A close-up on 'top tweeters' in Finland: Relevance of the national context in political Twitter campaigning

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Abstract

This article examines the use of Twitter by Finnish candidates in the European parliamentary election of 2014. It concentrates on two groups of candidates: the 20 most active Twitter users measured by the number of tweets sent and those 20 candidates who aroused the most interest, measured by the number of Twitter replies received. The study takes into consideration contextual variables, such as gender, age, party, position and place of residence of the candidates. The main research question asks for what kind of candidates does Twitter offer a platform to challenge existing political power structures (equalizing hypothesis), and for what kind of candidates does Twitter not offer this platform (normalization hypothesis)

The main finding was that Twitter was mostly used by established, middle-aged, urban, professional politicians of the right-wing National Coalition Party. This party has mostly young, well-educated and urban supporters in Southern Finland. For these people, Twitter was an effective tool to normalize the current power structures.

However, for some other candidates Twitter seemed to have a more equalizing nature: the Green candidates, women and representatives of the parties' youth organisations. The article demonstrates the need for a more nuanced approach to the normalization/equalization hypothesis in future research.

Keywords: Twitter; election; social media; campaign; normalization

Introduction

Twitter[1] and social media in general, are increasingly used in political campaigning and in the maintenance of politicians' public images. Finnish political parties have been relatively quick to adapt the latest 'killer apps' for effective campaigning (Strandberg 2013). The aim of this article is to examine whether it is possible to challenge the existing balance of political campaigning by using Twitter as a medium for campaign publicity. When online campaigning started to gain popularity, minor parties in the US had an advantage against major parties when adopting tools of new media campaigning. However, according to the 'normalization hypothesis' (Margolis, Resnick and Wolfe 1999), major parties have since recovered from the disadvantage, and have also been able to also establish reach their dominant position in 'new' media. According to the normalization hypothesis, with time the patterns of socioeconomic and political relationships online come to resemble those of the off-line world. The debate over normalization is ongoing in studies about online campaigning (Larsson 2016; Nelimarkka et al. 2016; Samuel-Azran, Yarchi and Wolfsfeld 2015; Lilleker and Jackson 2010; Anduiza, Cantijoch and Gallego 2009). According to the equalisation thesis (Ward, Gibson and Nixon 2003, p. 22–23), small or fringe parties might by exploiting the low cost and other advantages of online campaigning to gain a more equal position when compared with major parties.

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[1] Tweets are short, up to 140-character-long messages sent to a network of followers. An individual Twitter user has very limited ability to influence the size or the quality of the audience of a single tweet. He or she is not able to invite followers, but Twitter users decide whom they want to follow. A user is able to block followers, but this ability is not widely used.

The national context

Finland became a member of the European Union (EU) in 1995. Since then, there have been five parliamentary elections: in 1996, 1999, 2004, 2009 and 2014. The last election to the European Parliament (EP) took place 25 May 2014. For this election, the Finnish parties put forward 251 candidates. The eight largest parties with representation in the Finnish parliament nominated 160 candidates, the maximum number allowed under electoral law. Finns chose 13 candidates representing seven different parties: three (22.6% of the votes cast) from the right-wing conservative National Coalition Party (NCP), three (19.7%) from the Centre Party (the Centre), two (12.3%) from the Social Democratic Party (SDP), two (12.9%) from the populist Finns Party and one from each of the smaller parties, the Left Alliance (9.3%), the Greens (9.3%) and the Swedish People's Party (6.8%). The Christian Democrats (5.2%) were the only party represented in the national parliament that did not gain a seat in the European Parliament. These eight parties obtained 98.08% of the votes cast (Tulospalvelu 2014).

The Finnish party system is one of the most fragmented among Western European countries. After the 2011 election to the Finnish parliament, there were four major parties in the parliament: the conservative National Coalition Party, the Centre Party, the Social Democratic Party and the most recently established, populist the Finns Party. There were also four minor parties: the Left Alliance, the Greens, the Finnish Swedish People Party and the conservative Christian Democrats. The NCP has been strongly pro-EU and has been a member of the European People's Party since the start of Finland's EU membership in 1995. While the Centre Party is a member of the pro-EU the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) in the European Parliament, in Finland the party has been euro-sceptic, since it is a former agrarian party. The populist Finns Party broke through in the election of 2011, combining left-wing economic policies with conservative social values, anti-EU programme, ethnic nationalism and anti-immigration.

In EP elections, Finland is a treated as a single constituency. The electoral system is based on the so-called D'Hondt method of proportional representation, with open party lists. With open lists, citizens vote for individual candidates, and the total number of personal votes determines the choice of parliamentary representative. The combined number of votes for the candidates on a particular list defines the number of seats allotted to a party. The combination of the single constituency and the open party list system poses major challenges for individual candidates, as they need substantial resources to cover the entire country. In the 2014 election elected candidates and their first deputies used, on average, EUR68,800 to fund their campaign (see Vaali-ja Puoluerahoitusvalvonta).

The use of Twitter has become more appealing as the number of Twitter users has grown. Although there are no official statistics of Twitter use in Finland, there is evidence that the use of Twitter has grown significantly in recent years. The Finnish Twitter counter by Toni Nummela (Suomi-Twitter 2016) shows that between February 2013 (20493 accounts) and April 2016 (48611 accounts) the amount of active unique Twitter accounts more than doubled.

Under such circumstances, the Internet and social media seem to offer an ideal medium for campaigning, being a cost-efficient, quick and easy means of potentially reaching thousands of people all over the country. Indeed, Twitter and Facebook use in campaigning has increased in the recent years (Strandberg 2012, p. 84). Of the 160 candidates nominated by the eight largest parties in the 2014 election, 119 had a Twitter account. During the campaign period, the candidates sent a total of 31,577 tweets. Of the thirteen Finnish MEPs elected, only two did not use Twitter in their election campaigns.

Previous research

Research on the use of Twitter in politics has increased dramatically in recent years. Researchers have been especially interested in whether social media can change the character of political communication and consequently open prospects for change in the wider political structure. There have been optimistic visions in relation to deliberative democracy, social media, with a sense of communication and active citizenship, especially in the early 2000s (Rheingold 1995; Benkler 2006; Shirky 2008; Coleman and Blumler 2009). In her meta-analysis of 38 studies of Internet use in political engagement, Shelley Boulianne (2009) concludes that the Internet does not appear to have a negative effect on political engagement but rather a small, although questionable, positive effect. Jakob Linaa Jensen (2013) suggests that online political participation supplements other ways of taking part in politics. Skilful use of social media may benefit electoral candidates (Gibson and McAllister 2011) and it may also allow politicians and social movements to avoid the gatekeepers of legacy media (Herkman 2012, p. 377), creating positive images of themselves and challenging competitors' opinions. Social media gives candidates the opportunity to make direct, personal contact with thousands of voters. Studies in Finland have shown that voters have begun to value the personal qualities of individual politicians at the expense of party allegiance, and this is one of the reasons that individual candidates are using increasing amounts of money for their campaigns (Karvonen 2011, p. 316; Vento 2009, pp. 125–128).

Enli and Thumim (2012, pp. 91–92) have argued that social media is a powerful instrument in the hands of a skilful politician, since social media enables the candidate to make symbolic 'representations of the self' that are more durable and more influential than previous one-way, one-time communication of the mainstream media. In addition, social media ruptures the artificial private/public dichotomy, as even the most private and mundane aspects of life may become exposed to thousands of people, thus creating the illusion of the personal presence of the politician.

When online campaigning started to gain popularity in the 1990s, minor parties in the U.S. had an advantage against major parties. However, according to Margolis and Resnicks' 'normalization hypothesis' (2000), major parties soon recovered and were able to reach their dominant position in 'new' media. After Margolis and Resnick, the 'normalization debate' is still on going. At present, the understanding is that there is little proof that Twitter has the capacity to radically transform political communication.

Recent discussions on the use of Twitter as a tool for political communication, can be summed up by four explanations that suggest that Twitter may not change political communication as much as had been previously imagined by many. First, politicians use Twitter more or less in the same way as other means of communication, i.e. to market themselves rather than a genuine dialogue with the public. The results are broadly the same in different countries, irrespective of whether researchers analyse tweets or interview politicians (Enli and Skogerbø 2013; Graham et al. 2013; Vergeer et al. 2011; Grant et al. 2010).

Secondly, Twitter is interconnected with other media outlets (Moe and Larsson 2013, p. 790). People tend to re-tweet news originally published by news agencies. The use of Twitter, thus, results in very few new ideas; rather, it mirrors society and is a medium heavily based on the circulation of news and commentary from the media. Peter Verweij (2012) goes as far as to say that 'Twitter is about spreading information and not so much about social networking' (p. 682). However, it is a two-way process, as journalists also use politicians' tweets as sources (Parmelee 2013; Broersma and Graham 2012).

Thirdly, several studies have pointed out that established parties and politicians dominate in Twitter. For example, Aussenhofer and Maireder (2013) found that in Austria it was mostly established politicians that

determined the topics and perspectives, despite there being room for participation from outside (also Nelimarkka et al. 2016; Larsson and Kalsnes 2014; Bekafigo and McBride 2013; Vergeer et al. 2011).

Fourthly, thus far, only a small majority of voters regularly use Twitter and an even smaller share use it to keep track of politics (Strandberg 2013; Nordicom-Sveriges Internetbarometer 2012; Smith and Rainie 2008). Actually, in Sweden voters seem to view Facebook rather than Twitter as the more convenient information-channel on politics (Larsson and Kalsnes 2014, p. 11), and it is especially in the Finnish context that Twitter has become profiled as a communication channel for the educated urban citizens, rather than the general nationwide public.

Research questions

This article offers a valuable contribution to the normalization vs. equalization debate (Margolis, Resnick and Levy 2003, p. 65–67; Samuel-Azran, Yarchi and Wolfsfeld 2015) by giving more nuanced information on *who* are the politicians who see the use of Twitter advantageous. The working hypothesis is that the normalization vs. equalization debate should no longer be examined at a general level, but rather in a more detailed manner, asking *when* does an effort to equalize the election campaign work and *under what circumstances,* and conversely, when does it not. The article combines the analysis of tweets with the details of the national context. This approach opens new venues for the investigation of the normalization and equalization effect.

Previous studies demonstrate that there are major differences between politicians' use of Twitter. Some make extensive use of Twitter, while others do not use it at all (see also Strandberg 2013, p. 1337). In this article, we analyse these differences between groups of politicians and explain the differences based on certain personal qualities of the politicians, such as gender, age, party, position and place of residence as well as national context. The article follows the approach of Larsson and Kalsnes (2014) who look at more or less similar contextual variables relating to the individual characteristics of politicians in Sweden and Norway[2] The hypothesis is that there are substantial variations between different politicians. We answer the question of what characteristics unite politicians using Twitter extensively, and alternatively those politicians who do not find use of Twitter fruitful.

Method and data

This analysis combines quantitative and qualitative methods. Our observations are based on quantitative data of the twenty most prolific candidates in terms of their use of Twitter and the amount of replies they received in Twitter (see Table 1 and Table 2). The quantitative data is used as background for a qualitative contextual analysis of each case. The data is contextualized with information about the political system, political landscape and the election process, as explained in the introduction of this article.

Twitter data for the quantitative analysis was collected during the campaign period of the European Parliament election in 2014. First, a list was composed of the EU parliamentary election candidates of the

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[2] Larsson and Kalsnes argue that in Norway and Sweden, Twitter was mostly used by 'challengers', i.e. younger non-incumbent politicians 'outside immediate political hotspots' rather than established politicians, as in many other countries. Nelimarkka et al. (2016) found that in Finland the opposition gained more visibility in traditional media outlets, whereas the parties in parliament gained more visibility in social media in the 2015 election.

parties represented in Finnish parliament. The list consisted of 160 politicians. Twitter handles of those people were collected manually, resulting in a list of 119 candidates. Using Twitter's Application Programming Interface (API) and customized software, all tweets sent by the EP election candidates, and those in which they were mentioned (re-tweets and @-mentions) were collected between 4 April, when the EP disbanded for the campaign break, and 26 May 2014, the day after the election[3]. During this period, all candidates sent a total of 31,577 tweets and were mentioned in 11,250 tweets (@-mentions).

The large dataset of tweets was then narrowed down to a list of the top 20 most prolific Twitter users and the top 20 recipients of replies. These people are comparable to the so-called *high-end users* (Larsson and Moe 2011), as they accounted for the majority of tweets and replies received. The top 20 users sent 20,673 tweets (65.47% of all tweets sent) during the campaign period out of a total of 31,577 tweets sent by candidates. The 'top 20 receivers of replies' gathered 8,789 tweets (78.12%) out of a total of 11,250 replies. The results confirm earlier findings that networks have a tendency to evolve around a few supernodes that have exponentially more contacts than others (Barabasi and Bonabeu 2003, pp. 54–55; Huhtamäki and Parviainen 2013, p. 252). At the other end of the spectrum were thirteen candidates, who did not send any tweets, even though they had an account. We will not systemically compare the high-end users with the thirteen people who did not send any tweets, but we briefly look into the composition of this group to see whether it fits the overall observations of the article.

The two groups of 'top 20 users' were then examined in more detail. The data is complemented with background variables, party affiliation, political position, age, gender and place of residence. These variables of the 'top 20 users' were combined with the data obtained through the Twitter API (number of tweets, number of replies and retweets) to generate contextualized information about the 'top tweeters' in the 2014 EP campaign.

Results of the analysis

The top 20 tweeters: compensation for lack of campaign resources

Table 1 presents the twenty most active Twitter users in the two-month period preceding the election. It shows that Johanna Sumuvuori, one of the leading Green candidates, was the most prolific tweeter among all candidates. She was closely trailed by Alexander Stubb, the leading candidate of the conservative National Coalition Party, and Foreign Trade Minister at the time.

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[3] Twitter users have several means available with which to enhance their messaging. They may use hashtags using the '#' character in conjunction with a word or phrase to connect the tweet to a particular issue. This allows other users to search and follow the particular hashtag to keep track of an interesting topic. Users may also engage in conversations by including the '@' character and a username, thus directing the message to a specific person, or making the person aware of the ongoing discussion. In the context of this study, these tweets are referred to as 'replies', the same term used by Twitter. The word 'replies' is therefore not a reply in the literal sense of the word; rather, it is a notification to the person named in the tweet. Users also have the possibility of retweeting other users' messages to their followers.

Table 1: The top 20 tweeters – number of tweets, age, position and gender

Abbreviations: NCP = National Coalition Party; SDP = Social Democratic Party; MEP = Member of the

#	Name	Number of tweets	Age	Sex	Party	Position	Place of residence
1.	Johanna Sumuvuori	1,389	38	F	Greens	f. MP	Helsinki
2.	Alexander Stubb	1,117	46	M	NCP	Minister	Helsinki
3.	Jyrki Kasvi	885	50	M	Greens	f. MP	Helsinki
4.	Maria Ohisalo	750	29	F	Greens	Leader of the youth organisation	Helsinki
5.	Lisa Sounio	730	44	F	NCP	Novice	Helsinki
6.	Mitro Repo	726	56	M	SDP	Current MEP	Helsinki
7.	Tom Himanen	726	24	M	CD	Novice	Kouvola
8.	Antero Vartia	625	34	M	Greens	Novice	Helsinki
9.	Sirpa Pietikäinen	574	55	F	NCP	Current MEP	Helsinki
10.	Pia Lohikoski	559	37	F	Left Alliance	Novice	Kerava
11.	Anni Sinnemäki	513	41	F	Greens	MP	Helsinki
12.	Anne Bland	493	45	F	Greens	Vice-chair of the party	Huittinen
13.	Anne-Mari Virolainen	473	49	F	NCP	MP	Lieto
18.	Eija-Riitta Korhola	464	55	F	NCP	MEP	Helsinki
14.	Heidi Hautala	443	59	F	Greens	MP	Helsinki
17.	Simon Elo	401	28	M	Finns Party	Leader of the youth organisation	Espoo
15.	Laura Peuhkuri	398	38	F	CD	Vice-chair of the party	Lappeenranta
16.	Antti Kaikkonen	392	40	M	Centre	MP	Tuusula
19.	Aura Salla	353	30	F	NCP	Novice	Helsinki
20.	Annika Lapintie	323	59	F	Left Alliance	MP	Turku

European Parliament; MP = Member of the Finnish Parliament; f. MP = former Member of the Finnish Parliament

Compared with many other countries, women have always played a relatively prominent role in Finnish politics and, since early 1990s, the share of women in parliament has been around 40% (Kuusipalo 2011). Consequently, it is not very surprising that a small majority of top 20 tweeters, 13 were women. This is notable, since out of all the candidates in the election, women were in the minority at 61 of 160 candidates. There were almost twice as many women among the top 20 tweeters than there were among the candidates in general. The same applied to the Twitter-using candidates in general where, of the 119 candidates using Twitter, there were 61 men and 58 women. Women politicians were active in Twitter, and only three female candidates from the eight parties represented in the Finnish Parliament did not have a Twitter account. The most likely explanation for the activity of women candidates is that they tried to compensate for lack of other resources by using Twitter. Women have been shown to have less money for campaigning (Venho 2012, p. 81), and the mainstream news media pays consistently less attention to female politicians in the news (Suikkanen and Syrjälä 2010, p. 53–62). However, Twitter seems to have no remarkable gendered impact in the election results. In the 2009 EP election, female election candidates won eight of the 13 places available. In 2014, they gained seven places out of 13.

Among the top 20 tweeters, there were seven Greens, six from the NCP, two Christian Democrats, two from the Left Alliance and one each from the populist Finns Party, the Centre Party and the SDP. The only party with no candidates among the top 20 tweeters was the Swedish People's Party. Interestingly, the only person from the SDP list to make it to the top 20 was the MEP Mitro Repo, an independent candidate on the SDP's list. The results are similar to those of a study on the 2009 elections for the European Parliament, which noted that the Greens and NCP candidates were the most prolific users of Twitter (Borg 2009). In the election to the national parliament in 2011, somewhat surprisingly, the Swedish Peoples' Party candidates were the most enthusiastic users of Twitter (35% of the candidates had an account), closely followed by the NCP (32%) and the Greens (34%) (Strandberg 2012, p. 84).

Regional policy and centre-periphery cleavages have traditionally been a fundamental axis in Finnish politics. The Eastern and Northern regions are sparsely populated, and an increasing share of the people live in the more urbanised Southern parts of the country. The capital, Helsinki, together with its surrounding areas, has more than 1.5 million inhabitants.

During political debates, the Centre Party, in particular, has accused both current regional policy for forgetting the sparsely populated Eastern and Northern regions and the concentration of the media around Helsinki. The cleavage between rural and urban areas of Finland has also been linked to increasing ideological and social polarisation in the Finnish society in the media. Some Centre Party politicians have used the phrase 'etelän media' (engl. Southern media) to describe major media houses' excessive focus on the political discourse around Helsinki, and the resulting neglect in addressing issues relating to ordinary people in the countryside. (Grönlund and Westinen 2012, pp. 168; Paloheimo, 2008, 44–45) Bearing this in mind, one might expect the Centre party candidates to utilise Twitter more, to compensate for the alleged bias in media attention. However, they did not do so.

A clear majority, fifteen of the top 20 tweeters were from Helsinki or the metropolitan area. Only five of the 'top 20 recipients of Twitter replies' came from outside the metropolitan region, and all of them were professional politicians (current MEPs, MPs or leaders of parties' youth organisations). Two major parties in the Helsinki city council are the National Coalition Party and the Greens. The NCP is also the most popular party in the Helsinki area, and the Greens had more support there than elsewhere in Finland; however, all of the Centre Party candidates on the 'top 20 list' were from Helsinki or its surroundings. The eagerness of the Greens to use Twitter can partly be explained by the fact that their core supporters are young, well-educated city dwellers who are most likely to use social media. The same can be said of the supporters of

the NCP, who often live in large cities and have a high level of educational attainment. In contrast to the Greens, however, the NCP's supporters are older and wealthier (Grönlund and Westinen 2012, pp. 164–166). Only one of the NCP candidates on the list lives outside Helsinki. Parties with older supporters (the Finns Party, the SDP) are clearly under-represented in the top 20 tweeters. However, the Finns party and the Swedish party were clearly overrepresented in the group of thirteen candidates who did not send any tweets. There were three candidates from each party in the list of non-tweeters. In addition, there were two candidates from the SDP and one from each of the Centre, the NCP, the Greens, Left Alliance and the Christian democrats.

The geographical location of supporters is reflected in the use of Twitter. The Centre Party, whose supporters live mostly outside large cities and in Northern and Eastern parts of Finland, only had one candidate in the top 20 tweeters, i.e. Antti Kaikkonen (Grönlund and Westinen 2012, p. 163–167), who was 40 years old in 2014 and lives less than 20 km from the centre of the capital Helsinki. All of the top 20 tweeters were between 20 and 59 years of age. The age division of the top 20 tweeters does not support the widespread assumption that tweeting is most common among the youngest of politicians. Most of the top tweeters (12), were over 40 years old and five of them were over 50, so in this case Twitter is rather a medium of middle-aged than young politicians. The age division also reflects the age distribution of candidates in general. Most candidates aiming for political positions tend to be middle-aged. There were a number of young candidates running, but they did not dominate the list of the top 20 tweeters. With only a few exceptions – the Left Alliance and the Christian Democrats, who had young candidates in the top 20 tweeters – the top tweeters were mostly established politicians.

What the SDP and the Centre Party have in common is the fact that they both have a strong grassroots organisation. The NCP and the Greens traditionally have a much weaker organisation, particularly outside the large cities of Southern Finland (Sundberg 2008, pp. 64–65; Vento 2008, pp. 22–23). It appears that some of the NCP and Green candidates try to balance the organisational weakness of their party by using Twitter. According to previous research conducted in Austria by Aussenhofer and Maireder (2013), left-wing parties and the Greens are more eager to use Twitter than the conservative parties. The prominence of the left-wing party candidates is not explained, but Aussenhofer and Maireder ascribe the eagerness of Greens to use Twitter to their generally high level of education and ability to adopt new technology. Apart from the Greens, studies in different countries have found no clear explanation as to why some parties are keener on the use of Twitter than others. The results of this research demonstrate the need to analyse the use of Twitter from the viewpoint of organisational strengths and weaknesses of parties, as well the geography of party support.

It seems that the Twitter public of Finnish politics is located heavily in the area of metropolitan Helsinki and its surroundings. We could also speculate that the Twitter public is leaning towards urban, middle class and middle-aged users, rather than being a demographic cross-section of all Finnish citizens. The composition of the thirteen candidates who did not send any tweets supports this argument. Out of these thirteen candidates, all but three lived outside Helsinki. Interestingly, two out of these three, Jussi Halla-aho (Finns party) and Nils Torvalds (Swedish Party), were actually elected to the European Parliament. One can safely conclude that these candidates had found means to contact their supporters outside the Twittersphere. The Twittersphere seems to be merely a part of a much wider publicity and the candidates try to use their limited resources to cover those parts of publicity that are important to them.

By looking at the official political positions of the top 20 tweeters, it is fair to say, that they are relatively well-established politicians, with three incumbent members of the European Parliament, nine current, and two former members of the Finnish parliament, including the Foreign Trade Minister. Three were vice-chairs

of their parties and two were leaders of the youth organisations of their parties. Among the top 20 tweeters, only four candidates are novices in politics: Lisa Sounio (NCP), Tom Himanen (CD), Antero Vartia (Greens) and Pia Lohikoski (Left Alliance). However, three of these four candidates had substantial resources either politically or otherwise. Lisa Sounio is a very successful entrepreneur and the daughter-in-law of the former President of Finland, Martti Ahtisaari. Antero Vartia is a former actor in a popular television series, and Pia Lohikoski had already been running in the 2011 parliamentary elections. Tom Himanen was the only candidate with no previous experience of party political activity or substantial resources outside politics. The results indicate that the well-established politicians dominate the Twittersphere as they probably find gaining visibility in Twitter easier than regular users. The common 'rich get richer' principle (Barabási and Albert 1999; Tufekci 2010) illustrates that well-known public figures gain followers more easily. Vergeer, Hermans and Sams (2011) have noted that in the 2009 EP election, although the most prolific tweeters were from 'fringe' parties, this activity did not translate into election victory. The same seems to be true in this case, only three of the top 20 tweeters gained a seat in the European Parliament. Being a prolific tweeter in itself does not secure success in the elections.

The top 20 recipients of replies and retweets: 'rich getting richer'

The list of top 20 candidates in terms of received replies on Twitter is shown in Table 2, and it differs somewhat from the list of top 20 tweeters. The largest party on the list of top 20 recipients of replies is the Greens, with seven candidates on the list. The Green candidates were able to conduct a lively discussion with their followers on Twitter, notwithstanding the fact that they are a small party with a support base of less than 10%. The second largest party on the list was the NCP, with five candidates on the list. Lisa Sounio, a more novice candidate, did not appear on the second list and was replaced by Minister Henna Virkkunen (NCP). The high political position of a person may result in more replies than is warranted by his or her activity in sending them. The only candidate from the Centre Party to make it to the top 20 recipients of tweets was Antti Kaikkonen, who also appeared on the list of most active tweeters.

In addition, two candidates from the Centre Party received a sufficient number of replies to gain a place in the list of the top 20 recipients of tweets, despite not tweeting enough to make it to the top 20 tweeters list. The first was Olli Rehn, the former EU Commissioner for Economic Affairs and Enlargement, and the second was Mikael Pentikäinen, former editor-in-chief of the largest Finnish daily newspaper, *Helsingin Sanomat*. The success of Rehn and Pentikäinen, as well as the fact that there were three candidates from the Centre Party on the top 20 recipients list, demonstrates that well-known figures have advantage in generating buzz in Twitter (it is important to note that they both live in Helsinki and belong to the political and/or media elite). This argument is supported by the fact that the SDP only has one candidate in the top 20 tweeters list, but three in the top 20 recipients list. According to the widely reported 'rich get richer' phenomenon, followers in social media seem to cumulate towards those who are already popular or well-known (Barabási and Albert 1999; Tufekci 2010). In this case too, the Twitter replies cumulated towards well-known, visible figures in politics and media.

Table 2: Top 20 recipients of Twitter replies

#	Name	Number of replies	Age	Sex	Party	Position	Place of residence
1.	Alexander Stubb*	2967	46	M	NCP	Minister	Helsinki
2.	Jyrki Kasvi	686	50	M	Greens	f. MP	Helsinki
3.	Johanna Sumuvuori	673	38	F	Greens	f. MP	Helsinki
4.	Eija-Riitta Korhola	503	55	F	NCP	MEP	Helsinki
5.	Antti Kaikkonen	446	40	M	Centre	MP	Tuusula
6.	Sirpa Pietikäinen*	435	55	F	NCP	MEP	Hämeenlinna Brussels
7.	Mikael Jungner	326	49	M	SDP	MP	Helsinki
8.	Antero Vartia	308	34	M	Greens	Novice	Helsinki
9.	Henna Virkkunen	294	42	F	NCP	Minister	Jyväskylä
10.	Mikael Pentikäinen	255	50	M	Centre	Former editor in chief	Helsinki
11.	Liisa Jaakonsaari*	221	59	F	SDP	MEP	Oulu
12.	Mitro Repo	220	56	M	SDP	MEP	Helsinki
13.	Oras Tynkkynen	209	37	M	Greens	MP	Tampere
14.	Anni Sinnemäki	207	41	F	Greens	MP	Helsinki
15.	Heidi Hautala*	188	59	F	Greens	MP	Helsinki
16.	Simon Elo	186	28	M	Finns party	Leader of the youth organisation	Espoo
17.	Li Andersson	181	27	F	Left Alliance	Leader of the youth organisation	Turku
18.	Olli Rehn*	180	52	M	Centre	Former commissioner	Helsinki/Brussels
19.	Maria Ohisalo	170	29	F	Greens	Leader of the youth organisation	Helsinki

20.	Anne-Mari Virolainen	134	49	F	NCP	MP	Turku

The elected candidates are marked with an asterisk "*".

Interestingly, the list no longer includes the candidate of the small Christian Democrat Party, novice politician Tom Himanen. At the same time, Li Andersson, the leader of the youth organisation of the Left Alliance, replaced the other Left Alliance candidates. Having a position at the top of a nationwide organisation seems to result in more replies from people on Twitter. The only Finns Party candidate on the list was Simon Elo, the leader of their youth organisation.

Overall, 19 of the top 20 tweet recipients were from the so-called large parties (the NCP, the SDP, the Centre Party and the Finns Party) and the Greens, whereas six of the 20 top tweeters were from large parties and the Greens. In other words, Twitter users show a small inclination to answer more to the tweets of large parties and the Greens, than to minor parties. Five of the top 20 recipients of tweets were able to gain a seat in the European Parliament, whereas only three of the top 20 tweeters we able to do so. It also appears that male candidates prompted more responses from the audience than female candidates. Of the top 20 tweeters, 13 were female, but of the top 20 recipients of tweets, only 10 were female. Nelimarkka et al. (2016) have also found that male candidates had more influence on the media in the Finnish parliamentary elections of 2015. Similarly, it appears that older candidates had a greater advantage. The average age of the top 20 recipients of tweets was 44.75 years compared with 42.1 years among the top 20 tweeters.

The information illustrating the hometowns of the candidates tells of the ability of the candidates to connect with voters through Twitter. All candidates among the top 20 recipients of replies lived in the large cities of Finland, with sixteen of them in Helsinki or its surroundings. In addition, there was one candidate per large urban centre in Finland: Turku, Tampere, Jyväskylä and Oulu. This gives a strong indication that the use of Twitter for two-way communication was most effective in larger cities, particularly the Helsinki region, and less so in other parts of Finland. The results reveal how Helsinki-centric the Finnish Twitter actually is. The other larger university cities, such as Turku and Tampere are at a clear disadvantage, as the tweeters correspondences were directed towards Helsinki-based candidates. Previous studies have shown a strong correlation between traditional news media coverage on one hand and Twitter on the other (Graham et al. 2014, p. 14). Since the large parties dominate the news, their politicians are also able to feed on Twitter much more effectively.

Conclusions

In this article we analysed the top 20 Twitter users and the top 20 recipients of Twitter replies among Finnish candidates of the 2014 EP elections. We pointed out the groups that have either used Twitter most or received most replies, and explained the differences based on certain personal qualities of politicians: gender, age, party, position and place of residence. The results give a fresh insight to the normalization vs. equalization debate, by answering questions *when* do the candidates and parties try to equalize their position in election, *when* is it successful and *why*.

At a general level, the main conclusion is that Twitter seems to be an instrument that reinforces existing structures of power, rather than challenges them, and therefore in line with the normalization hypothesis (Margolis, Resnick and Wolfe 1999; Margolis, Resnick and Levy 2003). The majority of the active Twitter users in this study were well-established candidates who had substantial resources available for

campaigning. Sixteen of the 20 top Twitter users were career politicians; three were well-known figures with substantial resources in the form of money and/or fame and visibility. There was only one genuine novice in politics in the top 20 tweeters. Most of the top 20 tweeters were over 40 years old and lived in the urban centres of Southern Finland. The Finnish political Twittersphere is very much located around the capital area of Helsinki.

The most active tweeters were from the conservative National Coalition Party and the Greens. It seems to be that the Green candidates made an effort to use the Twitter in order to equalize the election campaign because of their small organisation and smaller campaign resources. Why would this not apply to other small parties? The most likely explanation is that, unlike the Christian democrats or the Left Alliance voters, the Green party supporters have a relatively high level of education and live mostly in the Greater Helsinki area or other urban centres in Finland. For the same reasons the NCP candidates also found Twitter useful in normalizing the campaigning. The NCP has a large support base and their candidates use the largest amount of money for campaigning. However, the party has relatively weak organization, so one may argue that the candidates of the NCP tried to compensate for weak organization with the help of Twitter.

Interestingly, it seemed that the female candidates, who usually have less money available and get less visibility in the media, made a particular effort to equalize inequalities in resources by using Twitter. We argue, therefore, that some candidates think Twitter useful in compensating for some deficiencies in their campaign, such as lack of money, weak party organization or disadvantage by gender. The candidates of large parties, apart from the NCP (the Centre, the SDP and the Finns party), on the whole did not use Twitter in a manner that would suggest that they aimed at upholding their advantageous position. The simplest explanation is that the support base of these three parties was such that the use of Twitter would have been a waste of effort. The potential voters of the Centre and the Finns party are relatively evenly spread around Finland and, in the case of the SDP and the Finns Party in particular, are older and have a lower level of educational attainment than the supporters of the Greens and the NCP.

The Finns Party candidates used the least amount of money for campaigning and have a relatively weak organisation, but still did not find Twitter especially useful in compensating for these deficiencies. The most probable reason is that people outside large cities, with lower education and higher age are unlikely to be reached with Twitter (Grönlund and Westinen 2012, p. 163–167). It is possible that the political online publics of the Centre party, the Finns Party and the SDP lie elsewhere than in the nationwide Twitter conversations, an idea which could be studied further through, for example, the idea of political 'balkanization' (Himelboim et al. 2013).

The analysis of the top 20 recipients of replies adds more details to the analysis, with our main conclusion being that people on Twitter pay more attention to the candidates who tweet the most and who often are already well-known public figures. Novice politicians did not make it to the list of top recipients of replies. The candidates of small parties – the CDP, the Swedish People's Party and the Left Alliance – were not able to attract as much attention as the larger parties. At a general level, these findings bolster the normalization hypothesis. On the other hand, the Greens were indeed successful in their effort to equalize their position with larger parties.

The list of top 20 recipients of replies demonstrates that Twitter was not a particularly efficient tool in equalizing the gender or age disadvantage of candidates. The middle-aged male candidates got more visibility than their effort in using Twitter would lead one to expect. The average age of top 20 recipients of tweets was higher than the list top 20 users. Our results differ from those of Larsson and Kalsnes (2014, p. 9), who demonstrated that in Sweden, Twitter is rather used by young challengers than established politicians. The most likely explanation for this phenomenon is that in Finland, the electoral system places

the campaign burden on individual politicians, whereas in Sweden parties play a greater role in electoral campaigns.

The conclusion is that the candidates have found Twitter to be useful in equalizing candidate positions in terms of party organisation and financial resources, but only if the voters are young and from urban areas. This makes Twitter an efficient tool for the Greens and the NCP, but not so for other parties. On the other hand, the Twitter was not useful in equalizing deficiencies for female or for younger candidates. Our research demonstrates the need for a more nuanced analysis of the normalization vs. equalization hypothesis. It may be that the Twitter is actually able to equalize the differences in resources of parties and politicians, but is more effective in some categories of resources than in others, and only works under certain conditions.

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