Mapping the on-line campaign audience: an analysis of the on-line "participatory class" in the 2011 Finnish parliamentary campaign

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Abstract

Participation is said to be transforming and also increasingly taking place via new on-line channels as a new generation of voters arrive. But are we already at the stage that we can identify an on-line political generation, i.e. citizens who mainly engage online? And, if so, what characterizes this 'class' in terms of both demographic composition and participatory profile? How do they use the internet to follow political campaigns and does it affect their 'off-line' voting decisions? This article seeks to answer all of these questions through an explorative analysis of the citizens' internet use in conjunction with the most recent parliamentary election in Finland in 2011. Finland is a suitable context since it is, in a Western European context, one of the countries with the longest history of internet usage in campaigns. The analysis utilizes data from the Finnish National Election Study, which is a large-scale national representative survey (N=1,300) conducted in conjunction with the elections. Utilizing explorative techniques such as cluster analysis, the study shows that a distinct on-line political 'class' is indeed evident in Finland. Moreover, this group of individuals is clearly distinct from other citizens in terms of demographic composition, participatory profile and the significance which they place on the internet in their voting decisions.

Introduction

Throughout history, democracy and political communication have often developed in tandem (Gurevitch et al., 2009; Manin, 1997; Norris, 2001a). Thus, both a wide encompassing societal modernization process (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005; Manin, 1997) 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). Acknowledging the significance of his development, Bennett (2012, p. 37) concludes that "The rise of personalized forms of political participation is perhaps the defining change in the political culture of our era".

Political communication, secondly, developed in three phases in the 20th century; the premodern, modern and postmodern phase (e.g. Norris, 2001a). Although the modern phase decreased citizen involvement in politics to mainly a role of spectators (cf. Manin, 1997), scholars have perceived the medium of the postmodern phase, the internet, as providing new and ample opportunities for civic participation in politics (e.g. Budge, 1996, pp. 28-31). Hence, the internet brings about 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. Interestingly, thus, the new communication media is mostly catered towards facilitating untraditional, individualized "elite-challenging" forms of activity, or "self-actualizing, digitally mediated DIY politics" as Bennett (2012, p. 30) rather appropriately calls it (c.f. Kahne & Middaugh, 2012).

Given a situation as the one described above where 'new' expressions of participation meet new communication channels catered towards such activities, it was hardly surprising that leading scholars foresaw that "telecommunications" could come to play an important part in reviving citizen participation (e.g. Barber, 1984; Dahl, 1989). Early on, nonetheless, a dualism between optimism and scepticism was 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 its 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 (see Nam, 2010; Norris, 2001b) – both in

terms of which citizens had access to the technology and in terms of who of those with access had motivation for using online channels for political purposes – more 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; Gibson et al., 2010; Oser et al., 2012; Vaccari, 2012). Thus, important knowledge of the growing online participatory repertoire and its increasing diversity has begun to emerge. It is now becoming evident that distinct forms of political activity, which are in many ways equivalent – but also different – to participation observed off-line, are in fact also found online (e.g. Gibson et al., 2010; Norris & Curtice, 2006, p. 2).

Quite interestingly, also, the research findings concerning online participation and its potentially mobilizing effects have evolved in a rather corresponding manner. Hence, there was initially little scholarly 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 studies[1], have reported findings which suggest that the familiar resource-based patterns regarding political participation (e.g. Cantijoch, 2012; Cantijoch et al., 2011; Gibson et al., 2010; Mossberger et al., 2007; Oser et al., 2012; Scholzman et al., 2010) are beginning to erode as the use of the internet for societal and political purposes has matured and diversified (see also Cantijoch et al., 2010, p. 22). Seemingly, the diversified approach to online participation could serve as an important 'key' to unlock any crucial knowledge regarding potential online mobilization. Hence, this article seeks to add one more piece to the puzzle by studying citizens' use of the internet – and whether it contains any sign of mobilizing effects –in conjunction with the 2011 Finnish parliamentary election campaign. The subsequent section builds a framework for the present study by reviewing relevant literature concerning online participation.

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. More importantly, though, 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 of this call since the overarching impression one gets from reviewing the most recent

literature is that the 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 to an increasing extent (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; Xenos & Moy, 2007).

So how, then, does the multifaceted online participation manifest itself? At the moment the view on 'new' online participation is quite aligned with the multidimensional view of offline political participation (e.g. Verba et al., 1995). Thus, Norris and Curtice (2006, pp. 4-7) were early to ponder how the internet might impact 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 any new form of participatory activity.

However, several studies of online participation (e.g. Anduiza et al., 2010; Cantijoch et al.. 2012; Gibson & Cantijoch. 2011; Gil de Zuniga et al.. 2010; Jensen & Anduiza. 2012; Oser et al.. 2012) have also found that certain forms of online activity are

distinct from the traditional modes 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 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). Furthermore, they note that the internet thus appears to be promoting activities which previously were "seen as falling outside the bounds of 'true' participation". In the Web 2.0 era, the societal reach of these e-expressive activities has become even more significant through the popularity of Facebook, Twitter and other social networking sites (Baumgartner & Morris, 2010; Bennett, 2012; Cogburn & Espinoza-Vasques, 2011; Strandberg, 2013).

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 rather 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

When considering 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, obviously, deals with the familiar resource-based model perspective (Verba et al., 1995) and has been quite dominant 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 mobilization (e.g. Gibson et al., 2010, pp. 17-18; Gil de Zuniga, 2010; Xenos and Moy, 2007; Östman, 2010).

Concerning the first perspective on a potential mobilization, the common denominator found in almost every study is that online participation is predominately a realm of younger citizens, which thus breaks the usual 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). It is a matter of fact that young citizens are far less underrepresented in political activity taking place online than they are off-line and that this is currently the most obvious difference found between off-line and online participation (Anduiza et al., 2010; Gibson et al., 2010; Oser et al., 2009; Schlozman et al., 2010). This indicator of mobilization could however, as Schlozman et al. remark (2010, p. 503), nonetheless be mostly due to the fact that young people are heavy internet users, rather than 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 rose 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 more formal forms of participation; Cantijoch et al. (2011), for instance, 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 who are rich in traditional resources (cf. Gibson et al., 2010; Nam, 2010, p. 144; Schlozman et al., 2010; Vaccari, 2012).

Nonetheless, the recent focus on the diversity of online participation has altered these patterns to the extent that scholars have even suggested that "traditional resources now matter little for online participation" (Anduiza at el., 2010, p. 365) and that 'online skills' are much more central in explaining certain forms of e-participation (e.g. Jensen & Anduiza, 2010, pp. 96-97; Gibson et al. 2010, p. 14). While such statements are arguably bold, empirical findings concerning more informal, passive, 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...". Hence their findings show that although resources matter for using the internet for formal political activities, it has 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 as a "new participatory outlet" social media equalizes patterns of educational and income gaps concerning participation. Shlozman et al. (2010, p. 501) also, albeit cautiously, acknowledge a similar mobilizing potential for social media when they write 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 reconfiguring the pathways to participation – a connection to the earlier discussion on how online participation broadens the participatory repertoire is again evident within the literature. Often, hence, studies of online participation struggle to find a direct independent impact of online participation on turnout or similar formal modes of participation (e.g. Cantijoch et al., 2011; Gibson et al., 2010, pp. 17-18). Instead, they tend to show that those who engage in such demanding, elite-directed participatory acts are often already predisposed to engage in such activities off-line (Xenos & Moy, 2007, p. 714). Therefore, scholars have pondered whether there instead lies a hidden, indirect, mobilizing potential in more informal forms of online participation – such as the earlier discussed e-expressive participation (e.g Boulianne, 2009; Gil de Zuniga, 2010; Östman, 2012). Here the view is that 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) . Boulianne (2009, p. 205) for instance, 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. Xenos and Moy (2007, pp. 714-715) also found that the internet

is positive for democratic citizenship to the extent that it increases civic learning. Gil de Zuniga et al. (2010, pp. 46-47) similarly 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". Gibson and Cantijoch (2011, p. 19), finally, also suggest that informal political online talk could be a precursor to other more "instrumental" political activities.

3. Summary of the literature review and analytical framework

As stated in the introduction, the purpose of this article is to explore online participation and 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 are now summarized in Figure 1:
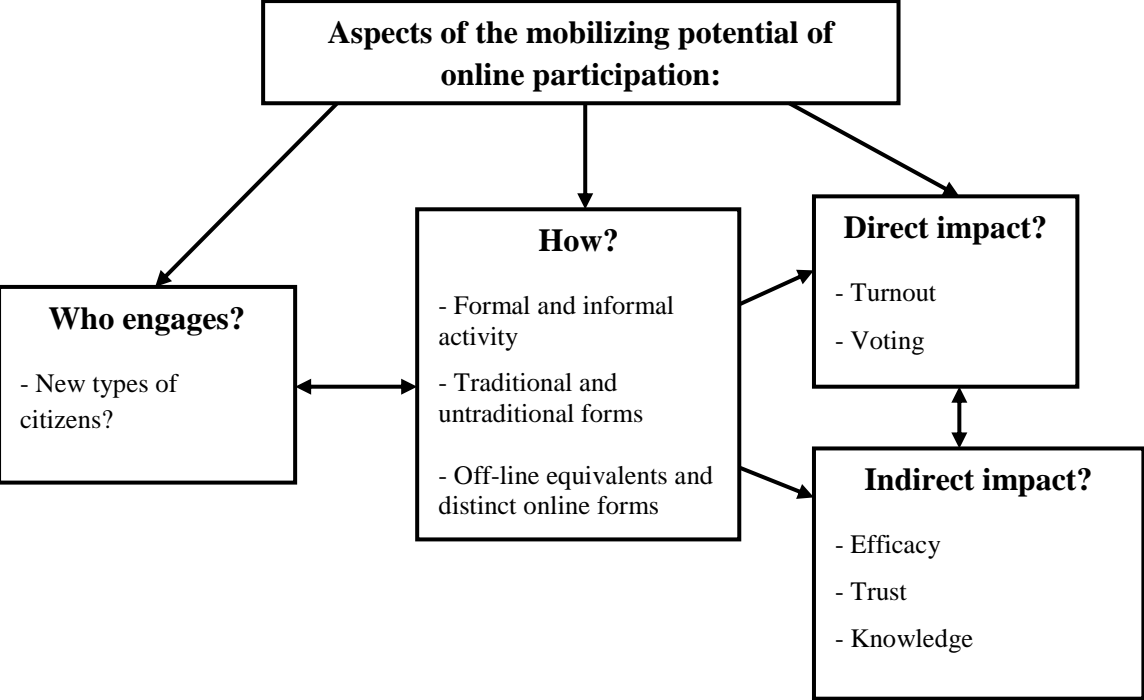

Figure 1. Summary of literature review: analytical framework and key points of departure for empirical study

Without overly repeating what has already been discussed in the literature, it should nonetheless be stressed that the main essence of the framework depicted in Figure 1 is how the mobilizing potential of online participation is contingent on several interconnected aspects; the central aspect being the variation in online activities, among which specifically distinct forms – such as e-expressive activities – unlock potentials concerning both who participates and the impact this has. Combined, the analytical framework, which essentially contains three descriptive research questions, which will be explored in the empirical part of this article in order to assess whether a mobilizing potential was discernible in the 2011 Finnish parliamentary campaign:

RQ1: How did citizens participate – both off-line and on-line – in conjunction with the 2011 Finnish parliamentary elections?

RQ2: What are the characteristics of the citizens engaging online in the 2011 Finnish parliamentary campaign?

RQ3: What impact – both direct and indirect – did online participation in conjunction with the 2011 Finnish parliamentary elections have on citizens?

Methods & data

In order to find an analytical technique by which one can sufficiently emulate the analytical framework – and the emphasis I placed therein on *how* citizens engage online – as well as answering all three overarching research questions, I opted for an explorative design which will be conducted in several steps (e.g. 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 in conjunction with the elections, 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 "the online citizens" and thereafter describe them with regard to their participatory activities, characteristics and the impact such participatory on-line

activities have. Naturally, a reversed strategy, where one would use participatory activities as bases for identifying groups of citizens which are thereafter depicted regarding their background variables (see Oser et al., 2009 for instance), would also have been possible. The choice of departing from online activities in general – instead of explicit participatory activities – was made on the basis that earlier studies (e.g. Anduiza et al., 2010; Cantijoch et al., 2011; Gibson et al., 2010; Nam, 2010) have demonstrated that e-expressive activities, in particular, may contain a potential for participatory mobilization. Thus, as a next analytical step, the analyses which are central to the purpose of exploring online participation specifically, depart from the identified groups of "on-line citizens" and examine (i) how citizens in each citizen group participated, i.e. whether their varied use of the internet and engagement in e-expressive activities are reflected in differences in participatory profiles (c.f. Oser et al., 2009), (ii) whether there are potential differences to be found in the characteristics of the citizens belonging to each group and (iii) whether there are any differences in direct and indirect impact to be found between citizens belonging to each group.

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 conducted in conjunction with the Finnish parliamentary elections by a team of political science scholars and adheres to stringent survey techniques and established questionnaire items (see Borg, 2012). The 2011 FNES survey was answered by a large, representative sample of Finnish citizens (N=1,297). 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 campaign[2]. 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 (Figure 1).

The Finnish context

Before the findings are presented, I will briefly present the Finnish electoral context and argue as to why an analysis of the Finnish case provides added value to the research on online participation. Concerning the latter, I perceive the importance for the research field of this study 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 still remains a geographical gap in the current phase of studying online participation – the existing studies within the latest stage of research are mainly from the US or 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) 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 index[3] (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; Schlozman et al., 2010) – for two consecutive parliamentary elections (see Carlson & Strandberg, 2008; Strandberg, 2009).

Jensen and Anduiza (2012, p. 98) write in the conclusion to their comparison of online participation in the US and Spain 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 examining online participation and its diversity.

Findings

The presentation of the findings starts by depicting the results of the automatic clustering algorithm. This clustering was carried out by entering twenty 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. Secondly, a battery of items measuring activities which are more engaging but still mostly consist of reading or following content are entered. Finally, a set of items which measures activity, which entails the creation and sharing of own e-expressive content, are included. The results of this clustering are presented in Table 1:

[Table 1 about here]

The results of the clustering are rather uncomplicated; Cluster I contains people who do not use the internet beyond the very basic level. Cluster II contains citizens who use the internet extensively but mainly for following, reading or watching content rather than creating or sharing their own. Cluster III, 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. At this first glance, these citizens clearly seem to be the ones who can be labeled as "the online citizens". 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 next.

Table 2 describes the clusters in light of how they participate, both off-line and via the internet.

[Table 2 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 in the level of on-line participation. After all, it is not logically possible to have a low level of general internet use and nonetheless engage in on-line participation extensively. Beyond this, nonetheless, there is some very interesting information contained in Table 2. For instance, there is a clear pattern

of "small-larger-largest" from cluster I, through II to III when looking at the extent of participatory activities across the whole range of items. The main thing to notice, concerning this, is not that the citizens in cluster III 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 III participated off-line more than citizens in both other clusters 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). A tentative interpretation of this – which will be further explored next (Table 3) – is that these citizens appear to be politically active and interested citizens who have incorporated the internet as a complementary venue for their participatory repertoire. Hence, it seems unlikely that their use of the internet per se is the driver behind their high engagement in participatory activities. Such an interpretation 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 III actually engaged off-line to a slightly higher extent than on-line.

In order to explore this aspect of potential underlying factors explaining the three clusters, further analyses in which the citizens' demographic characteristics (see Appendix for the bivariate demographic distributions) along with variables concerning their political interest and general media use are entered as predictors in logistic regression models predicting cluster membership (Table 3):

[Table 3 about here]

As evident in Table 3, higher political interest was the strongest predictor of belonging to cluster III followed by living in an urban residential area and being young. So in terms of the internet activating new citizens, these findings mostly indicate that the 'new' is mostly a generational aspect – albeit the lack of a significant impact for traditional resources such as income and education is also noteworthy – and not in a mobilization of politically uninterested citizens. Thus, the "on-line citizens" seem to be the next urban political generation who are engaging in the communicative channel which they have grown up with. The findings for the other two clusters seem to follow more traditional resources patterns

(Schlozman et al. 2010) in as much as belonging to the disengaged cluster I is mainly significantly influenced by low levels of education and income. Belonging to the semi-engaged cluster II (whose citizens mainly were active off-line and in a traditional manner) was conversely influenced positively by higher income and levels of education.

The analyses now continue by exploring indications of a potential impact of internet use. Firstly, traces of a direct impact on voting are explored by comparing how the citizens in each cluster were directly 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 use among citizens in cluster III 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 the other two clusters were more influenced by traditional media sources. Also, in choosing which specific candidate to vote for, the citizens in cluster III were much more influenced by on-line sources – especially by on-line candidate selectors[4] – than by the candidates' general campaigns. The citizens in cluster II where also quite influenced by candidate selectors, but citizens belonging to cluster I were not influenced by on-line sources at all in their choice of candidate.

Turning to the last aspect of the empirical analyses, the clusters are compared in light of various aspects concerning indirect impact – i.e. so-called civic skills (Mossberger et al., 2007, pp. 87-88) such as efficacy, trust and knowledge (Table 5).

[Table 5 about here]

Looking at the figures in Table 5 it is hard to find any indication of cluster III being especially high on civic skills. Concerning efficacy, for instance, the standout finding is that cluster I is much lower in efficacy than the other two clusters which are rather similar, although cluster III displays a slightly higher degree of efficacy than cluster II. A tentative interpretation of

this is that it is more the general disengagement among citizens in cluster I which is reflected here rather than any effects spurring from media- or internet use. Looking at trust and knowledge, finally, it is again cluster I which displays some findings that differ from those concerning the other two clusters. Specifically, the citizens in cluster I are much more trusting of the European Union[5] and somewhat less knowledgeable than citizens in the other two clusters.

Summary and discussion

In wrapping up the findings of this study I return to the analytical framework depicted earlier (Figure 1). Therein, the mobilizing potential of on-line participation was seen as the sum of three parts; the types of citizens engaging on-line, how they are participating and the potential impact this has. So in light of the empirical findings, what indications of a mobilizing potential were there to be found in the internet use of Finnish citizens in conjunction with the 2011 parliamentary elections?

At the outset, when creating the clusters as a basis for exploration, this study showed that there is a distinct group of citizens – which I called the "on-line citizens" – who use the internet extensively and often in an expressive manner. What is more, this group also took part in participatory activities to the highest extent, both on-line and off-line and also in both traditional and unconventional ways. For other types of citizens, i.e. the ones who use the internet but not expressively, traditional off-line forms of participation are clearly the preferred participatory activities. So at a bare minimum, for the "on-line citizens", the internet has been incorporated as a natural complementary communicative venue, in which their participatory behavior off-line has found its on-line equivalents (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).

Looking at who these "on-line citizens" are, the findings concerning a mobilizing potential are inconclusive; on the one hand these citizens were very young and not especially high on SES or income (see Appendix). This, of course, breaks familiar patterns concerning who usually participates (e.g. Schlozman et al., 2010). On the other hand, though,

regression analyses (Table 3) revealed that a very strong interest in politics was the primary factor explaining being a part of the "on-line citizens"- cluster. 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 new generation of interested and active citizens turning to the new generation of communicative media. Also, as other scholars have pointed out (e.g. Norris and Curtice, 2006, Schlozman et al., 2010, p. 503), the importance of income and SES could very well rise as this generation of citizens grows up. At the moment, many of the "on-line citizens" have not graduated and, consequently, do not yet have the level of income which they might have later in life.

Concerning, finally, what mobilization indications were found in the impact that internet use has on citizens, the evidence brought forth here is again twofold. Firstly, the analyses showed that when looking at *direct* impact, such as in making a choice of who to vote for, the internet had a strong influence on the "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. However, a look at potential *indirect* effects – i.e. tentative indication of whether the internet might be reconfiguring the pathways to participation (Gil de Zuniga et al., 2010) – did not reveal any dramatic differences in efficacy nor in trust or in knowledge between the "on-line citizens" and the other group of web users (cluster II). So any indications of an indirect impact of specific e-expressive web use in the form of boosting civic skills, which in turn might boost participatory activities, was not found here (cf. Boulianne, 2009; Gil de Zuniga, 2010; Östman, 2012).

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. Thus, even though internet use in general was used as a basis for creating clusters which thereafter were explored, I do not thereby claim that internet use is proven as being the driver behind on-line participation, nor that it is the decisive factor behind vote choices. Future studies need to apply more intrusive methods such as experiments (Sanders & Norris, 2005) in order to more thoroughly address the directions of causality. 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 even plays a part in 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? While some findings here lend some tentative support to the latter alternatives, 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 widely adopted among the next political generation. So while perhaps not being a 'true' mobilization, this nonetheless indicates that the importance of the internet in politics 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.

[5] The underlying reason for the high trust in the EU is puzzling but a further analysis of what parties citizens in each cluster voted for (not displayed in detail here) showed that support for the parties in government – who are generally positive towards the EU – is the highest in cluster I.

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Tables and Appendix

Table 1. The identified clusters of citizens (N=731)

	Cluster I (N=216)	Cluster II (N=349)	Cluster III (N=166)
Internet use (daily or more)	29.6	85.0	99.2
Visited Social Networking Sites (e.g. FB, Twitter)	0.5	44.4	95.2
Maintained SNS profile	0.0	24.6	83.7
Read blogs	0.0	40.1	88.6
Commented blogs	0.0	8.6	44.6
Written own blog	0.0	0.6	14.5
Watched online videos/music	0.5	70.2	95.2
Shared own photos, videos etc.	0.0	16.6	73.5
Written or edited Wiki	0.0	1.4	13.9
Tagged online content	0.0	0.6	41.6
Read online discussion	0.9	74.5	95.2
Written in online discussion	0.0	10.9	62.7
Started online discussion	0.0	3.7	31.9
Followed action groups or issue-campaign	0.0	18.9	63.9
Participated in action group or issue-campaign	0.0	7.4	38.6
Started action group or issue-campaign	0.0	0.0	3.6
Shared information of events	0.5	5.7	53.0
Subscribed to RSS-feed	0.0	2.3	18.7
Listened to podcast	0.5	5.4	23.5
Produced podcast	0.0	0.0	1.8

* 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 2. Off-line and on-line participation in the three clusters

	Cluster I (N=216)	Cluster II (N=349)	Cluster III (N=166)
Off-line participation			
Write to a newspaper's public section	7.4	18.6	30.7
Contact politicians regarding an important matter	19.9	24.6	35.5
Sign a petition	29.6	55.9	75.9
Take part in the activity of a political party	9.3	12.0	19.3
Take part in the activity of an organization	39.4	43.8	56.0
Environmentally conscious consumption	50.0	70.2	75.3
Make consumption choices with the aim of influencing political matters	30.1	41.0	57.2
Take part in boycott or similar consumers' strike	10.2	18.9	40.4
Take part in peaceful demonstration	4.2	8.9	16.9
Demonstrate civil disobedience by taking part in non-violent illegal activity	2.3	0.9	4.8
Take part in a demonstration where violence has occurred previously	0.0	0.0	0.6
Use force to achieve one's goals	0.5	1.7	4.2
On-line participation			
Sign a petition	4.7	31.2	67.5
Contact politicians regarding an important matter	3.3	9.2	27.3
Take part in online political discussion in blog or by commenting on news stories	0.0	6.6	35.5
Donate funds to party or candidate	0.9	3.4	4.8
Shared election related e-mails among family, friends and acquaintances	0.0	8.7	27.0
Write about elections in own blog	0.0	0.6	6.6

The figures represent the share of respondents who reported having engaged in the corresponding activity during the last four years. The other answer options were: "No, I have not engaged in the activity but I might"; and "No, I would never engage in the activity"

Note: Between–cluster differences are statistically significant for all items, $p<0.01$ (Chi-squares test). A post-hoc comparison between clusters II and III revealed that all between-groups differences were significant for all but three items; Take part in the activity of an organization; Environmentally conscious consumption ; and Use force to achieve one's goals

Table 3. Logistic regressions predicting cluster membership

	Cluster I			Cluster II			Cluster III		
	B	**S.E.**	**Exp(B)**	**B**	**S.E.**	**Exp(B)**	**B**	**S.E.**	**Exp(B)**
Education	**-1.68	..52	.187	*.89	.37	2.44	.74	.50	2.10
Household income	*-.99	.48	.37	***1.34	.33	3.82	-.45	.42	.64
Age	***.11	.01	1.11	-.012	.01	.99	***-.09	.01	.92
Female	-.21	.23	.81	.14	.17	1.15	.5	.22	1.05
Media use	-.64	.99	.53	-.03	.72	.97	.42	.99	1.52
Voted 2011	.21	.43	1.23	-.39	.30	.68	.39	.40	1.48
Political interest	-.64	.71	.53	-.55	.51	.58	*1.59	.71	4.89
Urbanity	-.84	.52	.43	-.46	.38	.63	*1.33	.53	3.79
Constant	***-3.69			-.23			-.21		
N	662			662			662		
% predicted correctly	71.6			51.7			76.7		
Cox-snell R2	.35			.06			.25		
Nagelkerke R2	.50			.08			.37		

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

Note: Dependent variables are dichotomous: 0 = respondent did not belong to the respective cluster, 1= respondent belonged to the respective cluster. All predictors except age (continuous) 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.

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

	Cluster I (N=214)	Cluster II (N=346)	Cluster III (N=165)
Newspapers	73.8	73.7	63.0
Television***	67.8	69.8	52.1
Radio	33.4	28.6	24.8
Internet***	7.1	43.6	80.8
Candidate's campaign and ads**	26.1	14.4	19.4
Candidate's online presence***	1.5	14.1	32.9
Candidate's answers to on-line candidate selectors***	4.6	25.1	52.4

* p <.05 ** p<.01 ***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)	Cluster III (N=166)
	%	**%**	**%**
Efficacy			
Sometimes politics seems so complicated that I do not really understand what is going on***	75.0	65.1	64.5
I have no say in what the government or parliament decide***	69.0	61.6	50.0
People can exert influence only through voting***	77.8	62.7	53.7
I am satisfied with the working of Finnish democracy	75.4	79.4	75.3
	Mean	**Mean**	**Mean**
Trust (range: 0-10)			
Generally speaking, most people can be trusted	7.9	7.5	7.9
The parliament	7.8	7.2	7.5
The government	7.7	7.5	7.4
Politicians	6.2	6.2	6.5
The European Union*	9.0	6.0	5.7
Knowledge (scale 0-7)**	4.5	4.9	4.8

* p <.05 ** p<.01 ***p<.00 tested for differences between groups (chi-squares for distributions and Anova 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.

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

	Cluster I (N=216)	Cluster II (N=349)	Cluster III (N=166)
Education***			
Primary	24.5	13.8	21.1
Secondary	64.3	53.0	37.2
Tertiary	11.1	33.3	39.8
Age***			
18-24	0.0	5.2	15.7
25-34	0.5	14.3	36.7
35-44	2.3	20.1	20.5
45-54	10.2	20.3	14.5
Over 55	87.1	40.4	12.6
Gender			
Male	54.2	48.4	47.6
Female	45.8	51.6	52.4
Household income***			
Lowest quartile I	17.9	10.3	24.4
Quartile II	38.4	24.9	18.6
Quartile III	27.4	27.4	25.6
Highest quartile IV	16.3	37.4	31.4
Type of residence*			
City centre	21.3	20.1	25.3
City suburbs	41.2	46.7	51.8
Centre of rural municipality	27.8	21.2	18.1
Sparsely populated rural area	9.7	12.0	4.8

* $p < .05$ ***$p < .001$ (chi-squares test for differences between groups)
Note: the figures represent the percentage share of citizens within each cluster.