

MAPPING THE ONLINE AUDIENCE

Mapping the on-line campaign audience: an analysis of on-line participation and
its mobilizing potential in the 2011 Finnish parliamentary campaign

Kim Strandberg

Åbo Akademi University

Finland

Kim Strandberg is a postdoctoral researcher and associate professor at the Department of politics and administration at the Åbo Akademi University in Finland. His research focuses on several aspects of the relationship between the Internet and politics and political communication. His research has concerned online campaigning, online citizen deliberations, and online participation. He has published several articles in political science and political communication journals and in edited volumes. He is also often used by Finnish media as an expert commentator in conjunction to elections.

Abstract

This article analyses citizens' use of the Internet in conjunction with the 2011 Finnish parliamentary election. The purpose is to examine online participation and aspects of its mobilizing potential through asking questions regarding to what extent, and how citizens used the Internet for participatory activities. The analysis utilizes survey data from the Finnish National Election Study survey. The findings show that a certain group of citizens display a broad and expressive use of the Internet. This use is also reflected in how they participate on-line and off-line, how they form the informational basis for their vote choices and also, to some extent, indirectly appears to mobilize citizens beyond the Internet.

Introduction

Throughout history, democracy and political communication have often developed in tandem (Gurevitch et al., 2009; Norris, 2001a). Thus, both a wide encompassing societal modernization process (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005) and a modernization of political communication (cf. Budge, 1996, pp. 28-31; Norris, 2001a) were observed during the latter part of the 20th century. The societal modernization process, firstly, is proposed to have transformed politics from “elite-directed participation” mainly focusing on protecting collective interests through traditional political agents, towards increasingly having to meet the self-expressive demands of individuals – especially those belonging to younger generations (e.g. Inglehart & Welzel, 2005, 118; Kies, 2010, 70). These citizens mainly engage in new “elite-challenging” types of political activities in cause-driven networks and ad-hoc organizations (e.g. Bennett, 2012, p. 21; Dalton, 2007).

Political communication, secondly, developed in three phases in the 20th century; the premodern, modern and postmodern phase (e.g. Norris, 2001a). In the postmodern phase, the Internet has been seen as providing new and ample opportunities for civic participation in politics (e.g. Budge, 1996, pp. 28-31). Hence, a distinct shift in the ways media can be used by citizens for expressing their views, building networks and for engaging in political- and participatory activities is evident – especially as the Internet has matured in the so-called Web 2.0 phase. Interestingly, thus, the new communication media is catered towards facilitating untraditional, individualized “elite-challenging” forms of political activity, or “self-actualizing, digitally mediated DIY politics“ as Bennett (2012, p. 30) rather appropriately calls it (c.f. Kahne & Middaugh, 2012). However, a dualism between optimism and scepticism has been evident within the research field regarding the impact of ICTs on political participation. Norris (2001b) minted the now well-known terms mobilization and

reinforcement to summarize these rather disparate views on whether ICTs will activate previously inactive citizens or just ‘preach to the converted’ (Norris, 1999). Interestingly, and to its credit, this theoretical framing has been relevant to the research field for over a decade now and still maintains a central position (e.g. Nam, 2010, p. 132; Oser et al., 2012, p. 1). However, the focus of this framing has evolved with time. Thus, whereas earlier studies were often concerned with digital divides (Norris, 2001b) – both in terms of which citizens had access to the technology and whether those with access had motivation for using online channels for political purposes – recent studies have put significant effort into furthering our knowledge on *what* kind of participatory activities citizens are engaging in (e.g. Anduiza et al., 2010; Cantijoch, 2012; Cantijoch et al., 2011; Oser et al., 2012; Vaccari, 2012).

Correspondingly, research findings concerning the potentially mobilizing effects of online participation have evolved too. Hence, there was initially little evidence suggesting that political participation experienced any major mobilization even though the public’s general use of the Internet began to rise (e.g. Gibson et al., 2010, p. 3). Over time, though, several studies applying a more diversified approach to online participation than what was the case in earlier studies¹, have reported findings which suggest that resource-based patterns explaining political participation – i.e. that citizens participating often have high SES, income, and level of education (e.g. Verba et al. 1995) – are beginning to erode as the use of the Internet for societal and political purposes has matured and diversified (e.g. Cantijoch, 2012; Gibson et al., 2010; Mossberger et al., 2007; Scholzman et al., 2010). Seemingly, the diversified approach to online participation could serve as an important ‘key’ to unlock crucial knowledge regarding potential mobilization effects. This article applies an explorative approach with the purpose of examining the diversity and extent of online participation and aspects of its mobilizing potential in conjunction with the Finnish parliamentary elections in 2011. The article seeks to answer questions regarding to what extent, and how citizens used

the Internet for participatory activities. How this is connected to other forms of participation, and what traces of further mobilization effects there are to be found in connection to this on-line activity.

Literature review

In the conclusion to her meta-analysis of studies on the effects of the Internet on civic engagement, Boulianne (2009, p. 205) notes that early studies were quick to assume that the Internet had no impact on participation. However, she also encourages future studies to “more fully explore the Internet’s varied effects, considering other types of Internet use and specific civic and political activities”. Apparently, scholars seem to have taken notice since the current state of the art within the research field is now *precisely* focusing on the diversity of online participation, how it can be explained, and what the impact of various forms of online activities have in terms of mobilizing citizens (e.g. Anduiza et al., 2010; Cantijoch, 2012; Oser et al., 2012). Concerning the last of these three foci, Gibson et al. (2010, p. 3) summarize the development of the research by stating that “as measures and models of Internet use expanded, a more mobilizing picture began to emerge” (c.f. Gibson & Cantijoch, 2011, pp. 5-6; Cantijoch et al., 2011, pp. 3-5). Thus, as the ways in which the Internet can be used have grown – especially in the web 2.0 era with social networking sites and user generated content at the forefront (e.g. Baumgartner & Morris, 2010; Cogburn & Espinoza-Vasques, 2011; Kahne & Middaugh, 2012; Östman, 2012) – assumptions of the Internet having one-dimensional direct effects on participation have been abandoned in favor of more complex models accounting for the expanded participatory repertoire and incorporating multifaceted

indirect effects (Cantijoch, 2012; Gil de Zuniga et al., 2010; Jensen & Anduiza, 2012, p. 82; Mossberger et al., 2007, p. 78; Norris & Curtice, 2006; Oser et al., 2012).

But how, then, does online participation manifest itself? Currently, the view on online participation is quite aligned with the multidimensional view of offline political participation established by Verba and colleagues (e.g. Verba et al., 1995). Thus, corresponding to how off-line participation is not seen as one-dimensional, neither is on-line participation to be seen as one single entity. Norris and Curtice (2006, pp. 4-7) were early to ponder how the Internet might impact various types of participation such as voting, campaign-oriented activism, cause-oriented activism and civic-oriented activism. Their view (*ibid.*, pp. 6-7) is that certain types of participatory activities might be augmented more by the Internet than others. In specific, they highlight cause-oriented activism as being most strongly associated with Internet use, since this is the type of activity preferred by the online population. In a similar vein, other scholars (e.g. Gibson & Cantijoch, 2011) have noted that some forms of online participation have off-line equivalents – for instance campaigning, donating or contacting a politician (e.g. Gibson et al., 2010) – and that the on-line and off-line activities concerning these often seem to complement one another so that participatory behavior off-line carries over to the on-line world. For these activities the Internet thus mainly alters the communicative manner through which they take place (Anduiza et al., 2012, pp. 364-365) rather than bringing about new forms of participatory activity.

However, several studies of online participation (e.g. Anduiza et al., 2010; Cantijoch et al., 2012; Gibson & Cantijoch, 2011; Jensen & Anduiza, 2012; Oser et al. 2012) have found that certain forms of online activity are distinct from traditional types of participation – i.e. they do not only differ from traditional participation in the channel through which they take place, but also in the nature of the actual activity. Gil de Zuniga et al. (2010, p. 39), for instance, write that “Online expressive participation does not take away from the

more traditional offline activities [...] But online expressive participation may open a different pathway to participation...”. Gibson and Cantijoch (2010) also echo this view in as much as they find that online participation often has an off-line equivalent but that it also contains a ‘new’ element of e-expressive participation – i.e. expressing one’s political views publically in blogs, posting comments, sharing or forwarding political content or other types of user-generated content – which serves to broaden the participatory repertoire (cf. Anduiza et al., 2010; Cantijoch et al., 2011; Östman, 2012).

So online participation, subsequently, is both equivalent but also distinct from off-line participation. This means that it is equivalent in as much as it constitutes an ‘electronic version’ of traditional participatory activities and distinct in the sense that it also contains a ‘new’ element of the so-called e-expressive participation. The final part of the literature review focuses on how scholars have drawn upon these two characteristics in order to further assess the mobilizing potential of online participation.

On-line Participation’s Mobilizing Potential

Concerning the mobilizing potential of online participation, two strains of thought are discernible within the literature; firstly, by taking place in a ‘new’ communicative venue online participation could mobilize in terms of which type of citizens participate and what resources are required to engage politically (Anduiza et al., 2010, p. 364). Secondly, a potential mobilization is perceivable in the effects that online participation might have on those participating. The former of these perspectives, deals with a resource-based model perspective (c.f. Verba et al., 1995) according to which political participation is contingent on higher age, SES, income, education, and has been quite dominant thus far within the research field. The latter perspective, albeit not as wholly researched as the former, suggests that online

participation has a potential indirect mobilizing impact through the ways in which it increases knowledge, engagement and interest which, in turn, could make citizens better equipped to engage in other forms of participation (e.g. Gibson et al., 2010, pp. 17-18; Gil de Zuniga, 2010; Xenos and Moy, 2007; Östman, 2010).

As to the first perspective on a potential mobilization, the common denominator found in most studies is that online participation is predominately a realm of younger citizens, which breaks the pattern of political participation rising with age (e.g. Cantijoch et al., 2011; Schlozman et al., 2010, p. 501; Oser et al., 2012, pp. 8-9). Certainly, the fact that young citizens are far less underrepresented in political activity taking place online than they are off-line is currently the most obvious difference found between off-line and online participation (Anduiza et al., 2010; Gibson et al., 2010). This indicator of mobilization could, however, as Schlozman et al. remark (2010, p. 503), be mostly due to the fact that young people are heavy Internet users, rather than of them becoming more active due to their Internet use. Thus, some scholars argue that it is plausible that resources such as SES, income and education will be highly influential on political involvement when the young Internet generation ages (Schlozman et al., 2010, p. 503; cf. Norris and Curtice, 2006, p. 16). Some studies have also demonstrated this empirically. For instance, Norris and Curtice (2006, p. 14) found that when keeping Internet use constant, online political activity increased with age, income, education and social class. Oser et al. (2012, p. 9) also found that the influence of SES was equivalent for *both* off-line and on-line political activity. Other studies report similar findings concerning the online variants of formal forms of participation; Cantijoch et al. (2011) found that citizens engaging in what they call e-formal activities (such as party-driven activities online or information seeking) are often already very active off-line, politically interested citizens (cf. Gibson et al., 2010; Nam, 2010, p. 144; Schlozman et al., 2010; Vaccari, 2012).

However, the recent focus on the diversity of online participation has challenged this view to the extent that scholars have even suggested that “traditional resources now matter little for online participation” (Anduiza et al., 2010, p. 365). While such statements are arguably bold, empirical findings concerning informal, e-expressive forms of online participation support them. Thus, as Cantijoch et al. (2011, p. 23) conclude their analysis of participation in the 2010 UK elections: “some [types of e-participation] are clearly the domain of ‘usual suspects’ [...] Others, however, are appealing to citizens who are not highly involved with politics...”. Their findings show that although resources matter for using the Internet for formal political activities, they have little influence on so-called ‘e-expressive’ activity which characterizes, for instance, social media. Strandberg (2013, pp. 12-14) similarly found that when explaining citizens’ use of the Internet in the 2011 Finnish election campaign, the relevance of political interest in explaining online participation diminished for the use of social media sites, while it remained significant for other more traditional forms of online participation (i.e. visiting party websites). Nam (2010, p. 146) also shows that social media equalizes patterns of educational and income gaps concerning participation. Shlozman et al. (2010, p. 501) also, albeit cautiously, acknowledge that “[SNS] have the potential to overcome the structuring of political participation by age and SES”.

Turning, finally, to the second aspect of the mobilizing potential of online participation – i.e. how it might be creating indirect pathways to further participation – a connection to the broad view of the participatory repertoire is again evident within the literature. Often, studies of online participation struggle to find a direct independent impact of online participation on turnout or other formal modes of participation (e.g. Cantijoch et al., 2011; Gibson et al., 2010, pp. 17-18). Therefore, scholars have pondered whether there instead lies an indirect mobilizing potential in other forms of online participation – such as the earlier discussed e-expressive participation (e.g. Boulianne, 2009; Gil de Zuniga, 2010;

Östman, 2012). According to this view, online participation could lead to a tangible political mobilization by increasing citizens' knowledge, interest, engagement, and capability to express themselves politically – i.e. by augmenting their civic skills which in turn might 'spill over' into increased turnout, volunteering and other formal forms of participation (Mossberger et al., 2007, pp. 87-88). Thus, these civic skills acquired through on-line activities could have important bearing for further political participation, both on- and off-line (e.g. Jensen & Anduiza, 2010, pp. 96-97; Gibson et al. 2010, p. 14). Boulianne (2009, p. 205) writes that "increased access to a large, diverse set of political information may help reinvigorate civic life". Similarly, Östman (2012, pp. 1015-1016) found that although being involved in creating user-generated content online did not directly affect users' participation, it nonetheless promotes democratic qualities such as expression and collaboration. Gil de Zuniga et al. (2010, pp. 46-47) likewise show that for citizens engaging in reading and commenting blogs, this activity "...seems to serve not as an endpoint of participation, but fosters greater participation in a variety of settings".

Summary of the literature review and analytical framework

As stated in the introduction, the purpose of this article is to explore online participation and aspects of its mobilizing potential in conjunction with the Finnish parliamentary elections in 2011. To this end, the theoretical framework reviewed some of the key literature concerning online participation. Several important aspects concerning the mobilizing potential of online participation which are of relevance to the empirical analysis of the present study emanated from the literature review. These core of these are summarized in Table 1:

[Table 1 about here]

Without excessively repeating what has already been discussed in the literature, it should nonetheless be stressed that the main essence of the framework depicted in Table 1 is how the mobilizing potential of online participation is composed of several interconnected aspects. The central aspect is arguably the participatory repertoire which contains activities both equivalent and distinct from off-line participatory activities. These are potentially connected to two different kinds of mobilization; a resource based (direct) and a skill based mobilization (indirect). From this framework, three research questions emanate:

RQ1: To what extent are citizens engaging in various activities contained in the participatory repertoire?

RQ2: Are there indications of either a resource-based and/or a skilled based mobilization to be found in the citizens' use of the Internet in conjunction to the 2011 Finnish elections?

RQ3: What indications of either direct or indirect impact of the citizens' use of the Internet can be found in conjunction to the 2011 Finnish parliamentary elections?

Methods and Data

In order to find an analytical technique by which one can sufficiently emulate the analytical framework as well as answering all three overarching research questions, I opted for an explorative design which will be conducted in several steps (for studies applying similar

analytical techniques see Cantijoch et al., 2011; Gibson & Cantijoch, 2011; Oser et al., 2009). Thus, in a precursory step to the main analysis, the extent in which citizens generally used the Internet – not in an explicitly participatory manner – and engaged in online activities of the e-expressive type, is used as a basis for an automatic clustering algorithm in order to identify groups of citizens. Basically, the analytical logic in this study is thus to identify whether there is a group of citizens who are very actively and extensively using the Internet, whom one might call “the online citizens” and thereafter, as a next analytical step, depart from these identified groups and examine (i) how citizens in each citizen group participated both off-line and on-line, i.e. whether their varied use of the Internet and engagement in e-expressive activities are reflected in differences in participatory profiles on-line and off-line (c.f. Oser et al., 2009), (ii) whether there are any differences in direct and indirect impact to be found between citizens belonging to each group and (iii) whether potential differences in participatory profiles and turnout appear to be contingent on the citizens’ Internet use and e-expression or if it contains other signs of resource-based or skilled based mobilization.

The dataset used for these analyses is survey data from the 2011 Finnish national election study (Finnish Social Science Data Archive, FSD2653). The FNES is a nationwide survey conducted in conjunction with Finnish parliamentary elections by a team of political science scholars and adheres to stringent survey techniques and established questionnaire items (see Borg, 2012 chapter 1). The survey consists of a pre-election face-to-face interviews and a post-election drop-off survey which the interviewed respondents voluntarily answer and mail in after the elections. The 2011 FNES survey was answered by a large, representative sample of Finnish citizens (N=1,297 in the interviews of which N=806 mailed in the drop-off survey). In the analysis here some survey items which stem from the drop-off survey are used to create clusters and the population for this analysis is thus N=806. Detailed data on the representativeness of the FNES respondents and the drop-off respondents

to the Finnish population in general can be found in appendix A. Partly due to the long tradition of using the Internet in election campaigns in Finland (see Carlson & Strandberg, 2012), the FNES survey has evolved rather rapidly over time regarding items concerning the Internet, and it currently contains several questions concerning online participation and engagement in conjunction with the campaign². Hence, the empirical analyses are able to shed light – albeit with some limitation set by the available survey items – on all parts of the analytical framework (Table 1).

The Finnish Context

Before presenting the findings I will briefly present the Finnish electoral context and indicate why an analysis of the Finnish case provides added value to the research on online participation. Concerning the latter, the importance of this study for the research field not so much to be based on methodological innovativeness – in fact the analytical approach is heavily inspired by other studies (e.g. Cantijoch et al., 2011; Gibson et al., 2010; Oser et al., 2009) – instead, the value arises from extending the contexts in which the recent forms of online participation have been studied. Arguably, there remains a geographical gap in the current phase of studying online participation – the existing studies are mainly from the US or the UK (e.g. Gibson et al., 2010; Oser et al., 2012), with Spain (e.g. Cantijoch, 2012; Cantijoch, et al. 2011;) and Italy (Vaccari, 2012) being the main exceptions. The Nordic countries, being a region with a long history of Internet use and societal penetration (Norris, 2000) are thus yet to be fully explored.

As a specific case for studying the various mechanisms of political life on the Internet, Finland has proven to be very suitable in past studies (e.g. Carlson & Strandberg,

2012). Some specific circumstances which explain why that has been the case can be brought forth here; Firstly, Finland's high level of societal Internet penetration (89 per cent) ranks seventh in Europe, and the population's level of Internet use (76 percent at least on weekly basis) is among the five highest in Europe (Statistics Finland, 2012). Currently, it also ranks among the top five countries worldwide in the International Telecommunications Union's ICT development index³ (ITU, 2012). Thus, a large and skilled on-line electoral audience exists in Finland. Moreover, the use of the Internet in conjunction with Finnish election campaigns has a very long history (Carlson and Strandberg, 2012, pp. 127-128) and Finnish online politics has already been in the latest Web 2.0 stage – which is a prerequisite for e-expressive participation (e.g. Nam, 2010) – for two consecutive parliamentary elections (see Carlson & Strandberg, 2008; Strandberg, 2009).

Jensen and Anduiza (2012, p. 98) write that “...the degree to which people have access to the Internet and have incorporated it into their daily lives [...] varies across countries and serves as a constraint on online participation”. Consequently, the relative high maturity and societal penetration of the Finnish online electoral context demonstrated here indicates that the online environment in Finland does not a priori constrain online participation – a rather crucial contextual prerequisite for there being any point in studying online participation and its diversity there.

Findings

Creating clusters

The presentation of the findings starts by depicting the results of the automatic clustering algorithm. This clustering was carried out by entering 17 variables as a basis for the clustering. The underlying logic by which these have been chosen is that they measure the

extent to which citizens generally (i.e. not specifically for political purposes) use the Internet in more demanding, e-expressive ways. Thus, at the basic level, general Internet use is entered into the algorithm (indicted as Level 1 in Table 2). Secondly, a battery of items measuring activities which are more engaging but still mostly consist of reading or following content are entered (level 2 in Table 2). Finally, a set of items which measures expressive activity such as creation and sharing of content, are included (Level 3 in Table 2). The results of this automatic clustering algorithm are presented in Table 2:

[Table 2 about here]

The results of the clustering are rather straightforward; two distinct clusters emerged of which citizens in Cluster I use the Internet to some extent but not extensively. Cluster II, on the other hand, contains citizens who use the Internet daily and who also take part in e-expressive activities – both as followers/readers/watchers and as creators/sharers – in a relatively high degree. As indicted by the average scores for each level of use in Table 2, the differences between the two clusters are rather stark. At this first glance, the citizens in Cluster II seem to be the ones who might be labeled as “the online citizens” in as much as they apparently are very active and extensive Internet users. But does being such a citizen have any bearing on participation patterns, and does it contain any other signs of a mobilizing potential? These are the questions which are attended to in the next subsection.

Participatory repertoire

In exploring the connection between the two clusters and the extent to which they engage in participatory activities, Table 3 describes the two clusters in light of how they participate *both* off-line and on-line. The table contains information on what citizens have engaged in and also shows in what activities they feel they might engage in the future. It is noteworthy that the information displayed in Table 3 serves a descriptive purpose and no assumptions of proving causality between the clusters and participatory activities are made.

[Table 3 about here]

It should be clearly stressed, to begin with, that since Internet activity in general was used in order to generate the clusters, it was to be expected that this is reflected to some extent in their level of on-line participation. After all, it is not logically possible to have a low level and narrow extent of Internet use and e-expressive engagement, and nonetheless engage in on-line participation extensively. Beyond this, nonetheless, there is some very interesting information contained in Table 3. For instance, there is a clear difference between cluster I and II when looking at the extent of participatory activities across the whole range of items. The main thing to notice, concerning this, is perhaps not that the citizens in cluster II are active in online participation (again, this was to be logically expected) but that they were also the most active in off-line participation. Thus, the citizens in cluster II participated off-line more than citizens in Cluster I concerning more traditional activities (i.e. contacting politicians or taking part in activity of political party) as well as for more untraditional activities (i.e. boycotts or demonstrations). Hence, at this stage, it seems unlikely that their use of the Internet per se is the driver behind their high engagement in participatory activities. Such an interpretation, albeit being tentative, is also supported by the fact that a cross-media comparison of the two

items found for both off-line and on-line activities – signing a petition and contacting a politician – shows that citizens in cluster II actually engaged off-line to a slightly higher extent than on-line.

Direct and indirect impact and patterns of mobilization

Thus far, without making any conclusions about causality, the analyses have established that citizens' participatory repertoires reflect their general Internet activity and the extent to which they engage in e-expressive activities (i.e. the clusters). The analyses now continue by exploring various indications of a potential impact – direct and indirect – emanating from the general Internet activity and engagement in e-expressive activities. Firstly, as an initial examination of a *direct* impact of sorts, the connection between on-line engagement and voting are explored by comparing how the citizens in each cluster were influenced in their voting decisions and candidate choices by various media sources (Table 4).

[Table 4 about here]

Apparently, the greater level of general and e-expressive Internet engagement among the citizens in cluster II is also reflected in how they were influenced in their voting decisions. Thus, these citizens were relatively highly influenced by on-line sources, whereas the citizens in Cluster I were more influenced by traditional media sources. Also, in choosing which specific candidate to vote for, the citizens in cluster II were much more influenced by on-line sources – especially by on-line candidate selectors⁴ – than by the candidates' general campaigns. The citizens belonging to cluster I were not influenced to a high extent by on-line

sources in their choice of candidate. Hence, as was the case concerning the participatory repertoire, the informational basis upon which citizens make their vote choice reflects their general on-line activity and engagement in e-expressive activities.

The analyses now continue by examining several indicators of *indirect* impact stemming from Internet use and engagement in e-expressive activities. Thus, the clusters are compared (Table 5) in light of various aspects concerning political efficacy, trust and knowledge – i.e. so-called civic skills (Mossberger et al., 2007, pp. 87-88).

[Table 5 about here]

Looking at the figures in Table 5, some differences between the two clusters can be found regarding civic skills. These are all concerning efficacy, where citizens in cluster II differ significantly from the citizens in cluster I in three out of four items. At a bare minimum, these findings indicate that the “on-line citizens” are rather high on civic skills which could potentially foster further participation in the long run (c.f. Boulianne, 2009, p. 209).

Nonetheless, being politically interested and otherwise active citizens (see Table 3), it is certainly plausible that the citizens in cluster II would be high in efficacy regardless of them using the Internet or not. Looking at the findings regarding trust and knowledge in Table 5, finally, there are no statistically significant differences to be found between the two clusters.

Arguably, all of the analyses thus far have done little to assess the relative influence of general Internet use and engagement in e-expressive activities on tangible political behaviour among the citizens. Rather, I have merely indicated how one aspect reflects the other as indicative of a potential relationship between them. Also, the analyses are

yet to shed light on potential mobilization patterns in the citizens' use of the Internet. Thus, in bringing the analyses to a close, the relative importance of various factors in directly explaining citizens' participatory activities and turnout are conducted. These findings are presented as three regression analyses in which on-line participation, off-line participation and turnout in the 2011 election are explained (Table 6). In the first regression model which predicts on-line participation, cluster membership is entered as a predictor (indicator of on-line activity and e-expressive activity), along with the citizens' demographic characteristics (see Appendix B for the bivariate demographic distributions), their political interest, political efficacy, knowledge, trust and general media use. In the second model in which off-line participation is predicted, the same predictors are used but on-line participation is entered as a predictor as well. Thus, its relative importance on the off-line participatory repertoire is assessed. In the third model, which predicts turnout (voting 2011), off-line participation is entered alongside all the other predictors:

[Table 6 about here]

Initially, it is very important to bear in mind that it is impossible here to prove any directions of causality in the observed statistical relationships as the FNES survey is cross-sectional and not longitudinal. Nonetheless, some interesting indications of a plausible connection between the two clusters, as indicative of the level of general Internet use and engagement in e-expressive activities, and on-line participation is discernible ($B=.14$ in Model 1). On-line participation itself also seems to have an independent influence on off-line participation ($B=.33$ in model 2) – separate from the cluster membership (no significance in model 2). Although these interpretations are to be considered as clearly tentative, they do indicate some

form of indirect path from citizens' general and expressive Internet use (clusters) to their on-line participatory repertoire which, per se, is connected to their off-line participatory repertoire. Thus, similarly to findings in several other studies (e.g. Gibson et al. 2010; Gil de Zuniga et al. 2010; Jensen & Anduiza, 2010), this lends some support the notion of on-line skills acting as a "gateway" to further participation. Interestingly, though, the path is broken when looking at Model 3 explaining turnout. Here, neither clusters nor on-line or off-line participation have any statistical significance. Instead, political interest ($B=.35$ in Model 3) and high trust for political institutions ($B=.23$ in Model 3) are the strongest predictors. So, as indicated by other studies as well (c.f. Cantijoch et al. 2011; Gibson et. al, 2010), in explaining this formal and traditional type of political participation no connection, neither directly nor indirectly, is found to online activity and e-expression.

It should also be noted that the findings concerning the predictors of on-line participation shown in Table 6 also demonstrate that political interest was a strong significant predictor ($B=.17$ in Model 1). A tentative interpretation of this is that these citizens appear to be politically active and interested citizens who have incorporated the Internet as a complementary venue for their participatory activity (c.f. Anduiza et al, 2012, pp. 364-365). Looking, finally, at the demographic predictors – in the regressions in Table 6 and also the bivariate distributions in Appendix B – it is hard to readily see anything that would challenge the resource-based model of political participation in this analysis of on-line participation (c.f. Shlozman et al. 2010). Albeit younger age cohorts are overrepresented among the "on-line citizens" (Cluster II in Appendix B), younger age only has a diminishingly small independent influence in predicting participatory activities (Table 6). Moreover, the citizens in Cluster II are highly educated and part of high income households (Appendix B).

Summary and discussion

In wrapping up the findings of this study I return to the analytical framework depicted earlier (Table 1). Therein, the mobilizing potential of on-line participation was seen as being either resource based or skill based and the potential impact of on-line activity as being either direct or indirect. All of these aspects were also conceptually seen as connected to a broad range of participatory activities, the participatory repertoire. So in light of the empirical findings, what conclusions concerning on-line participation and potential mobilizations effects can be drawn from the Internet use of Finnish citizens in conjunction with the 2011 parliamentary elections?

At the outset of the analyses, two clusters were generated automatically as a basis for sorting the empirical exploration. Per se, the two clusters provide some interesting information. Thus, while most respondents in the FNES survey did use the Internet to some extent, there is a distinct group of citizens – which I called the “on-line citizens” – who use the Internet more extensively and often in an expressive manner. The different Internet use profiles (i.e. the two clusters) is also reflected in the participatory activities of the citizens. Hence, citizens belonging to cluster II engaged in a wider range of both on-line and off-line participation to a significantly higher extent than citizens in Cluster I. So at a bare minimum, the Internet seems to have been incorporated as a natural complementary communicative venue for the “on-line citizens”, in which their participatory behavior off-line has found its on-line equivalents. These findings are in line with what has been suggested in other studies (e.g. Anduiza et al., 2012, Gibson & Cantijoch, 2011). Hence, those with extensive on-line skills find it natural to use the Internet for political purposes as well (c.f. Jensen & Anduiza, 2010, pp. 96-97; Gibson et al., 2010, p. 14).

Turning to aspects of mobilization, starting firstly with the resource-based and direct perspective, the findings from this study do not readily echo those found in other studies according to which “traditional resources” ought to matter little for on-line participation (e.g. Anduiza et al., 2010; Cantijoch et al. 2011). Besides belonging to younger age cohorts, the “on-line citizens” identified in this study do not break familiar patterns concerning who usually participates (e.g. Schlozman et al., 2010; Verba et al. 1995). These citizens were highly educated and part of households belonging to the highest earning quartile (Appendix B). What is more, the regression analyses (Table 6) revealed that a strong interest in politics an important independent factor explaining on-line participation. In that sense, it is seemingly not a case of the Internet mobilizing previously uninterested or inactive citizens. Instead, this is most likely an indication of a younger generation of interested, active and resource-rich citizens turning to the new generation of communicative media. Nonetheless, the analyses did show that when looking at direct impact of on-line activity, such as in making a choice of who to vote for, the Internet had a strong influence as an informational basis on the group of “on-line citizens”. So not only are the new politically interested generation using the Internet, they are also influenced by it in making off-line political choices.

Concerning the other aspect of a potential mobilization contained in the theoretical framework – the indirect, skill based mobilization – some rather interesting findings were evident in this study. Thus, looking at the bivariate comparisons concerning civic skills (Table 5), citizens in the “on-line citizens” group (Cluster II) were found to have a statistically significant higher level of political efficacy than citizens in the other group. In addition, having high levels of political efficacy was shown in the regression analyses (Table 6) to have an independent impact on both on-line and off-line participation. Indeed, this is in accordance with the theoretical perspective that on-line activity might increase such civic skills which thereafter could lead to other increases in participation (cf. Boulianne, 2009; Gil

de Zuniga, 2010; Mossberger et al., 2007, pp. 87-88; Östman, 2012). Needless to say, though, whether such a causal chain actually has occurred has not been empirically proven here, merely its plausibility. Concerning plausible causal chains, too, a rather central finding of this study which merits attention here is the observed connection between the extent of on-line activity (the clusters) and on-line participation, which itself has a connection to off-line participation (Table 6). Undoubtedly this is by no means any conclusive proof of the Internet “reconfiguring the pathways to participation”, but it certainly indicates a plausibility of Gil de Zuniga and colleagues’ (2010, pp. 46-47) view that on-line activity “...seems to serve not as an endpoint of participation...”.

Wrapping up the discussion and the study as a whole, it should first and foremost be clearly stressed that the ambition of this study was neither to address nor to prove directions of causality; rather, the aim was to explore the use of the Internet to find *indications* of mobilization in the use of the Internet in conjunction with the 2011 Finnish elections. Clearly, future studies need to apply more intrusive methods such as experiments (Sanders & Norris, 2005) or use time-series data in order to more thoroughly address the directions of causality. Additionally, as the available survey items regarding on-line participatory activities increase, more granularity and detailed analysis of the mechanisms of mobilization will be achieved in future studies. Nonetheless, the overarching impression of the analysis conducted here is that the Internet has become an important political venue for a significant segment of the population. For these citizens the Internet is a natural part of their participatory repertoire and is also connected to their off-line participatory behavior and in some regards influences their institutional political choices. However, the key question which this and other studies are unable to shed light on is what these citizens would have done if the Internet had never arrived? Would they have been inactive or would they have found another venue for their political interest and engagement? Is there a broader mobilization at hand or just a

generational shift in which communicative venues – or arenas –are used by the already active citizens? The findings presented in this article mostly support to the latter alternative, but only the future will tell what the definitive answers to these questions are. Currently, at least we know that the Internet has broadened the participatory repertoire and that it has been rather widely adopted among the next political generation. So while perhaps not being a ‘true’, and certainly not a readily tangible mobilization, this nonetheless indicates that the importance of the Internet for political participation is only bound to increase.

Notes

¹ This was, of course, mostly due to a lack of surveys with detailed enough data to allow for more nuanced and diverse approaches to online participation.

² The precise number of questions was six with a total of 34 specific items on Internet use

³ This so-called IDI index is calculated based on 11 indicators related to ICT access, use and skills, and literacy

⁴ Candidate selectors are web-based applications which are usually hosted on the websites of traditional media outlets. Citizens using selectors provide answers to a battery of questions measuring their opinions regarding current societal matters. The selector website then matches the citizen’s answers to those of the candidates in order to provide a shortlist of candidates whose opinions are the closest to the citizen’s views.

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Appendix A. Finnish population in general compared to respondents of Finnish National Election Survey

	Popu- lation	FNES	Drop-off survey
Gender			
Man	49	50	49
Woman	51	50	51
Age			
18-24	11	8	6
25-34	16	16	15
35-44	15	14	14
45-54	17	15	15
55-64	18	18	20
over 64 years	23	29	30
Education			
Only compulsory education	28	22	19
Vocational or upper secondary	42	29	28
Lowest tertiary (institute)	11	24	26
Polytechnic or bachelor	10	9	10
Master's degree or higher	9	16	17
Use of Internet (at least on weekly basis)			
	76	77	79
N	4 092 061	1286	806

Note: the figures represent the percentage share of citizens/respondents within each category.

Appendix B. Demographic characteristics of the citizens belonging to the three clusters.

	Cluster I (N=352)	Cluster II (N=391)
Education***		
Primary	21.5	16.4
Secondary	64.2	62.2
Tertiary	14.2	21.5
Age***		
18-24	1.4	10.0
25-34	3.7	26.1
35-44	6.3	22.5
45-54	13.4	17.9
Over 55	75.2	23.5
Gender*		
Male	55.1	46.0
Female	44.9	54.0
Household income***		
Lowest quartile I	14.9	15.9
Quartile II	34.6	22.5
Quartile III	27.6	26.1
Highest quartile IV	22.9	35.4
Type of residence		
City centre	23.6	19.7
City suburbs	41.8	50.4
Centre of rural municipality	24.7	20.7
Sparsely populated rural area	9.9	9.2

* p <.05 ***p<.001 (chi-squares test for differences between groups)

Note: the figures represent the percentage share of citizens within each cluster.

Table 1. Summary of theoretical background

	Activity	Mobilization type
Participatory repertoire	Equivalent to off-line	Resourced based and direct: new people engaging in familiar activities albeit through a new channel?
	Distinct form	Skill based and indirect: use fosters civic skills which equip citizens for further participation?

Table 2. The identified clusters of citizens (N=743)

	Cluster I (N=352)	Cluster II (N=391)
Level 1		
Internet use (daily or more)	46.6	93.4
Level 2		
Visited Social Networking Sites (e.g. FB, Twitter)	4.3	78.0
Maintained SNS profile	0.3	58.3
Read blogs	4.3	71.4
Watched online videos/music	22.4	84.7
Tagged online content	0.0	18.4
Read online discussion	22.2	89.8
Subscribed to RSS-feed	0.3	9.7
Listened to podcast	1.1	14.8
Average:	6.9	53.1
Level 3		
Commented blogs	0.3	26.6
Written own blog	0.0	6.9
Shared own photos, videos, articles etc.	4.5	42.5
Written or edited Wiki	0.6	6.6
Written in online discussion	0.6	36.3
Started online discussion	0.0	17.4
Shared information of events	1.7	26.6
Produced podcast	0.0	0.8
Average:	1.9	20.5

* The differences between groups are statistically significant for all items, $p < 0.01$ (chi-squares test). Post-hoc comparisons of cluster II and III also revealed that the between-group differences were significant for all items.

Note: Figures represent the share of respondents who had engaged in the corresponding activity during the last month. The exact phrasing of the question was: "What of the following have you done on the Internet or on social media during the last month?"

Table 3. Off-line and on-line participation in the two clusters

	Cluster I (N=216)		Cluster II (N=349)	
	Have done	Might do	Have done	Might do
Off-line participation				
Write to a newspaper's public section	11.1	54.0	24.6	61.1
Contact politicians regarding an important matter	23.0	55.4	28.6	62.1
Sign a petition	36.9	48.6	65.7	29.7
Take part in the activity of a political party	9.9	34.1	16.1	50.6
Take part in the activity of an organization	41.2	38.4	49.6	41.2
Environmentally conscious consumption	57.1	36.9	72.6	23.0
Make consumption choices with the aim of influencing political matters	32.4	47.7	49.1	41.2
Take part in boycott or similar consumers' strike	13.4	48.6	27.6	53.2
Take part in peaceful demonstration	6.5	37.2	11.5	54.2
Demonstrate civil disobedience by taking part in non-violent illegal activity	1.7	9.4	2.6	27.9
Take part in a demonstration where violence has occurred previously	0.0	2.6	0.3	12.0
Use force to achieve one's goals	0.0	0.3	0.0	3.3
Average:	16.4	34.4	29.0	38.3
On-line participation				
Sign a petition	10.9	30.9	49.7	35.9
Contact politicians regarding an important matter	4.9	44.4	17.3	68.3
Take part in online political discussion in blog or by commenting on news stories	1.2	29.2	20.0	58.7
Donate funds to party or candidate	1.4	7.2	4.4	21.1
Shared election related e-mails among family, friends and acquaintances	1.7	23.0	18.0	47.9
Write about elections in own blog	0.0	10.3	3.3	35.4
Start action group or issue campaign*	0.0	n.a.	1.6	n.a.
Participate in action group or issue campaign*	2.3	n.a.	21.3	n.a.
Follow action group or issue campaign*	5.4	n.a.	40.1	n.a.
Average:	3.1	24.2	19.5	44.6

The figures represent the share of respondents who reported having engaged in the corresponding activity during the last four years or those that responded that "No, I have not engaged in the activity but I might"

* The question for these items was different; it stated "What of the following have you done on the Internet or on social media during the last month?" with either "yes" or "no" as alternative answers.

Note: Between-cluster differences are statistically significant for all items, $p < 0.01$ (Chi-squares test).

Table 4. The impact on citizens' voting decisions of various sources according to cluster membership

	Cluster I (N=322)	Cluster II (N=344)
Newspapers	76.0	66.4
Television***	71.1	49.9
Radio	35.5	23.7
Internet***	16.8	64.0
Candidate's campaign and ads	20.8	18.0
Candidate's online presence***	6.2	23.0
Candidate's answers to on-line candidate selectors***	13.4	36.6

***p<.00, tested for differences between groups (chi-squares)

Note: The first four items were asked in the following manner: "To what extent did you receive important information for your voting decisions from each source?" The figures represent the share of respondents within each cluster indicating they had received either very much or quite much important information from the corresponding source. The last three items were asked in the following way: "To what extent did the following sources influence the candidate you voted for?" The figures represent the share of respondents indicating that the respective aspect influenced their candidate choice either very much or quite much.

Table 5. Indirect effects: efficacy and trust according to cluster membership

	Cluster I (N=216)	Cluster II (N=349)
	%	%
Efficacy		
Sometimes politics seems so complicated that I do not really understand what is going on**	72.1	63.4
I have no say in what the government or parliament decide***	68.7	54.2
People can exert influence only through voting***	73.6	58.1
I am satisfied with the working of Finnish democracy	77.3	77.2
	Mean	Mean
Trust (range: 0-10)		
Generally speaking, most people can be trusted	7.9	7.4
The parliament	7.3	7.5
The government	7.6	7.4
Politicians	5.9	6.5
The European Union	7.7	6.0
Knowledge (scale 0-7)		
	4.7	4.8

** p<.01 ***p<.00 tested for differences between groups (chi-squares for distributions and T-test for mean values)

Note: The figures for efficacy represent the share of respondents agreeing with the statement either very much or quite much. The figures for trust and for knowledge are average scores on scales where low values correspond to low levels of trust and high values correspond to high levels of trust.

Table 6. Regression analyses predicting on-line participation, off-line participation and turnout in 2011 election

	On-line participation (0-1)		Off-line participation (0-1)		Voted 2011? (0/1)	
	B	S.E.	B	S.E.	B	S.E.
Education	.04	.03	** .05	.02	.06	.06
Household income	-.02	.02	.01	.02	.09	.05
Age	*** -.00	.00	.00	.00	** .00	.00
Female	* .02	.01	.01	.01	.01	.03
Media use	* .12	.05	.00	.04	.11	.11
Political interest	*** .17	.04	* .05	.03	*** .35	.09
Urbanity	.04	.02	-.00	.02	.04	.06
Cluster membership	*** .14	.01	.01	.01	-.01	.04
Efficacy	* .08	.04	*** .11	.03	-.02	.09
Generalized trust	.04	.03	.04	.02	.05	.07
Institutional trust	-.06	.04	* -.06	.03	** .23	.01
Knowledge	.01	.00	.00	.00	* .02	.01
On-line participation	n.a		*** .33	.03	.08	.12
Off-line participation	n.a		n.a		-.02	.15
Constant	-.03		*** .32		.07	
R Square	.47		.44		.21	
N	685		661		462	

* p <.05 ** p<.01 ***p<.001

Note: Dependent variables are standardized scales from the corresponding items in Table 3. Voted 2011 0= no; 1= Yes. All predictors except age (continuous) and cluster membership (values 1 or 2) are standardized (scale: 0-1). Education: scale constructed from six categories which range from 0=elementary to 1= University; Household income: scale constructed from 4 categories which range from 0= lowest quartile to 1=highest quartile; Gender: 0= male 1= female; Media use: standardized scale constructed from 7 items; Voted 0 = No 1 = Yes; Political interest: scale constructed from 4 categories ranging from 0=not interested at all to 1=Very interested. Urbanity: scale constructed from 4 categories ranging from 0=scarcely populated rural area to 1=centre of city. Efficacy: scale constructed from items in Table 5; Generalized trust, standardized item from Table 5; Institutional trust: scale constructed of items in Table 5; Knowledge: standardized scale from Table 5. On-line participation: standardized scale from items in Table 3; Off-line participation: standardized scale from items in Table 3.