Nina on the Net
A study of a politician campaigning on social networking sites[1]

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Jakob Svensson
KARLSTAD UNIVERSITY, SWEDEN

ABSTRACT: In this paper I will attend to contemporary individualization and digitalization of politics from an in-depth study of a Swedish politician, Nina Larsson, campaigning on social networking sites for re-election to the Swedish Parliament in the 2010 general election. The aim of this paper is to contribute to the discussion on social networking sites and their potential for representative democracy and broaden the analysis beyond perspectives of strategic political communication and deliberative democracy. The research question I will attend to is how Nina uses social networking sites in her election campaign. The method for empirical data gathering is (n)ethnographic. The results suggest that Nina uses social networking sites mostly for negotiating her political persona.

KEYWORDS: e-campaigning, Late Modernity, Deliberative Democracy, Political Communication, Social Networking Sites

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INTRODUCTION

Communication and democracy are strongly connected to each other. Not least Habermas' (1996) writings on ideal forms of communication in order to reach enlightenment have been influential for theorizing on democracy. Particularly within Media and Communication Studies, Habermas has been used as a yardstick to evaluate and discuss different forms of media and communications. Within Political Science his normative theorizing has been translated into a concept of deliberation (rational conversations), argued by some to be pivotal when revitalizing representative democracy (see Dryzek, 2000; Fishkin, 1991). Thus when analyzing the rise

of the Internet, especially with recent improvements of possible interactive features, the framework of deliberative democracy is often used. The approach of this paper is somewhat different from such normative and evaluative studies. The quest here is to understand contemporary use of the Internet within practices of representative democracy and discuss how this may (or may not) be related to the electorate's online participation such as information gathering, opinion formation and expression. Out of such understanding we can better inform a discussion of the Internet and its implications for representative democracy. This quest will take me beyond perspectives of deliberative democracy and its counterpart, strategic political communication, also popular for analysing election campaigns.

This article will be theoretically framed in a socio-technological understanding of individualization processes in late modernity (for accounts on late modernity see Bauman, 2001; Beck, 1998; Giddens, 1991). At the same time as society becomes more and more individualized, communication and sociability are increasingly characterized by digitalization and networking (Castells, 2001; Donath & Boyd, 2004). From a sociological perspective, these developments could be understood as undermining the rather collective enterprise of representative democracy (see Bauman, 2001), whereas proponents of deliberative democracy envision a potential for the reinforcement of representative democracy through increasing individual participation in collective online deliberations (for a good summary of the debate see Coleman & Blumler, 2009 and Kies, 2010). Today we have the possibility to conduct empirical studies on Internet uses in contemporary democracies. Hence it is time to make empirical contributions to the rather general debate on the Internet and democracy, to discover the nuances and complexities of the role of the Internet in our societies and for our democratic systems. This I intend to do in this paper from one instance in the 2010 Swedish general election.

I will approach late modern individualization, the Internet and representative democracy from a study of Nina Larsson, a young Swedish politician in her thirties, representing Folkpartiet (the Liberal Party) in the region of Värmland (Midwest of Sweden). My main quest here is to understand how Nina Larsson uses the Internet in her election campaign. I have followed Nina for over two years, but in this paper the study is limited to the 2010 election. Voting is at the very core of representative democracy; a central activity the system depends on for legitimizing its exercise of power. Hence the period chosen to study Nina is evident when aiming to discuss representative democracy in relation to the Internet. Election campaigns in Sweden tend to start early due to the fixed election date (the third Sunday in September every four years), beginning already in January to peak in the summer months before the election. In this paper the study is also delineated to Nina's uses of social networking sites such as blogging, Facebooking and Twittering. I will not consider the more traditional campaign methods she used. There is hype around social networking sites, not least when it comes to election campaigning (see Anduiza, 2009). Deliberative democrats tend to underline the enhanced possibilities of interaction

on social networking sites and possibilities for voter participation and dialogues between the electorate and their representatives (see the Deliberative Democracy Consortium, www.deliberative-democracy.net). Strategic political communicators also underline social networking sites for the improved possibilities for politicians to circumvent traditional media logic, for direct and tailored communication (Anduiza, 2009; Schweitzer, 2010; Zafiropoulos & Vrana, 2009). Nina is especially interesting to study since she contracted a communication agency, Hello Clarice, to develop a strategy for her communication on social media prior to the election.

The method used for empirical data gathering around Nina's use of social networking sites is ethnographic in general, having followed, observed and talked to Nina and employees at Hello Clarice, and nethnographic in particular (see Berg, 2011; Kozinets, 2006), continuously following Nina online and participating in her social networks on Facebook, Twitter and two blogs. Thus the research could be described as a case study where Nina Larsson serves as an example of a politician campaigning in a late modern and digitalized society. Out of this case I then aim to discuss the potential of social networking sites for representative democracy. However it is important to bear in mind that the case of Nina Larsson is far from representative of politicians in general, and that in this paper she rather represents the future generation. Before I attend to the methodological considerations in more detail, I will start with a background section on our time, late modernity, the rise of social networking sites, and the debate on its influence on democracy.

BACKGROUND: THE INTERNET AND REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY IN LATE MODERNITY

The experience of increased personal autonomy and expressions of this individualization are among the most debated trends in our time (see Bauman, 2001; Giddens, 1991; Lasch, 1979/1991). In accounts of the late modern era, processes of individualization are given priority over the collectively shared cultural frames of references that dominated social spaces and their organization in modernity (such as family, nation, class, party affiliation et cetera). With the increasing use of digital technology, processes of individualization tend to become more networked in character (Castells, 2001, p. 122–125). The negotiation of oneself as a unique individual becomes impossible without visibility, and constant updating in, and of, self-selected/created social networks online. On social networking sites online, connecting ourselves to other nodes in the network with their supposed connotations has become central for negotiating, managing and monitoring one's own subject. In this way the emerging digital media landscape gets conflated with pluralisation of lifestyles, tastes and subcultures that in turn work in tandem with our times manageable and negotiable individuality (Dahlgren, 2009, p. 152; Donath & Boyd, 2004). When socio-cultural processes, media and patterns of communication mutually reinforce each other, I believe it is appropriate to speak of a *digital* late modernity (see Svensson, 2011 for a more detailed account).

At the same time as society, individuals and technology mutually reinforce each other in digital late modernity towards increasing individualization and the network as the model of social organization, it seems like citizens are more and more dissatisfied and estranged from the processes and people of representative democracy (Loader, 2007; Coleman & Blumler, 2009). Since representative democracy has its roots in an era marked by modernization and industrialization, contemporary withdrawal from its institutions may be understood as a consequence of new forms of sociability and an increasing emphasis on processes of identification in digital late modernity (see Coleman & Blumler, 2009, p. 84). Instead of joining a political party and vote, we experience new forms of expressing political engagement and new ways of participating that rather underline the late modern preoccupation with identity negotiation (Giddens, 1991, p. 253; Loader, 2007, p. 2; Svensson, 2011; Vromen, 2007, p. 106).

Discussing individualization and citizens' withdrawal from representative democracy, the Internet and social networking sites (SNS) take on a dual role. On the one hand it could be argued that individual political blogs and Facebook pages reinforce the processes that undermine a democratic system based on identification with traditional political parties with roots in the popular movements of modernity (Coleman & Blumler, 2009, p. 84). On the other hand SNS have been discussed as instruments for political parties' election campaigning, not least through Obama's presidential campaign of 2008, where much of his support and electorate engagement was initiated and staged with the help of SNS (Costa, 2009; Montero, 2009, p. 30). Today it is claimed that political parties and their representatives need to communicate outside the mass party model since the ties between political parties and voters have become weaker (Kalnes, 2009, p. 64). Within the field of strategic political communication the Internet is discussed out of its potential for fast circulation of large amounts of information that could be directed selectively to special groups and networks (Anduiza, 2009, p. 6). SNS are discussed as an alternative to traditional media, as a way for politicians to circumvent its gatekeeping function and for direct communication with their constituencies (Schweitzer, 2010; Zafiropoulos & Vrana, 2009, p. 78). In this manner the ties between politicians and citizens are supposed to be reinforced and the information to the electorate better and more extensive (Anduiza, 2009, p. 5; Zafiropoulos & Vrana, 2009, p. 78). The Internet is also supposed to attract undecided voters and mobilise slow coaches (Anduiza, 2009, p. 7; Montero, 2009, p. 28).

Besides this strategic framing of potential uses of social networking sites for politicians' election campaigning, Habermas' analysis of the rise and fall of the public sphere (1989) is also often invoked when discussing the Internet and democracy. In sharp contrast to strategic political spin, Habermas' (1996) theorizing of what procedures and qualities should persist in communication within democratic fora, is applied more normatively by scholars, as something to strive for and evaluate existing practices against. Habermas (1996, p. 114–115) argues for a communica-

tive rationality, a rationality he bases on peoples' inherent striving for enlightenment through listening to each others' arguments and being willing to change ones opinions according to the best argument. In this way consensus is supposed to be reached and decisions are made (ibid., p. 140). Theoreticians of deliberative democracy have attempted to apply Habermas' normative philosophy and to evaluate democratic procedures according to ideas of an ideal public sphere where everybody is heard, can voice their concerns and consensus can be obtained when agreeing on the best arguments (Dryzek, 2000; Fenton, 2010; Fishkin, 1991). Rational conversations (i.e. deliberations) are considered to have a democratizing effect because participants are supposed to become more attuned to the common good of all rather than to negotiate between predetermined personal interests (Coleman & Blumler, 2009, p.17; Svensson, 2008). This deliberative democratic perspective has gained ground within public administration and the institutions of representative democracy recently. The communicative view of citizens has become especially attractive when attempting to reorient citizens back to the fora of representative democracy (for a more thorough discussion see Svensson, 2008). However, these normative ideas have been used for participatory democratic experiments as if the citizens already possessed the rather demanding qualities necessary for successful deliberations (see Svensson, 2008 for an example of such an experiment as well as Stokes, 2005 for a discussion on the likelihood for actual deliberative democracy). As we shall see next, this is not always the case among internet users.

The Internet was early given attention because of its potential to engage citizens in deliberations within a larger framework of increasing civic participation in representative democracy (Coleman & Blumler, 2009; Dahlgren, 2009, p. 26; Kies, 2010; Loader, 2007, p. 11). The emergence of the Internet coincided with lower participation in elections (Coleman & Blumler, 2009, p 143; Dahlgren, 2009, p. 159), and a deliberative turn within public administration (Svensson, 2008). Recent research has questioned the potential of the Internet to reorient citizens back to representative institutions, and questioned whether communication platforms online really are governed by communicative rationality. Research has indicated that political participation on the Internet most often is based in a high level of political participation offline (Calenda & Mosca, 2007, pp. 87, 92; Dahlgren & Olsson, 2007; Vromen, 2007, pp. 97, 113), and that users rather seem to seek confirmation of their already established viewpoints, than to expose oneself for new and diverging opinions (Anduiza, 2009, p. 8; Sunstein, 2001). However, the vision of the Internet as a haven for deliberations across groups of people continues to thrive, not least because users, and the areas of uses, increase steadily. Above all, social networking sites have begun to take place in the discussions of the Internet as a medium for opinion formation, expression and information gathering (Donath & Boyd, 2004; Svensson, 2011). Before attending to how Nina used social networking sites strategically, communicatively or in other ways, I will next attend to some methodological considerations.

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NOTES ON METHODOLOGY

As I shall present in this section, the method for researching Nina Larsson's use of social networking sites is both ethno- and nethnographic. The specific situation I am interested in is how Nina Larsson campaigns through social networking sites. I followed Nina Larsson in 2010, up to the September elections, both online as well as offline, and observed how she used the Internet in her political campaigning. I will start with a discussion of studying digital technology, case studies and ethnography, before I enter into detail about the data gathering process, the empirical data and the nethnographic method.

Digital technology and social networking sites are neither neutral artefacts nor do they have inherent capacities for social organization and change (Coleman & Blumler, 2009, p. 10). Technology and society evolves in tandem (Svensson, 2011), hence new technology and new media should be understood from its uses and social contexts. Information and communication technologies are constructed, maintained and given meaning through a range of complex and social processes (Coleman & Blumler, 2009, p. 10). To avoid an essensialistic, causal or technical deterministic study, it is therefore important to instead inquire into how and under which circumstances technology is used. Causal models of explanations are potentially misleading since it is impossible to isolate internet use from other social practices and determine what causes what (Anduiza, 2009). One way of dealing with this is through a case study. When focusing on a case, the webpages to study are almost given in advance, and researchers may concentrate on events and practices in a more empirically constructive manner (Gerodimos & Ward, 2007, p. 118). Case studies most often generalize in their aim, something the ethnographic study does not. The study presented in this paper may not be generalized to politics in general. The aim of this paper is to contribute to the discussion on the potential of social networking sites for representative democracy. For this purpose, Nina Larsson's campaign is not all embracing, but very useful, not least for pointing out tendencies and nuances in political campaigning practices in digital late modernity.

In this article I have focused on Nina Larsson's uses of Twitter, Facebook and on two blogs, one connected to the regional newspaper *VF* (Värmlands Folkblad, http://blogg.vf.se/ninalarsson) and one personal blog tied to her as politician representing Folkpartiet (the Liberal Party, http://www.ninalarsson.se). Ninalarsson. se, has been up and running since 2006, and is used to communicate ideas with more obvious political angles. The months prior to the elections, Nina posted approximately five postings a week. On the blog there are links to Nina's Twitter and Facebook account, her campaign website as well as the VF blog. In the regional newspaper Värmlands Folkblad (*VF*), Nina has had a blog since 2008. Her aim was one posting a day during the height of the campaign. However, postings here were rarer than on ninalarsson.se, approximately one posting per week. Nina decided herself what to post on the VF blog, the newspaper only provided the domain.

There were also other blogs from other politicians and regional inhabitants on VF to follow. Nina stopped using this blog after the elections in late 2010. Nina Larsson has Twitter since spring 2009 (http://twitter.com/NinaLarsson). Twitter is a platform that allows users to publish messages (tweets) up to 140 characters in length, or forward messages from other users (retweets). In the months leading up to the elections Nina used Twitter practically daily by publishing one or more tweets. Twitter was used more for personal networking than the two blogs and campaign website. However, she did use the platform, especially in the months prior to the elections, for stating political opinions and linking to articles suitable for her political agenda at the same time as chit-chatting with friends and acquaintances, tweeting updates on her whereabouts, plans and situations. The same goes for her Facebook page (http://www.facebook.com/ninalarsson). On Twitter Nina had a link to her campaign website, on her Facebook page there were also links to ninalarsson.se, her Twitter account and her personal page on the liberal party website.

In a nethnographic study we are released as researchers from the physical place to conduct observations in a virtual context on communities that can be understood as social in its character (Berg, 2011, pp. 119–120). The aim of nethnographic research is to understand the social interaction taking place online, hence a focus on user-generated information flows (ibid., p. 120). The nethnographic approach thus suits the aims of this paper since I am studying how Nina uses SNS and the information flow she initiated and/or took part in. By doing nethnography, I followed Nina Larsson on all her different social media platforms, taking field notes and screenshots when I observed something I deemed particularly interesting. I use her SNS as archives of information (see Berg, 2011, p. 126), but I have also created my own archive with screenshots since data and interactions on SNS are instantaneous and may be changed or disappear. As a participant researcher, I have participated in some of the debates on ninalarsson.se as well as twittered and facebooked with her. My interventions with Nina followed a simple plan; when I reacted to, or felt I wanted to get clarification, information or just agreeing on something she posted, I interacted with her (wrote on the wall, retweeted a tweet, commented on, or liked a posting, et cetera). My interventions most often concerned statements on education policies and infrastructure (since I work at a university and commute between Karlstad and Stockholm). Examples of interactions on her Facebook page were given the thumbs up when she posted that her train was on time, or posting comments about my train delays and asking for her ideas of improving the railway tracks in Värmland. Our twittering mostly revolved around when to meet, or asking for quick information on liberal politics, or sending condolences when she twittered she had a cold for example.

Nethnography is different from ethnography in its exclusive focus on net-based social environments. The physical absence is compensated by different textual and figurative representations, which gives the user larger possibilities to reflect on, test

and review different ways of action before they become part of the social interaction (Berg, 2011, p. 121). This also requires (disciplines) the user to make an active and conscious effort when presenting oneself online. Hence we can distinguish between asynchronous postings, allowing for greater reflection and planning (for example on Nina's blogs and campaign website) and synchronous postings, happening in real time (on Twitter and Facebook, see Berg, 2011, p. 127). Because of the enhanced possibility/requirements of reflexivity on SNS, nethnography is a good companion to theories of late modernity. Nethnography is also good in combination with a more traditional ethnographic method, especially when being interested in what considerations lie behind (inter)actions online. Since this was the case the observations online were complemented with continuous interviews with both Nina Larsson herself and Olle Nilsson and Gunnar Bark at Hello Clarice. I have also followed Nina Larsson offline during some weeks before the election.

RESULTS

Nina Larsson says that she conceives social networking sites (SNS) as a channel to come in contact with new voters and to broaden her web of contacts. Nina explains that she uses the Internet as a complement to personal face to face meetings which she means are the best way of getting in contact with citizens. Talking to Nina it becomes obvious that she uses a discourse of deliberation and participation to frame her campaign. It is about coming into contact with her constituency, discuss and listen to the different sentiments among the voters. Nina looks down on other politicians that she claims still use SNS as megaphones, as yet another channel to broadcast their statements on (see also García & Lara, 2009). Nina conceives SNS more as platforms for dialogue rather than as megaphones and in this way reinforces representative democracy. This reasoning is very much in line with what scholars of deliberative democracy would argue.

It is hardly surprising that Nina, as a professional politician talking to me, underlines the purpose of her online social networking to come closer to her constituency and to dialogue with potential voters. But if I go beyond what seems to be a discursive façade of deliberation, I soon discern more strategic purposes with Nina's social networking practices, such as being visible, becoming re-elected, and attracting new voters to her and her political party. The interactions Nina establishes and participates in are mainly on her terms and around the topics she herself puts on the agenda. It is Nina who decides what will be discussed, even if she cannot completely govern the commentaries she gets. It does not really seem that what she labels as dialogue should lead to, or bring about consensus or agreements. For example, Nina defines a good posting on her blog ninalarsson.se as something that not everyone agrees upon and something that is a little bit provocative. Through coaching by Hello Clarice Nina confirms that she has become more daring in her postings and more provocative in her tone. Olle Nilsson from Hello Clarice explains

that they give Nina feedback on her postings in forms of thumbs up or thumbs down with the purpose of getting her to mediate certain kinds of emotions and to get her to "think right" about online communication. When asking Olle what this thinking right implies, he explains that they coach her to become more personal, to dare to be more provocative and direct in the communication with her voters. Nina, for her part, claims that she has noticed that this tone attracts more readers to her blog. I thus conclude that being exposed to a large amount of readers that might not always agree with her, is of greater importance when posting on ninalarsson.se than agreeing upon an issue.

A deliberative discourse, as well as references to more strategic purposes, are utilized by both Nina and people at Hello Clarice to explain her social networking practices and provide it with meaning. However, the interview results become interesting when observing the actual communication on ninalarsson.se. It seems that the explanations of why using SNS in political campaigning and how she makes her social networking practices relevant, differ from what is actually taking place. A closer study of the postings on ninalarsson.se during the period up to the elections indicates that the more provocative and personal tone have actually not led to more comments, which I would take as an indication as to whether she had succeeded in attracting more readers or not. One comment was especially interesting. Someone invited Nina to his/her own blog instead of "fighting" in the commentary section of Nina's blog. When talking to Nina she says herself that communication tends to become unpleasant rather quickly online even if not really meant to. The overall picture emerging of Nina's use of ninalarsson.se is that it is framed in a mix of a participatory democratic discourse of increasing dialogue with citizens, and a more strategic purpose of being exposed to as many potential voters as possible through provoking debate with people with diverging opinions. However, when such a debate finally happens it seems hard to maintain.

Talking further with Nina about her uses of SNS she underlines the possibility for her to put forward her own version in her own media channels. Within political communication it has been discussed whether the Internet contributes with ways for politicians to circumvent the media logic that established and commercial offline-media have set up (see Altheide, 2004). SNS give Nina a possibility to use other channels she has greater control over than established media channels. However, it seems that Nina uses SNS (especially ninalarsson.se) to position herself in relation to traditional media, whose stories and angles she has no influence over, rather than to circumvent traditional offline media channels. For example in one posting on ninalarsson.se she comments on an investigative journalistic TV show scrutinizing the presence of MPs during voting in the chamber. In the program she was mentioned as being one politician absent from many parliamentary votes. In another posting she comments on the editorial of a leading national newspaper. In this way I argue established media channels are setting the agenda for her posting practice. More than 60 percent of the postings on ninalarsson.se refer to media texts

initially broadcast offline. These postings either comment on or spread texts initiated in traditional offline media. If Nina for example writes a debate article in a daily newspaper, or appears on TV or Radio, this will almost automatically generate a blog posting, Facebook posting and a tweet often linking to the original appearance. In this way her uses of social networking sites have the function of an *amplifier* of selected traditional media texts. Thus, communicating and disseminating media appearances of herself, stands out as an important part of her SNS practices. In an identity negotiating digital late modernity it seems like the increasing information noise mainly consists of puffs, links and reinforcements of already, on traditional media channels, published texts.

It is not only her own media appearances that generate postings in her online social networks. She also links to, retweets and comments on current news stories and other politicians' debate articles. Her postings and comments can thus not be separated from the politics of the Liberal Party. She uses her social networks online largely to promote the Liberal Party, to reinforce, retweet and like political messages that other liberals have been communicating both in traditional offline media, as well as on their blogs and social media platforms. A virtual back-slapping of fellow party comrades seems to take place in the form of multiplying and commending each others' appearances. It seems that it is important for Nina to connect her political persona to other liberals in her network through linking to and commenting on each others' postings.

Nina's use of SNS thus seems more to revolve around negotiating the image of her as a politician. Contrary to Sey & Castells (2004, p. 366) who write that it is more difficult for politicians to control the information flow on social networking sites, I argue this is precisely the reason why Nina is using SNS (see also Zafiropoulos & Vrana, 2009). Moreover, it is not primarily the information she seeks to control, rather the image of herself as a politician. In this way she uses SNS to put forward her versions of stories being discussed in newspapers and TV shows, promote her own media appearances and those of fellow party members. Many of her social networks seem to be in a larger communicative network where traditional media channels are part as important nodes.

The postings on the VF blog reinforce the above discussion of SNS as tools for identity expression and negotiation. The postings here are more personal, dealing with her feelings about her life and job as a politician, and also to some parts of her private life. According to Gunnar Bark at Hello Clarice, the strategy for the VF blog is for the reader to get to know Nina on a more private level. The VF blog reader should more easily embrace Nina as a person through shorter postings and more pictures. The individualization in late modernity is well illustrated here, in how important it is for a politician to also show off her personality. Nina herself defines a good posting on the VF blog if she succeeds with a good picture of an exciting meeting, or an entertaining story. Nina says that the image she wants to convey on the VF blog is one of being engaged and hardworking, both at work and at home.

In other words, she is negotiating her identity as a politician. This is about a form of impression management (see Donath & boyd, 2004) or expressive rationality (see Svensson, 2011) where identity negotiation is at the foreground of political expressions that take place on the SNS she uses. The more intimate tone on several of the SNS allows Nina to develop a more personal relationship to her network/readers, but also to control and monitor her political persona.

To conclude the (n)ethnographic study, Nina uses SNS also for the purpose of negotiating and expressing her political persona, to control the image that is broadcast of her in established media. Readers may comment on the postings that Nina chose to put on the agenda, but they hardly have any influence over this agenda. The strategic purpose to stand out and be seen through provoking debate is not compatible with striving for consensus through deliberation. Debate does not take place at great length on the SNS she uses. Rather, observing the exchanges online I witness calm and friendly exchanges between what seems to be a rather familiar and party political network. This rather points towards an expressive use of SNS, to negotiate herself as a politician through amplifying the messages and the performances she has participated in herself on other media channels, comment on current affairs and not least to tie her political identity to other liberals.

DISCUSSION

In this paper I have shown that other perspectives than strategic political communication and deliberative democracy can be useful for understanding social networking sites and their uses in relation to representative democracy. Departing from theories of late modernity it becomes evident that politicians not only use the Internet strategically (in order to gain more voters) or normatively (for better communication with the electorate), but politicians also use the Internet reflexively, in order to express themselves and negotiate their political persona(s). However, this does neither render strategic political communication, nor deliberative democracy, inadequate. Habermas may be too normative to use for understanding actual uses of SNS, but deliberative theories of an ideal public sphere may still be useful for evaluating the quality of political communication. We also have to remember the impact of Habermas' ideas in contemporary western societies. Nina herself framed her uses of SNS in a deliberative discourse in order to justify or provide them with meaning when being interviewed. Political spin on the other hand may be too offensive as a resource for meaning-making/justification in its overtly strategic goal of winning elections regardless. However, this was the ultimate goal of Nina's campaign, to become re-elected and stay in Parliament. To nuance the discussion and more fully understand a politician's use of SNS, I believe we have to refine our conception of what rationalities govern online behaviour (see also Svensson, 2011). Nina's use was neither purely communicative, striving for ideal forms of communication with her constituency, nor purely instrumental, in trying to reach out to new

voters and win them over. To a large extent she was also using SNS expressively, to reflexively negotiate and monitor her identity as a politician.

The aim of this paper was to contribute to the discussion on social networking sites and their potential for representative democracy. SNS may certainly be used as tools for better and more direct communication with the electorate as well as for circulating large amounts of electoral propaganda, and tailoring messages for specific target groups. But as I have discussed here, SNS are to a large extent used for negotiating, maintaining and monitoring identities. It is nothing new that politicians wish to construct the images and control the presentation of themselves. According to Thompson (1995/2001, p. 169), the control of visibility is an old political art. The development of communication media and the transformation of the function of visibility have changed the rules as to how this art is practiced (ibid.), which is certainly the case with the advent of social networking sites. However, the question remains, what does this mean for democracy? An increasing preoccupation with individual identities has been attacked for undermining a sense of collectiveness important for acting as a group towards collective goals (see Bauman, 2001). However, I do not believe that individualism and a sense of collectiveness are mutually exclusive. Individualism can be considered a form of collective identity (see Lasch, 1979/1991). In digital late modernity I find Castells' (2001, pp. 129–133) concept of networked individualism particularly illuminating for understanding the practice of linking the individual self to different collectives. Through processes of identification we tie ourselves to others, to causes that provide our life and participation with meaning. Important characteristics emerging in digital late modernity are thus responsiveness and connectedness (see Frau-Meigs, 2007). This is also true for politicians migrating to online social networks. However, from my study of Nina, it seems that this responsiveness and connectedness to a larger extent applies to fellow politicians and party members than it does to the voters in her constituency.

Negotiating identity does not necessarily have to undermine democracy in a wider understanding of the notion. Beck (1998, p. 160) discusses individualization (under the idea of sub-politics) as a way for people to learn about themselves, break free and search for new social belonging. The retreat from traditional representative institutions of democracy is accompanied by an opening up of a new political dimension that does not have to be carried by large political collectives. From this reasoning Nina's uses of SNS are contradictory. On the one hand she takes part in the media and communication platforms that undermine identification with large political collectives. We could thus proclaim the death of political parties and the rise of the self-made non-affiliated politician. On the other hand Nina uses the communication platforms mostly to interact with other party members and politicians. This is where I believe we have to return to the idea of interconnectedness of individualism and collectivism. In order for Nina to be the politician she is, and to negotiate her political identity, she needs others, in particular, she needs party comrades as resources for maintaining and confirming her political persona. My

conclusion then is that social networking sites will not make political parties inadequate. But they will contribute to processes of networked individualization of connected western societies and an increasing personalization of politics. However, personalization of politics may not necessarily lead to the end of political parties.

So what happened to Nina after the election? Nina Larsson was not immediately re-elected by the Värmland voters in 2010, but eventually she got to keep her seat in Parliament due to a so-called adjustment mandate (my translation; utjämningsmandat) that was awarded to the Liberal Party in the Värmland constituency. After the election she was also promoted to Liberal Party Secretary, since her predecessor was appointed Minister for Integration in the new government.

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