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Personalized Politics in Traditional and Social Media: The Case of the 2019 Finnish Parliamentary Elections

Abstract. Personalization of politics is a well-established field of research, yet not much is known about how the phenomenon has been influenced by the increased use of social media as a tool for political communication. In this research we analyze media personalization in newspapers and on social media posts of parties and party leaders during the 2019 Finnish parliamentary elections. Combining quantitative and qualitative content analysis, we find that a) personalized content was more common in newspapers than on social media, and b) the contexts of personalized content were largely similar regardless of media type, suggesting it may be more relevant to speak of "hybrid media personalization" rather than "traditional media personalization" and "social media personalization". These findings are linked to broader discussions on personalization of politics and the use of social media as a political communication tool.

Keywords: political communication; social media; personalization of politics; newspapers; media personalization

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Introduction

People have always been central actors in politics, and the actions and opinions of powerful individuals, such as politicians, have always been of interest to the media. In recent decades, however, it has been claimed that the focus has increasingly shifted from parties and issues to individual politicians, a phenomenon known as personalization of politics (Van Aelst et al., 2012). In this process, individual politicians "become the main anchor of interpretations and evaluations in the political process" (Adam & Maier, 2010, p. 213).

A multifaceted concept, personalization of politics can be used to describe several different processes (Holtz-Bacha et al., 2014). This research is focused on media personalization, which comprises media coverage of politics as well as politicians' self-personalization in the media (Rahat & Kenig, 2018). While literature reviews have produced mixed evidence on the increased personalization of politics in general (e.g. Adam & Maier, 2010; Karvonen, 2009), much of the research focusing on media, specifically, has found evidence of increased media personalization (e.g. Adam & Maier, 2010; Langer, 2007; Langer & Sagarzazu, 2018; Balmas & Sheafer, 2014), although the development can also be non-linear (Holtz-Bacha et al., 2014; Šimunjak, 2018). In contrast, research analyzing personalization of election campaigns has failed to show evidence of a growing trend (Adam & Maier, 2010). This may however have changed in recent years, as the use of social media may increase the personalization of political campaigns (e.g. Enli & Skogerbø, 2013; Meeks, 2017).

Social media, by definition personalized media (Metz et al., 2020), form another possible arena for self-personalization of politicians and parties, with clear incentives for leading politicians to be present and publish personal content on social media. Previous research shows that politicians' personalized content on social media can increase the posts' success (Lee et al., 2018; Metz et al., 2020; Vučković & Oblak Črnič, 2020) as well as political involvement of citizens (Kruikemeier et al., 2013). Campaign posts shared by party leaders tend to be more successful than those shared by the party (Larsson, 2019) and party leaders often have more followers than official party accounts (Small, 2017).

Due to lack of research analyzing personalization of politics in the context of social media (Rahat & Kenig, 2018), it is unclear if personalized content is indeed a common feature of parties' and politicians' communication in social media. Furthermore, because social media personalization is rarely analyzed side by side with traditional media personalization, we lack the comparative perspective on how personalization manifests in traditional and on social media during election campaigns.

In this research, using both quantitative and qualitative analysis, we aim to understand to what extent, and how, personalization manifested in the 2019 Finnish parliamentary elections. We focus on both newspaper coverage and social media

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campaign posts during these elections, and what this tells us about personalization of politics in social media. Our analysis, which relies on a single set of elections, does not attempt to make claims about the development of personalization over time. Rather, the focus is on how dimensions of personalization are seen in different types of media content during political campaigns.

Theoretical concepts and previous research

Personalization is a multidimensional concept (Holtz-Bacha et al,. 2014) that suffers from conceptual ambiguity (Van Aelst et al., 2012). Research so far has agreed on the need for two clarifications: the aspects of personalization and the types of personalization studied. In this research we analyze media personalization, and our understanding of the concept includes both individualization and privatization, as per Van Aelst and colleagues' (2012) conceptualization.

For most scholars, media personalization comprises two separate developments that are taking place over time: 1) individualization, where individual politicians are increasingly becoming the center of focus at the expense of parties and issues, and 2) privatization, where individual politicians are increasingly being portrayed as private persons (Van Aelst et al., 2012). The latter has also been termed *intimization* (Stanyer, 2013) or *politicization of private persona* (Langer, 2010). Balmas and colleagues (2014) differentiate between *decentralized personalization* and *centralized personalization*, the former referring to a focus on individual politicians in general and the latter describing a focus on leading politicians. Van Aelst and colleagues (2012) call the two subtypes *general visibility* and *concentrated visibility.*

In this research, Van Aelst and colleagues' (2012) conceptualization of media personalization, drawing from an extended literature review, is applied to the analysis of Finnish parliamentary elections communications in newspapers and on social media. The operationalization of this model is described in detail later in this research paper.

Personalization in newspapers and social media

Most scholars agree that the (possible) personalization development can be attributed to both societal changes and changes in the media landscape. These include the decline of parties and party membership, causing political actors to search for alternative ways to connect with the public (Van Aelst et al., 2012; Garcia et al., 2022), and changes in the media landscape, especially the rise of television, which favors individuals at the expense of organizations (Holtz-Bacha et al., 2014; McAllister, 2015), as well as escalating competition, which prompts journalists to focus

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on individual politicians to make their political coverage more appealing (Kriesi, 2011). Those political leaders, who are eager for personal publicity and soft coverage, may benefit from personalization (Langer, 2007), as may parties, who find it easier to convey messages through individuals with whom voters identify (McAllister, 2015). Therefore, far from merely reacting to media demand, political actors may be "active accomplices" in reinforcing the personalization trend (Langer, 2010, p. 61).

Media personalization has mainly been studied in the context of newspapers, and personalization on social media has attracted little scholarly attention (Otto et al., 2018; Rahat & Kenig, 2018). The argument that growing use of social media would increase the personalization of politics seems to be based more on scholars' perception of social media as an inherently personal media than on empirical evidence (Rahat & Kenig, 2018). Existing research focused on personalization in social media consists of mostly single-platform studies and employs various operationalizations of the concept. As the relative short history and ever-changing nature of social media pose a challenge for longitudinal research (Rahat & Kenig, 2018), it may be more helpful to ask how personalization of political communication manifests in social media, not whether social media has increased the personalization of politics.

Personalization of politics in social media has steadily attracted research in the context of election campaigns, where personalized elements have been identified in social media campaign posts in single-country studies (e.g. Kruikemeier et al., 2014; Larsson, 2019; Meeks, 2017; Otto et al., 2018; Small, 2017; Grusell & Nord, 2020; Kannasto, 2021; Kannasto et al., 2023). Perhaps the most comprehensive analysis so far has been conducted by Rahat and Kenig (2018), who analyzed personalization in the Facebook and Twitter accounts of politicians from 25 countries. They identified a high variance in the levels of personalization across parties and countries, indicating that "personalization is not a necessary development of online politics" (p. 190). However, their study only focused on the number of profiles and their update frequency, not the content of the posts.

Regardless of extensive theoretical background from previous research, the rapid changes in traditional and social media call for an updated analysis that includes both traditional and social media, as earlier results may no longer reflect the current situation. Furthermore, results from other countries may not be applicable to Finland due to differences in political system and cultures (Paatelainen et al., 2016); therefore an analysis of the Finnish context is justified. Though social media and newspapers are inherently different media types (for instance, social media typically lacks the gatekeeping practices and content control of newspapers), analyzing them side by side offers the needed comparative perspective, as they form the two main information channels for voters during election campaigns, with sometimes competing narratives. This allows for a more holistic view on the manifestation of personalization during election campaigns.

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Research questions

In this research, we analyze personalized politics in newspapers and in the social media posts of parties and their leaders in the context of the 2019 Finnish parliamentary elections. With the media having an "inherent tendency to personalize political reporting" (Langer, 2007, p. 372), there is a reason to expect to see high levels of personalized content in the news coverages. As for the social media posts of parties and their leaders, the expectations are mixed. On the one hand, politicians' social media posts are often more successful if they contain personal elements (Lee et al., 2018; Metz et al., 2020; Small, 2017; Parmelee et al., 2023), which may encourage politicians to post more personalized content. On the other hand, previous research suggests Finnish politicians have negative attitudes toward what they perceive as increased privatization of politics (Isotalus & Almonkari, 2014; Mannevuo, 2022); with control over their social media accounts, they may withdraw from personalized communication. Therefore, our first research question is:

RQ1. To what extent does personalization manifest in the campaign coverage of a) newspapers and b) social media?

Previous research has focused on identifying whether media personalization has taken place and finding causes for either its existence or non-existence. This has typically taken place through quantitative analysis, with researchers counting the mentions of certain categories, such as references to a political leader's childhood or love life. While certainly useful, this approach does not tell us much about the contexts of personalization, or *how* personalization manifests in news coverage or campaign communication. For that purpose, a qualitative approach is needed in addition to a quantitative one. Thus, our second research question is:

RQ2. How does personalization manifest in a) newspapers and b) social media?

Our research is set in the context of Finland, a parliamentary democracy with elections taking place every four years. The open list system used in Finnish parliamentary elections means that a candidate competes for votes against candidates from other parties as well as other candidates from their own party. They must therefore try to differentiate themselves by focusing on building their own personal image and relationship with voters (Shugart, 2001). The prime minister's position usually aligns with the party with the majority of the votes, which can lead to increased personalization, as both the media and voters evaluate parties and their leaders with this perspective in mind (Borg et al., 2020). Before the entry of social media in Finnish election campaigns, Karvonen (2009) noted an increase in the personalization of politics. This has later been contested by von Schoultz and colleagues (2020), who argue that the role of party leaders and individual candidates in influencing voting decisions has not increased during the 21st century. An update to include the increased social media context in the discussion is, however, much needed.

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Research data

The research data were collected during a month-long period before election day, 14 March 2019 to 14 April 2019, from social media and newspapers. We chose to focus on newspapers as much of the existing research studies on media personalization has analyzed newspapers (Rahat & Kenig, 2018), so comparison with previous research is possible.

The newspaper data presented in Table 1 were collected manually from four Finnish newspapers: two afternoon papers (*Iltalehti* and *Ilta-Sanomat*) and two quality dailies (national daily *Helsingin Sanomat* and regional daily *Aamulehti*). These were chosen as they are the four newspapers with the largest readership that are issued at least six days a week (Media Audit Finland, 2020). The newspaper data consisted of all articles covering politics or the elections that were published during the data gathering period.

Table 1. Newspaper data

Newspaper	Newspaper type	Number of articles
Iltalehti	afternoon paper	117
Ilta-Sanomat	afternoon paper	161
Helsingin Sanomat	daily, national	202
Aamulehti	daily, regional	207

Source: Authors' own study.

The social media data were gathered from three social media platforms – Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram – chosen based on their popularity among political actors and the public. The data were gathered from the public accounts of the parties and leaders who had formed the parliament in the 2015–2019 term. We chose to focus our analysis on both individual party leaders and parties in order to identify possible differences between the social media posts of these two types of actors. We concentrated on party leaders as they are considered the literal embodiments of the beliefs and policies of the party (Rahat & Kenig, 2018) and typically represent their parties on a national level in the media (Isotalus, 2017; Kannasto et al., 2023).

The social media data were gathered using different tools. Facebook data for party leaders were gathered using Facepager (Jünger & Keyling, 2019), and for parties using NodeXL (Smith et al,. 2010). Instagram data were collected manually using screenshots. For Twitter, a custom script was developed to access tweets from the Twitter API. The data consisted of all public posts published by the parties and their leaders during the month-long period: 4,063 posts published by parties and 1,471 posts published by party leaders.

Analysis

Our research method consisted of both quantitative and qualitative content analysis. The quantitative analysis relied on the operationalization of the concept of per-

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sonalization by Van Aelst and colleagues (2012). It consists of (1) the visibility of politicians, (2) the visibility of the personal characteristics of politicians, and (3) the visibility of information about the private lives of politicians. They posited a news article or item as the central unit of analysis, which we applied to the newspaper data. For social media posts, we used single posts (a tweet, Facebook post, or Instagram post) as the unit of analysis. With Facebook and Twitter, our analysis focused exclusively on text, as the limitations in the data collection did not enable the study of pictures or videos. With Instagram, the central unit of analysis consisted of both images and text. Due to the scope of the article, our analysis of images was limited to analyzing who was in the picture; any broader visual information, such as positions, expressions, or environment, was not analyzed.

In Van Aelst and colleagues' (2012) operationalization, the visibility of politicians can be studied by counting the number of times a politician is mentioned within a news item. Alternatively, they suggest visibility can also be studied by calculating the number of items mentioning at least one politician to overcome the challenge posed by different lengths of, for example, a Twitter post and a newspaper article, which would otherwise have likely skewed our results.

To analyze the visibility of the personal characteristics of politicians, Van Aelst et al. (2012) proposed the following categories: competence, leadership, credibility, morality, rhetorical skills, and physical appearance. In our analysis, we applied the framework with slight modifications (Table 2). The categories of competence, leadership, credibility, and morality were combined because of their limited occurrence. The category of non-professional characteristics was added because this allowed for a more detailed consideration of how politicians are represented in the privatization dimension.

Table 2. Personal characteristics of politicians

Category	Description
Non-professional characteristics	Any reference to a candidate's personality, such as "friendly", "optimistic", "kind", or "funny", etc.; characteristics that are presented in a personal context
Professional characteristics	Any reference to a candidate's professional characteristics, such as leadership skills, credibility, decisiveness, ability to work with others, etc.; characteristics that are presented in a political context
Public speaking and performance skills	Any reference to a candidate's skills as a public speaker and/or candidate's performance (e.g. during an election debate), such as "easy to follow", "energetic", "aggressive", etc.
Physical appearance	Any reference to a candidate's appearance, including clothes, hair, expressions, etc.

Source: Authors' own study.

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To analyze the visibility of information on the personal life of politicians, the operationalization included four categories: 1) family life (family relationships and all aspects of domestic life); 2) past life or upbringing (all biographical information); 3) leisure time (information on hobbies, vacations, and recreational activities); and 4) love life (information on sexual relationships, marriage, and divorce) (for full coding instructions, see the Appendix in Van Aelst et al., 2012). In our analysis, we added a fifth category, "other", to include issues such as health or religion, which are personal but do not fit into original categories.

The data were analyzed by two coders trained to use the coding method. A 10% sample of the data was tested for intercoder reliability. Our chosen statistic was Cohen's (1960) kappa, which controls for agreement by chance. Intercoder reliability for the different categories ranged from .72 to .99, representing "substantial" to "almost perfect" agreement (Landis & Koch, 1977).

Finally, we performed qualitative content analysis to answer our second research question concerning how individual politicians were featured in newspapers and in social media. Through a close reading of the data, we attempted to understand the contexts in which personalized aspects manifested in the data. Qualitative analysis was a suitable method, as "the focus of qualitative analysis is on the "how" questions – focusing on processes through which things come to be the way they are" (Pain & Chen, 2019, p. 5). Here, our analysis was focused on *how* and in what kind of contexts individual politicians were featured, and what this can tell us about *how* different forms of personalization manifest in the data.

Results

To answer the first research question, our analysis showed that, overall, personalized content was more common in newspapers than in social media posts. However, there was variance between the different types of personalization, as well as between different social media platforms.

Individualization

Both general and concentrated visibility occurred most often in newspapers, with three thirds of newspaper articles containing a reference to at least one politician, and over half of the newspaper articles mentioning a party leader. As for social media, general visibility was more common in the parties' posts than those of their leaders, while concentrated visibility was more common in the leaders' posts than the parties'. The results are presented in Table 3.

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Table 3. General and concentrated visibility in newspapers and social media

	General visibility	Concentrated visibility
Newspapers (n = 678 articles)	75% (n = 516 articles)	54% (n = 370 articles)
Social media, parties (n = 4,063 posts)	62% (n = 2,537 posts)	37% (n = 1,485 posts)
Social media, party leaders (n = 1,471 posts)	57% (n = 836 posts)	51% (n = 753 posts)

Source: Authors' own study.

We were also interested in the variance between the different social media platforms. The results of this comparison are outlined in Table 4.

Table 4. Individualization in different social media platforms (percentage of all posts)

Dimension	Facebook parties (n = 1,147) party leaders (n = 403)	Twitter parties (n = 2,622) party leaders (n = 931)	Instagram parties (n = 294) party leaders (n = 136)
General visibility, parties	57% (n = 652 posts)	66% (n = 1,724 posts)	55% (n = 161 posts)
General visibility, party leaders	65% (n = 263 posts)	48% (n = 446 posts)	93% (n = 127 posts)
Concentrated visibility, parties	28% (n = 324 posts)	40% (n = 1,055 posts)	36% (n = 106 posts)
Concentrated visibility, party leaders	64% (n = 258 posts)	40% (n = 368 posts)	93% (n = 127 posts)

Source: Authors' own study.

Both general and concentrated visibility were more common in the Facebook posts of party leaders than those of parties, while on Twitter, general visibility occurred more often in the parties' tweets than in the leaders', and concentrated visibility occurred equally often between both actors. The differences were most pronounced in the case of Instagram, where there was a significant difference between parties and party leaders in both general visibility and concentrated visibility. This is likely explained by the fact that party leaders typically feature in the photographs they publish.

Privatization

Next, we looked at the prevalence of privatization and its two dimensions, personal characteristics, and personal life. This is where the different media types diverged the

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most. Personal characteristics were referenced in 12% of the newspaper articles, but only in 1% of the party leaders' social media posts and in 0.5% of the parties' social media posts. Personal life, in turn, was mentioned in 11% of the newspaper articles, in 5% of the party leaders' social media posts and in 0.5% of the parties' posts.

We also looked at the variance between different social media platforms (Table 5). While there was no difference in the case of personal characteristics or in the case of parties, the results showed that party leaders were more likely to bring up personal life on Facebook and Instagram than on Twitter.

Table 5. Privatization in different social media platforms (percentage of all posts)

Dimension	Facebook parties (n = 1,147) party leaders (n = 403)	Twitter parties (n = 2,622) party leaders (n = 931)	Instagram parties (n = 294) party leaders (n = 136)
Personal characteristics, parties	0.6% (n = 7 posts)	0.5% (n = 13 posts)	0% (n = 0 posts)
Personal characteristics, party leaders	3% (n = 11 posts)	0.8% (n = 7 posts)	1.5% (n = 2 posts)
Personal life, parties	0.3% (n = 3 posts)	0.4% (n = 11 posts)	2% (n = 6 posts)
Personal life, party leaders	10% (n = 39 posts)	0.6% (n = 5 posts)	18% (n = 24 posts)

Source: Authors' own study.

The characteristics mentioned most often by newspapers were professional characteristics (mentioned in 10% of the articles) and public speaking and performance skills (7%), followed by non-professional characteristics (3%) and physical appearance (1%). In the case of social media there were no notable differences, as the overall figures were low.

When newspapers referenced a party leaders' personal life, they did so most often in the context of past life or upbringing (9%) and family life (6%), followed by leisure time (4%), other, such as health of religion (4%), and finally love life (3%). For party leader's, their leisure time (2%) and family life (2%) were the most referenced categories, with the other three categories referenced in approximately 1% of their social media posts. In the case of parties, each of these subcategories was mentioned in less than 0.5% of the posts.

Contexts of personalization

Our second research question concerned the way personalization manifested in newspapers and in social media. Here, we utilized qualitative content analysis to

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understand the situations and contexts in which the aspects of personalization were displayed in the data.

General visibility

We identified five separate contexts for general visibility in the data. Three of the five contexts were the same with both types of media, although the actual content differed slightly.

Candidate presentations was a context of general visibility that was identified both in the newspapers and on social media. In newspapers, this consisted of newspaper articles that listed individual candidates from a selected perspective, such as current MPs re-running for office or candidates with a criminal background. Candidates were usually not given a voice in these. In social media posts of parties and their leaders, they listed candidates from a particular area, posted links to candidates on the party website or to blog posts by individual candidates. Individual candidates were presented in a positive light and as someone to be voted for.

Political news coverage was also present both in newspapers and on social media. In newspapers, this consisted of typical news coverage of political events, where individual politicians – typically current MPs – were presented either as someone influencing a decision (such as voting for or against a particular bill) or as someone voicing an opinion on political events. In the case of social media, this consisted of posts commenting on current political events from the perspective of a party or an individual candidate. Here, individual politicians were presented as a party mouthpiece, while with newspapers individual politicians could also disagree with the official party line.

Campaign coverage was more common on the social media posts of parties and their leaders, but was also identifiable in newspapers. In newspaper articles, campaign coverage took the form of reports from the campaign trail, and individual politicians were either presented interacting with voters or quoted voicing their experiences from the campaign trail, especially when exceptional events, such as campaign violence, occurred. In comparison, on social media posts individual politicians were presented voicing their positive experiences and excitement from the campaign trail.

Political analysis was only identified in newspapers. This context consisted of newspaper articles analyzing the causes and effects of particular political events, and individual politicians – typically current or previous MPs – were presented as players in the game, their actions, aspirations and motivations having influenced different outcomes.

Campaign announcements was in contrast only identified on social media. Slightly different from campaign coverage, this context consisted of informative posts announcing where and when individual politicians could be met.

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Concentrated visibility

Similarly to general visibility, concentrated visibility also manifested in five contexts in the data. Again, three of the five contexts were the same both with newspapers and with social media.

Presentations of party leaders was a context that was identified both with newspapers and with social media. In newspapers, this consisted of interviews of party leaders, the purpose of which was to present the party leader as the face of the party, both as a private person and as a politician. In this context, the party leader typically acted as the mouthpiece of the party, outlining the most important political goals and ideologies of their party. These interviews often included privatized aspects, such as mentions of the party leaders' background or family. On social media, this context was heavily reliant on newspapers, with parties and their leaders mostly quoting and sharing links to these newspaper stories. Presentations of party leaders without a connection to newspapers were rare.

Political news coverage as a context was also present in both media types and was similar to general visibility. Newspapers brought up party leaders either as political actors influencing decision-making or opinionators commenting on political events. These were then replicated by parties and their leaders on social media by sharing these news stories and, in the case of party leaders, adding their personal comments.

Campaign coverage was also present in both media types and was again similar to general visibility. In newspaper articles, reports on party leaders' campaign events included descriptions of party leaders' discussions with voters and evaluations on their popularity based on the size of the crowd present. On social media, these consisted of party leaders posting positive messages from the campaign trail. This context also included descriptions of televised campaign events, such as televised election debates, where party leaders' statements were summarized or live-tweeted.

Political analysis was again a context that was only identifiable in newspapers. In addition to effects of party leaders' actions on political decisions, this context also included newspaper stories analyzing the effects of party leaders' actions or personality on the popularity of the party.

Again, similarly to general visibility, *campaign announcements* was a context that only appeared on social media and consisted of posts announcing where and when party leaders could be met.

Privatization

We identified two separate contexts for privatization in the newspapers and three separate contexts for privatization on social media. Two of these contexts appeared in both, and the privatized content published on social media was often derived from content published in the newspapers, displaying a strong link between the two.

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Personal interviews was a context that originated in newspapers and then migrated to social media. In newspapers, this context included interviews of party leaders and their spouses or other family members, thus presenting the party leader as a private person and providing information on their personal lives, such as childhood, interests or family life, or personal characteristics and family dynamics. All of the four analyzed newspapers included such interviews, although interviews of spouses and family members appeared on afternoon papers only. On social media, this context was reproduced by quoting and sharing links to these newspaper interviews. Notably, however, most of the party leaders did not share links to the interviews of their spouses or other family members.

Party leader evaluations was another category that originated in newspapers and was then reproduced by parties and their leaders on social media. In the newspapers, this context included evaluations of party leaders' personal characteristics, popularity and public speaking skills. Typically this took place after a televised election debate, with newspapers publishing their own assessments on how each party leader performed in the debate and who was the winner of that particular debate. Some newspaper articles also evaluated party leaders' personal characteristics in the context of political analysis, assessing how traits such the party leaders' stubbornness may have influenced political decision-making of the party. These evaluations were then selectively replicated by parties and their leaders on social media, with only positive evaluations brought up.

Personal snapshots only appeared on social media. This context was particular to party leaders, Instagram and – in few instances – Facebook, and it was the only context of privatization on social media that bore no connection to newspapers. In this context, party leaders provided snapshots of their personal lives, mostly in the form of photographs. These snapshots typically displayed hobbies, outdoor activities or pets, showcasing family members or (rarely) love life. This was clearly different from newspapers, where much of the focus was on family or love life.

Overall, the qualitative analysis showed that, in addition to personalized content occurring more frequently in newspapers than on social media, there were similarities between the personalized content regardless of the type of media. Personalized content emerged in similar contexts on both types of media, and in several instances the personalized content published in newspapers was duplicated on social media by parties and their leaders.

Conclusions

In this research we approached the manifestation of the personalized content in newspapers and on the social media posts of parties and party leaders from four perspectives: general and concentrated visibility and personal characteristics and per-

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sonal life. We found, first, that all four aspects of personalization were largely similar regardless of media type and author (journalists vs politicians vs parties). Also, while all media types included personalized content, traditional media showed more privatized content than social media. These results provide new understanding on both personalization of politics as well as the use of social media in election campaigns.

Our key finding was that social media personalization and traditional media personalization are not separate phenomena but intertwined, with newspapers forming a source of personalized content for political actors. Especially the privatized content published by parties and their leaders on social media was heavily reliant on content originally published by newspapers, suggesting that even though political actors were not keen on creating such content themselves, they were willing to utilize the content that was already published. Thus, it may not be applicable to speak of "traditional media personalization" and "social media personalization" or "online personalization", but of "hybrid media personalization". Built upon Chadwick's (2013) concept of hybrid media system, it describes a development where personal stories and personal images flow smoothly from older to newer media and *vice versa*. In our data this process was unidirectional, with personalized content flowing from newspapers to social media but not *vice versa*; however, it can also be a two-way relationship, as evidenced perhaps best by Donald Trump's ability to influence news agenda with his tweets (e.g. Oates & Moe, 2018).

Second, our analysis indicates that, unlike sometimes claimed (e.g. Meeks, 2017), the use of social media by political actors does not necessarily lead to increased personalization of politics. It is possible that social media logic (e.g. Metz et al., 2020) has less influence on political communication than the preferences and goals of individual political actors. Alternatively, the results may also speak of Finnish politicians' resistance towards personalization development (Isotalus & Almonkari, 2014; Mannevuo, 2022).

What, then, do our results tell us about the use of social media in election campaigns? First, we found that political actors actively utilized traditional media content in their social media campaign communication and that personalized content emerged in similar contexts both in newspapers and on social media, indicating that this is a relationship of synergy rather than of conflict. Instead of using social media to bypass traditional media or to challenge the agenda it has set, political actors may be using social media to provide more added visibility (Kannasto, 2021) to content published by traditional media. Alternatively, this may also be evidence of traditional media's influence over social media, and of traditional media's continuous ability to determine the agenda of political discussion even at the age of the hybrid media system.

We also identified some key differences between the personalized content published on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, with political actors being more likely to post personalized content on Facebook and on Instagram than on Twitter. These results were noteworthy, as they suggest strategic considerations, implying that, rather than approaching all social media platforms as one entity, political actors strategically

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choose the type of content by platform and modify their messages to suit the genres (Kreiss et al., 2018) of different political platforms. The most skilled political actors to do so may be rewarded with election success, especially among young voters actively using social media (Tukiainen et al., 2023).

As with other studies, the current study is not without limitations. First, our research was focused on a single point in time and on a single country, thus making it impossible to make claims about personalization as a process and limiting the extent that the results can be generalized to other countries besides Finland. In the future, comparative longitudinal research and comparative research covering multiple countries could help to identify any possible long-term and cross-cultural developments of the personalization trend.

The second limitation is that our research data was gathered during an active campaign period, meaning that the results may be not applicable to political communication outside of election times. Third, including smaller, local newspapers in addition to national and regional newspapers in the data may have revealed even higher levels of personalized content in the newspapers. Fourth, our results may have been influenced by a decision made early in the analysis process to categorize all social media posts written in first person as personalized, which led to a high number of posts being classified as personalized. However, it is noteworthy that even with this choice, newspapers still had a higher percentage of personalized content.

Finally, the limited visual analysis in our methodology neglected the visual nuances in the data, especially in Instagram images, but was also limited for Twitter and Facebook where data collection methods excluded visuals. Including visuals more comprehensively may have revealed higher levels of personalization. This should be considered in further research, as images and even videos are becoming increasingly important in political communication on emerging platforms such as TikTok. With multimodality becoming a central feature of platforms, future research should extend the analysis of personalized content beyond mere text (Salonen et al., 2021).

From a methodological perspective, applying Van Aelst and colleagues' (2012) operationalization of personalization to the context of social media is not without challenges. For instance, should a social media post published by a party leader automatically be classified as personalized, even if the post is not written in the first person nor does it reference the party leader? Adding to the challenge is the multimodal nature of social media (Salonen et al., 2021). A politicians' social media post may contain links, photographs and videos as well as text, posing a question that needs to be answered: what counts as personalization on social media?

Overall, our research suggests that while personalization is a prevalent feature of social media campaign communication, it exists in tandem with traditional media, to the extent that it makes sense to speak of "hybrid media personalization". It is likely that personalization on social media is motivated by traditional journalism, and political actors simply use social media as a megaphone for circulating this content.

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The use of social media by political actors is likely motivated by strategic considerations, which affects the platforms they choose and the types of content they publish.

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