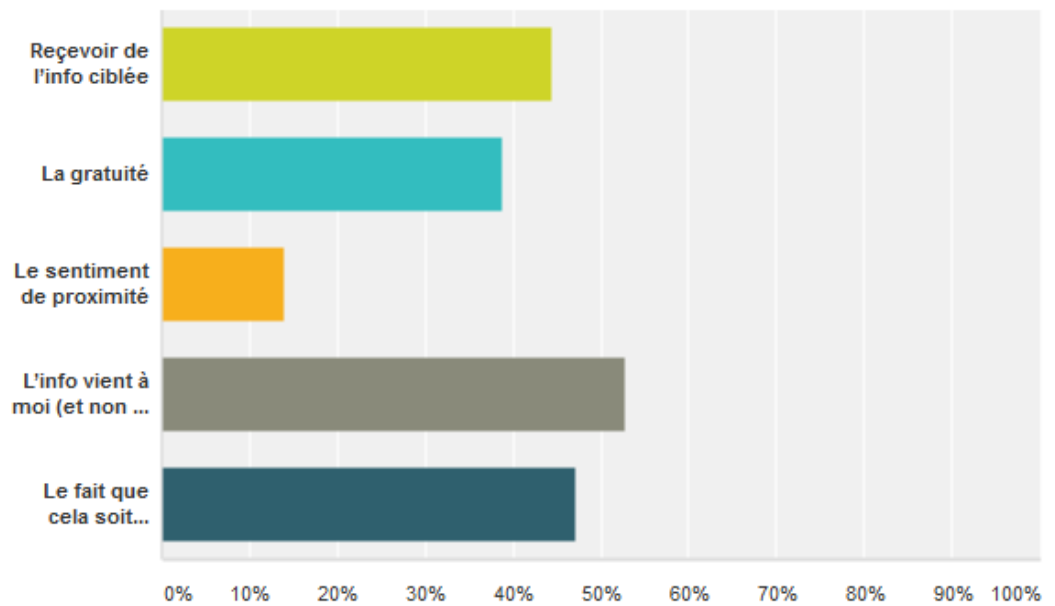
Answered: 36   Skipped: 7

Figure 3. "What do you like about following Politics on Social Media?"

Mistä pidät politiikan seuraamisessa sosiaalisessa mediassa?
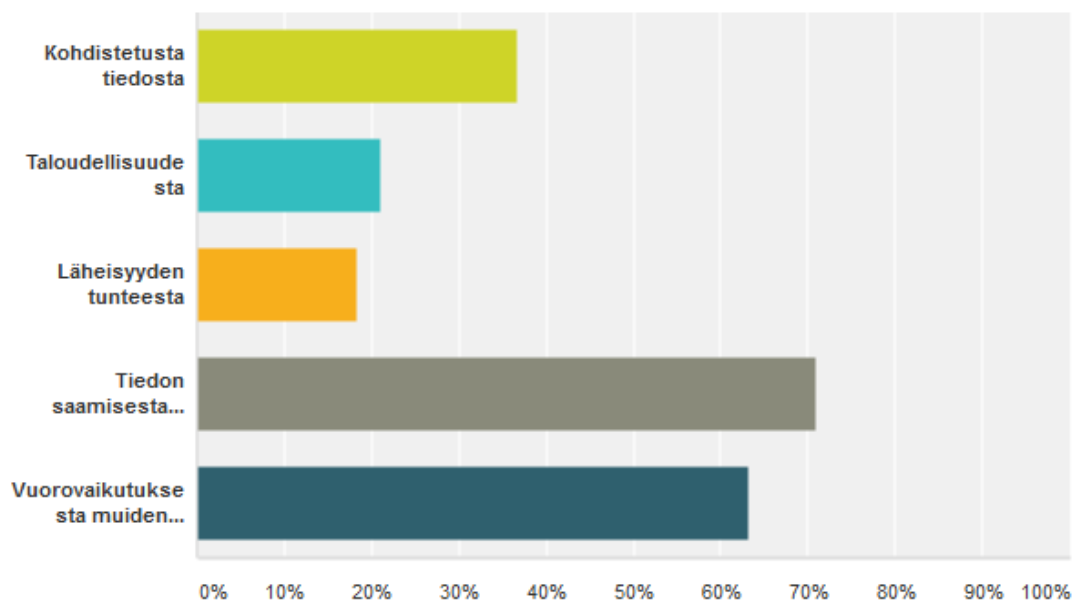
Answered: 38   Skipped: 2

Figure 4. "What do you like about following Politics on Social Media?"

Regarding the advantages of social media, answers from both countries were surprisingly similar, as we can see on Figure 3 and on Figure 4. The fact "the information is coming straight to me" as the main positive aspect of social media was voted by more than half in both countries. Both of the countries' respondents also enjoy that they can communicate with others on these platforms, which comes on the second place. The fact that you get information which is targeted seems also like an important aspect. However, the feeling of proximity does not seems that important, neither the fact that social media provides free information. This can be explained by the bloom of Web press, which provides also another other free alternative.

The respondents' comments on this question were also curiously much alike. They both expressed their need in getting other point of view. They are seeking something different from the mass media, which, to their opinion, is lacking a bit of criticism. They admitted also being interested in getting into constructive debates with others as well.

However, the matter of negative aspects of social media has brought different issues in those two countries. In Finland, the main aspect that people do not appreciate is that they can get into arguments with other users. This is quite a paradox, as in the previous question, 45% of them confirmed to have discussed with other users. This can be explained by the Finnish culture. People are more quiet and do not like getting into arguments with others. Still, this problem was also voted by the French the main issue and aspect they do not like about social media.

Here is the real difference: When, in Finland, exposing your political orientation does not seem like a problem. Only 13% of the Finns voted it as a negative aspect, in France it seems to be a greater taboo. Indeed, over 38% of the French people asked consider it to be a problem to expose their political affiliation. The same persons also commented on being "insulted", "be labelled", and admitted suffering from other's aggression. They would wish that their political orientation could remain secret or have to possibility to hide their identity under a pseudonym.

Some of the respondents, in both countries, still think that it does not bring much more than the other media. It shows that social media is still view as not such an essential media. But this does not seem to be an issue as they also expressed their need and appreciation in the previous question.

The last question's goal was to give respondents an open space to express their thoughts about the use of social media in politics, and how to improve it. Both Finns and French expressed the same needs: Their craving for freedom of speech, and the mutual respect for each other's opinions. They both want more control in this "jungle" in order to maintain peace and create constructive debates without judgment and aggression. Moreover, many expressed their reluctances for mainstream media and wish to get a different point of view, with less manipulation and less advertisement.

5.3. Interviews

Both versions of the interview were sent by e-mail, addresses which were all found of political parties' websites. The Finnish culture of transparency showed very fast, as it has been very easy to find information on people working for the party. On the contrary, on the French parties' websites, it has been more complicated to find any reliable kind of contact information.

This process was still successful. I got four answers from people with different responsibilities, in different countries, and from very different political affiliations.

- Press officer, Left Alliance (Vasemmistoliito),Finland
- Political advisor, Left Alliance (Vasemmistoliito),Finland
- Communication manager, Social Democratic Party (SDP), Finland
- Secretary general, Front National, France

Beyond their difference, many similarities have been observed in their answers. First of all, they were asked if they use social media, if they think that this online presence is important, and to what ends are they used for political purposes.

Their answers were unanimous. Indeed, according to the communication manager for the Finnish Social Democratic Party, "online presence is vital nowadays". He also added that it is a very important tool in his work, as "Politicians and political parties should always be where there are people." and also confirms as a great aspect of social media is not only to get the possibility to spread a message, but also to get the opportunity to listen, to learn something new, and to get to be social. He also raised an interesting point, which is to also get reach people on a place where they actually enjoy spending time: "Social media is basically about knowing your audience and getting them to do something they already like doing". A press officer for the Left Alliance party (Finland), also adds that social media offer the chance to "get more visibility" and bring people to have "more discussion on the issues we feel important".

When asked about the goals of the use of social media for political purposes, a political advisor for the Finnish Left Alliance Party confirms that he considers it a great channel to "spread opinions and campaigns". The secretary general at the French political party Front National (the "National Front") also replied that social media "took an important place in parties' communication, so their presence has to be optimal". But he also sees in them something beyond a simple tool. Indeed, he comments that they have the possibility to "spread information that sometimes, mass media does not relay" and considers them as a "very useful counter-power serving the democracy's vitality"

When asking about the most important thing to remember when using social media, they all agreed on the same points. All of our four interviewed considers that being honest, reliable and relevant are the most important things to remember when using social networks. Indeed, the political advisor for the left alliance comments that he "… believe that being honest and being yourself is the best way to use social media. Some focus on best possible propaganda and look false". The communication

manager for the Finnish Social Democratic party also adds that the most important things to remember are to "be four things: honest, interesting, real and relatable." This is an opinion which would be approved by the Front National secretary general, who advises to "transmit an intelligent and relevant message". The press officer of the Finnish Left Alliance also raised an interesting point, which is positivity. Indeed, she reminded us that "in politics, rather present solutions for problems than only problems."

When asking about which are the most effective social networks when using them to political purposes, opinions differed a bit but still, they all voted Facebook and Twitter to be the most influents networks. Indeed, the political advisor comments that "Facebook is the one". The communication manager also adds that Facebook is "definitely the most effective when it comes to canvassing". They also both agreed that Twitter is very important as well, and mentioned similar reasons: "With twitter you can contact journalists and other politicians" (political advisor), "Twitter is really important for media relations" (communication manager). The secretary general mentioned as well YouTube to be one important network.

The communication manager for of the Finnish Social Democratic party also raised an important point. Indeed, she says that "Instagram will play a bigger role in the future especially with younger voters." This is an interesting comment, as we previously discovered with the survey research that over 13% of the Finnish respondents affirmed following politics through Instagram (more than Google +).

Then, our interviewees were asked if they believe that social media do have the power to change the younger's generation behavior towards politics. They all had positive answers concerning this matter. Indeed, the communication manager thinks that social media has the power to change the attitude towards politics, by making feel people closer to each other, but also by discussing on equal grounds. He says that "it brings politics and politicians closer to people. Twitter is a platform where a prime minister and a citizen communicate by the same rules. It doesn't cost anything so it's democratic and socially just." He also believes that social media already have changed people's

behavior towards politics in general, and considers it a really good thing: "People have become more critical, they demand openness and that's something that politics needs". The Front National's secretary general also agrees that social media can change people's vision, but also comments that, to make it productive, the "debate should not be limited to platitudes and ideological conformities".

Concerning the place of social networks compared to mass media, our interviewed all agreed on their growing important. Indeed, the political adviser of the Finnish left alliance says that "it hasn't replaced them, but probably will in time". An opinion which the Social Democratic party's communication manager agrees on, as he comments: "it is still an underdog but will take over in the future. We as a society will go online. Media, politics and politicians must follow of they want to survive". The Left Alliance's press officer even goes further with assuring that "they are equal. The target groups use different media and none of those groups can be ignored". The Front National's secretary general also confirms on the growing importance of social media (and internet in general) and comments that "…it puts the political / media class into some kind of panic, as they are more and more tempted to censure individual freedom and freedom of speech." He also affirms that "Internet must stay a place of freedom".

When asked about the limits and the negative aspects of digital marketing and campaigning, different issues were raised. The political advisor, believes that, on the same level as other media, "it is very easy to annoy people if you are too aggressive", and adds that "television has the same feature". He also confirmed that to make social media efficient, you need to spend resources: "Sometimes I buy visibility to my political page in Facebook". The press officer also mentioned resources to be a limit to digital campaigning: "to get much visibility you must have people to spread your message." The secretary general also mentions that social media has its limits and reminds us of the importance of field campaigning, which, to his opinion will "never be replaced" by only social media, as not everybody uses them.

In another hand, the communication manager does not see limits to digital marketing, as it is such a new tool, that we are still discovering: "I do not see limits at the moment. We need to understand how people want to receive information, how they want to communicate and how they want to contacted in a marketing kind of way."

Concerning the negative aspects of digital marketing / campaigning, two of our interviewed expressed the same concern: "Internet is full of not only information but also disinformation "That is a big challenge" (communication manager). Left Alliance's press officer also adds "all the false news and negative rumors can spread out very fast and it might not be possible to correct them anymore".

6. Conclusion and recommendations

Both of these researches have brought a new insight on the potential of the use of social media in politics, but also about social media in general.

First of all, it has confirmed their importance, their advantages, but as well the limits and issues related to them, as analyzed in the empirical part. The relevant and updated material used, such as books and articles, gave us a general view on social media's use for marketing purposes. The literature review has shown that, beyond the basic aspects of marketing, like advertisement, social media has become crucial to businesses.

Indeed, it totally changed how people communicate, also in the business world. Then, it has appeared that being on the social media is not enough in order to be a successful tool. Businesses have to understand how to choose them and use them carefully. Social media cannot survive on their own; they needs to work hand in hand with other channels, without neglecting the most traditional media, which still have a lot of power. Social media are still just a part of the marketing mix.

Then, we have been focusing on their use in politics. The material gave us a general knowledge on their impacts on politics, to what purposes can they be used, and what are their limits. It has shown that ever since the first Obama campaign, the political world has discovered the potential of social media. This new form of communication allows them to reach and connect with citizens directly, without having to go through mass media, and it has become an integral part of campaigning and of the political life in general. Both politicians and citizens are beneficiating from this. It has, however, its limits. Indeed, as it was already discovered while reviewing general literature on social media, it is just part of the marketing activities, but a fast growing one. The research was also a way to get even more updated material, from both interests groups (citizens following politics on social media, and politicians/political parties). Then we will have a better understanding of the actual situation and expectations, and of the possible coming trends.

The purpose of both researches (survey and interviews) was to gather opinions from both sides (partisans following politics on social networks, and politicians) and get information at the source, to bring new objective information, in order to understand better the mechanisms, and improve the politicians' marketing and communication. These researches have been successful as I will present new information that was not present in the literature analyzed.

Even if it became clear and confirmed in both empirical study and research that social media has to be a part of the marketing mix, and cannot survive alone, this research have brought a real new understanding on what people research by following political life on social networks.

Beyond the importance of the interactive aspect of social media, people of both Finland and France expressed their craving for transparency. They are not looking to be targets for advertisements; they do not want to be convinced like through the mass media. They belong to these communities to get different point of views. They expressed their suspicions regarding the practices of mass media. People are becoming more critical and the politicians interviewed understood it. They all advocated honesty and transparency when asked about the most important thing to remember when communicating on those networks. The free space of internet made people more critical, more prone to question everything they are told. It became to be commonly considered a sign of intelligence. This leads us to think that social media and internet in general have completely changed marketing and communication in general. The golden age of advertisement where politicians (and businesses in general) were promoting their perfection is revoked. To gain people's trust, you need to be yourself, to be real, with your strengths and weaknesses. Hiding negative comments, and censoring people because of what they might say about you is consider very negative, worse, it is considered "propaganda". But, especially in politics, it seems that positivity is essential, but without twisting reality. Admitting problems is one step closer to solutions. All this have shown us that social media communication has deeply turned upside down the world of politics, for the better. From this started to emerge an age of transparency, giving power to people, reminding us what the real meaning of democracy is.

Yet still, survey's respondents expressed their needs of monitoring, they do not expect either from social media to be some kind of "jungle" where everyone could tell whatever they want, without fearing repercussions. Yes, they want dialogue, but constructive ones.

This brings us to think closer on what people call "freedom of speech". Indeed, there is a paradox. In one hand, they have expressed their need of freedom, their need on not feeling judged and criticized on their opinion and their affiliation, but still have shown their wishes on more rules and justice. The real freedom of speech would be to accept any kind of speech, regardless how to we personally feel about them. But still, people of France and Finland seem to feel not comfortable with this, which is probably related to their culture. They want to feel free but also want in the same time to feel safe.

Politicians interviewed also confirmed that, as the online presence became essential, human and financial resources have to be allocated for managing their social media communication. As it has been mentioned during the interview, social media do not only offer to spread messages and gain visibility, but it is also a great opportunity to listen, get feedback, learn something new and improve your image. By being attentive and responsive, political parties (and businesses in general) can really benefit from it like with no type of communication before.

Regarding the most efficient social networks used in politics, new perspectives have emerged. Indeed, when Facebook still stays, as expected, the most efficient and popular medium to reach citizens (and customers in general), Twitter also appeared to be crucial. Indeed, it has been presented by our interviewed not to only very efficient to spread messages and communicate with citizens, but also to be a great PR tool to contact journalists and other politicians.

Another thing was discovered. Indeed, one particular social network that was not discussed at all in the material reviewed but that the research brought up is Instagram.

Indeed, the survey revealed that over 13% of the respondents from Finland have confirmed using it to follow Politics. The communication manager for the Finnish Social Democratic Party also mentioned the growing importance of Instagram to reach especially the younger citizen's generation. The real question is: Is it just a phase or really new trend? The political world will have to experiment in order to discover the answer.

When asked about the limits of digital marketing and campaigning, issues have been confirmed. Indeed, the lack of control over the content was considered as the main threats in the literature review, but also by our interviewed. Indeed, once something is posted, information will spread, regardless if it is true or false.

The real dilemma for using social media for political purposes seems to be finding the right balance between having too much authority or too little. Both extremes seem to result in making people very suspicious. Too little control over the content and conversations would provoke a deep sense of mistrust from citizens, as they could not differentiate information from disinformation. Then, in another hand, too much control over information and conversations would be considered censorship and against individual freedom and freedom of speech. It would make people reluctant and would be totally counter-productive. I do believe that the solution resides in this new concept of "transparency". At the age of internet and social media, you have no choice but to embrace criticism, and be ready to be there not to convince or convert, but to converse in a constructive and diplomatic way. If you cannot make people embrace your ideas, you can at least appear courteous and sympathetic to them. This is already a huge step towards a better image and reputation.

As analyzed in the literature review but also confirmed by the researches, another key concept for better marketing is the "cross media alliance". It means that different channels can and should support each other. Indeed, the survey revealed that Finnish and French people still do seek for information related to politics on other media. A majority of them have voted television, printed press and online press to be important to them. By synchronizing the marketing activities and making your different channels

complementary, you can achieve to convince people to follow you on social networks and gain popularity. Yet again, it is important to remember, as mentioned by the political advisor for the Finnish Left Alliance party, "it is very easy to annoy people if you are too aggressive". Once again, it reminds us the importance of the balance. However, it seems that all the limits of social media marketing are not seen and / or understood, for the simple reason that this is still a too new recent too. This research was maybe what politicians and political parties have been waiting for to understand better what the citizens are expecting from their presence on social media, and therefore, uses them in order to gain the most from them.

7. Self – evaluation

The thesis process has been very positive and enriching; for the simple reason that I got the opportunity to discuss a trendy subject which really interested me: Social media. A trendy subject who totally changed the way people communicate, and the way that I communicate. It was really important for me to find an interesting subject which I can also relate to. I am very grateful that I got the chance to talk about something that mattered to me, and therefore, made the thesis process very pleasant to me. I was surprised on how much quality information I could find of this topic, how much I could talk about.

After discussing social media marketing on a general level, I realized that this topic is so vast that I must narrow down my efforts to study one specific branch, in order to produce a relevant research. I chose politics, again out of personal interest. Then I had real doubts, whether or not I would be able to find enough information on this topic, and I had concerns on how I could conduct a research on a world which seemed still so inaccessible to me. I almost abandoned the idea for another topic but still, I was too curious, and thought that, even if it will be more complicated, it would just make my thesis even more unique.

Again, thanks to social networks, I had the possibility to gather information, which might have been impossible to day maybe ten years ago. By posting a single survey on different Facebook pages, I got such a variety of answers from people from really different backgrounds and political affiliations, proving to me again the power of social media as a communication tool. The interviews also gave me very satisfying and interesting answers. I had the chance to again get opinion from people with different responsibilities, in very different political parties.

I think that this variety gave my research more weight, as I realized that beyond people's political views, they still all had something in common. It showed me that it does not matter if you are a left-wing or right-wing partisan, Finnish or French, in the

end we all want the same thing: To be respected and to be heard. We all deserve to know the facts, no matter what our personal opinions are. History has made us suspicious towards people in power, suspicious towards what we are told. As Mark McKinnon (American political advisor) said: "Technology and social media have brought power back to the people."

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Questions for the survey (and translations)

1. How old are you?
   - 18-30
   - 31-40
   - 41-55
   - 55 +

2. What is your political orientation?

   - Left
   - Center
   - Right
   - Other

3. Where you do get information on politics? (Multi answers possible)

   - Printed press
   - Television
   - Radio
   - Online press
   - Political party websites
   - Social media
   - Other (please specify)

4. Whom do you follow on social media? (Multi answers possible)

   - Candidates / Politicians
   - Political parties
   - Both

5. On which medium do you follow politics? (Multi answers possible)

   - Facebook
   - Twitter
   - YouTube
   - Google +
   - Flickr
   - Instagram
   - Other (please specify)

6. Which activities have you done? (Multi answers possible)

➢ I have been at least once exchanging with other "fans"
➢ I have been at least one exchanging with the profile owner (or the person in charge)
➢ I have been sharing content
➢ I have not done anything special; I am just there to stay informed
➢ Other (please specify)

7. What do you like about following politics on social media? (Multi answers possible)

➢ Targeted information
➢ Cost-efficiency
➢ Feeling of proximity
➢ Having the info coming straight at you
➢ Interaction with other people
➢ Other (please specify)

8. What do you dislike? (Multi answers possible)

➢ Exposing my political view
➢ Getting into arguments
➢ It does not bring anything more than the "traditional" media
➢ Other (please specify)

9. How would you improve it?

Thank you for your participation!

French translation:

1. Quelle est votre tranche d'âge?

➢ 18-30 ans
➢ 31- 40 ans
➢ 41-55 ans
➢ plus de 55 ans

2. Quelle est votre orientation politique?

➢ Gauche
➢ Centre

➢ Droite
➢ Autre

3. Par quels médias vous informez-vous sur la vie politique française?
➢ Presse écrite
➢ Télévision
➢ Radio
➢ Presse en ligne
➢ Site web des partis politiques
➢ Réseaux sociaux
➢ Autres (veuillez préciser)

4. Que suivez-vous sur les réseaux sociaux?

➢ Un ou des candidats / politiciens
➢ Un ou des partis politiques
➢ Les deux

5. Sur quels réseaux les suivez-vous?

➢ Facebook
➢ Twitter
➢ YouTube
➢ Google +
➢ Flickr
➢ Instagram
➢ Autres (veuillez préciser)

6. Etes-vous actifs?

➢ J'ai déjà discuté avec d'autres "fans"
➢ J'ai déjà discuté avec le propriétaire du profil en question
➢ J'ai déjà partagé un contenu / Retweeté /etc.
➢ Je ne suis pas actif, je suis juste là pour m'informer
➢ Autres (veuillez préciser)

7. Qu'aimez-vous dans le fait de suivre la vie politique sur les réseaux sociaux?

➢ Recevoir de l'info ciblée
➢ La gratuité
➢ Le sentiment de proximité
➢ L'info vient à moi (et non le contraire)
➢ Le fait que cela soit interactif, de pouvoir échanger et discuter
➢ Autres (veuillez préciser)

8. Que n'aimez-vous pas?

9.

➢ Le fait de rendre mon orientation politique publique
➢ Se retrouver dans des débats/ querelles en ligne
➢ Cela ne m'apporte réellement rien de plus que les médias classiques
➢ Autres (veuillez préciser)

10. Que feriez-vous pour améliorer cela?

Merci de votre participation!

Finnish translation:

1. Kuinka vanha olet? (yksi vastaus mahdollinen)

➢ 18-30
➢ 31-40
➢ 41-55
➢ 55+

2. Mikä on poliittinen suuntautumisesi?

➢ Vasemmisto
➢ Keskusta
➢ Oikeisto
➢ Muu

3. Mistä saat tietoa politiikasta? (useampi kuin yksi vastaus mahdollinen)

➢ Sanomalehdistä
➢ Televisiosta
➢ Radiosta
➢ Web-uutisista
➢ Poliittisten puolueiden web-sivuilta
➢ Sosiaalisesta mediasta
➢ Muualta (mistä?)

4. Keitä seuraat sosiaalisessa mediassa? (useampi kuin yksi vastaus mahdollinen)

➢ Ehdokkaita / poliitikkoja
➢ Poliittisia puolueita
➢ Muita

5. Mitä kautta seuraat politiikkaa? (useampi kuin yksi vastaus mahdollinen)

➢ Facebook
➢ Twitter
➢ YouTube
➢ Google+
➢ Flickr
➢ Instagram
➢ Muu (mikä)

6. Mitä aktiviteetteja sinulla on ollut näissä sivustoilla?

➢ Olen ainakin kerran vaihtanut näkemyksiä muiden kannattajien kanssa
➢ Olen ainakin kerran vaihtanut näkemyksiä profiilin omistajan (tai vastuullisen henkilön) kanssa
➢ Olen jakanut sisältöä
➢ En ole tehnyt mitään erityistä; tarkoituksena on vain pysyä ajan tasalla
➢ Muuta (mitä?)

7. Mistä pidät politiikan seuraamisessa sosiaalisessa mediassa?

➢ Kohdistetusta tiedosta
➢ Taloudellisuudesta
➢ Läheisyyden tunteesta
➢ Tiedon saamisesta suoraan
➢ Vuorovaikutuksesta muiden kanssa
➢ Muusta (mistä?)

8. Mistä et pidä?

➢ Oman näkemyksen julkituonnista
➢ Väittelyihin ajautumisesta
➢ Lisäarvon puutteesta verrattuna perinteiseen mediaan
➢ Muusta (mistä?)

9. Miten parantaisit sitä?

Kiitoksia osallistumisesta!

Appendix 2 Question for the interview (and translation)

1. For which purposes a Politician / Political party would use social media? Do you use them yourself?

2. Do you think that this online presence is important nowadays?

3. To your opinion, what is the most important thing to do and remember when using social media?

4. Which social networking site do you think is the more effective for reaching potential voters / members?

5. Do you think that communication through social networking sites has the possibility of changing long term the young generation's behavior towards politics?

6. How important are the social media compared to more "classic" media, such as television or printed press?

7. To your opinion, what are the limits and the negative aspects to digital campaigning?

French translation:

1. A quelles fins un politicien / un parti politique utilise les médias sociaux? les utilisez-vous vous-mêmes?

2. Pensez-vous que, de nos jours, être présent et actif sur le net est important?

3. Selon vous, quelle est la chose la plus importante à faire et à se souvenir lorsqu'on utilise les réseaux sociaux?

4. Quels réseaux sociaux trouvez-vous les plus efficaces afin d'atteindre vos électeurs et vos membres?

5. Pensez-vous que les réseaux sociaux ont le pouvoir de changer le comportement des jeunes générations vis-à-vis de la politique en général?

6. Pouvez-vous dire que les médias sociaux sont en phase de devenir aussi important que les médias classiques, comme la télévision par exemple?

7. Selon vous, quelles sont les limites et les aspects négatif de la communication / campagne numérique?