Personalization Online: Effects of Online Campaigns by Party Leaders on Images of Party Leaders Held by Voters

Carlson, Tom; Strandberg, Kim; Djupsund, Göran

[Link to publication](#)

Personalization Online:

Effects of Online Campaigns by Party Leaders on Images of Party Leaders Held by Voters

Tom Carlson
Åbo Akademi University, Finland

Kim Strandberg
Åbo Akademi University, Finland

Göran Djupsund
Åbo Akademi University, Finland

ABSTRACT

Research on the increasing importance of party leaders in elections has observed that party leaders maintain personal websites, blogs, and social networking sites in order to personalize the image of themselves by mixing personal and professional matters. This chapter examines whether these efforts affect the party leader character impressions by voters in a positive way. The chapter presents two experiments that examine the impact of exposure to authentic personal websites and, as a form of social media, blogs of party leaders on voters' perceptions regarding various traits of party leaders during a Finnish election campaign. The findings are mixed. The perception of one leader was significantly enhanced by exposure to his website as well as his blog. Moreover, exposure to the blog by this politician resulted in an enhanced assessment of his personality traits whereas exposure to his website had positive effect on the evaluation of his professional traits. In making sense of the findings, web and social media approaches, and participant expectancies are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter is about the effect that personalized politics online has on voters. According to Pruysers, Cross and Katz (2018, p. 3), personalized politics means that individual political actors are "centrally important, prominent and highly visible" in politics. Among these actors, the international literature on political personalization has paid much attention to the increasing importance of party leaders in elections (e.g. Cross, Katz, & Pruysers, 2018; Karvonen, 2010; McAllister, 2007; Mughan, 2000; Poguntke & Webb, 2005). The concept of presidentialization of parliamentary systems stresses increasingly leadership-centred electoral processes and personalized party campaigns (Poguntke & Webb, 2005). Correspondingly, Bittner (2011, 2018) has empirically demonstrated that voters' perceptions of party leaders, in particular the leaders' traits and personality, affect voter decisions and the distribution of votes in elections (see also Garzia, 2011).

In empirically testing the personalization thesis, claiming that party leaders have become more important to voters *over time*, Bittner (2018) concludes that party leaders and their personality have always been important in the minds of the electorate; voters have constantly evaluated party leaders and considered them in their vote calculus. However, what is new, Bittner notes, is that the amount of and access to information about the personality of party leaders is increasing, particularly on the web and in social networking sites and apps (Bittner, 2018, p. 53). This evolution, from personalization offline to a growing personalization online, might increase the role of party leaders' personality with time.

For some time already, party organizations have created separate web and social networking sites for their party leaders, giving them an emphasized personal presence online during election campaigns. Firstly, parties maintain special party leader websites, which are different from the main party campaign site (e.g. Rahat & Zamir, 2018; Van Os, Hagemann, Voerman, & Jankowski, 2007; Voerman & Boogers, 2008). Secondly, advancing from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0, party organizations are personalizing their party leaders during campaigns by using various social media tools, too. Hence, party leaders maintain personal blogs, create profiles on Facebook and post messages on personal Twitter and Instagram accounts (Jackson, 2006; Larsson, 2015; Larsson & Ihlen, 2015; Small, 2016; Vergeer, Hermans, & Sams, 2013). In a recent study on political personalization online, Rahat and Zamir (2018) survey the online presence of 127 party leaders in 25 countries. In the year 2015, 57% of the party leaders had own websites, 90% had personal Facebook accounts and 80% used Twitter accounts.

In "selling" party leaders online, by means of personal websites and various social networking sites and apps, an overriding aim is, arguably, to build a bond between the party leader and the voters by allowing for personal interactions and stressing such personal traits and characteristics of the leader that are believed to be perceived as positive by the voters. Scholars have noted that politicians,

including political leaders, use various online platforms to stress their competence, qualifications and achievements as well as to emphasize their ordinariness, in order to appear as ordinary human beings by sharing personal information and stories, glimpses of family life etc. (e.g. Enli & Skogerbø, 2013; Graham, Jackson, & Broersma, 2018; Jackson & Lilleker, 2011; Lalancette & Raynauld, 2017). However, this emergent trend by parties to maintain special party leader websites, blogs, social networking sites and apps in order to personalize the leaders by mixing personal matters and traits with professional and political activities and issues begs the obvious question if it matters: Do these efforts affect the party leader character impressions of voters in a significant and positive way?

In exploring this question, this study focuses on two types of personal web campaigns by party leaders. Firstly, we include an initial and now well-established form of online campaigning: websites. Secondly, in order to comprise also newer online devices—social media tools—we also include party leader blogs. Blogs are, of course, not new as such; after an initial breakthrough into the political arena in the early 2000s (see e.g. Strandberg 2006), a sustained period of lesser importance endured. However, in recent years there has been a clear resurgence in the popularity of blogs both in the non-political and in the political sphere (e.g. Karlsson 2013, 2015). Thus, albeit blogs are one of the oldest forms of social media, they are again at the front of the development of digital campaign communication. In election campaigns, blogs, and other types of social media, tend to carry a more personal touch than websites (e.g. Graham, Jackson, & Broersma, 2018; Trammell, Williams, Postelnicu, & Landreville, 2006; Utz, 2009; Vergeer, Hermans, & Sams, 2013; Williams, Trammell, Postelnicu, Landreville, & Martin, 2005).

In this empirical study, we examine whether exposure to the personal websites and blogs of party leaders affects the perceptions held by voters regarding various traits of party leaders. Moreover, since party leader blogs, as a form of social media, tend to have a more personal touch than their websites, we will compare the effects on party leader impressions of exposure to websites and blogs by party leaders respectively. Methodologically, the study applies an experimental research approach, since we wish to observe causation between exposure to party leader websites/blogs and party leader image impressions, while maintaining control over other factors that may affect the dependent variable.

Empirically, we conducted two experiments during the campaign of the 2007 parliamentary elections in Finland, using actual party leader websites and blogs as stimuli and young adult voters as participants. The 2007 elections, although not so recent, make an excellent case because the leaders of the three major parties all had to deal with personal image concerns in their campaigns (these concerns are discussed later on). These elections were also the first real major breakthrough for the use of blogs in Finnish campaigning with more than 40 per cent of the candidates of the parties in parliament having a blog (Strandberg, 2009).

The chapter proceeds as follows. In the following section, we review the significant literature and develop research questions. Thereafter, our empirical case, Finland and the 2007 elections, is presented. Sections four, five and six present our

experimental studies and their findings. The seventh section discusses the findings and presents conclusions. The final section notes limitations of the research and identifies future research directions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on how exposure to campaign media affects the images of electoral candidates and party leaders held by voters has typically concerned televised political advertising. Regarding the effects of televised advertising on voter perceptions of particularly party leaders, experiments conducted during national elections in Europe show that party leader-focused spot ads can sometimes, but not always, significantly affect a party leader's image rating (Kaid & Holtz-Bacha, 2006a, pp. 452–454).When it comes to research on how web campaigns by individual political actors affect perceptions held by voters regarding various traits of these actors, we do not know, to the best of our knowledge, of any studies that have focused particularly on party leaders. Regarding other types of politicians, mainly political candidates in elections, there are some studies.

A common theme in the previous research has been to analyze experimentally how the level and kinds of technical interactivity on candidates' online campaign platforms affect voters' perception of the candidates. In an experiment, using a website for a fictitious candidate and manipulating the level of interactivity while controlling for message variables, Sundar, Kalyanaraman and Brown (2003) found that respondents' impressions of the candidate—his character, competence, and likeability—were most positive in the medium interactivity condition. Newer studies have examined the impact of interactive features in social media, e.g. Twitter. Lee and Shin (2012) found that the level of reciprocal interactivity in a politician's Twitter communication affected individuals' overall evaluation of the politician; exposure to a Twitter page with high level of interactivity induced a stronger sense of social presence of the politician and a more positive overall evaluation of the politician's traits. Similarly, Utz (2009) conducted an experiment with a fictive candidate's social network site and found that respondents evaluated the candidate more positive in the experimental condition where the candidate responded to comments on the site. In both these studies, the overall evaluation of traits was measured with a single variable that averaged several trait dimensions.

In an experimental study, examining the effectiveness of personalized communication and interactive features in online political communication, Kruikemeier, Noort, Vliegenthart and de Vreese (2013) found an interaction effect of high interactivity and personalized communication (stressing individual political competence and private lives) on how respondents felt an emotional "closeness" to politicians and politics. McGregor (2018) observes the effect of personalizing messages in candidates' social media platforms in a recent study, too. Her experiment showed that candidates that displayed self-personalizing tweets in their Twitter feed received higher evaluations of social presence and parasocial

interaction. However, self-personalization worked better for male candidates than female.

Finally, in a study directly related to our research, as it employs real candidates with real online campaigns and examine effects on *various* image traits, Hansen and Benoit (2005) examined the impact of viewing Al Gore's and George W. Bush's websites in the 2000 US presidential elections on voters' attitudes towards issues and candidate character. This experiment employed a post-test-only control group design, with student participants randomly assigned to one of three groups: a group viewing Bush's website, a group viewing Gore's website, and a control group. Regarding the effects on perceptions of candidate character, the findings provide mixed evidence. Whereas the group who used Gore's website reported significantly more favourable impressions of Gore's character than the control group, no significant differences occurred for the group exposed to Bush's website compared with the control group. The authors' conclusion, relevant to our study, is that campaign websites may influence voters but do not always do so. In discussing why only Gore's site had effects, Hansen and Benoit, most importantly, consider differences in content, style, and functions of the two websites. Whereas there was little difference in content, the level of interactivity—measured as the number of links—was higher on Gore's site. The authors consider that this circumstance possibly contributed to the results.

In sum, the prior research provides some mixed findings concerning the effects of political websites and social media platforms on the perceptions voters have towards politicians and candidates. When it comes to individual campaigning by means of websites, the findings do not, similar to the European experiments of the effects of exposure to televised political advertising on the images voters have of party leaders, provide a coherent picture. In some cases, the websites of candidates do not influence the perception voters have regarding the traits of candidates, while in other cases the perception is affected. Consequently, regarding our empirical study, we find it hard to propose hypotheses concerning the impressions voters have of party leaders after exposure to the *websites* of Finnish party leaders. Instead, we opt to explore two research questions:

RQ1a: Does exposure to a party leader's website affect the general perceptions voters have regarding the traits of the featured party leader?
RQ1b: Which specific party leader trait perceptions, if any, are affected by voters' exposure to a party leader's website?

Subsequently, regarding the subject of the effects of campaign blogs on voter perceptions regarding the traits of party leaders, previous research indicates that the more personalizing and reciprocal interactive nature of social networking sites and apps can make a difference. Although campaign websites and blogs are part of the same communication channel—and technically speaking are identical; both consist of web pages—there are some differences in their nature and in the ways they are used that may have bearing on what effects they may have on voters. A major

difference is that blogs typically employ technical interactivity to a higher degree than websites (Trammell et al., 2006; Williams et al., 2005). Blogs usually offer commenting functions for the readers.

Additionally, Trammell et al. (2006) argue that the more personal, engaging nature of the blogs' text and content is perhaps an even more important difference between candidate websites and blogs. This notion builds on the concept of text-based interactivity, developed by Endres and Warnick before the social media breakthrough in campaigning (Endres & Warnick, 2004; Warnick, Xenos, Endres, & Gastil, 2005). According to them, text-based interactivity is a rhetorical dimension of website text, simulating face-to-face communication and creating a sense that the web user is engaged in a conversation while browsing the website. Techniques for creating text-based interactivity include the use of direct address (1st and 2nd person), active voice, and dialogized, conversational language (Endres & Warnick, 2004). In order to promote personal presence and immediacy, web campaigns rhetorically make the candidate's persona present by, for example, posting candidate-written content, addressing the web user directly, calling the candidate by his/her first name, and publishing in situ photographs (Endres & Warnick, 2004). Trammell et al. (2006), comparing websites and blogs of Democrats competing for their party's presidential nomination in 2004, found that the blogs indeed had a higher degree of personal presence and text-based interactivity than the websites, even if the candidates themselves rarely wrote the blog posts.

Although the research reviewed above would indicate that blogs could potentially affect perceptions of candidates' personal traits, we here opt to formulate open research questions rather than hypotheses:

RQ2a: Does reading a party leader's blog affect the general perceptions of voters regarding the traits of a featured party leader?

RQ2b: Which specific party leader trait perceptions, if any, are affected by voters' exposure to a party leader's blog?

In addition, as the literature suggests that candidates' websites and blogs differ in the level of use of actual and textual interactivity, which may affect candidate perceptions, we finally pose a hypothesis:

H1: Exposure by voters to a party leader's blog results in enhancement of other types of party leader trait perceptions than exposure to the same party leader's website.

THE FINNISH CASE

Several circumstances make Finland an interesting case for our study. Firstly, the basic prerequisite for online campaigning, a high level of societal internet penetration, was fulfilled early in Finland (Norris, 2000). Accordingly, and together with the fact that the electoral system is candidate-centred (see Ruostetsaari & Mattila, 2002), Finnish politicians have, from early on, experimented with individual uses online campaigns (Carlson & Strandberg, 2011; Carlson, Djupsund, & Strandberg, 2014). Secondly, the internet and social media have become increasingly important and frequently used sources for the Finnish electorate when seeking information for their vote choices. Moreover, what used to be an arena for the youngest citizens is now broadly used by middle-aged Finnish citizens, too (Strandberg, 2016). Thirdly, as to presidentialization trends, Finnish parties increasingly stress the images of their party leaders in campaigns (Paloheimo, 2003, 2005). Moreover, after the constitutional reform in 2000, reducing presidential power, Finnish parliamentary elections are also races for the next Prime Minister (Paloheimo, 2003, 2005). In practice, this competition concerns the three largest parties: the Social Democrats, the Centre Party, and the Conservative Party. Since each of these parties captures approximately 20% of the votes, coalition government is the rule. According to Paloheimo, the major parties…

> […] try to campaign so as to present their party leader as the most suitable prime minister for the next government. Therefore, the leaders of the big parties cannot be too militant. They have to present themselves as statesmen capable of leading a coalition government. (Paloheimo, 2003, p. 238)

Fourthly, this development has resonated within the Finnish electorate. The party leaders are usually well known in the public and survey research shows that the Finnish electorate increasingly feel that the significance of party leaders for vote choices has grown over time (von Schoultz, 2016) As noted by Paloheimo (2003), the evaluation of the skillfulness of party leaders has become a significant issue when Finnish voters make up their minds in elections (Paloheimo, 2003).

In sum, the personal quality of the party leaders of the three major parties is an important factor in modern Finnish election campaigns. Hence, it is logical that the leaders of these parties maintain personal websites, blogs and various social networking sites and apps in the elections. Moreover, it is relevant to examine the effects of exposure to such online campaign platforms by the party leaders on the perceptions held by young voters regarding the traits of party leaders.

Finally, the specific case of this study, the 2007 Finnish elections, was especially interesting since the leaders of the three major parties all had to deal with personal image concerns in their campaigns. When the incumbent Prime Minister, Matti Vanhanen, became party leader of the Centre Party in 2003, the public perceived him as a grey, dull, quiet, bureaucratic, modest, and non-confrontational politician (Arter, 2007; Karvonen, 2007). Over time, the Finns related to this and his image broadened. During the 2007 campaign, though, his former girlfriend

published a kiss-and-tell-book revealing his private life in public which could, possibly, jeopardize his established personal image. Nevertheless, in the polls on the eve of the elections, Vanhanen (51 years) was the most popular prime minister candidate (Arter, 2007). Yet, since Vanhanen and his party lost in the 2006 presidential and the 2004 local government elections, much was at stake this time.

The leaders of the other main parties were elected in the preceding parliamentary term and were, accordingly, inexperienced in competing as party leaders in parliamentary elections. The leader of the Social Democrats, Eero Heinäluoma (51 years), was a previous party secretary and trade union official.

According to Arter (2007), his image-problems were durable and acute in the campaign; he was publicly perceived as uncharismatic and grey and had the lowest approval rating as prime minster in the polls. The leader of the Conservatives, the youthful Jyrki Katainen (35 years), was largely unknown and inexperienced (Arter, 2007; Karvonen, 2007). Moreover, in the campaign, he was sometimes eclipsed by an experienced and highly popular former leader of the party, Sauli Niinistö (now the President of Finland), running for parliament. In sum, the three party leaders had to construct personal images in their campaigns in order to (a) convince the electorate of their leadership skills and suitability as prime minister, and (b) show up more personal sides of themselves. Their online campaigns were, arguably, a part of this two-folded strategy.

We now turn to the empirical experimental studies. As our experiments—one on trait perception effects of website exposure, the other on corresponding effects of blog exposure—were not originally intended for comparison, and thus were differently designed, we present the two studies and their findings separately (sections four and five). Thereafter, in order to test hypothesis H1, the findings of the two experiments are juxtaposed in section six.

EXPERIMENT 1: WEBSITES

Design and Procedures

Our first experiment, in which we study the effects of exposure to Finnish party leaders' websites on the perceptions held by voters regarding the traits of party leaders, used a pre-test-post-test control group design (see Campbell & Stanley, 1963; Gribbons & Herman, 1997). A sample of 96 participants was randomly assigned to two groups: an experimental group ($n = 34$) and a control group ($n = 62$).[1] This one-factor factorial design thus entails a good statistical power of 90% at a significance level (alpha = 0.05) of 95 per cent with medium effect size of approximately 0.5 (Kraemer & Thiemann, 1987). It should be noted that random allocation to different groups is an effective way to control for (1) the influence of known factors that can affect the outcome of the experiment (e.g. gender, age, levels of political interest), and (2) the influence of unknown (intervening) factors that may affect the outcome (Stoker, 2010, p. 304).

Our experiment was conducted in the final week leading up to the 2007 Finnish parliamentary election, thus raising the external validity. In the experimental group, participants filled out a pre-test questionnaire and thereafter browsed the campaign websites of the three major party leaders (Heinäluoma, Katainen, and Vanhanen) in turn for 10 minutes each. In order to minimize the risk of participants systematically comparing the websites to each other, and thus influencing the findings, the website viewing order was varied for each participant.[2] The pre-test questionnaire contained items about demographics, political interest, and a semantic differential scale evaluating the traits of each party leader. After studying the websites, the participants filled out a post-test questionnaire repeating the semantic differential scale and some general questions. The participants in the control group answered the same pre-test questionnaire as the experimental group, watched a non-political sitcom for 30 minutes, and thereafter completed the post-test questionnaire. Initially, all participants were told a cover story about our research objectives but they were debriefed after the study.

Participants

The participants consisted of university students. Accordingly, the majority of the participants (77%) were aged 18 to 25. The remaining 33% were between 25 and 35 years. Since the experiment used authentic politicians and real websites, the participants' young age is important in two regards. Firstly, at the time of the experiment, young people were clearly the ones among the Finnish citizens who used the internet the most, and who also deemed it as important for political purposes (Strandberg, 2009). This raises the external validity of the experiment as its participants were drawn from the usual web-users in Finland. Secondly, young adults tend to have weaker party affiliations and may therefore not be predisposed to favour (or disfavour) one party leader over another. Prior party affiliations might have served to affect our findings as a latent factor and thus render the findings less valid. The gender distribution was 67% female and 33% male. The participants were quite interested in the upcoming election; the average level of interest was 4.8 on a seven-point scale (SD = 1.3). When the participants of the experimental and the control group were compared to check if the randomization worked (see Gribbons & Herman, 1997), no significant differences by age, gender, or election interest were found (chi-square test and independent samples t-test). In addition, there was no significant difference between the participants in the two groups regarding the pre-experiment trait evaluations of the party leaders (independent samples t-test).

Dependent Measures

In measuring the participants' pre- and post-test perceptions of the traits of party leaders, we adapted a 12-item semantic differential scale assessing candidate image, developed by Kaid (1995) and widely used in experimental studies of campaign media effects (Kaid & Holtz-Bacha, 2006a). When used across countries and languages, this scale has achieved satisfactory reliability coefficients (Kaid & Holtz-Bacha, 1995, 2000). The 12 bipolar adjective pairs (each rated on a seven-point scale) were: incompetent-competent, dishonest-honest, unbelievable-believable, unsuccessful-successful, insincere-sincere, excitable-calm, undetermined-determined[3], weak-strong, inactive-active, unsophisticated-sophisticated, unattractive-attractive, and unfriendly-friendly. We added two pairs relevant to Finnish political culture; dull-humorous, and elitist-has the common touch. The pre-test/post-test internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's α) for the 14-item scale, used for answering our first research question (RQ1a), was .89/.92 (Heinäluoma), .88/.88 (Katainen) and .88/.88 (Vanhanen).

In order to be able to test hypothesis H1, the scale was split into two sub-scales. Five bipolar adjectives—unsophisticated-sophisticated, unattractive-attractive, unfriendly-friendly, dull-humorous, and elitist-has the common touch—were considered to be related to the personality of a politician. Accordingly, the scores of these items were summed and divided by the number of items to obtain a personality trait scale (range 1–7). The pre-test/post-test Cronbach's α for this sub-scale were .69/.74 (Heinäluoma), .71/.60 (Katainen), and .73/.69 (Vanhanen). The remaining bipolar adjectives were regarded to be related to a politician's professional role. By similarly summing the item scores and dividing by the number of items, a professional trait scale (range 1–7) was obtained (pre-test/post-test Cronbach's α: 87/.91 (Heinäluoma), .84/.86 (Katainen), and .84/.86 (Vanhanen).

Analysis

The difference in the mean scores from the pre-test to the post-test were tested for statistical significance ($p < .05$) separately for the experimental group and the control group (dependent samples t-test). If a statistically significant pre-test post-test change was found only in the experimental group, the website exposure affected the participants' perceptions of the traits of party leaders. In cases where significant pre-test post-test changes were found in both groups, mean change scores were compared between the groups in order to verify a true experimental effect of website exposure (independent samples t-test).

Results

Research question RQ1a concerned whether the general perceptions of the traits of the party leaders changed due to exposure to the party leaders' websites. As shown by the total 14-item scale in Table 1, the participants in the experimental group became significantly more favourable towards Heinäluoma after having browsed his website (+.30 which corresponds to 2 per cent of the scale). In the control group, there was no statistical significant change from pre-test to post-test.

[TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Studying Katainen's website had no significant effect in neither the treatment nor the control group. The participants' perception of Vanhanen's traits, finally, changed significantly in a positive direction in both the experimental group and the control group. However, since the difference between the change in the experimental group (+.13) and the change in the control group (+.09) is not statistically significant, the improved impressions of Vanhanen in the experimental group cannot be ascribed to website exposure with certainty.

The second research question (RQ1b) concerned which specific party leader trait perceptions are affected due to browsing the party leaders' websites. Hardly surprising, regarding exposure to Heinäluoma's website, several significant positive effects, not found in the control group, were found in the experimental group. Thus, after viewing his site, the participants in the experimental group regarded Heinäluoma as more successful, more determined, stronger, more active, and less elitist. After exposure, Katainen was regarded as significantly more successful and Vanhanen as more honest by the experimental group's participants, compared to the control group.

Summary

The findings of the first experiment, with one exception, give the impression that websites per se did not enhance the participants' perceptions of the three party leaders. Interestingly, though, the one party leader for whom browsing his website did have at least some effects, Mr. Heinäluoma, started at the lowest pre-exposure perception of traits among the participants. This suggests that websites may, after all, have an effect in strengthening voters' perception of their traits for lesser-known candidates who, so-to-speak, have more to gain than to lose.

EXPERIMENT 2: BLOGS

Design and Procedures

The second experiment employed a post-test only control group design (Campbell & Stanley, 1963; Gribbons & Herman, 1997) with 130 participants assigned to a control group ($n = 49$) and three experimental groups: one group who read Heinäluoma's blog ($n = 20$), one who read Katainen's blog ($n = 32$), and one who read Vanhanen's blog ($n = 29$). This setup yields a statistical power of 90 per cent at alpha = 0.05 and with medium expected effect size (Kraemer & Thiemann, 1987, p. 110). In each of the experimental groups, participants read the party leader blog which had been assigned to them and thereafter completed a questionnaire containing items concerning demographics, political interest, and a semantic differential scale evaluating the traits of the party leader in question. The control group, not exposed to any stimuli, answered a questionnaire including the same semantic differential scales evaluating each party leader's traits. As stimuli, we used the five most recent posts from each party leader's blog. All blog posts were thus authentic posts written by the party leaders themselves. This experiment, just like the first experiment, was carried out during the final week of the campaign. The participants were told a cover story about our research objectives; after completing the questionnaire, they were debriefed. This experiment was administered electronically: the stimulus, a data file containing the actual party leader blog with the five most recent posts available, and a link to an online questionnaire were sent by e-mail to the participants.

Participants

Initially, 508 e-mail addresses to students at a Finnish university were randomly assigned into the four groups of the experiment (127 students per group). In the e-mail messages posted to the groups, the students were asked to participate in our experiment (students participating in Experiment 1 were not invited). Among the 130 students that eventually volunteered, the average age was 24 ($SD = 2.8$) and the gender distribution was again heavily skewed at 78% female and 22% male. The level of interest in the upcoming election was 5.8 ($SD = 1.0$) on a seven-point scale. Since a large share of the addressees, randomly assigned to the groups, dropped off, statistical tests were conducted in order to check whether each final experimental group was equivalent to the final control group. Fortunately, despite the attrition, the initial randomization was effective: there were no significant pair-wise differences between the groups regarding age and interest in the upcoming election (ANOVA with Bonferroni pair-wise comparisons), and gender distribution (2x2 Fisher's exact test).

Dependent Measures

In measuring the participants' evaluations of the traits of the party leaders, we used the same 14-item semantic differential scale as in Experiment 1. The internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's α) for the scale was .92 (Heinäluoma), .90 (Katainen), and .93 (Vanhanen). In this experiment, too, the 14 items were additionally split into a personality trait scale and a professional trait scale (constructed as in Experiment 1). Cronbach's α for the personality and professional trait scales respectively were .82/.89 (Heinäluoma), .81/.86 (Katainen), and .79/.90 (Vanhanen).

Results

The question concerning whether the general perceptions of the traits of party leaders changed due to exposure to their blogs (RQ2a) is answered in Table 2 (the total 14-item scale).

[TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

Strikingly, reading a party leader blog yielded a significant effect for only one party leader: participants who read Heinäluoma's blog had a significantly more favourable general impression of him (4.41) than the participants in the control group (3.89). Regarding the question as to which specific party leader trait perceptions are influenced by party leader blog exposure (RQ2b), virtually all statistically significant effects were found for the participants reading Heinäluoma's blog. Compared to the control group, the participants evaluated Heinäluoma as more qualified (4.90 vs. 4.02), more honest (4.75 vs. 3.98), more believable (4.60 vs. 3.57), more sophisticated (4.10 vs. 3.22), and friendlier (4.55 vs. 3.53).

Summary

The general impression of the second experiment is similar to that of the first. Thus, significant effects were only found for participants who were exposed to Mr. Heinäluoma's blog posts. This, again, points to the importance of other factors, such as prior knowledge or impression of said politician, in conjunction with reading a blog in building the image of a politician.

COMPARING EFFECTS OF EXPOSURE TO WEBSITES AND BLOGS

Finally, although it is somewhat problematic to directly compare across the two experiments because of the different designs—one focusing on pre-post effects within and between groups and the other solely on between-group effects—we tentatively test the hypothesis (H1) stating that reading the party leaders' blogs results in an enhancement of other types of perceptions regarding the traits of party leaders than browsing their websites.

Firstly, we compare the mean scores of the two sub-scales, the professional trait scale and the personality trait scale, in the two experiments (Tables 1 and 2). Due to the scarcity of statistically significant effects found in the Katainen and Vanhanen cases, we focus on Heinäluoma here. The perception of Heinäluoma's professional traits was positively affected due to exposure to his website as well as his blog (.29 and .49 respectively). Interestingly, browsing Heinäluoma's website had no significant impact on the assessment of his personality traits (as the difference between the change in the experimental group and the change in the control group is not statistically significant), whereas reading his blog resulted in a significant and positive effect on the evaluation of his personality traits (mean score difference compared to control group = .59).

Secondly, we compare the effects concerning the perceptions of traits pertaining to specific party leaders in both experiments. Since such effects in the Katainen and Vanhanen cases were too few for any comparison to be made, we again focus on Heinäluoma. Table 3 shows that exposure to Heinäluoma's website and blog respectively resulted in enhanced impressions of quite different types of traits.

[TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE]

Strikingly, none of the specific trait perceptions improved by exposure to Heinäluoma's website are identical to the trait impressions positively affected by exposure to his blog. Regarding the web experiment, we note that the four enhanced professional trait perceptions—active, strong, determined, and successful—are conceptually inter-connected; they are related to political success and the prerequisites for being politically successful. Conversely, the trait perceptions affected by blog reading accentuate a two-dimensional party leader image. Thus, studying Heinäluoma's blog partly affected certain personality traits (friendly and sophisticated), and partly created an image of a credible politician (honest, believable, and qualified). These findings fit well into the general notion of how websites and blogs serve different roles for politicians whereby blogs tend to have a more personal touch than websites (Trammell et al., 2006; see also Karlsson & Åström, 2016).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This research has been exploratory rather than theory-driven, given that we have focused on a phenomenon that was new at the time of the experiments and thus had received little previous research attention. Interestingly, to this date, research focusing specifically on how blogs, and other social media platforms, affect impressions of traits of political leaders and candidates is still scarce. Our initial empirical findings have shed some light on voter impacts of party leader-centred web campaigning. Still, we have not, like prior research, been able to reach definite conclusions regarding whether web campaigning, by means of websites and social media tools, is clearly beneficial for political leaders in influencing voters' leader trait impressions. However, as the perceptions of two of the three party leaders observed in this study were not significantly influenced either by their websites or by blogs, a first conclusion must be that party leader-centred web campaigning efforts do not, generally, enhance voters' impressions of party leader character.

Of course, that general conclusion is challenged by the findings regarding Eero Heinäluoma. Strikingly, exposure to both his website and his blog positively affected the young voters' impressions of his general image and his professional traits. Additionally, the impressions of his personality traits were affected by reading his blog. Why was he successful when the others failed? Essentially, this suggests that there are interactions between the candidate and the medium he/she uses to convey an image of himself/herself. Regarding the medium, then, we firstly compared elements of the three websites. Here, we focused on website features related to four campaigning practices such as informing, involving, connecting, and mobilizing (Foot & Schneider, 2006). When Heinäluoma's site features are compared to those of the two other sites, there were more similarities than there were differences (see Appendix). If anything, Heinäluoma's site did better in providing certain interactive features: volunteer sign up, online polling, and email list sign up). Consistent with the previous research suggesting that the level of website interactivity affects perceptions of the candidate promoted on the website (e.g. Sundar et al., 2003), this would imply that Heinäluoma's website was more effective in enhancing party leader perceptions than the opponents' sites due to a better provision of interactivity features. However, the fact that the differences between the websites in the provision of various interactive features are less than dramatic makes such a conclusion uncertain.

Therefore, we propose another potential explanation. Earlier, we noted that Heinäluoma had the lowest approval rating as Prime Minister in the pre-election polls. Probably, to young voters, Heinäluoma—a middle-aged former trade union bureaucrat newly chosen as party leader—was, in comparison with the young Katainen and the incumbent Prime Minister, Matti Vanhanen, quite unfamiliar. Comparing the *pre-test* evaluations of the leaders in Experiment 1 (Table 1), we note that Heinäluoma was indeed rated lower by both the experimental group and control group on the 14-item trait scale (4.45/4.23) than Katainen (4.70/4.67) and Vanhanen (5.00/4.92). Arguably, then, when the participants of the experimental

group had to study Heinäluoma's website, their low expectations were exceeded. Speaking in terms of expectancy theories, their expectations were positively violated (Burgoon & Miller, 1985). This is confirmed by a correlation analysis revealing a significant negative correlation between the pre-test and the post-test score on the overall trait impression of Heinäluoma in the experimental group (Pearson's correlation: $r = -.482$; $p < .01$). In the control group, this negative correlation was absent ($r = -.026$; $p = .842$). Our second tentative conclusion, then, is that less well known and low-rated politicians might, to some extent, improve their image if voters examine their campaign websites.

Concerning the findings of the blog experiment, we suggest that the repeated success of Heinäluoma— and the failure of his opponents—can be explained partly by the expectancy-based reasoning above, and partly by differences in the party leaders' blog approaches. Again, there is an interaction between several factors in shaping the effect of blogging on perceptions of a candidate. Comparing the unexposed control group's trait evaluations of the party leaders (Table 2), we note that Heinäluoma was, again, rated considerably lower (3.89) than Katainen (4.42) and Vanhanen (4.59). Thus, some extent of a floor-effect might have been present. In addition, scrutinizing the blogs, we note that there were, in fact, differences in the blogging style of the party leaders. Although all three blogs lacked technical interactive features (no links and feedback options) and the five blog posts per blog were roughly equal in word-count[4], Heinäluoma's style of writing included more—although not very much—elements of text-based interactivity than the style of the others. Though all leaders wrote in the 1st person, Heinäluoma did better in promoting a personal immediacy and creating a sense that the reader was engaged in a conversation with him (compare Kruikemeier et al., 2013; Lee & Shin, 2012; Utz, 2009). Interwoven with political statements, Heinäluoma thanked supporters he had met on the campaign trail for their feedback, used colloquial expressions, and talked about his everyday life (visiting the barber; dancing with too big shoes; ice fishing bringing back childhood memories of fishing together with his father; revealing that his son, too, is interested in fishing). When comparing this to the noticeably more formal, political and less personal style in Katainen's and Vanhanen's blog posts, the positive effect of exposure to Heinäluoma's blog makes sense. Possibly, the fact that the participants who read Heinäluoma's blog evaluated him as being more credible (more honest and believable) and friendlier than did the control group, may be connected with the authenticity and personal presence in his blog. A third tentative conclusion, then, is that party leaders that dare to blog in accordance with the nature and practices of this social media tool—writing in a more personalized manner and creating a sense of dialogue—might affect the party leader perception of voters in a positive way. This might be the case particularly when the blog readers have low expectations: a politician who is a priori perceived as dull writing vivid and engaging blog posts might have success, given that the blogging appears authentic. As the deviant case in this study suggests, party leader blogs may, when used right and when voters exposed to them have low expectations, project a different image than the one projected by campaign

websites. For future online campaigns aiming to project positive party leader images, the main practical implication is that there is a need to understand websites and social media tools as being different, albeit complementary online campaigning genres. In the era of social media, the importance of these differences between online campaign platforms has been accentuated through the logic of long-tail campaigning whereby specific social media outlets serve specific nano-needs (Koster, 2009; Shaha, 2008).

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The findings presented in this study should be interpreted considering methodological limitations relevant to the study. Above all, convenience samples of young adult students were used. However, it can be argued that websites and blogs by party leaders are targeted particularly to the younger cohorts of voters. As noted above, young Finns regard the web as an important source of electoral information. Against this background, the selection of student samples in this study is less problematic. Nevertheless, future studies experimentally examining the effects of web and social media campaigns on party leader trait perception of voters should select samples more representative of the electorate in order to test the validity of our initial investigations. This has become increasingly relevant as the use of online sources has spread among older age cohorts.

Another potential limitation is that our samples were skewed towards female participants. The risk is that females evaluate the traits of (male) party leaders differently than males, making findings from a study with samples skewed towards female respondents hard to generalize. However, post hoc analyses of our data do not indicate this being the case.[5] That said, future studies should use more representative samples with an equal distribution between men and women.

An obvious direction for future studies of the image effects of party leader web campaigns is to combine systematic content analysis with experimental research in order to further investigate whether certain kinds of web features in real web campaigns affect certain kinds of trait impressions. Moreover, since 2007, the use of social media by party leaders has extended beyond blogs to include, for instance, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, and YouTube. Accordingly, future studies should include various social media tools in studying political image building online and its effects on voters. While there are some research efforts along these lines, studies focusing specifically on party leader traits are still surprisingly rare, even in the contemporary social media era and in the process of an increasing political personalization online.

18

REFERENCES

Arter, D. (2007). The end of the social democratic hegemony? The March 2007 Finnish general elections. *West European Politics*, *30*(5), 1148–1157. doi:10.1080/01402380701617506

Bittner, A. (2011). *Platform or personality? The role of party leaders in elections*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press. doi:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199595365.001.0001

Bittner, A. (2018). The personalization of parliamentary politics? In W. P. Cross, R. S. Katz, & S. Pruysers (Eds.), *The personalization of democratic politics and the challenge for political parties* (pp. 39–55). London, UK: Rowman & Littlefield.

Burgoon, M., & Miller, G. R. (1985). An expectancy interpretation of language and persuasion. In H. Giles & R. N. St. Clair (Eds.), *Recent advances in language, communication, and social psychology* (pp. 199–229). London, UK: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Campbell, D. T., & Stanley, J. C. (1963). *Experimental and quasi-experimental designs for research*. Chicago, IL: Rand McNally.

Carlson, T., Djupsund, G., & Strandberg, K. (2014). Taking risks in social media campaigning: The early adoption of blogging by candidates. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, *37*(1), 21–40. doi:10.1111/1467-9477.12011

Carlson, T., & Strandberg, K. (2011). The rise of web campaigning in Finland. In J. M. Ramos & R. L. Fox (Eds.), *iPolitics: Citizens, elections, and governing in the new media era* (pp. 125–150). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9781139059893.009

Cross, W. P., Katz, R. S., & Pruysers, S. (Eds.). (2018). *The personalization of democratic politics and the challenge for political parties*. London, UK: Rowman & Littlefield.

Endres, D., & Warnick, B. (2004). Text-based interactivity in candidate campaign web sites: A case study from the 2002 elections. *Western Journal of Communication*, *68*(3), 322–342. doi:10.1080/10570310409374804

Enli, G. S., & Skogerbø, E. (2013). Personalized campaigns in party-centred politics. *Information Communication and Society*, *16*(5), 757–774. doi:10.1080/1369118X.2013.782330

Foot, K. A., & Schneider, S. M. (2006). *Web campaigning*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. doi:10.7551/ mitpress/7186.001.0001

Garzia, D. (2011). The personalization of politics in western democracies: Causes and consequences on leader–follower relationships. *The Leadership Quarterly*, *22*(4), 697–709. doi:10.1016/j.leaqua.2011.05.010

Graham, T., Jackson, D., & Broersma, M. (2018). The personal in the political on Twitter: Towards a typology of politicians' personalized tweeting behaviours. In J. Schwanholz, T. Graham, & P. T. Stoll (Eds.), *Managing democracy in the digital age* (pp. 137–155). Cham, Switzerland: Springer. doi:10.1007/978-3-319-61708-4_8

Gribbons, B., & Herman, J. (1997). True and quasi-experimental designs. *Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluation*, *5*(14), 1–3.

Hansen, G. J., & Benoit, W. L. (2005). Presidential campaigning on the web: The influence of candidate World Wide Web sites in the 2000 general election. *The Southern Communication Journal*, *70*(3), 219–228. doi:10.1080/10417940509373328

Jackson, N. (2006). Dipping their big toe into the blogosphere: The use of weblogs by the political parties in the 2005 general election. *Aslib Proceedings*, *58*(4), 292–303. doi:10.1108/00012530610687678

Jackson, N., & Lilleker, D. (2011). Microblogging, Constituency service and impression management: UK MPs and the use of Twitter. *Journal of Legislative Studies*, *17*(1), 86–105. doi:10.1080/13572334 .2011.545181

Kaid, L. L. (1995). Measuring candidate images with semantic differentials. In K. Hacker (Ed.), *Candidate images in presidential elections* (pp. 131–134). Westport, CT: Praeger.

Kaid, L. L., & Holtz-Bacha, C. (1995). Political advertising across cultures: Comparing content, style, and effects. In L. L. Kaid & C. Holtz-Bacha (Eds.), *Political advertising in western democracies: Parties and candidates on television* (pp. 206–227). London, UK: Sage.

Kaid, L. L., & Holtz-Bacha, C. (2000). Gender reactions to TV political broadcasts: A multicountry comparison. *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, *5*(2), 17–29.

Kaid, L. L., & Holtz-Bacha, C. (2006a). Television advertising and democratic systems around the world. In L. L. Kaid & C. Holtz-Bacha (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of political advertising* (pp. 445–457). London, UK: Sage. doi:10.4135/9781412973403.n27

Karlsson, M. (2013). *Covering distance. Essays on representation and political communication*. Örebro, Sweden: Örebro Studies in Political Science 33.

Karlsson, M. (2015). Interactive, qualitative, and inclusive? Assessing the deliberative capacity of the political blogosphere. In K. Jezierska & L. Koczanowicz (Eds.), *Democracy in dialogue in democracy: The politics of dialogue in theory and practice* (pp. 253–270). Farnham, UK: Ashgate.

Karlsson, M., & Åström, J. (2016). The political blog space: A new arena for political representation? *New Media & Society*, *18*(3), 465–483. doi:10.1177/1461444814543990

Karvonen, K. (2007). *Gang of Three*. Retrieved from http://newsroom.finland.fi/netcomm/news/showarticle.asp?intNWSAID=60434

Karvonen, L. (2010). *The personalization of politics: A study of parliamentary democracies*. Colchester, UK: ECPR Press.

Koster, J. (2009). Long-tail nanotargeting. Al Franken's online ad buys earned an unbelievable return on investment. *Politics*, (Feb), 23–26.

Kraemer, H., & Thiemann, S. (1987). *How many subjects? Statistical power analysis in research*. London, UK: Sage.

Kruikemeier, S., van Noort, G., Vliegenthart, R., & de Vreese, C. H. (2013). Getting closer: The effects of personalized and interactive online political communication. *European Journal of Communication*, *28*(1), 53–66. doi:10.1177/0267323112464837

Lalancette, M., & Raynauld, V. (2017). The power of political image: Justin Trudeau, Instagram, and celebrity politics. *The American Behavioral Scientist*. doi:10.1177/0002764217744838

Larsson, A. O. (2015). Pandering, protesting, engaging. Norwegian party leaders on Facebook during the 2013 'Short campaign'. *Information Communication and Society*, *18*(4), 459–473. doi:10.1080/1369118X.2014.967269

Larsson, A. O., & Ihlen, Ø. (2015). Birds of a feather flock together? Party leaders on Twitter during the 2013 Norwegian elections. *European Journal of Communication*, *30*(6), 666–681. doi:10.1177/0267323115595525

Lee, E.-J., & Shin, S. Y. (2012). Are they talking to me? Cognitive and affective effects of interactivity in politicians' Twitter communication. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, *15*(10), 515–520. doi:10.1089/cyber.2012.0228 PMID:22970827

McAllister, I. (2007). The personalization of politics. In R. J. Dalton & H.-D. Klingemann (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of political behavior* (pp. 571–588). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

McGregor, S. C. (2018). Personalization, social media, and voting: Effects of candidate self-personalization on vote intention. *New Media & Society*, *20*(3), 1139–1160. doi:10.1177/1461444816686103

Mughan, A. (2000). *Media and the presidentialization of parliamentary elections*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave. doi:10.1057/9781403920126

Norris, P. (2000). The Internet in Europe: A new north-south divide? *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, *5*(1), 1–12. doi:10.1177/1081180X00005001001

Paloheimo, H. (2003). The rising power of the Prime Minister in Finland. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, *26*(3), 219–243. doi:10.1111/1467-9477.00086

Paloheimo, H. (2005). Let the force be with the leader – but who is the leader? In T. Poguntke & P. D. Webb (Eds.), *The presidentialization of politics: A comparative study of modern democracies* (pp. 246–268). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press. doi:10.1093/0199252017.003.0011

Poguntke, T., & Webb, P. D. (Eds.). (2005). *The presidentialization of politics: A comparative study of modern democracies*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press. doi:10.1093/0199252017.001.0001

Pruysers, S., Cross, W. P., & Katz, R. S. (2018). Personalism, personalization and party politics. In W. P. Cross, R. S. Katz, & S. Pruysers (Eds.), *The personalization of democratic politics and the challenge for political parties* (pp. 1–17). London, UK: Rowman & Littlefield.

Rahat, G., & Zamir, S. (2018). Personalized politics online. In W. P. Cross, R. S. Katz, & S. Pruysers (Eds.), *The personalization of democratic politics and the challenge for political parties* (pp. 103–124). London, UK: Rowman & Littlefield.

Ruostetsaari, I., & Mattila, M. (2002). Candidate-centred campaigns and their effects in an open list system: The case of Finland. In D. M. Farrell & R. Schmitt-Beck (Eds.), *Do political campaigns matter Campaign Effects in Elections and Referendums* (pp. 93–107). London, UK: Routledge. doi:10.4324/9780203166956_chapter_6

Shaha, A. (2008). Long tail politics: Sell less of more. *Politics*, (Nov), 14–15.

Small, T. A. (2016). Parties, leaders and online personalization: Twitter in Canadian electoral politics. In R. Davis, C. Holtz-Bacha, & M. R. Just (Eds.), *Twitter and elections around the world: Campaigning in 140 characters or less* (pp. 189–205). New York, NY: Routledge.

Stoker, G. (2010). Exploring the promise of experimentation in political science: Micro-Foundational insights and policy relevance. *Political Studies*, *58*(2), 300–319. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9248.2009.00812.x

Strandberg, K. (2006). *Parties, candidates and citizens on-line: Studies of politics on the Internet*. Åbo, Finland: Åbo Akademi University Press.

Strandberg, K. (2009). Internet vaalikampanjassa: Etulinjassa vai marginaalissa? In H. Paloheimo & S. Borg (Eds.), *Vaalit yleisödemokratiassa* (pp. 60–93). Tampere, Finland: Tampere University Press.

Strandberg, K. (2016). Ehdokkaiden ja kansalaisten internetin ja sosiaalisen median poliittinen käyttö vuosien 2003–2015 eduskuntavaaleissa. In K. Grönlund & H. Wass (Eds.), *Poliittisen osallistumisen eriytyminen – Eduskuntatutkimus 2015* (pp. 95–116). Helsinki, Finland: Finnish Ministry of Justice.

Sundar, S. S., Kalyanaraman, S., & Brown, J. (2003). Explicating web site interactivity: Impression formation effects in political campaign sites. *Communication Research*, *30*(1), 30–59. doi:10.1177/0093650202239025

Trammell, K. D., Williams, A. P., Postelnicu, M., & Landreville, K. D. (2006). Evolution of online campaigning: Increasing interactivity in candidate web sites and blogs through text and technical features. *Mass Communication & Society*, *9*(1), 21–44. doi:10.120715327825mcs0901_2

Utz, S. (2009). The (potential) benefits of campaigning via social network sites. *Journal of ComputerMediated Communication*, *14*(2), 221–243. doi:10.1111/j.1083-6101.2009.01438.x

van Os, R., Hagemann, C., Voerman, G., & Jankowski, N. W. (2007). The Netherlands: Party and candidate websites during the 2004 European Parliament election campaign. In R. Kluver, N. W. Jankowski, K. A. Foot, & S. M. Schneider (Eds.), *The Internet and national elections: A comparative study of web campaigning* (pp. 43–59). London, UK: Routledge.

Vergeer, M., Hermans, L., & Sams, S. (2013). Online social networks and micro-blogging in political campaigning: The exploration of a new campaign tool and a new campaign style. *Party Politics*, *19*(3), 477–501. doi:10.1177/1354068811407580

Voerman, G., & Boogers, M. (2008). Netherlands: Digital campaigning in the 2002 and 2003 parliamentary elections. In S. J. Ward, D. Owen, R. Davis, & D. Taras (Eds.), *Making a difference: A comparative view of the role of the Internet in election politics* (pp. 197–216). Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

von Schoultz, Å. (2016). Puolueiden puheenjohtajien merkitys äänestyspäätöksen kannalta. In K. Grönlund & H. Wass (Eds.), *Poliittisen*

osallistumisen eriytyminen – Eduskuntatutkimus 2015 (pp. 159–177). Helsinki, Finland: Finnish Ministry of Justice.

Warnick, B., Xenos, M., Endres, D., & Gastil, J. (2005). Effects of campaign-to-user and text-based interactivity in political candidate campaign web sites. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *10*(3), 5.

Williams, A. P., Trammell, K. D., Postelnicu, M., Landreville, K. D., & Martin, J. (2005). Blogging and hyperlinking: Use of the web to enhance viability during the 2004 U.S. campaign. *Journalism Studies*, *6*(2), 177–186. doi:10.1080/14616700500057262

APPENDIX

[TABLE A HERE]

ENDNOTES

[1] The control group was over-sampled to create a pool of participants who could be used as control subjects in other planned experiments during the election campaign.

[2] The party leaders included their blogs—the stimuli in our second experiment—in their websites. This could have resulted in a situation where the participants in the website experiment were mostly reading the candidates blogs instead of studying the website. Using tracking software, all sessions were recorded and mouse patterns as well as eye movements were tracked during the experiment. Thus, we could examine how the participants had browsed each website. Fortunately, the examination of these data showed that the participants did not generally spend much time reading the blogs: The average share (in percentages) spent for blog reading during the 10 minutes of web browsing per party leader site was 16% (Heinäluoma), 14% (Katainen), and 8% (Vanhanen).

[3] Originally, this pair was titled unaggressive-aggressive (Kaid, 1995). Since aggressiveness is not considered a positive trait in the Finnish political culture, we used this re-titled pair.

[4] Heinäluoma's posts: $M = 258$, Katainen's posts: $M = 315$, Vanhanen's posts: $M = 246$.

[5] For example, in the website experiment, the male and female respondents in the experimental group did not differ significantly as to the change between the pre- and post-test of the overall trait evaluation of Heinäluoma (2-sided independent t-test; $p = 226$). The same goes for the pretest-posttest change of Heinäluoma's political and personal trait impressions ($p = .279$ and $.345$ respectively).

Table 1. Effects of Exposure to Party Leaders' Websites on Party Leader Trait Perception (pre-test mean scores and pre-test-post-test change)

	Heinäluoma				Katainen				Vanhanen			
	Experimental group		Control group		Experimental group		Control group		Experimental group		Control group	
Traits	Pre	Change	Pre	Change	Pre	Change	Pre	Change	Pre	Change	Pre	Change
Professional traits												
Qualified	4.85	.29	4.58	−.02	4.91	.15	4.87	.23	5.64	.09	5.66	.16
Honest	4.64	.12	4.18	.05	4.62	.09	4.53	*.19	4.82	* a.29	5.15	*−.21
Believable	4.61	.12	4.13	.16	4.59	.06	4.53	.15	5.23	.21	5.02	.03
Successful	4.76	*.35	4.35	.15	5.03	*.29	5.19	−.10	5.61	.12	5.24	.23
Sincere	4.47	.26	4.15	−.03	4.56	−.06	4.48	.05	4.88	.29	4.84	.08
Calm	4.97	.06	4.95	−.29	4.26	−.21	4.18	−.03	5.53	.00	5.82	−.06
Determined	4.70	*.35	4.61	.16	5.26	−.06	5.13	−.13	5.41	.00	4.94	*.26
Strong	4.47	*.47	4.56	.11	4.85	.09	4.87	−.02	5.12	.21	5.02	*.21
Active	4.35	*.62	4.63	−.16	5.09	.09	5.08	−.03	4.91	*.35	4.61	**.44
Total sub-scale:	4.65	**.29	4.46	.01	4.80	***−.53	4.75	***−.52	5.23	*.17	5.14	.09
Personality traits												
Sophisticated	4.26	.18	3.85	**.27	5.15	−.03	5.03	−.02	4.97	.09	4.92	.21
Attractive	3.50	.35	3.05	*.31	4.35	.03	4.69	−.05	4.50	.15	4.58	.13
Friendly	4.62	.21	4.24	−.02	4.74	.15	4.92	−.19	5.06	.03	5.18	−.10
Humorous	3.82	.44	3.47	*.21	4.62	−.12	4.42	−.15	4.12	.18	3.60	.23
Has the common touch	4.29	*.44	4.48	−.13	3.71	.12	3.60	−.03	4.38	−.15	4.29	.48
Total sub-scale:	4.10	**.32	3.82	*.13	4.51	.03	4.51	−.07	4.61	.06	4.51	*.10
Total 14-item scale:	4.45	*.30	4.23	.06	4.70	.04	4.67	−.00	5.00	*.13	4.92	*.09

Note: Experimental group: *n* = 34; control group: *n* = 62.
* *p* < .05; ** *p* < .01; *** *p* < .001 (change within group, two-tailed paired samples *t*-test)
ᵃ *p* <.01 (change compared to change in control group; two-tailed independent samples *t*-test)

Table 2. *Effects of Exposure to Party Leaders' Blogs on Party Leader Trait Perception (mean scores)*

Traits	Heinäluoma			Katainen			Vanhanen		
	Experimental group (*n* = 20)	Control group (*n* = 49)	Diff.	Experimental group (*n* = 32)	Control group (*n* = 49)	Diff.	Experimental group (*n* = 29)	Control group (*n* = 49)	Diff.
Professional traits									
Qualified	4.90	4.02	*.88	4.81	4.67	.14	5.10	5.33	− .23
Honest	4.75	3.98	*.77	4.19	4.22	− .03	4.83	4.39	.44
Believable	4.60	3.57	**1.03	3.88	4.14	− .26	4.90	4.57	.33
Successful	4.25	4.06	.19	4.72	4.96	− .24	4.52	5.20	*− .68
Sincere	4.25	3.73	.52	4.22	4.16	.06	4.21	4.29	− .08
Calm	5.50	5.37	.13	4.81	4.24	.57	6.03	6.20	− .17
Determined	5.15	4.94	.21	5.69	5.33	.36	5.21	5.02	.19
Strong	4.65	4.27	.38	4.50	4.20	.30	4.21	4.61	− .40
Active	4.60	4.31	.29	5.28	4.98	.30	4.31	4.39	− .08
Total sub-scale:	4.74	4.25	*.49	4.68	4.55	.13	4.81	4.89	− .08
Personality traits									
Sophisticated	4.10	3.22	**.88	4.81	5.02	− .21	4.38	4.53	− .15
Attractive	2.65	2.31	.34	4.13	4.22	− .09	3.17	3.57	− .40
Friendly	4.55	3.53	**1.02	4.09	4.24	− .15	4.21	4.61	− .40
Humorous	3.20	2.98	.22	3.44	4.00	− .56	2.93	3.04	− .11
Has the common touch	4.65	4.14	.51	3.31	3.14	.17	4.59	4.57	.02
Total sub-scale:	3.83	3.24	*.59	3.96	4.13	− .17	3.86	4.06	− .21
Total 14-item scale	4.41	3.89	*.52	4.42	4.40	.02	4.47	4.59	− .12

Note: * *p* < .05; ** *p* < .01 (two-tailed independent samples *t*-test).

Table 3. *Comparing the Experiments: Significant Effects of Exposure to Heinäluoma's Website versus His Blog*

Trait perceptions significantly affected in the experiments	Significant effects	
	Web experiment	Blog experiment
Active	X	—
Strong	X	—
Has the common touch	X	—
Determined	X	—
Successful	X	—
Believable	—	X
Friendly	—	X
Sophisticated	—	X
Qualified	—	X
Honest	—	X

Table A. *A Comparison of Elements in the Websites of the Party Leaders*

Features	Heinäluoma's website	Katainen's website	Vanhanen's website
Informational features			
Biography	●	●	●
Issue positions	●	●	●
Comparison of issue positions	●	●	●
Speech texts	●	●	●
Items on party's election programme	○	○	○
Items on party's campaign	○	○	○
Current party news	○	○	○
Audio clips	○	○	○
Campaign news	●	○	●
Endorsements	●	○	●
Number of photos	65	6	57
Video clips	○	○	● (1)
Connecting features			
Link to party site	●	●	●
Number of links to other sites	20	7	n.c.
Involvement features			
Email address	●	●	●
Visitor comments	●	●	●
Donations	○	○	○
RSS updates	○	○	○
Online chat	○	○	○
Photos of campaign events	●	○	●
Calendar	●	○	●
Volunteer sign up	●	○	n.c.
Email list sign up	●	○	n.c.
Online polls	●	○	n.c.
Mobilizing features			
Offline distribution	○	○	○
Send links	○	○	○
E-paraphernalia	○	○	○

Note: ● = Present; ○ = absent; n.c. = not coded due to technical problems with the archived website.