

# Social media in campaigning — citizens and politicians in the 2010 Swedish election



**Annika Bergström**

UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG, SWEDEN

**ABSTRACT:** Within the last few years, social media have emerged and offer network possibilities for political communication. There are large expectations of social media in campaigning and many politicians turned to such networks in the 2010 Swedish election. In spite of the high level of internet penetration and use in Sweden, people seem reluctant to go online for politics. Survey data collected in an e-panel was analyzed with a focus on social media to reveal to what extent internet users contact politicians, the information value of these channels and what users expect from politicians during campaigning. Even among frequent users such as the e-panel members, involvement in politics and politicians in social media is rather low. People tend to view social media as an information channel for politics rather than a conversation medium. Politicians should respond to questions if requested, but not assume the position of friends in peoples' networks.

**KEY WORDS:** political involvement, online participation, social media networks, internet use, personalized profiles, digital divide



## **INTRODUCTION: SOCIAL MEDIA IN CAMPAIGNING — CITIZENS AND POLITICIANS IN THE 2010 SWEDISH ELECTION**

The introduction of the Internet can be considered as a turning point in political communication (Castells, 2007). Furthermore, it is obvious that the Internet plays some role in campaigning processes (Smith, 2009) by providing large amounts of information (Lilleker & Malagón, 2010; Schweitzer, 2008) and by enabling dialogue (McMillan, 2002). Bimber (2010) argues that contacting officials through the Internet differs from traditional contacts since cost and effect aspects differ. The Internet dramatically reduces the time and inconvenience involved in the communication process.

Within the last few years, so-called social media have emerged and offer network possibilities for political communication. The increasing number of users makes social network sites like Facebook, Twitter and Youtube interesting venues for political campaigns. In the 2010 Swedish elections, several candidates and parties in-

corporated different social network sites in their campaigning, some of them just because it was possible, some hoping to catch votes and some to converse and discuss with citizens and voters. Blogs are also part of social media and it is evident that political bloggers consider the blogosphere as a platform for disseminating information and expressing political opinions and they also wish to provide alternative perspectives to mainstream media (Ekdale et.al., 2010).

Just as with the Internet in general, great expectations have been invested in social media with regard to politics and campaigning. However, research points to the fact that social media have less influence than first believed. It has turned out, for instance, that blog audiences are much smaller than commonly believed (Drezner & Farrell, 2008). A fragmented readership indicates that the influence of political bloggers extends only to a small audience already in agreement with a blog's particular viewpoint (Ekdale et.al., 2010). It is more likely that blogs influence the general public through traditional news media (Adamic & Glance, 2005).

The influence of social media on political communication and participation has been studied less. The theoretical framework of this study combines what is known from online political participation with knowledge about the use of social media. Three research questions are in focus in this article:

RQ1 To what extent have people contacted politicians on social media during the 2010 election campaigning period?

RQ2 How do people perceive social media as political information channels?

RQ3 How do people consider social media in campaigning, is it desirable to find politicians on the networks and what are they supposed to do?

Much research regarding political communication on the Internet has been carried out in the Anglo-Saxon context. Sweden represents what Hallin and Mancini (2004) call the *Northern European* or *Democratic Corporatist* model which differs from the *North Atlantic* or *Liberal* model represented by, among others, the United States and Great Britain. Media structure models differ in terms of political systems as well as media systems and this study widens the scope of online political activity. The case of Sweden is also interesting since it is one of the top ten countries when comparing internet access, skills and use. The preconditions for online political communication are favourable, and yet the above-mentioned reluctance is striking.

## **INVOLVEMENT IN SOCIAL MEDIA AND ONLINE POLITICS**

There has been worldwide rapid growth in the use of social network sites within the last few years (cf. Lenhart et.al., 2010; Pascu, 2008). Many new blogs have been created, videos and photos have been uploaded, profiles created and postings published. The characteristics of the 21st century media are, among others, blurring the boundaries between producer and consumer, low publishing costs and new tools opening up for different groups to develop their own public space (cf. Papacharissi,

2002; Silverstone, 2007). It is important to keep in mind that in spite of the many advantages with online communication, there are no guarantees for a fair or representative public sphere. It seems that online discussions are dominated by a few and “while the Internet has the potential to extend the public sphere [...] not all of us are able or willing to take on the challenge” (Papacharissi, 2002, p. 15).

Identifying the unique qualities of social media is challenging since all media have a social element (Hogan & Quan-Haase, 2010). There are, however, ways of defining them: social network sites are ‘web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system’ (Boyd & Ellison, 2007, p. 211). Social network sites are a means for self-presentation and for building and maintaining contact with friends and acquaintances (Boyd, 2006; Ellison et.al., 2007). They are so-called user-centred networks meaning that people use them to present themselves and their interests and to display themselves to their networks (Utz, 2009).

There is no single standard for all social media sites. Most social network sites integrate different forms of computer-mediated communication, as they invite convergence among activities such as e-mail, messaging, website creation, diaries and photo albums (Livingstone, 2007). Each form of social media has developed its own niche in terms of the kinds of communicative practices that it supports (Hogan & Quan-Haase, 2010). Facebook, for instance, has direct messaging systems akin to e-mail. The site also provides a platform for broadcasting ideas, thoughts and feelings to a wider audience composed of close and distant friends as well as friends of friends (Quan-Haase & Young, 2010).

Computer-mediated communication has the capacity for enabling high interactivity, which is one of the key features in the online social network environment. There is no single definition of interactivity; the term is treated in a variety of ways in research literature. Rafaeli and Sudweeks (1997) argue that interactivity is about responsiveness, a condition of communication in which simultaneous and continuous exchange occur. McMillan (2002) suggests a four-part model also including the level of receiver control over the communication process. The *monologue* is one-way communication with relatively little receiver control (for instance corporate web sites). *Feedback* is primarily one-way but allows receivers limited participation and sender and receiver roles are distinct (e-mail links). A *responsive dialogue* enables two-way communication but the sender retains primary control (e-commerce, customer support websites). *Mutual discourse* is two-way communication that gives receivers a great deal of control. All participants have the opportunity to send and receive messages (chat rooms, bulletin boards). Social media combines features of one-way media and two-way media. Information is broadcast from one source to an audience but individuals can react and respond to this communication through the same channels (Hogan & Quan-Haase, 2010).

Social network sites, unlike websites and weblogs, include the profiles of political candidates in the same context as users or citizens. One does not have to direct browsers to certain websites or weblogs. Social network sites can therefore provide users with unanticipated exposure to candidates, since users might stumble upon a candidate's profile while browsing friends. It turns out that this is more likely for very active users, no matter what size their network is (Utz, 2009).

Generally, internet users engage in content creation and social networks online to establish personal identity, gain respect and publish their experience(s) but also to socialize with friends and to be entertained. Wanting to be recognized is the strongest motivation for reading, writing and commenting on other people's blogs and posting videos on YouTube. Online content producers value expressing and sharing their feelings, viewpoints and experiences (Leung, 2009). It is evident that motives for blogging are also often of a personal character. Bloggers wish to document their own lives, express deeply-felt emotions, articulate ideas and maintain community forums (Ekdale et.al., 2010; Nardi et.al., 2004).

The personal orientation is also confirmed in research focusing on people's contacts. Despite the potential for global networking on the Internet, most people's contacts are local (boyd, 2008; Gross, 2004). There is less interest in 'strangers' or distant others (Boneva et.al., 2006; Mesch & Talmud, 2007). Facebook, for instance, is primarily used to keep in touch with old friends and to maintain or intensify relationships characterised by some form of offline connection (Ellison et.al., 2007). American teens devote most of their time to private communication, mostly message boards or chat rooms, and most of this time is spent with people met offline (Gross, 2004). Furthermore, it turns out that London-based students value Facebook particularly for the way it enables broad, low pressure and low commitment communication with acquaintances (Lewis & West, 2009).

It is important to stress that participatory media products, also including social network sites, will have audiences that are not involved in the participatory process (Carpentier, 2009). It seems that a minority of users contribute with a disproportionately large share of the overall amount of user-generated content. Only a few percent of the population create or edit articles on Wikipedia, write blogs, upload videos or comment on other people's contributions (cf. Fisch & Gscheidle, 2008; Limonard, 2007; OECD, 2007).

It is evident that many activities in online environments are motivated by individual interest and involvement, not least political activity. Generally, it seems that political online activities such as contacting politicians, work quite similarly in demographic terms to traditional contacts. Bimber (2010) concludes that technology itself leads to slightly different behaviour but the effects are small and quite subtle. Traditional models explaining contacts in terms of for instance education, age, gender and political connectedness can be extended to new media with only a few modifications.

There are differences in use and motives for use when comparing different groups in society. One of the most important factors explaining general online ac-

tivity is age. The younger generation appears to participate more in online discussions and overall digital political activity has been shown to be more common among young people (cf. Clark, 2002; Davis, 2005; Mesch & Coleman, 2007; Winsvold, 2007). Bimber (2010) shows in a multivariate analysis that for contacting politicians in traditional ways such as by telephone, age is a significant predictor with higher rates of contact among older persons, whereas for e-mail contact age shows a slight negative effect. When talking about contribution in a wider sense, young people tend to generate more content than older persons; uploading music and films are common activities in groups of younger persons (Limonard, 2007; Nielsen, 2006; Tancer, 2007).

Furthermore, female internet users tend to be less involved in accessing political information and less involved in online political communication (Davis, 2005; Mesch & Coleman, 2007). Women seem to be more active in expressing personal matters, while men are more likely to become involved in public forums, political discussions and debates (Limonard, 2007; Nielsen, 2006; Tancer, 2007). However, gender has proved to be of less importance for online political participation than age.

The most frequent participants are well-educated, and the working class is under-represented in online political life. Postings for instance could be viewed as the opinions of a well-educated minority rather than of a cross-section of the general public (Clark, 2002; Davis, 2005). The probability of communicating with government has been shown to be a function of education among other factors. The more education, the more the activity (Bimber, 2010). But there is also evidence showing that the well-educated are less likely to attend an online political forum. One explanation might be that they have other forums for expression and simply do not need yet another one (Davis, 2005).

Much of the virtual sphere resembles traditional politics rather than reforming it (Papacharissi, 2002). There is little evidence that the Internet attracts those not already politically involved (Livingstone, 2007). Much previous research points to the fact that web campaigns have usually been visited mainly by citizens who are highly interested in politics (Bimber & Davis, 2003). Online political activity is more frequent among people already politically involved (Winsvold, 2007) and to a great extent participators already have links to established political organizations (Clark, 2002).

To conclude, political online communication shows diverse patterns and has thus far not attracted the masses. Social network sites involve more and more people, but it seems that contact with friends who are already familiar and personal expressions attract the most. Politicians are simply stumbling into people's living rooms. From what is known from online political involvement, it is also likely that social network sites will constitute yet another platform for people already engaged in online activities and in politics. This study intends to find out the potential of social networking during campaigning and whom it might attract.

## METHODS

The presented analyses are based on data collected in an e-panel during the 2010 Swedish election campaign (see [www.mod.gu.se/lore/e\\_panelen2010](http://www.mod.gu.se/lore/e_panelen2010)). The so-called *campaign panel* is a six-wave panel study. During the intense election campaign, four pre-election web questionnaires and a post-election questionnaire containing more than 180 sets of questions were sent out to almost 15,000 respondents. The panel members were self-recruited via advertisements on internet portals, such as research portals, news sites and university sites.

Internet panels of volunteer respondents do suffer from representative bias. The campaign panel is particularly biased in terms of gender as there are fewer women than men compared to the Swedish population as a whole. Furthermore, the respondents in the panel are younger, more politically interested and more highly educated than the average Swedish population (Dahlberg et al., 2010). When comparing a group of frequent internet users in an e-survey with the same group in a mail survey, however, many of these differences disappear. An e-panel seems to be fairly representative for frequent internet users (Nilsson et al., 2007).

The purpose of the study that has been conducted is to reveal attitudes towards politicians in social media and the actual communication between voters and elected in the new digital networks. Using the campaign panel has several advantages. Firstly, the method is quick and will pick up attitudes and actions during the election campaign. This gives a “real time” experience. Since the focus is on social media networks, it is further interesting to establish who the frequent internet users actually are, and the panel is a suitable choice for that.

Data was collected during a five-week period from August 24th to September 30th, 2010. The web surveys randomly put each individual’s questionnaire together; each panel member received one short (8 to 10 questions) questionnaire a week. This design was chosen to keep down the number of questions for each individual panel member in order to keep up the response rate. The surveys were posted on different weekdays to make possible analysis of the impact of television debates, single initiatives or scandals during the campaigning period.

The e-panel survey included questions about the attitudes towards politicians’ appearance in social media networks along with questions on which network sites were used, whether the respondents had contacted a politician during the campaign period and how they perceive social media as a channel for political information. Apart from these specific questions there are several background questions both of demographic character and about political interest and involvement.

It is obvious that the study that has been conducted will not give a representative picture of the Swedish adult population but rather a fairly representative picture of frequent internet users during the last few weeks before election day. The results should be interpreted as tendencies regarding social media networks and their role in the campaign.

## FINDINGS

Before the Swedish election on September 19 2010, many local and national politicians signed on to different social networks on the Internet. News coverage focused a great deal on the value of social media for communication, campaigning and of course its significance for the outcome of the election. It is evident that social media is perceived and used to a large extent as some kind of private sphere where people socialize with family and friends already known from offline. The findings focus on contact that took place on social media networks and how the public perceived politicians' appearances in social media networks during campaigning.

The first issue in the analysis is about whether politicians should be found on social media networks in the first place. Do people find it desirable to find politicians among their friends and followers? One third of the panel members found this very important (value 8–10, Table 1), the mean is 5.44 on a scale from 0 to 10. About one fourth did not find it important at all (value 0–2). Almost half of the respondents were more half-hearted towards whether politicians should be on social media or not (value 3–7).

Table 1. People's attitudes towards politicians' appearance on social media (mean, percent)

	Mean	Percent, value 8–10	Number of answers	Logistic regression, odds
All	5.44	32	3003	
Gender:				
Women	6.29	42	1124	2.19***
Men (ref)	5.00	27	1863	1
Age:				
15–24 years	6.08	40	228	0.62
25–29 years	5.40	28	306	0.53*
30–34 years	5.55	31	348	0.59*
35–39 years	5.34	30	363	0.66
40–44 years	5.34	30	306	0.55*
45–49 years	5.42	33	305	0.58*
50–54 years	5.23	33	309	0.51**
55–59 years	5.22	29	272	0.55*
60–64 years	5.42	34	234	0.58*
65–69 years	5.55	32	213	0.70
70 years or more (ref)	6.41	50	119	1

	Mean	Percent, value 8–10	Number of answers	Logistic regression, odds
Level of education:				
High	6.07	41	133	0.54**
Above average	5.90	37	578	0.74
Below average	5.70	36	914	0.88
Low (ref)	5.09	27	1372	1
General political interest:				
Very interested	5.31	30	1464	0.98
Fairly interested	5.40	32	1590	0.87
Not very interested	5.73	33	341	1.02
Not interested at all (ref)	5.50	29	24	1
Nagelkerke $R^2$				0.05
$n =$				2783

*p* values with two-tailed significance: \**p* < .05, \*\**p* < .01, \*\*\**p* < .001.

Comment: The dependent variable is based on the question “How important do you find the following: politicians appearing on social media networks?” The answering options were on an eleven grade scale from 0 = not important at all to 10 = very important.

Gender: dummy coded (female = 1 and male = 2)

Age: dummy coded (15–24 = 1, 25–29 = 2 etc.)

Level of education: four-point scale from high level to low level.

Political interest: four-point scale from very interested to not at all interested.

Several factors have an impact on the use of social media and political online engagement. Traditional demographics such as gender and age along with level of education and general political interest have all turned out to be good predictors. It is clear that women in the campaign panel find it more important than men that politicians are present on social networking sites. Educational level also has a significant impact on attitudes towards politicians in social media, whereas age and general political interest seem to be of less importance.

Many politicians have registered on social media network sites and so have many citizens. The next analysis focuses on whether the campaign panel members have contacted any politician through this channel. It is evident that most respondents in the campaign panel did not establish contact with politicians during the campaign period in September 2010. In general about 70 percent had never contacted any politician, and the regular habit was quite low among the respondents. On a daily basis one percent had made contact with a politician via social media networks, another five percent had contacted politicians quite often (Table 2).



Table 2. Contacting politicians in social media networks (percent and odds)

	Have you contacted any politician in social media during the campaign period?					Logistic regression, odds
	Yes, every day	Yes, quite often	Yes, once every now and then	No, never	<i>n</i> =	
All	1	5	22	71	3798	
Gender:						
Women	1	5	21	73	1923	1.02
Men (ref)	1	6	24	70	1159	1
Age:						
15–24 years	2	4	28	66	232	0.79
25–29 years	1	5	18	75	312	0.61
30–34 years	1	6	22	70	353	0.91
35–39 years	2	5	23	70	368	0.97
40–44 years	1	7	24	69	318	1.05
45–49 years	1	4	22	73	325	0.87
50–54 years	1	6	23	71	322	0.91
55–59 years	2	7	19	71	284	0.88
60–64 years	1	5	21	73	260	0.76
65–69 years	0	4	26	70	231	0.79
70 years or more (ref)	1	8	27	64	129	1
Level of education:						
High	1	5	21	73	1437	0.57**
Above average	1	7	25	67	950	0.84
Below average	1	5	23	72	603	0.77
Low	0	8	23	69	137	1
General political interest:						
Very interested	2	9	30	59	1500	16.31**
Fairly interested	0	2	18	79	1611	5.16
Not very interested	1	1	10	88	348	2.46
Not at all interested	0	0	4	96	24	1
Nagelkerke <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>						0.12
<i>n</i> =						2829

*p* values with two-tailed significance: \**p* < .05, \*\**p* < .01, \*\*\**p* < .001.

Comment: The dependent variable is based on the question “Have you contacted politicians on social media during the campaign period?” The answering options “yes, daily”, “yes, often”, “yes, sometimes” were given value 1, the option “no, never” was given value 0. The coefficient shows odds for value 1. Reference categories were given value 1.

Gender: dummy coded (female = 1 and male = 2)

Age: dummy coded (15–24 = 1, 25–29 = 2 etc.)

Level of education: four-point scale from high level to low level.

Political interest: four-point scale from very interested to not at all interested.

When comparing different groups among the campaign panel respondents, it turns out that general political interest is the strongest predictor for contacting politicians on social media networks. Persons who are very interested in politics are significantly more likely to have contacted a politician during the election campaign. About 40 percent of the persons in this group have made contact compared to about 30 percent among the average respondents and the odds for persons who are very interested in politics is significantly higher than among persons not interested at all.

Another significant factor of explanation is level of education. Highly-educated persons contact politicians on social media more often than lowly-educated. In conclusion, the factors which traditionally explain much of political involvement and communication also predict to a large extent whether internet users will contact politicians on social media networks or not.

One way of capturing the significance of the role of social media among internet users during campaigning is to investigate the perceived information value with regard to political issues. A single question was posed in the web survey: *Do you get information about politicians or politics through social media which you would not have got elsewhere?* Slightly over 3,700 persons in the e-panel answered this particular question.

It is evident that many respondents came across information about politics or politicians through social media — information they wouldn't have come across elsewhere. Almost 20 percent get this kind of information on a regular basis and another 40 percent are informed about politics through social media every now and then (Table 3).

Table 3. Information about politicians or political issues through social media (percent and odds)

	Do you get information about politicians or politics through social media which you would not have got elsewhere?					Logistic regression, odds
	Yes, every day	Yes, quite often	Yes, every now and then	No, never	n =	
All	4	13	40	43	3754	
Gender:						
Women	4	12	38	46	1923	0.84
Men (ref)	4	16	44	35	1159	1
Age:						
15–24 years	2	4	28	66	232	0.77
25–29 years	1	5	18	75	312	0.53
30–34 years	1	6	22	70	353	1.00
35–39 years	2	5	23	70	368	0.82
40–44 years	1	7	24	69	318	1.40

	Do you get information about politicians or politics through social media which you would not have got elsewhere?					Logistic regression, odds
	Yes, every day	Yes, quite often	Yes, every now and then	No, never	<i>n</i> =	
45–49 years	1	4	22	73	325	1.48
50–54 years	1	6	23	71	322	1.98
55–59 years	2	7	19	71	284	1.31
60–64 years	1	5	21	73	260	3.86
65–69 years	0	4	26	70	231	2.18
70 years or more (ref)	6	16	29	50	129	1
Level of education:						
High	4	16	38	46	1418	2.58*
Above average	4	15	44	37	943	2.30
Below average	4	13	43	39	597	1.80
Low (ref)	5	14	41	39	133	1
General political interest:						
Very interested	6	18	38	38	1478	0.00
Fairly interested	2	10	40	48	1598	0.00
Not very interested	2	8	39	51	342	0.00
Not interested at all (ref)	0	21	33	46	24	1
Nagelkerke <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>						0.09
<i>n</i> =						2795

*p* values with two-tailed significance: \**p* < .05, \*\**p* < .01, \*\*\**p* < .001.

Comment: The dependent variable is based on the question “Do you get information about politicians or politics through social media which you would not have got elsewhere?” The answering options “yes, every day”, “yes, often”, “yes, sometimes” was given value 1, the option “no, never” was given value 0. The coefficient shows odds for value 1. Reference categories were given value 1.

Gender: dummy coded (female = 1 and male = 2)

Age: dummy coded (15–24 = 1, 25–29 = 2 etc.)

Level of education: four-point scale from high level to low level

Political interest: four-point scale from very interested to not at all interested

When comparing groups of respondents in a regression analysis, significant differences are found for the level of education. Highly-educated panel members perceive more often that they get unique information through social media. Traditional demographics has little impact and correlations are not significant for any other factor in the model. The results are somewhat hard to interpret. One likely explanation is that politicians in social media are a rather new phenomenon in the Swedish campaign context. It is common for people to not really have opinions about issues not familiar to them, and this is usually evident for all groups of respondents.

It is sometimes taken for granted that politicians should perform in social media and there has been a great deal of focus on how to reach out through this channel

during campaigning. There has been little research, however, about what people desire from politicians and what they expect to find regarding politicians' appearance in social media networks. Since research that has been conducted clearly shows that social media are used for personal expression and networking, it is not clear how politicians are expected to find a place in this context. To deepen the analysis further, attitudes towards politicians' appearance in social media were measured. In the web survey, a question with seven items about different activities was designed and the respondents were asked about the importance of each of them on an eleven-grade scale from 0 (not important at all) to 10 (very important).

As has already been concluded in the previous analysis, about one third of the campaign panel members wish to find politicians on social media networks. The following analysis focuses on what people expect politicians to do when networking. The most important issue both when considering the mean value and proportion as a percentage of positive respondents (value 8 to 10), is that politicians respond to questions or comments from the public. More than two thirds of the respondents find this important (mean 7.82, Table 4). The findings correspond to what are considered to be the somewhat unique facilities offered by the technology: interactivity and easy, direct conversation. These are among the basic characteristics for social media networks.

Table 4. Attitudes towards politicians' appearance in social media in different groups (mean, std dev and percent)

	Mean	Std dev	Percent value 8–10	n =
Answer questions from the public	7.82	2.64	68	3730
Talk party politics	7.11	2.86	55	3728
Campaigning	6.03	3.00	37	3721
Follow their party line	5.70	3.17	35	3729
Become friends with, or follow the public	5.56	3.33	35	3641
Be personal, write about themselves	4.28	2.96	16	3720

More than half of the respondents — 55 percent — support the idea that politicians should talk about politics on social network sites. It is, however, considered less important to conduct campaign work during an election period. Slightly over one third of the respondents find this of great importance. About as many want their politicians to follow their party line when communicating on social media network sites.

Even though it is evident that politicians are expected to respond to the public's questions, it is not as important that they become friends with members of the

public. This resembles previous findings emphasizing the private character of social network use on the Internet. Network members do not want politicians to assume the position of friends in their networks, but they want them to respond if requested.

Among the proposed issues in the questions posed to the campaign panel, the least important is the one suggesting that a politician be personal or write about themselves. On social media networks, people do not seem to be interested in the private lives of politicians but rather in what they want to achieve within the field of politics. The personal and private forms of expression to people one knows well which characterise activities in social media do not seem to include fairly unfamiliar political candidates.

As outlined above, both use of social media and political online participation differ when comparing groups in society. Young people have turned out to be more active in using social media networks and this group is also more politically involved on the Internet. Furthermore, men have turned out to be more involved than women in some areas within online political communication and politically interested and involved persons have also been shown to be over-represented in political online contexts.

Attitudes as well as patterns differ for the items in the web survey question. All together, the chosen model of explanation only to a small extent explains the attitudes towards politicians appearance in social media as measured in this study ( $R^2$  0.02–0.09). In general, women are for instance significantly more positive towards politicians in social media than men (Table 5). This is especially evident for talking politics and communicating party politics and also with regard to answering the public’s questions. Since women have been shown to be generally more active on social media the results are expected. On the other hand, men are more often involved in online politics. The results raise questions about what actually happens on social media networks and to what extent such networks are perceived as platforms for talking politics or for socializing. Future research needs to put an emphasis on such questions.

Table 5. Attitudes towards politicians’ appearance in social media in different groups (logistic regression, odds)

	Answer questions from the public	Talk party politics	Campaigning	Follow their party line	Become friends with, or follow the public	Be personal, write about themselves
Gender:						
Women	2.60***	2.06***	1.83***	2.56***	1.70***	1.08
Men (ref)	1	1	1	1	1	1
Age:						
15–24 years	1.59	1.84	1.41	0.57*	0.77	0.73

	Answer questions from the public	Talk party politics	Cam-paigning	Follow their party line	Become friends with, or follow the public	Be personal, write about themselves
25–29 years	0.77	1.00	1.30	0.55*	0.59*	0.72
30–34 years	0.88	0.92	0.85	0.45**	0.75	0.68
35–39 years	0.94	1.27	1.30	0.60*	0.75	0.78
40–44 years	0.66	0.93	0.93	0.74	0.75	0.71
45–49 years	0.64	0.67	0.87	0.57*	0.72	0.88
50–54 years	0.62	0.59	0.70	0.46**	0.63	0.70
55–59 years	0.65	0.76	0.94	0.55*	0.74	0.70
60–64 years	0.58	0.68	0.80	0.74	0.70	0.79
65–69 years	0.80	0.75	0.98	0.81	0.71	0.74
70 years or more (ref)	1	1	1	1	1	1
Level of education:						
High	0.54	0.67	0.70	0.42***	0.29***	0.51***
Above average	0.85	0.82	0.80	0.65	0.51**	0.77
Below average	1.18	1.21	1.05	0.80	0.71	0.87
Low (ref)	1	1	1	1	1	1
General political interest:						
Very interested	2.65	2.23	3.04*	1.71	1.29	0.64
Fairly interested	2.22	1.90	2.79*	2.10	1.38	0.59
Not very interested	2.75	2.34	2.73*	3.11*	1.69	0.74
Not interested at all	1	1	1	1	1	1
Nagelkerke $R^2$	0.06	0.07	0.05	0.09	0.06	0.02
$n =$	2775	2772	2768	2774	2717	2768

$p$  values with two-tailed significance: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Comment: The dependent variable is based on the question “Do you get information about politicians or politics through social media which you would not have got elsewhere?” The answering options were on an eleven grade scale from 0 (not important at all) to 10 (very important). Reference categories were given value 1.

Gender: dummy coded (female = 1 and male = 2)

Age: dummy coded (15–24 = 1, 25–29 = 2 etc.)

Level of education: four-point scale from high level to low level.

Political interest: four-point scale from very interested to not at all interested.

Another factor explaining some of the attitudes towards politicians in social media networks is level of education. E-panel members with a higher level of education are significantly less interested in politicians to follow their party line, politicians becoming friends with the public or being personal than persons with a low level of education. Age, which is generally important for the use of social media

networks, has hardly any significance for these attitudes. Political interest does explain some of the attitudes towards campaigning on social media. The more interested in politics, the more important people find political campaigning on this platform.

All in all, the expectations concerning politicians on social media networks seem to be that they should do what politicians usually do: talk party politics, and when people ask questions, they are expected to answer them. Frequent internet users do not want politicians in their living rooms even though it is technically possible. Furthermore, traditional demographics only to a certain extent explain these attitudes. Opposite to what is known from political online involvement, women tend to be generally more positive towards politicians appearing on social media networks. On the other hand women are more often socializing on these networks, which can be interpreted as the network functions being more important than political functions in the current situation.

## CONCLUSIONS

The overall impression is that it is of importance that politicians are to be found on social media networks on the Internet, not mainly as friends, but rather as providers of information. The findings are somewhat hard to interpret. Politicians are expected to participate, just as everyone else on social media networks is expected to contribute. But in contrast to ordinary people, who are to a large extent interested in writing about themselves, this is not to the same extent desired from the politicians. There is reason to believe that there are several spheres within social media networks, where friends belong to a private sphere and politicians to a public one even though they are technically not separated. The study that has been conducted cannot provide answers to questions about if, and in that case how, these spheres are made apparent to the individual user and in that case how they are experienced by the individual user. A qualitatively designed study would be suitable for demonstrating how networks within networks are perceived.

The fact that many respondents find it important that politicians use social media for communicating — responding to questions and comments — is very much in line with what is expected on social media networks. They are communicative by character and members are expected to converse and to contribute to some extent. If politicians do not involve themselves in social media as expected, people may not pay attention to them.

Many studies of internet use and online participation point out age as one of the strongest predictors. Young people are more likely to get involved. This is not found in this study. A reasonable explanation is probably that online political involvement points in two directions: institutional politics seems to reinforce knowledge gaps and attract middle-aged, more highly educated persons. Online activism, on the other hand, draws younger people. This study has not defined the content of

communication, only the attitudes towards areas of use within social media. To gain deeper knowledge and explore the role of age, further research is needed which will include content within different areas of political use on social media networks.

The campaign panel used in this study consists of frequent internet users who, among other things, are members of social networks. Among these almost 3,800 persons, about 70 percent have never contacted a politician in social media. If one were to try to estimate what this means in terms of the population, it is reasonable to believe the study shows an overestimation. The Swedish population is all in all less represented on online social networks and it has turned out that political use is not the number one issue among these users (Bergström, 2010). On the other hand, a few percent of the population adds up to quite a lot of people. If one looks at the context of campaigning, contacts on social media networks might be a complement to other contact platforms, one that works well in situations where politicians meet voters. This study cannot provide answers concerning the role of social media in relation to all the work included in a campaign. It has, however, shown tendencies with regard to how internet users perceived the appearance of politicians in social media during the 2010 Swedish election campaign.

## REFERENCES

- Adamic, N., Glance, N. (2005). *The Political Blogosphere and the 2004 U.S. Election: Divided They Blog*. 2nd Annual Weblogging Workshop, WWW 2005, May 10, Chiba, Japan.
- Bergström, A. (2010). Personligt och privat I sociala medier [Personal and private in social media]. In: S. Holmberg, L. Weibull (eds.). *Nordiskt ljus* [Nordic Light]. Gothenburg: The SOM-Institute, University of Gothenburg. Report no. 50, pp. 435–442.
- Bimber, B. (2010). The Internet and citizen communication with government: Does the medium matter? *Political Communication* 16(4), pp. 409–428.
- Bimber, B., Davis, R. (2003). *Campaigning online: the Internet in U.S. elections*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Boneva, B.S., Quinn, A., Kraut, R.E., Kiesler, S., Shklovski, I. (2006). Teenage communication in the instant messaging era. In: R. Kraut, M. Brynin, and S. Kiesler (eds.). *Computers, Phones, and the Internet: Domesticating Information Technology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 201–218.
- Boyd, D.M. (2006). Friends, Friendsters, and MySpace top 8: Writing community into being on social network sites. *First Monday*, 11–12 December. Retrieved November 23, 2010 from [http://www.firstmonday.org/issues/issue11\\_12/boyd/index.html](http://www.firstmonday.org/issues/issue11_12/boyd/index.html).
- Boyd, D.M. (2008). Facebook's privacy trainwreck: Exposure, invasion and social convergence. *Convergence. The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, 14(1), pp. 13–20.
- Boyd, D.M., Ellison, N.B. (2007). Social network sites: definition, history and scholarship. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 13(1), pp. 210–230.
- Carpentier, N. (2009). Participation is not enough: The conditions of possibility of mediated participatory practices. *European Journal of Communication*, 24(4), pp. 407–420.
- Castells, M. (2007). Communication, power and counter-power in the network society. *International Journal of Communication*, 1, pp. 238–266.



- Clark, W. (2002). *Activism in the Public Sphere. Exploring the Discourse of Political Participation*. Aldershot, Burlington, Singapore and Sidney: Ashgate.
- Dahlberg, S., Lindholm, H., Lundmark, S., Oscarsson, H., Åsbrink, R. (2010). *The 2010 Internet Campaign Panel*. Gothenburg: The Multidisciplinary Research on Opinion and Democracy (MOD) Group, University of Gothenburg, Working paper 2010:3. Retrieved January 7, 2011 from [www.mod.gu.se](http://www.mod.gu.se).
- Davis, R. (2005). *Politics Online. Blogs, Chatrooms and Discussion Groups in American Democracy*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Drezner, D.W., Farrell, H. (2008). Introduction: Blogs, politics and power: a special issue of Public Choice. *Public Choice*, 134(1–2), pp. 1–13.
- Ekdale, B., Namkoong, K., Fung, T.K.F., Perlmutter, D.D. (2010). Why blog? (then and now): Exploring the motivations for blogging by popular American political bloggers. *New Media & Society*, 12(2), pp. 217–234.
- Ellison, N.B., Steinfield, C., Lampe, C. (2007). The benefits of Facebook “friends”: Social capital and college students’ use of online social network sites. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 12(4), pp. 1143–1168.
- Fisch, M., Gscheidle, C. (2008). Mitmachnetz Web 2.0: Rege Beteiligung nur in Communitys. *Media Perspektiven* 7, pp. 356–364.
- Gross, E.F. (2004). Adolescent Internet use: What we expect, what teens report. *Applied Developmental Psychology*, 25(6), pp. 633–649.
- Hallin, D., Mancini, P. (2004). *Comparing Media Systems. Three Models of Media and Politics*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Hogan, B., Quan-Haase, A. (2010). Persistence and change in social media. *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society*, 30(5), pp. 309–315.
- Lenhart, A., Purcell, K., Smith, A., Zickuhr, K. (2010). *Social Media & Mobile Internet Use Among Teens and Young Adults*. Washington: Pew Internet & American Life project.
- Leung, L. (2009). User-generated content on the Internet: An examination of gratifications, civic engagement and psychological empowerment. *New Media & Society*, 11(8), pp. 1327–1347.
- Lewis, J., West, A. (2009). ‘Friending’: London-based undergraduates’ experience of Facebook. *New Media & Society*, 11(7), pp. 1209–1229.
- Lilleker, D.G., Malagón, C. (2010). Level of interactivity in the 2007 French presidential candidates’ websites. *European Journal of Communication*, 25(1), pp. 25–42.
- Limonard, S. (2007). *Business Requirements and Potential Bottlenecks for Successful New CITIZEN MEDIA Applications*, Sixth Framework Programme: Citizen Media Project.
- Livingstone, S. (2007). The challenge of engaging youth online: Contrasting producers’ and teenagers’ interpretations of websites. *European Journal of Communication*, 22(2), pp. 165–184.
- McMillan, S.J. (2002). A four-part model of cyber-interactivity: Some cyber-places are more interactive than others. *New Media & Society*, 4(2), pp. 271–291.
- Mesch, G.S., Coleman, S. (2007). New media and the new voters: The promise and problems of youth-oriented political content on the web. In: B.D. Loader (ed.). *Young Citizens in the Digital Age. Political Engagement, Young People and New Media*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 35–47.
- Mesch, G.S., Talmud, I. (2007). Similarity and the quality of online and offline social relationships among adolescents in Israel. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 17(4), pp. 455–466.
- Nardi, B.A., Schiano, D.J., Gumbrecht, M., Swartz, L. (2004). Why we blog. *Communications of the Association for Computing Machinery*, December, pp. 41–46.
- Nielsen (2006). *Participation Inequality. Encouraging More Users to Contribute*. Jacob Nielsen’s Alertbox. Retrieved from [www.useit.com/alertbox/participation\\_inequality.html](http://www.useit.com/alertbox/participation_inequality.html). Retrieved February 24, 2008.
- Nilsson, Å., Dahlberg, S., Ohlsson, J., Oscarsson, H. (2007). *Hur representativ är en självselekterad internetpanel?* [The representativeness of a self-recruited Internet panel]. Gothenburg: The SOM-Institute, University of Gothenburg.

- OECD (2007). *Participative Net and User-Created Content: Web 2.0, Wikis and Social Networking*.
- Papacharissi, Z. (2002). The virtual sphere: The Internet as a public sphere. *New Media & Society*, 4(1), pp. 9–27.
- Pascu, C. (2008). *An Empirical Analysis of the Creation, Use and Adoption of Social Computing Applications. IPTS Exploratory Research on the Socio-economic Impact of Social Computing*. European Commission, Institute for Prospective Technological Studies.
- Quan-Haase, A., Young, A.L. (2010). Uses and gratifications of social media: A comparison of Facebook and instant messaging. *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society*, 30(5), pp. 350–361.
- Rafaeli, S., Sudweeks, F. (1997). Networked interactivity. In *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, vol 2(4). Available on <http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol2/issue4/rafaeli.sudweeks.html>.
- Roscoe, T. (1999). The construction of the World Wide Web audience. *Media, Culture and Society*, 21, pp. 673–684.
- Schweitzer, E.J. (2008). Innovation or normalization in e-campaigning?: A longitudinal content and structural analysis of German party websites in the 2002 and 2005 national elections. *European Journal of Communication*, 23(4), pp. 229–270.
- Silverstone, R. (2007). *Media and Morality. On the Rise of the Mediapolis*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Smith, A. (2009). *The Internet's Role in Campaign 2008*. Pew Internet & American Life Project. Retrieved January 16, 2010 from [www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2009/6-The-Internets-Role-in-Campaign-2008.aspx](http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2009/6-The-Internets-Role-in-Campaign-2008.aspx).
- Tancer, B. (2007). *Measuring Web 2.0 Consumer Participation*. Retrieved from [www.hitwise.com/downloads/reports/Hitwise\\_US\\_Measuring\\_Web\\_2.0\\_Consumer\\_Participation\\_June\\_2007.pdf](http://www.hitwise.com/downloads/reports/Hitwise_US_Measuring_Web_2.0_Consumer_Participation_June_2007.pdf) Retrieved October 14, 2009.
- Utz, S. (2009). The (potential) benefits of campaigning via social network sites. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 14(2), pp. 221–243.
- Winsvold, M. (2007). Municipal websites in the local public debate. Supplying facts or setting agenda? *Nordicom Review*, 28(2), pp. 7–23.
- [www.mod.gu.se/lore/e\\_panelen2010](http://www.mod.gu.se/lore/e_panelen2010) — The Multidisciplinary Opinion & Democracy Group, Laboratory of Opinion Research (LORE). Retrieved January 15, 2011.