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ABSTRACT

In this dissertation, I assess interaction in social media as a novel mode of political participation and ask how are party politics extended within the social media public sphere in Finland during the 2010s. In this research, I evaluate the formation of the social media political sphere by analyzing the party–political, demographic, and ideological standings from which the sphere is produced and accessed, and how these factors are reconstructing social structures and orders on social media platforms. This dissertation concentrates on the six largest parties in Finland, namely the Social Democratic Party, the Finns Party, the National Coalition Party, the Center Party, the Green League, and the Left Alliance. By combining theoretical perspectives from a variety of academic fields, such as sociology, political science, social psychology, and economic sociology, the dissertation attempts to produce nuanced understandings of social, ideological, and party-political origins of digital participation and other topical phenomena, such as political polarization and spread of hate speech, in the Finnish political context.

In addition to a theoretical introduction, the dissertation comprises five research articles that cross-expose the party-related political actions on social media platforms from different perspectives. Articles I and II form temporal and structural frames for understanding the evolution of the social media political sphere in Finland. In Article I, we investigate the current state of and recent changes in access to social media, as well as the utilization of social media platforms for various purposes by the Finnish population. The social mechanisms that guide the formation of the social structure of the social media sphere are evaluated in Article II. In the following articles, we provide a more nuanced understanding of the formation of the social media political sphere. In Article III, we evaluate the state of the social media political sphere by assessing social media participation among party supporter groups in the Finnish political field and contribute to the discussion on the effects of party supporters' sociodemographic background and value-based premises on social media participation. In Articles IV and V, social media participation is understood as an explanatory mechanism associated with party supporters' behavioral tendencies on social media and affective aspects of party members' commitment to their parties.

The research contributes novel knowledge related to political participation in social media and the formation of the political sphere in Finland during the 2010s. In the dissertation, I propose that political discussions in social media could be

understood as a political activity through which participants can modify the public opinion by raising ideological aims and desires within the public sphere. The research illuminates how social structures and ideological aims both accelerate and attenuate political activity in the social media political sphere. In addition, the research shows how social structures and ideological stances are reflected in the structures of social media networks. Results of the dissertation also indicate that the social media political sphere emphasizes the visibility of the new identity parties, namely the Finns Party, the Green League, and the Left Alliance. Accordingly, the results infer that political discussions related to post-material and neo-conservative issues are highlighted on social media, which is especially reflected in the pronounced activity of the new identity parties' supporters and members within both the social media sphere and political parties.

KEYWORDS: social media; political parties; political participation; political polarization; economic sociology; Finland

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TIIVISTELMÄ

Väitöstutkimus käsittelee sosiaalisessa mediassa käytävää keskustelua uudenlaisena yhteiskunnallisen osallistumisen muotona ja kysyy, miten puoluepolitiikka välittyy sosiaalisen median tilaan 2010-luvun Suomessa. Tutkimus lähestyy sosiaalista mediaa politiikan tilana keskittyen jäljittämään, mistä sosiaalisista ja ideologisista lähtökohdista tilaan liitytään, mistä lähtökohdista tilaa täytetään sekä miten nämä lähtökohdat vaikuttavat tilan sosiaaliseen rakenteeseen ja järjestykseen. Tutkimus nojaa politiikan sosiologiseen, politologiseen, sosiaalipsykologiseen sekä talous-sosiologiseen teoriaan ja yhdistelee uudella tavalla eri kentillä käytyjä tieteellisiä keskusteluja. Siten tutkimus monipuolistaa nykyistä ymmärrystä digitaalisesta osallistumisesta ja auttaa hahmottamaan sosiaalisen median ajankohtaisten ilmiöiden – kuten muun muassa kuplaantumisen, polarisaation ja vihapuheen – taustalla piileviä yhteiskunnallisia rakenteita, puoluelähtöisiä eroja sekä ideologisia kannusteita.

Johdanto- ja yhteenveto-osuuden lisäksi tutkimus sisältää viisi tutkimus-artikkelia, joissa sosiaalisen median kautta tapahtuvaa poliittista osallistumista ja puolueiden edellytyksiä sosiaalisen median julkisessa tilassa tarkastellaan erilaisia näkökulmia ja aineistoja hyödyntäen. Väitöstutkimuksen kaksi ensimmäistä artikkelia muodostavat ajallisen ja rakenteellisen kehyksen sosiaalisen media tilan muodostumisen ymmärtämiselle. Ensimmäisessä artikkelissa tarkastelemme sosiaalisen median käytön väestöryhmäkohtaisia eroja sekä ajallisia muutoksia 2010-luvun Suomessa. Toisessa artikkelissa puolestaan tutkimme sosiaalisen median verkostojen muodostumiseen liittyviä sosiaalisia ja poliittisia mekanismeja. Väitöstutkimuksen kolmannessa, neljännessä sekä viidennessä artikkelissa paneudumme yksityiskohtaisemmin sosiaalisessa mediassa tapahtuvaan poliittiseen toimintaan. Kolmannessa artikkelissa tutkimme, miten suomalaisten puolueiden kannattajat käyttävät sosiaalista mediaa poliittisiin tarkoituksiin sekä miten kannattajaryhmien sosiodemografinen tausta ja poliittiset asenteet vaikuttavat sosiaalisessa mediassa tapahtuvaan poliittiseen osallistumiseen. Neljännessä ja viidennessä artikkelissa sosiaalisen median poliittista osallistumista lähestytään selittävänä toimintana, joka on yhteydessä niin puoluekannattajien sosiaalisen median toiminta- ja käyttäytymistapoihin kuin puoluejäsenten kokemaan puoluesitoutumiseen.

Käsillä oleva väitöstutkimus tuottaa uutta empiiristä tietoa sosiaalisessa mediassa tapahtuvasta poliittisesta osallistumisesta ja (puolue)poliittisen tilan muodostumisesta 2010-luvun Suomessa. Tutkimuksessa esitän, että sosiaalisessa mediassa tapahtuva yhteiskunnallisten aiheiden kommentointi ja niihin liittyvä keskustelu voidaan ymmärtää politiikan tekemisenä, jossa keskusteluun osallistumalla muokataan sosiaalisen median julkista tilaa ja nostetaan ideologisia tavoitteita suuremman yleisön nähtäville. Tutkimus valottaa, miten sosiaaliset rakenteet ja ideologiset asenteet yhtäältä kannustavat ja toisaalta vaimentavat suomalaisten osallistumista sosiaalisessa mediassa. Samoin tutkimus osoittaa, miten sosiaaliset rakenteet ja ideologiset tavoitteet heijastuvat sosiaalisen median käyttäjien sosiaalisiin verkostoihin. Sosiaalisten rakenteiden sekä ideologisten asenteiden merkityksellisyydestä johtuen sosiaaliseen mediaan muotoutuva poliittinen tila korostaa erityisesti uusien identiteettipuolueiden – eli perussuomalaisten, vihreiden ja vasemmistoliiton – tavoitteiden näkyvyyttä julkisessa keskustelussa sekä näiden puolueiden asemaa suomalaisella poliittisella kentällä. Samoin tutkimus antaa viitteitä siitä, miten sosiaalisessa mediassa tapahtuva poliittinen keskustelu kärjistyy erityisesti postmaterialististen sekä uuskonservatismisten ryhmien välillä, mikä osaltaan heijastuu uusien identiteettipuolueiden kannattajien ja jäsenten toimintaan sekä sosiaalisessa mediassa että poliittisissa puolueissa.

ASIASANAT: sosiaalinen media; poliittiset puolueet; poliittinen osallistuminen; poliittinen polarisaatio; taloussosiologia; Suomi

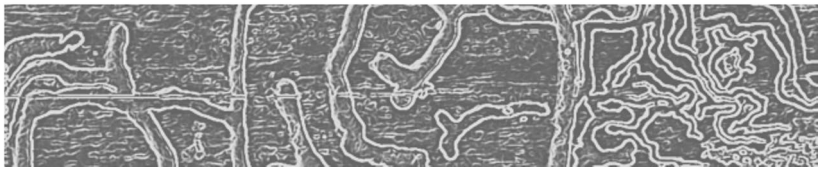
Acknowledgments

> "But that charms me, that trail of a caterpillar in a tree…
> How complicated a pattern, without any planning and reason.
> But it is a beautiful print—it is like human life."[1]
>
> Reidar Särestöniemi, an artist

When I graduated with a master's degree, I never planned to write a doctoral dissertation. Yet, for a variety of reasons and with the aid of many great people along the way, becoming a PhD is now about to happen. Overall, the journey to this point has been a complicated one, but it has been rewarding as well. In the following, I present a list of people, whom I thank for all the help and support they have given me—and partially blame them for luring me onto this trail.

The greatest thanks go to my supervisors Pekka Räsänen and Arttu Saarinen for their advice, mentoring, and cooperation. I am very grateful for the help and support Arttu and Pekka have provided me from the very beginning of my academic journey to the last steps of finalizing my dissertation. I wish to thank Pekka for helping me enter the field of academia by recruiting me to the DDI project while I was still finalizing my master's studies. Pekka has also showed me how things are done effectively, which has been very valuable especially for somebody who easily tends to get lost in thought. I am very grateful to Arttu as well for setting an inspirational example and for being a role model especially when it comes to teaching in the university. Arttu truly has shown how the enthusiastic attitude for learning is also a social feature that spreads across networks. Overall, I want to thank both of my supervisors for all the help and guidance during these years.

[1] An image for those who do not know what sort of a pattern the quote is referring to:



I would like to express my gratitude to both pre-examiners, Salla-Maaria Laaksonen from the University of Helsinki and Anders Olof Larsson from the Kristiania University College. I am especially grateful for the valuable insights, supportive comments, and the new perspectives on the topic that helped to profoundly improve the quality of the dissertation. Furthermore, I would like to thank Salla-Maaria Laaksonen for agreeing to act as the opponent in my public examination of the dissertation.

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April 2022
Ilkka Koiranen

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Tables

Figures

List of Original Publications

This dissertation is based on the following original publications, referred to in the text by their Roman numerals:

I Koiranen, I., Keipi, T., Koivula, A., & Räsänen, P. (2020). Changing patterns of social media use? A population-level study of Finland. *Universal Access in the Information Society, 19*(3), 603–617.

II Koiranen, I., Koivula, A., Keipi, T., & Saarinen, A. (2020). Partisanship, shared background, shared values – Homophily in Finnish Parliament members' social networks on Twitter. *Telematics & Informatics, 36*, 117–131.

III Koiranen, I., Koivula, A., Saarinen, A., & Keipi, T. (2020). Ideological motives, digital divides, and political polarization: How do political party preference and values correspond with the political use of social media? *Telematics & Informatics, 46*, 1–18.

IV Koiranen, I., Koivula, A., Malinen, S., & Keipi, T. (2021). Undercurrents of echo chambers and flame wars: Party political determinants of social media behavior. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics 19*(2), 197–213.

V Koiranen, I., Koivula, A., Kuusela, A., & Saarinen, A. From the inside out to the outside in: party members' extra-parliamentary activity and commitment within the party network.

1 Introduction: Understanding the intersections of political parties and social media

"Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds."

- Robert Oppenheimer, a theoretical physicist

Witnessing the very first mushroom cloud, Robert Oppenheimer, one of the leading scientists working to create the atomic bomb (A-bomb), cited the aforementioned passage from Hindu scripture, the Bhagavad-Gita. Although it would be a gross exaggeration to directly compare social media to a lethal device such as the A-bomb, Oppenheimer's statement reveals how scientific and technological innovations can lead to political turmoil, profoundly affecting how politics are organized within and beyond nation states. As nuclear weapons could be interpreted as devices that provide the power of a god-like creature, social media platforms have been argued to possess somewhat similar abilities but in different contexts—and obviously without the immediate threat of mass destruction.

While enabling many people to shape public opinion, social media platforms have indeed led to political turmoil worldwide. For example, it is now obvious that the election of Donald Trump and Britain's European Union (EU) Referendum could have turned in other directions without the influence of social media platforms (see Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Enli, 2017). Additionally, during the twenty-first century, social media movements, such as the Arab Spring, have facilitated uprisings that have attempted to challenge the power of tyrannical dictators, enabling the formation of democratic systems in the Middle East and in Northern African countries (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Papacharissi, 2015, pp. 30–33), even though the success of these movements turned out to be short lived. Thus, resembling the case of the A-bomb, the technological innovations that have led to the rise of social media have indeed disrupted the power balance between and within societies in multiple ways.

As in the case of social movements, digitalization and the emergence of social media have certainly disrupted political parties' positions as links across different

realms of society (Bennett et al., 2018; Chadwick, 2007; Chadwick & Stromer-Galley, 2016). Yet, despite the numerous studies on the growing importance of social media participation, influencing, and campaigning (Bennett, 2012; Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Vromen et al., 2015), relatively little attention has been paid to how party members and supporters have become entangled in the social media sphere. In the Finnish context, there is research on how party offices, leaders, representatives, candidates, and citizens utilize online media, especially during elections (e.g., Strandberg, 2013; Strandberg & Borg, 2020; Strandberg & Carlson, 2021). Similarly, in-depth research in Finland illuminates how a particular party's (especially the Finns Party's) supporters connect with online groups and utilize various forms of digital participation (e.g., Hatakka, 2017, 2019; Horsti & Saresma, 2021; Ylä-Anttila, 2020). Nonetheless, knowledge about the impacts of the digitalized communication possibilities of grassroots party movements when it comes to online participation and its influence in the broader Finnish context remain limited.

The changes in parties' societal position and relevance raise the following question: *How are party politics intertwined with social media*? In the current research, I answer this question by expanding the understanding of Finnish digital politics by placing political parties at the center of analysis and inquiring about the social media–related actions of Finnish party representatives, members, and supporters. In particular, I assess the formation of the social media political sphere by analyzing the party–political standings from which the sphere is produced and accessed and how the ideological standings have played out in the social media sphere. Then, rather than dissecting how the precise content, discourses, or demands are presented in the social media political sphere, the present dissertation expands earlier research by evaluating the social and political standings of those who form, fill, and modify the social media sphere. Next, I more specifically unwrap these analytical aims.

1.1 Research aims and analytical perspectives

In this dissertation, I contribute and expand to current academic debates by reflecting on political activity on social media in relation to the Finnish political parties. Based on analysis of a vast set of survey and social media data, I argue that the main disruptive mechanism related to social media is based on the reallocation of political power through citizens' broadened possibilities for content production and dissemination in the public sphere. Social media is a (relatively) new and important sphere for political campaigning, participation, and influence (e.g., Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Bennett et al., 2018; Vromen et al., 2015). As this sphere has become more relevant, the positioning of political actors on social media has

increasingly been modifying the different contexts where the parties traditionally operate. In other words, succession in social media politics most likely supports the parties' success among the electorate, which is the primary way to gain power in the government and legislature. Therefore, I argue that probing these interconnections between political parties and the social media sphere may yield additional information about the disruptive role of social media in Finnish politics.

In the current study, I focus my analytical gaze on the actual social corpus of political parties, namely their supporters, members, and representatives, assessing how these groups participate and interact on social media. As social media platforms have empowered the masses, I argue that to understand the changes in political parties and in the Finnish political field—instead of assessing party office-coordinated communication practices—it is essential to evaluate how political parties' members, especially supporters, "organically" promote the parties' political aims and desires on social media. Simultaneously, instead of providing an in-depth understanding of the complex relations between a particular party and social media crowds, my aim is to provide a broader perspective of the Finnish political parties' social and ideological prerequisites for bottom-up political influence on social media.

Derived from this line of reasoning, I propose that the party–political setting on social media could be better comprehended by evaluating the interventions of political party contexts on the formation of the social media political sphere. For better understanding these relations, I lay out more accurate research questions, namely the following:

1) *how political action of parties' grassroots formats the social media political sphere*,
2) *how political party contexts intervene in political action on social media,*
3) *how the political and social setting in social media and within parties may further rouse political action*, and
4) *how the setup in the social media political sphere is reflected in the Finnish political field and the parties within it.*

The main concepts and functions of these perspectives are presented in Figure 1. Accordingly, for understanding these relations, the present research makes contributions related to three bodies of scholarship that are related to *theorizing political participation on social media*, *understanding the activating and attenuating contextual factors in political parties*, and *comprehending the formation of the social media political sphere*. First, in this dissertation, political action on social media does not just refer to traditional forms of political engagement, such as formal activities in the party's organization, but rather to how party members and supporters

participate in the public sphere. In the social media sphere, these actions involve (but are not limited to) accessing the sphere, receiving, curating, and producing political content and discourses, and participating in discussions and debates from their political standings (see Carpini et al., 2004; Vromen et al., 2015). Although such participatory actions may not always be aligned with parties' motives and aims (see Hatakka, 2019), they still increase the visibility of the parties' political subjects in the social media sphere. Thus, it is important to acknowledge who can join the formation of the content in the social media political sphere, who are influenced by the political content, and, then, what kinds of broader consequences these dynamics might have for Finnish politics.

Second, to understand the interconnected dynamics between party politics and social media, I address political parties as a central social context for citizens' political action (Mudge & Chen, 2014; Poguntke et al., 2016). My aim is to provide a detailed picture of Finnish politics and political parties on social media, especially from the perspectives of party-related sociostructural and ideological factors and characteristics. Thus, to elaborate on the understanding of the relations among political preferences, party membership, and political action on social media, I place political parties as the focal points in online political activity by foregrounding how they shape individuals' political behavior (see Koivula, 2019; Mudge & Chen, 2014). In the present thesis, I especially concentrate how the social and ideological composition within the parties rouse and skew political activity.

Third, my analytical aim is to theoretically scrutinize the formation of the social media political sphere by assessing four separate but related aspects of this sphere: *boundaries, substance, structure,* and *order*. Related to the inequalities of social media participation, I elaborate on the understanding of *boundaries* and *substance* by evaluating how Finnish citizens, as well as party supporters and members, access social media and produce and disseminate its visible political content (Brake, 2014; Hargittai & Walejko, 2008; Hoffman & Lutz, 2021; Schradie, 2019, 2020; Van Deursen & Helsper, 2015). Thus, from the perspective of digital divides, I evaluate those who produce and disseminate visible content, how they belong to the social media sphere, and, in this sense, have a theoretical chance to participate digitally in democratic processes—or at least are influenced by the content they consume.

Additionally, I contribute to the understanding of how *structure* and *order* are assembled in the scattered and polarized social media sphere by assessing how social media networks are both structured and modified by users. Recent academic discussions suggest that in this era of social media, the public sphere has become more individualized, scattered, and polarized (e.g., Chadwick, 2015). In this dissertation, I attempt to scrutinize the clustered social media context by understanding both the structural (structure) and cultural (order) setting within the sphere. As information, news, and ideological discourses are filtered, amplified, and

distorted by curators belonging to various social networks (Colleoni et al., 2014; Harteveld, 2021), as well as by algorithms arranging the content (Flaxman et al., 2016; Sunstein, 2001), users' comprehension of the current public sphere and public in general may become skewed and polarized[2]. This social and platform-based segregation may further generate separate fields and subcultures with alternative norms, values, ideologies, and rules.

Finally, to theoretically scrutinize the complex intersections of party politics and the social media political sphere, I attempt to understand political activity as a dynamic constellation. The current research contributes to the literature on political party action on social media by offering an economic sociological perspective that begins with the idea of political action and participation as complex social phenomena. In a sociologically oriented understanding of politics, political action is not clearly viewed as an outcome of an economic–rational pursuit of self-interest or a rational calculus of desired outcomes (see Aldrich, 2011; Verba, 1961; Zuckerman, 2005). Rather, sociologically oriented perspectives recognize that people develop their political knowledge, desires, and values as partly influenced by their interactions with others (see Verba, 1961; Zuckerman, 2005). The idea of the social logic of politics is based on a philosophical comprehension of methodological holism, where people are perceived to be influenced by their social environment. Political decisions and ambitions are spread this way, and as the frequency of social interactions rises, the probability of political influence increases (see Verba, 1961, p. 4; Zuckerman, 2005, p. 645).

Thus, based on theoretical perspective of fields and networks, my aim is to recognize both the *thrust* for and *traction* of social media participation, by understanding these mechanisms in relation to concurrent aspects of societal and cultural changes in the Finnish party–political context, as well as how they are related to the aspects of the social media political sphere itself. The core idea is to recognize the aspects that *pull* and *push* citizens from different social and political contexts to engage in social media platforms. Overall, according to this line of reasoning, the appeal of the platforms and digitalized communication emerges in relation to the actors' social surroundings and positions in various social fields and networks.

[2] This research primarily considers the social and ideological aspects of polarization. The question of polarization as a temporal process—that is, whether ideological differences increase or decrease over time—is beyond the scope of this research. What this research offers is a detailed still image of how these disparities take shape in the Finnish social media sphere at the end of the 2010s. Specifically, in addition to tracking sociodemographic disparities on social media, the current research is concerned with two ideological dimensions of polarization: the traditional left–right cleavage and that between postmaterial and neoconservative poles.

To conclude, searching for answers to the research questions from multiple directions and viewpoints allows for a multifaceted understanding of the interdependent dynamics between these two contexts of inquiry, namely political parties and the social media political sphere. Digitalization and social media have disrupted the formation of the public sphere by redistributing the possibilities of citizens, corporations, institutions, organizations, and other actors to participate in the formation of public opinion. Therefore, I aim to map the formation of the social media political sphere by elaborating on the economic sociological understanding of the mixed logics of social media and political parties. By assessing political parties' positions in and across different separated-but-related political contexts, as well as acknowledging the parallel and collateral logics embedded in the social media sphere, I identify different party-based aspects that might encourage or constrain the participation of supporters, members, and activists in the formation of the digital political sphere.

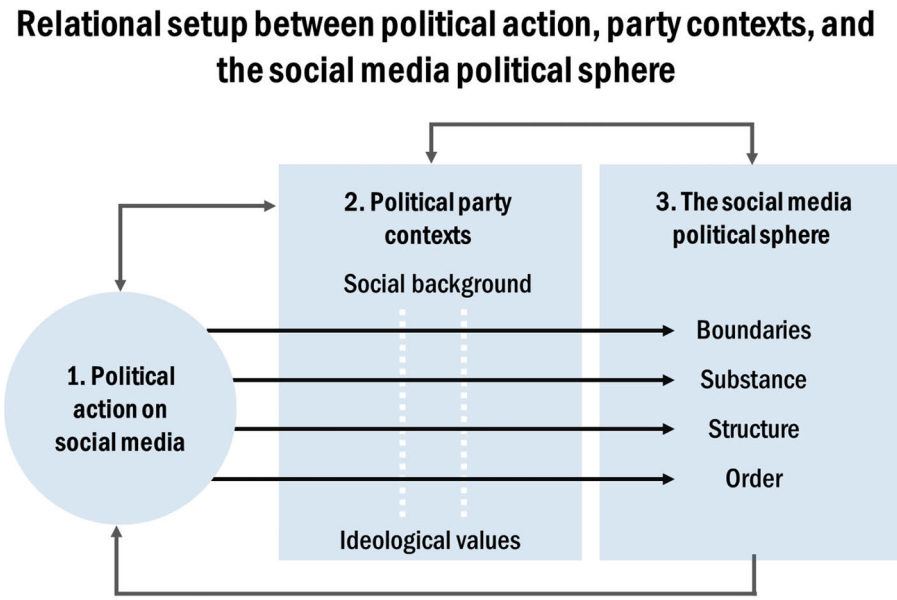

Figure 1. Relational setup: Interconnections between social media political action, political party contexts, and the social media political sphere.

1.2 Research articles and outline of the study

The current dissertation consists of five research articles taking different perspectives on the interconnections between political parties and the social media sphere. The articles concentrate on the six largest parties in Finland: the Social Democratic Party (SDP), the Finns Party (FP), the National Coalition Party (NCP),

the Center Party (CPF), the Green League (GL), and the Left Alliance (LA). A vast set of analytical approaches, statistical modeling, and comprehensive datasets are utilized, concentrating on various forms of social and political practices, phenomena, and actions. With this analytical versatility, combined with detailed theoretical reasoning, the present dissertation yields rich and novel empirical insights into the contours of party politics and social media in the Finnish political context.

Together, these five articles cross-expose the party-related political actions on social media platforms from the perspectives of party-related groups, namely supporters, members, and representatives. First, Articles I and II aim to provide both temporal and structural frames for understanding the formation of the social media political sphere in Finland. Article I provides the temporal frame and Article II the sociostructural one. Article III offers more refined understandings related to social media politics by assessing Finnish party supporters' social media participation and how political activity is associated with supporters' social background and ideological standings. In turn, Articles IV and V explore how social media participation itself formats the primary social contexts, namely political parties and the social media sphere. Article IV assesses how a divergent emphasis for alternative behavioral styles between the Finnish party supporter groups format the social media sphere. Article V evaluates how different modes of extra-parliamentary participation are associated with social coherence within the Finnish parties.

Table 1 shows the outline of Chapters 2–4 in relation to the main concepts presented in Figure 1. In Chapter 2, I lay the contextual groundwork of the dissertation by describing how the rise of social media has affected party politics in Finland and globally. I foreground the disruptive consequences of social media and the contextual characteristics that steer users' social activities. Additionally, I approach the contextual changes within the Finnish political parties and in Finnish parliamentary politics. In Chapter 3, I outline the conceptual underpinnings of the research, first on social media and then on political parties. The purpose of these sections is to deepen and elaborate on the individual articles' conceptualization of political participation, social media, political parties, and their intersections. In each of these sections, I explain my conceptual starting points that are implicitly included in the individual articles and have substantially shaped what I discuss when I refer to participation, political parties, or social media. Additionally, in this chapter, I make a case for a sociological understanding of political action on social media by foregrounding the social complexity of social media, party politics, and political action.

After these conceptual starting points, the key theoretical debates to which this research contributes are discussed in Chapter 4. I deepen this understanding by carrying out a cross-exposure of social media logics and characters in the Finnish political party context, here by evaluating the effects of the parties' sociostructural

and ideological features on individual participation and, at the end, on the parties' positions in the social media political sphere. First, I form an economic sociology-oriented theoretical lens for my inquiry based on the perspective of networks and fields. I further elaborate on Finnish parties' prerequisites for horizontal social media influencing by concentrating on the parties' sociodemographic and ideological characteristics. After this, in Chapter 5, I introduce the analytical design with descriptions of the methodological choices (including datasets, methods, variables, and research ethics) applied in the empirical studies. Next, I present the summaries of the original articles in Chapter 6. In Chapter 7, I conclude the dissertation by discussing the implications of my findings, as well as some directions for future research.

Table 1. Outline of Chapters 2–4.

Chapter	Political action	Social media sphere	Political party context	Contrasting the concepts
Chapter 2: Contextual change	Changes in political participation	Contextual change in public sphere and the rise of the social media	Contextual change in political parties and the Finnish political field	
Chapter 3: Conceptual underpinnings	Comprehending social media political participation	Understanding the social and economic logics of social media	Conceptual understandings of political parties	Adaption of political parties on the rise of social media politics
Chapter 4: Theoretical understandings	Thrust for and traction of the social media political participation	The four aspects of the social media political sphere	Relevance of parties' social background and ideological values in the social media participation	**Interconnections between political parties and the social media political sphere**

2 The overlapping contexts: Contextualizing changes in party politics and social media

> "We are on the threshold of a new decade. The 2010s was a time of rapid change. The pace of change will continue to increase, but we can affect the direction it will take. Unrest, instability, and short-term thinking have characterized life both in Finland and the world at large. Counterforces to them must be created. We need more peace, stability and long-term thinking."
>
> - Sauli Niinistö, the President of the Republic of Finland

On the first day of 2020, Finland's President Sauli Niinistö addressed several societal phenomena and concerns in his New Year's speech. The president's speeches can been understood as detectors of the issues currently in the center of society's social and political realms. In his speech, President Niinistö was especially concerned about hate speech, social and political polarization, and deliberate misunderstandings. He underlined the importance of public deliberation but condemned the detrimental modes of the discussion—in both the public sphere and parliamentary politics. Altogether, President Niinistö urged citizens to redeem the societal consensus that has now been lost as a result of political turmoil in Finnish society.

Overall, the Finnish context offers an informative setting for assessing the social media political sphere in Western European multiparty systems. What makes Finland an especially fruitful national context for empirical inquiry is the highlighted contradiction between the presocial media era and the present one. As Niinistö illustrates, in the 2010s, Finnish society rapidly changed. Especially, the rise of social media has disrupted the formation of the public sphere, the ways in which citizens connect with society, and the ways that people interact with one another. Simultaneously, accelerating climate change, increasing immigration, and widespread right-wing populism have accentuated the political struggles seen in the previous decade. Accordingly, these same developments have also affected a change in the core political questions on Finnish political culture, as such disrupting the traditional assemblage in Finnish politics (see Koivula, 2019). Then, as the argument

goes, the former technology trailblazer, Finland, is now losing its coherence and stability because of technology-based disruption.

Generally, similar to other late-industrial societies, Finland can also be characterized as a mature information society whose economy heavily relies on knowledge industries and technological innovations (see Pyöriä, 2006) and where computers, the internet, mobile phones, and social media have been widely utilized for several decades (Official Statistics of Finland [OSF], 2020a; Vicente & Lopez, 2011). In the democratic sense, Finland is generally perceived as representing one of the Nordic welfare societies, with its high-quality educational system, low poverty rate, small income disparities, and a relatively small share of foreign residents. The assembly in Finnish politics resembles a Western European multiparty system based on an open-list proportional representation (OLPR), which has been traditionally based on consensus-seeking politics, because the parties have formed stable majority governments through strong coalitions, as well as providing government programs through interparty collaboration (von Schoultz, 2018). Thus, small disparities, cooperation, and consensus have characterized both the Finnish political system and Finnish society as a whole. Overall, its political setting and technology-related characteristics jointly make Finland a fruitful grounds for unpacking political action embedded in social media.

Connected to these notions, in this chapter, I lay the contextual groundwork for my research by describing how the rise of social media has transformed Finnish social interactions, the formation of the public sphere, and party politics. My aim is to assess how the rise of the social media and digitalization of politics—in tandem with other societal disruptions—has reshuffled traditional political organizations' positions as intermediaries of political action. Next, I more precisely describe the relevant changes in Finnish society by focusing on the contextual characteristics and changes in the social media sphere (Section 2.1), in Finnish politics (Section 2.2), and within and around political parties (Section 2.3).

2.1 Changes in the public sphere

Today, social media offers several platforms for social activity, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, Snapchat, TikTok, Reddit, and many others. In addition to social networking sites (SNSs), different kinds of instant messaging services, such as WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger, have gained popularity over the past few decades. Concurrently, companies providing social media platforms, such as Facebook Inc., have become among the most powerful corporations in the world. Across the globe, SNSs have become part of people's everyday lives, with the number of users tripling between 2010 and 2020; there are now approximately 3 billion users worldwide (Statista, 2020). In Finland as well, the number of social

media users increased steadily in the 2010s. According to the OSF (2020a), at the end of the decade, 69 percent of Finns followed social media during the preceding three months. Overall, these numbers indicate the enormous (potential) power that social media platforms now (could) hold in various social, economic, political, and governmental processes.

In the political sense, the most crucial change caused by the rise of social media is related to the decentralized possibilities for interacting, disseminating information, and influencing others without the traditional temporal and spatial restrictions. Especially, in the beginning of the social media era, there were high hopes that social networking platforms could improve citizens' democratic engagement and participation (Larsson, 2013; van Dijk & Hacker, 2018, pp. 3–5). Arguably, from the citizens' perspective, digital communication and social media platforms have offered possibilities never seen before. Today, social media users can disseminate content and share their opinions with large audiences, which might catch the attention of journalists and even legislators (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Jenkins, 2006; Vromen et al., 2015). Thus, by creating and sharing content and discourses, citizens could be perceived as engaging in new forms of online political participation (see also Carpentier, 2016; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012; Vromen et al., 2015). Additionally, social media platforms enable organizing the masses for collective political activities, such as demonstrations, boycotts, and signing petitions (e.g., Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). Because of these increased participatory possibilities, alternative social media platforms have outstripped various traditional institutional gatekeepers, encouraging citizens to engage politically, apart from the traditional political and journalistic mediators (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Chadwick, 2017; Jenkins, 2006; Wellman et al., 2003).

On the flipside of these positive developments, the reshuffling of power in the social media era is evidently not a desired outcome—especially when assessing the process of power redistribution from the top down. Because of the changes in the formation of the public sphere, governmental actors in the EU, the United States (US), China, Russia, Australia, and other countries have attempted to control these platforms in multiple ways. For example, after the 2016 presidential elections, the US government opened an investigation concerning Facebook's role in unlawful influencing of voters (e.g., Madrigal, 2017). Similarly, to limit Facebook's monopoly and omnipotent position, the European Commission (2021) has opened an investigation to evaluate whether Facebook violated EU competition rules. An additional concern is that governments have transformed—or will be able to transform—the social media platforms into surveillance machines to control civil society (Lorentzen, 2014). Overall, it is evident that the rise of digitalized communication and social media platforms have had disruptive consequences, both from the top down and bottom up.

In addition to disruptions related to citizens' possibilities to connect with society and the political turmoil within societies, the rise of social media has displaced traditional media actors' position in the public sphere. Formerly, mass media outlets—such as newspapers, television broadcasting companies, and radio channels—were perceived as occupying a prominent position in deliberative democracies (Eley & Calhoun, 1994; Fraser, 1990). The traditional mass media certainly was (and continues to be, but to a lesser extent) the agent that filled the public sphere and, thus, controlled public opinion (see Eley & Calhoun, 1994; Fraser, 1990; Gerhards & Schäfer, 2010; Habermas et al., 1974). However, in this social media era, traditional media actors' position in the field has drastically changed. With the possibilities to create content, broadcast, express views, and influence others becoming more decentralized, the traditional media companies have lost their dominant position as gatekeepers of the public sphere (Dahlgren, 2005; Gerhards & Schäfer, 2010). Thus, they have been forced to modify their modus operandi, mainly because of economic realities. Although "the eyeballs" and paying subscribers migrated from traditional media outlets to interactive spaces of social media, the scarcity of revenue forced these traditional media actors to follow their readers to the social media sphere as well.

As traditional media outlets have lost their former position, the disruption in the public sphere has opened the possibilities for new media outlets to rise. The new media environment could be regarded as a hybrid system (Chadwick, 2017), functioning at the crossroads of old and new media logics. Today, polyphonic voices are simultaneously filling the sphere from different sources and in different places. This forms a mosaic structure for the public sphere, where changing political tones and voices are scattered around different clusters of the network (Chadwick, 2017). Thus, the current media system provides an increasingly fragmented public sphere with changing comprehensions of public opinion.

Today, traditional media actors alongside different types of broadcasters—such as corporations, organizations, bloggers, vloggers, citizen journalists, influencers, ordinary users, and so on—produce content on their own sites, channels, and profiles, providing alternative views, opinions, and sometimes even "alternative facts" (Chadwick, 2017; Gerhards & Schäfer, 2010; Vihma et al., 2018). Thus, the diversification of voices in the public sphere and transformation in media settings have been argued as leading to the era of the spread of misinformation, fake news, and rise of post-truth politics (Alcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Bennett & Livingstone, 2018; McIntyre, 2018; Vihma et al., 2018). Overall, the rise of social media platforms has been seen as leading to undesired political turmoil in various national

contexts. Thus, because the public sphere is more obviously scattered, conflicting information may have produced a variety of public opinions.[3]

Overall, the rise of social media has reshuffled the traditional assemblage of societies. Social media platforms have brought forth new powerful corporate actors, altering the media environment by bypassing the traditional gatekeepers of the public sphere. With social media platforms empowering citizens, the positions of traditional institutional organizations have also changed. Accordingly, the rise of social media could probably be regarded as the most important development of the 21st century. Concurrently, political systems and political parties have undergone changes. Next, I shall introduce the key contextual changes in Finnish politics.

2.2 Changes in Finnish politics

Although the rise of digital communication has disrupted the traditional assemblage in the political field, the changes in the latter could not completely be the result of these techno-communication developments. Earlier research suggests that the parties' relationships with their core supporter groups dissolved during the late 20th century (e.g., Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Katz, 1990; Poguntke et al., 2016; Scarrow, 2019). In recent decades, these changes have altered the Finnish parties' positions in the political field. The traditional interest parties—the SDP, the NCP, and the CPF—dominated the political field for decades, but today, the new identity parties—the FP, the GL, and the LA—have challenged the "three big" ones. In the 21st century, the traditional interest parties' proportional share of votes has been drastically shrinking. These parties gained two-thirds of the votes in the parliamentary elections in the 1990s, but in the 2019 parliamentary elections, they gained only approximately 49 percent of the combined votes. In contrast, the FP in particular gained a prominent share of the votes in the 2010s (19.1% in 2011, 17.7% in 2015, 17.5% in 2019) (OSF, 2019a).

The traditional interest parties and the new identity parties clearly differ in the political contents on which they rely. According to the so-called freezing hypothesis, the traditional political cleavages in Finland, as in other Western democracies, were originally formed in the 1920s, maintaining the same setting in the political field for decades (see Lipset & Rokkan, 1967). Formerly, the Finnish political sphere was organized around three political poles representing the interests of labor, capital, and land (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967, p. 50; Sundberg, 2012; Westinen, 2015). The SDP,

[3] However, the idea of a scattered public sphere is not simply a product of the 21st century, as the public sphere has always been constructed by a variety of publics as "the structured setting where cultural and ideological contest or negotiation among a variety of publics takes place" (Eley & Calhoun, 1994, p. 11; see also Fraser, 1990).

together with the LA (and its predecessors), traditionally represented the interests of the working class, the NCP fostered the political interests of entrepreneurs and the economic sector, and the CPF long promoted the interests of the agrarian sector and the people living in rural regions. Notably, these three parties are still highly connected to the interests of labor, capital, and land (Koivula, 2019; Westinen, 2015).

Similar to other Western countries in a general sense, in Finland, the traditional categorizations based on social class no longer guide citizens' political identification in the sense that they used to (Fraser, 2000, 2018; Inglehart, 1990; Norris & Inglehart, 2019). The Finnish political field is now also increasingly divided by the struggle of recognition based on the cleavage of postmaterialist and neoconservative values (Koivula, 2019; Westinen, 2015), which is often referred to as the GAL–TAN cleavage[4] (Hooghe et al., 2002). Related to the concept of the struggle of recognition, *postmaterialism* refers to the political questions and struggles connected with issues concerning nonmaterial goals, such as self-expression, minority rights, and environmentalism (Inglehart, 1990). Already in the late 1970s, Inglehart (1977) predicted that political systems would be increasingly molded by postmaterial political issues because of the increased material well-being of Western democracies. According to Inglehart (1977), as material well-being increases in welfare states, citizens can start promoting postmaterial issues, and thus, these political struggles relocate the groups in political fields.

In the Finnish political context, arguably, the most visible party promoting postmaterial values has been the GL. It originated from environmental social movements in the 1980s, and its political aims remain closely related to environmental protection (Koiranen et al., 2016; Mickelsson, 2004; Raunio, 2015; Saarinen et al., 2018). However, because environmental values have become mainstream since other parties have more visibly integrated environmental political aims into their party programs and communications, the GL's political ambitions have more clearly been extended to other postmaterial themes (Koivula et al., 2020; Mickelsson, 2004; Saarinen et al., 2018). The LA has become another party that strongly addresses postmaterial political questions in Finnish politics. Today, together with the GL, the LA emphasizes the postmaterial values of equality, tolerance, and minority rights (Koivula et al., 2020).

Neoconservatism and right-wing populism are viewed as the counterforces of postmaterialist political values. A common explanation for the rise of populism is related to the detrimental consequences of globalization that have undermined the livelihoods of the middle and especially working classes (Bonschier & Kriesi, 2012).

[4] GAL–TAN is an acronym for green, alternative, libertarian—traditional, authoritarian, nationalist (Hooghe et al., 2002).

The argument is based on the idea that increasing austerity has generated an electoral seedbed for alternative political explanations and aims provided by right-wing populist parties (Bonschier & Kriesi, 2012). Nonetheless, according to Norris and Inglehart (2019), the implementation of austerity policies and their consequences for the working and middle classes are not the only forces that have triggered the rise of right-wing populism. In addition to the popular economic-structural explanations, Norris and Inglehart (2019) provide a more culturally oriented side of the phenomenon, proposing that the postmaterial shift has given rise to a counter-revolutionary cultural backlash among those citizens who oppose the rise of postmaterial values and the struggle of recognition.

Today, similar to many Western countries, in Finland, the cleavage between postmaterialism and neoconservatism has become a prolific front of political struggles. The cultural backlash truly materialized during the 2010s when the populist and neoconservative party, the FP, won the elections and entered the core of the Finnish political system (Arter, 2011, 2015). In contrast to other Finnish parties (and especially the GL and LA), the FP has especially opposed multiculturalism, immigration, and the EU (e.g., Hatakka, 2017; Jungar & Jupskås, 2014; Norocel, 2016; Ylä-Anttila, 2020). After the FP party split in 2017, these neoconservative tendencies have become even clearer (for further information see for example Westinen et al., 2020).

The rise of the struggle of recognition has naturally challenged the traditional interest parties' position in Finnish parliamentary politics. As postmaterialist issues have become important matters in Finnish politics, traditional parties have had to consider their standings related to the new political questions. The visible problem is that because the parties' core politics are formed around traditional struggles for redistribution, these parties lack a seemingly unifying position on the postmaterialist issues. This ambivalence of political position could be perceived as both protecting and undermining the parties' positions among the electorate.[5] Overall, the GAL–TAN scale has cut through the traditional interest parties. The ambivalence of the parties' standings had previously protected their positions, but it seems that the prominence of the GAL–TAN scale has grown in significance to the extent that it has forced these parties to choose which way to take.

[5] For example, in the eve of the 2021 municipal elections, the NCP representatives were visibly debating their party's position on the GAL–TAN scale. The largest Finnish newspaper, *Helsingin Sanomat*, reported that the party might recalibrate its political aims in a more conservative direction to appeal to voters leaning toward the FP (Teittinen, 2021). The party chair, Petteri Orpo, has recently stated that the NCP is opposing tax increases for fossil fuels and has personally taken a stand against social welfare costs incurred because of immigration (Orpo, 2020; Teittinen, 2021). Thus, it seems that the NCP's position could be moving toward the TAN pole.

The LA has been more proactive in this matter. During the late 20th and the early 21st centuries, the LA transformed itself from a traditional working-class party to more of a new left party, which alienated some of the traditional working-class voters but appealed to young and educated people living in urban areas (Koiranen et al., 2017). For example, most of the new members of the LA are residents of urban areas, women, and well-educated (Koiranen et al., 2017). Nevertheless, the LA could now be perceived as "a red–green party," indicating its ideological closeness with the GL, as well as the prominence of the intersection of socioeconomic left values and postmaterialism as the sources of political identification.

The positions of the FP and GL on the traditional socioeconomic left–right value scale have also become clearer. Formerly, both parties had no clear standing on the traditional left–right divide because the ambivalence of their political positions could benefit them as well (Hatakka, 2017; Mickelsson, 2004). After the FP split and election of Jussi Halla-aho as its chair, the party more clearly began to promote right-wing social and economic policies (Hatakka, 2017, 2019; Westinen et al., 2020; Ylä-Anttila, 2020). Similarly, it seems that the GL has turned more visibly to the left on the socioeconomic left–right scale. Previously, the GL lacked a clear stance on these questions, with the party emphasizing both the political themes typically supported by the left (e.g., the strong role of the public sector) and those endorsed by the right (e.g., the strong role of markets) (Koiranen et al., 2016; Mickelsson, 2004; Raunio, 2015). However, previous research shows that the GL's supporters and members have clearly felt closer to the left-wing parties than right-wing parties (Koiranen et al., 2016, 2017).

In addition to ideological and interest-based differences, the Finnish parties naturally hold divergent positions in different segments of the population. Thus, although the general argument is that the parties' connections to sociodemographic categorizations have loosened, political preferences are still strongly linked to sociostructural factors (Koivula, 2019). Earlier research shows that the traditional interest parties (and especially the members of the SDP and the CPF) are far more popular among the older population groups (Koiranen et al., 2017; Koivula, 2019). Additionally, the Finnish parties' popularity is clearly distinguished based on gender. Men usually vote for and join the right-wing parties, while women prefer the left-wing parties (Koivula, 2019). Educational level also has a major impact on the parties' popularity. The NCP, especially the GL, are popular among the well-educated Finns. Similarly, the area of residence still functions as an important predictor of party preference (Koivula, 2019; see also Keipi, Koiranen, Koivula & Saarinen, 2017; Koiranen et al., 2017; Koivula et al., 2020). Thus, it seems that the party–society ties remain based on sociodemographic attributes.

Overall, Finnish party politics have changed over the previous decades. The new identity parties, especially the FP, have truly challenged the traditional interest

parties' dominant position in parliamentary politics. Simultaneously, the political field has become more clearly aligned with the struggle for recognition and postmaterial political issues. The sociostructural factors predicting the party preferences have not vanished but have been altered. Political opinions, preferences, and ambitions are still related to social relations and surroundings (see Koivula, 2019; Wellman, 1983; Zuckerman, 2005). Next, I foreground more precisely how the contextual changes have molded political parties.

2.3 Changes in political parties

As the general argument goes, social media (Section 2.1) and the shifts in political struggles (Section 2.2) have disrupted political parties' position in the societal field. However, even before the era of social media, the links between political parties and civil society have been perceived as already weakened (e.g., Katz, 1990; van Biezen & Poguntke, 2014), leading several theorists to argue that party politics are in *crisis*, even alleging the *death* of party politics (see Katz, 1990; van Biezen & Poguntke, 2014; Van Haute et al., 2018). Then again, others suggest that the claim about the death of party politics seems premature, foregrounding the shifting agendas and functions of parties: Despite the waning number of political party *members,* on many occasions, political party *supporters* have adopted tasks and activities formerly performed by members and party activists, especially in this social media era (Chadwick & Stromer-Galley, 2016; Hooghe & Kölln, 2020; Webb et al., 2017).

Together, the disruptions related to information technology and social media and those shifts in political struggles have raised new forms of civic and political engagement. Traditionally, collective political action was understood as citizens' engagement, which involved the selection of representatives and activities, such as voting, campaign activity, and contacting officials or legislators (Dalton, 2008; Verba et al., 1978). These modes of political engagement were usually closely related to traditional and institutionalized political organizations, such as political parties, and political events, such as elections (see Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). In the 21st century, in particular, the traditional modes of participation and engagement have diminished in significance, especially among younger generations (Dalton, 2008; Kestilä-Kekkonen & Korvela, 2017). Simultaneously, other forms of digitalized engagement have emerged apart from traditional institutional structures (e.g., Bennett, 2012; Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Jenkins, 2006; Vromen et al., 2015).

Similarly, the changing political questions in parliamentary politics have opened a space for new political parties whose primary political demands are founded on political questions related to things such as self-expression, minority rights, environmentalism, nationalism, and populism (see Fraser, 2000; Hooghe et al., 2002;

Inglehart, 1990). Thus, several studies have suggested that parties in general still effectively bridge the gap between civil society and the state (van Haute & Gauja, 2015; Koivula, 2019; Mudge & Chen, 2014; Poguntke et al., 2016; Polk & Kölln, 2017; Scarrow & Gezgor, 2010; Scarrow & Webb, 2017). Hence, instead of being in crisis, political parties could be understood as adapting to the political struggles in the changing field of politics and means of communication (Chadwick & Stromer-Galley, 2016). Overall, political parties could still be understood as ideological and interest-based "lighthouses" guiding citizens' political orientations and actions in the political field and transfer interest-based desires to the otherwise rational–legal field of state affairs (Katz, 1990; Mudge & Chen, 2014; Scarrow & Webb, 2017).

Nonetheless, political parties and party politics have always undergone changes. In the history of parliamentary politics, the parties have been described with terms such as cadre parties, mass parties, cartel parties, professional parties, and catch-all parties, among others (Katz, 1990; Katz & Mair, 1995; Koole, 1996). All of these definitions describe what forms the parties have taken after various societal shocks have reverberated through parliamentary politics. Although these different modes of party organizations are at most theoretical frames and their definitions may not gain a unanimous consensus among scholars, these discussions still reveal that political parties have always adapted to broader societal and contextual changes.

Assessing the ruptures in the past shows the interconnected relations among the societal subfields where the parties operate. For example, the birth and diffusion of mass media communication in the mid-20th century upset the order in parliamentary politics in Western democracies (Katz, 1990). On the one hand, mass media shifted the target of the parties' communication objectives from their core supporter groups to a wider audience. On the other hand, mass media replaced the political parties' dominant position in the public sphere because mass media bypassed the parties as information sources of the electorate (Katz, 1990). This again led to the renegotiation of the connection between parties and civil society.

At the turn of the millennium, the political field has again been molded, especially by the ways in which citizens connect to society. Many scholars have argued that citizens have separated from the traditional means of collective action, as well as from the traditional organizations representing these modes of action (Beck, 1997; Dalton, 2008; Putnam, 2000). For example, in his famous book *Bowling Alone*, Robert Putnam (2000) observes that in its essence, social capital is constituted through citizen participation in different collective organizations, such as political parties, trade unions, and other social organizations. Putnam states that shrinking levels of social capital resulting from a decrease of collective action might ultimately endanger the collective political participation in state affairs. Thus, Putnam argues that decreasing levels of social capital might weaken governments and their effectiveness in representing citizens and that this might lead to the

separation between society's political and social realms, as well as lead to a vicious circle that could even drastically isolate the state and civil society from each other. As Putnam argues, these changes in participatory actions are related to broader changes in the relations among political organizations, civil society, and the state.

These transitions in the ways in which people attach themselves to their social surroundings are embedded in the changes in the modes of political action in a variety of ways. Due to the changes in societal norms, citizens now appear to emphasize various forms of nonelectoral participation, politics are now enacted outside the formal sphere of politics, and the truly political may disappear from the political system and reappear as sub(system)-politics in all other domains of society (Beck, 1997; Dalton, 2008). Overall, all of these discussions portray how political identification and engagement have increasingly stepped beyond the formal political organizations, such as political parties, labor unions, and traditional civic organizations. Concurrently, scholars argue that more informal, mercurial, and horizontally networked social movements have become more popular channels of political engagement, where the participants frame their actions and aims according to more individualized premises based on their lifestyle, consumerism, neotribalism, and other social entities unrelated to conventional class-based structures (Beck, 1997; Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Dalton, 2008; Maffesoli, 1996).

The changes in voter turnout, party preferences, and membership rates could function as general-level indicators of the changes in the strength of party–society ties. However, in the Finnish context, these signals are not clear. In Finland, voter turnout in the parliamentary elections declined drastically between the 1960s and 2000s (OSF, 2019b), indicating a decline of citizen interest in politics and political parties. However, in the current century, voter interest in the elections has slightly risen[6] (OSF, 2019b). The decline of membership rates could also be regarded as an indicator of the weakened party–society ties (see van Haute & Gauja, 2015; Kosiara-Pedersen et al., 2017; Scarrow, 2019). Generally, the membership rates in Finland have decreased since the 1980s (Koivula, 2019, pp. 41–43). Yet, in the current century, it seems that citizens' affection for political parties has partly become stronger. For example, the membership rates in the new identity parties and voting turnout have risen in this century (Koivula, 2019, pp. 41–43; OSF, 2019b), indicating the growing appeal of these parties. Thus, it seems that in the Finnish political context, there are divergent trends between the parties; as the traditional interest

[6] While falling behind the peak in the 1962 parliamentary elections (85.1%), the voter turnout in the 2019 parliamentary elections (72.1%) was clearly ahead the low points in 1999 (68.3%) and 2007 (67.9%). However, in the 2021 municipal elections, the voter turnout (55.1%) was the lowest since 1945.

parties' connections with society have loosened, the new identity parties' connections have solidified.

In the Western multiparty systems the party boundaries that determine those who belong to party organizations have become elusive and shifting as well. Perhaps the most traditional way to define the party boundaries is to use party membership as the indicator (see van Biezen & Poguntke, 2014). Nevertheless, the line that defines the party boundaries becomes blurred by the distinction between the officially affiliated members and those who do not officially belong to the party. First, several political parties in various political contexts have introduced new modes of membership (e.g., Scarrow, 2019; Webb et al., 2017). The idea behind modifying the meaning of membership is to ease the burdens (such as membership fees and duties) of belonging to these collective organizations (see Scarrow, 2019). Simultaneously (and alternatively), some parties have increased the possibilities and incentives offered for member subscription, such as the possibilities to participate in the election of the party leaders and in defining the party's political aims (Chadwick & Stromer-Galley, 2016; Webb et al., 2017). Here, the duties of and possibilities offered to party members have then been temporarily altered.

The supporters' role in party-related political processes has also changed: supporters have adopted the duties that were formerly assigned to party members and campaign workers (see Chadwick, 2007; Chadwick & Stromer-Galley, 2016; Hooghe & Kölln, 2020; Webb et al., 2017). In the current century, many supporters now participate on behalf of their party in various ways, for example, during the election campaigns (Chadwick & Stromer-Galley, 2016; Webb et al., 2017). Then, by flattening hierarchical structures and permitting a wider mass base to participate in decision-making processes, the European parties may be reorganized more as social movements (see Chadwick, 2007; Chadwick & Stromer-Galley, 2016; Dennis, 2020).

Similarly, with participatory possibilities diversifying, some parties have modified their organizations by means of digital applications (see Bennett et al., 2018; Chadwick, 2007; Dennis, 2020; Gerl et al., 2018; Kavada, 2019). First, it seems that aided by digital communication, some of the key components and intraparty functions of brick-and-mortar party organizations have been replaced (Bennett et al., 2018) with new means of digital network repertoires that were previously typical only of social movements and interest groups (Chadwick, 2007). Because of this deteriorating party–society ties, political parties have altered their ways of affiliation management, policy generation, leader and candidate selection, and public communication (Bennett et al., 2018).

In addition to these changes within parties, parties' ties with extra-parliamentary organizations have been transformed as well. The parties have had close and institutionalized connections with various organizations, such as trade unions,

religious groups, foundations, and trusts (Berry, 1969; Heaney & Rojas, 2015; Koiranen et al., 2017; Raunio & Laine, 2017; Schwartz, 2010). In the Finnish political context, traditionally, one of the most important aspects has involved the parties' idiosyncratic relations with corporate organizations. The connections between these two entities have remained visible (Koiranen et al., 2017; Raunio & Laine, 2017). Although international comparisons show that traditionally strong connections between labor organizations and social democratic parties weakened in many Western countries during the 20th century (Piazza, 2001), in Finland, labor unions still encourage their members to participate politically in a variety of electoral and extra-parliamentary processes (Kerrissey & Schofer, 2018). Today, the Finnish traditional interest parties' class-based political aims still encompass various political fields via corporate organizations and vice versa. The SDP and LA are close to organizations representing the working class, the NCP allies with the business sector and employer organizations, and the CPF works in tandem with agrarian interest organizations[7] (Raunio & Laine, 2017; Tiihonen, 2015). These formal ties reflect interorganizational connections at the individual level as well. The members of the SDP and LA generally hold positions in and cooperate with labor organizations, while the members of the NCP and CPF are active generally in and with employers' organizations (Koiranen et al., 2018, pp. 59–63). Altogether, political parties and corporatist organizations have represented both political and economic interests of the traditional political poles since the beginning of the 20th century (see Bergholm, 2013; Raunio & Laine, 2017; Tiihonen, 2015).

Nevertheless, it is crucial to note the weak relations between corporatist organizations and the GL and FP. Although the electoral support for the FP grew substantially among the members of SAK and STTK during the 2010s and the GL has a large number of supporters within AKAVA, these parties' formal ties to corporate organizations have remained rather weak (see Raunio & Laine, 2017). In this respect, it may be the case that these parties have had to find their extra-parliamentary leverage by other means. The GL was originally formed based on the environmental social movement (Mickelsson, 2015; Saarinen et al., 2018). Thus,

[7] According to Raunio and Laine (2017; see also Tiihonen, 2015), the traditional Finnish working-class parties—the SDP and LA (and its predecessors)—have had close relations with the Central Organization of Finnish Trade Unions (SAK), which consists of several individual member unions representing mainly working-class employees. The SDP has had close relations with the Finnish Confederation of Professionals (STTK) as well. The NCP and Confederation of Unions for Professional and Managerial Staff in Finland (AKAVA) have traditionally worked in tandem, but more clearly, the NCP is close to the Confederation of Finnish Industries (EK), which represents a variety of employer organizations. Similarly, the CPF has close ties with the Central Union of Agricultural Producers and Forest Owners (MTK) (Raunio & Laine, 2017).

because of shared aims and historical legacies, the GL still has close relations with environmental organizations and other social groups advocating for postmaterial issues (Koiranen et al., 2017).[8] In addition to the GL, when compared with other parties and their members, the LA's members have close relations with third-sector organizations that promote environmental and other postmaterial goals (Koiranen et al., 2017).

At first glance, the FP does not seem to have such established organizational sidekicks in the third sector.[9] Despite this setback, the party retains a prominent extra-parliamentary seat back—its close connections to various online communities. Approximately 28 percent of its members felt that they closely belonged to such communities (Koiranen et al., 2017, pp. 55–56). Foremost, the online community *Hommaforum,* which was originally formed by the FP's former chair Jussi Halla-aho, has had a crucial impact on both the party's constituents and on those within the party. The symbiosis of the FP and *Hommaforum* started in the late 2000s when active subscribers of the discussion board started to apply for the positions of communal candidates of the FP (Hatakka, 2017; Ylä-Anttila, 2020). According to Hatakka (2017), its cooperation with the online community offered the FP a significant number of assets, such as an effective means to attract potential voters, online visibility, capable human resources, and discursive and rhetorical assets. Subsequently, these assets were capitalized in the electorate as the FP gained—and maintained—vast electoral support in the 2011, 2015, and 2019 parliamentary elections. Similarly, the *Hommaforum* has indeed changed the setting within the party. The activists of the discussion board have now become a visible part of the party's political elite. Above all, the fact that the founding father of the discussion board was elected to lead the party is probably sufficient to justify this argument.

8 Approximately 18% of the GL's members reported that they cooperated with environmental and human rights organizations. Additionally, 15% of the LA members actively cooperated with such social organizations. Among the members of the NCP, CPF, and FP, approximately only 2% reported participating in similar activities. Among the SDP's members, the proportion was 5%. (Koiranen et al., 2017, p. 63.)

9 However, several journalists have addressed the FP's connections with nationalist, ethno-nationalist, and radical right organizations and movements (e.g., Halminen & Nieminen, 2016; Lehtonen, 2020). Nonetheless, the party leaders and officials have consciously kept a distance from the nationalist organizations and ideology. For example, the FP disbanded its youth organization (The Young Finns; in Finnish, *Perussuomalaiset Nuoret*) in the spring of 2020 because of the ethno-nationalist and fascist statements made by the youth organization's leaders and their visible connections with groups that support such harmful ideologies. After the disbandment, the party formed a new youth organization (The Finns' Youth; in Finnish, *Perussuomalainen Nuoriso*) to fill the emerging void.

Taken together, due to the emergence of online movements and groups on social media, the parties' control over their political agendas has partly declined. Although the parties' ability to set the tone of political discussions in the public sphere is not as effective as it used to be, the parties' positions and roles as connective links have been altered. Thus, like the traditional media actors earlier, the party organizations have faced a similar kind of disruption caused by digitalization. As digitalization and individualization have undermined the traditional media actors' role as gatekeepers of information, it has similarly disrupted the parties' position as a gatekeeper of citizen engagement and participation. However, various online groups and movements can function as prominent allies of political parties, especially when it comes to the electorate (Dennis, 2019; Heaney & Rojas, 2015; Schwartz, 2010). Thus, new social movements may offer political parties novel channels to influence the political sphere on social media.

Despite the disruptions within and at the boundaries of political parties, the parties have maintained their dominant mandate to control decision making within the state (see Katz, 1990; Mudge & Chen, 2014; Scarrow & Webb, 2017). Thus, if new online movements and groups acquire the power to affect decision making, they are compelled to target their political aims to political parties. As Heaney and Rojas (2015) show, new social movements can integrate their political ambitions with political parties' agendas. Nevertheless, to have an effect on the decisions made within the state, new online movements are compelled to influence the parties' position among the electorate. In this respect, although recent disruptions have shaken the parties' foundations in the electorate sector, the parties still control "the bureaucratic apparatus" within the state.

3 Entities with many faces: Conceptual starting points for comprehending political parties on social media

"I know Death. He's got many faces."

– Arya Stark, a fictional hero

I return to grim analogies and associate these with political parties by presenting them as *"entities with many faces."* The above quotation is taken from the box-office hit television series *Game of Thrones*. In the show, followers of one of the fictional religion, such as one of the main characters, Arya Stark, worship Death as their god and magically swap faces with dead people. Without going any further into the ritualistic details of this fictional religion or the storyline of the series, I want to underline the understanding of actors, such as individual human beings and organizational actors, as *multiple context-related beings*. Decades earlier, Goffman (1959, p. 254) offered an interpretation of these multifaceted beings by comparing social interaction to theater; people in everyday life resemble the actors on stage, playing a variety of roles. Similarly, in the current study, I comprehend political parties as multifaceted beings who adapt their actions in relation to the contextual surroundings in which they perform.

However, the analogy of political parties as *entities with many faces* has a dual meaning. In this chapter, I first approach political parties as multifaceted beings by covering the various fields surrounding and capturing the parties. Second, I highlight the multiform being of the representation of the parties in the current form of the scattered public sphere. Thus, social media platforms play an important role in the equation as a communication sphere, which enables actors, such as party organizations, to adapt their image in relation to the audiences with whom they interact. For example, Hatakka (2019) shows how actors related to political parties align their role when they are performing with different audiences in hybrid media systems. Hatakka states that this "logic of articulation" should be understood "via a

plethora of individual mediated acts of populist communication—which can vary in their ideological and stylistic content depending on who is speaking and in what context" (p. 76). By following this idea—as well as expanding it to political organizations more generally—I foreground the understanding that in the social media sphere, different organizations, such as political parties, could be interpreted as playing various roles on a variety of stages.

This chapter is intended to lay out the conceptual starting points that have informed my perspective on the dissertation's theoretical approaches, which are defined in Chapter 4. I elaborate on the sociological understanding by revealing the functional logic on social media platforms and evaluating how this logic guides political activity as well (Section 3.1). Additionally, I conceptualize political parties as networked fields and recognize the fields where the parties primarily operate, the fields with which the parties are linked, and those actors with whom the parties are connected through different networked relations (Section 3.2). I argue that this sort of holistic approach for understanding political parties and their various interdependent aims, means, and functions, as well as their social structures, hierarchies, and connections, is essential for also understanding the party-related political participation on social media (Section 3.3).

3.1 The surface of social media: Evaluating the social and economic setup

Social media platforms generate alternative social spaces for interaction. These platforms use operational logics that guide communication, the formation of networks, and the dissemination of information. Thus, the functional setup of the platform can be seen as shaping the surface of the social sphere within. First, because of the rise of social media, *digital* and *social* (as well as *digital* and *political*) are now closely entangled. The common denominator of these various digital spaces constitutes the sociability and multidirectional interaction among the users of a platform. Thus, although the internet was originally designed for interaction among actors, today, these possibilities for social interactivity are manifested in unprecedented forms and are promoted by default in the design of different online services. Accordingly, the *social* has become the cross-cutting feature defining our current digital spaces, and likewise, the *digital* is the feature that defines our current social, economic, and political lives.

Because of the pronounced prominence of sociability on digital platforms, to conceptualize political action in the social media sphere, I resort to using the social, structural, and network-based explanations of political processes. Here, political processes primarily result from the social positions of the political actors in large-scale structures of exchange and dependency (see Wellman, 1983, pp. 161–169). I

share the structural claim that the most important characteristic of these units is their position in social networks and the ways in which the networked structure in a social system allocates political resources. Thus, following Wellman, I "emphasize the pattern of links between interest groups, the linkage of these groups to resources through networks, the extent to which contending groups mobilize, and the structural possibilities for coalitions and competitive relations" (1983, p. 161).

In addition to the entanglement of the *social* and *digital* on social media platforms, the *social* and *economic* are also deeply connected to each other in digital spheres today. In short, the popular social media platforms have a corporate and capitalist architecture (Fuchs, 2010). This close connection between the two has been conceptualized with a novel business model: the platform economy. The platform economy is based on the idea that a corporation provides a platform for users' interactions and economic transactions, which are then turned into economic profits for the platform providers (see Fuchs, 2010). Thus, the logic of the platform economy is firmly based on prosumerism, a portmanteau concept describing how users act simultaneously as both consumers and producers (Ritzer & Jurgensson, 2010).

The core idea behind the business models of social media platforms is that the users form a self-feeding loop in which they provide content, which other users are interested to read, hear, and watch—in other words, consume. Thus, for the platform provider, it is crucial to reach a state where there is enough social interaction or "social buzz" that it entices more users on the platform to take part in these interactive practices[10] (see Vuorinen et al., 2020. Therefore, on social media platforms, economic relations are not just embedded in social ones, but social relations have arguably been already capitalized to the extent that they are also exploited by means of an almost complete alienation of the producers from the economic value of the "products," namely the data-related commodities derived from social actions and relations (see Fuchs, 2010; Vuorinen et al., 2020). Then again, the contextual logic of surplus value guides, allocates, and bends the social and political actions in the digital social sphere.

The economic logic of social media is embedded in the political processes on platforms in a variety of ways. Social media provides several different means for advertisers (e.g., political parties or candidates during elections) to achieve their

[10] Platforms are highly dependent on their users. If a platform does not reach this state of self-feeding loop, where social 'buzz' generates more 'buzz', the platform dies. In such a case, the platform becomes sort of an abandoned city; there is an infrastructure, but nobody is there. For example, platforms such as Google+ and many others eventually become such dead social spaces lacking a subject matter, that is, social interaction (see Vuorinen et al., 2020).

goals. Extensive user data enable different consumer (or voter) segments to be effectively gathered in highly detailed small niches for which those businesses (or political parties and candidates) that market their commodities (or their political promises during the election campaigns) can form highly detailed content in line with consumers' (or voters') preferences. Therefore, the economic logic crucially shapes the ways in which platforms are used. Thus, the architecture of social media platforms and expressions within these platforms are coproduced and mutually sustaining. Previous research on the various fields of social sciences indicates that the design and architecture of platforms have a substantial effect on how social action is performed, how social relations are structured, and how content is produced, distributed, and consumed (Kalsnes et al., 2017; Keipi, Koiranen, Koivula & Räsänen, 2017; Phua et al., 2017).

The level of user visibility is one of the essential factors for social action on different platforms. On some platforms, people generally present themselves with their own names and faces. On other platforms, such as on the many discussion forums and message boards, users communicate with pseudo-anonymized or completely anonymized user profiles (Keipi, 2015; Keipi, Koiranen, Koivula & Räsänen, 2017). In many cases, anonymity may prevent users from encountering social pressure because of the opinions they present online, but research also shows that anonymity encourages harmful outcomes of communication, such as ad hominem attacks and hate speech (Keipi, 2015; Keipi & Oksanen, 2014). Overall, platforms' design and features offer users a variety of possibilities to moderate their own visibility and those of others. Therefore, the designed operational functions become the central factors for explaining why and how people use platforms, as well as which social (and political) outcomes these generate.

Additionally, the characteristics of the audiences vary considerably on different online platforms because users can operate as themselves, with pseudo-anonymized user names or with full anonymity. The audience may be an unknown monolith of random users, with the active and familiar users of an online group whose real identities are hidden, or friends, relatives, and other already known people from real life. These dynamics inform social media interactions and political communication in crucial ways. As such, on social networking platforms, users usually act with recognizable user profiles. Thus, the social context may affect social action, for example, by silencing the expression of (political) opinions for fear of the social outcomes of the reactions presented by the audience. The users' different social roles in various social contexts may then collapse together. Then, the collateral social expectations related to the users' social behavior may become an obstacle to performing social actions online (Brandtzaeg et al., 2010; Davis & Jurgenson, 2014). Then again, vast and heterophilic social networks may also become features restricting visible political action on social media.

Although social media platforms offer implementations for users to control their visibility and social networks, platforms also attempt to tackle the socially (and economically) restricting features with hidden attributes, namely their operational algorithms. There have been arguments suggesting that algorithms on Facebook tend to support the content that the algorithms predict would please the users (Pariser, 2011). Thus, algorithms may muffle the content and connections that might attenuate (economically valuable) social interaction. Accordingly, the algorithmic intervention is argued as leading to so-called filter bubbles, where the content that users see and connections that they form provide information and ideological discourses similar to those they consumed earlier (Flaxman et al., 2016; Pariser, 2011; Sunstein, 2001). This biased proportion of content that the users encountered is argued as leading to differentiation in the perspectives of public opinion, thus potentially amplifying the political polarization of societies (see Pariser, 2011; Sunstein, 2001).

Yet, the recent empirical evidence related to the effects of the algorithmic intervention on social media has been mixed. For example, there are studies suggesting that the functional logic of platforms do not necessarily lead to segregation among users (Möller et al., 2018) or that the algorithms' relevance in socially segregating processes are less important than what has been suggested in the public discussions before (Bruns, 2019). Related to the functional logic of Twitter, for example, there is evidence that instead of increasing the formation of filter bubbles, today, the platform's algorithms are more likely highlighting popular content (i.e., engagement baits) outside the direct social connections among users (Freeman, 2022). Hence, instead of strengthening the separating effects among users, the economic logic of social media platforms might be amplifying the popular content outside closed social circles as well. Nevertheless, one way or another, the platforms' own interests and their functional logics have important meaning when it comes to forming the social media political sphere. Social media platforms are not neutral social spaces as they have hidden logics that aim to allocate the behavior and social connections of users.

Here, the design of the platform could really have consequences for societal cohesion and the ways in which political participation is carried out. On these platforms, the dynamics of political influencing on social media as economic action reveal the structures and power relations of the platform economy. The actors are able to gain resourceful positions and visibility with the aid of economic, network-related, and cultural resources (see also Schradie, 2019). Similarly, political parties can utilize the roles of advertisers and (disguised) prosumers. The parties and individual politicians can buy visibility within the platforms and build networks organically. The parties and their members and supporters can implement social media logic, decentralized possibilities, and communicative means in the party

operations as well (Bennett et al., 2018; Chadwick, 2007; Chadwick & Stromer-Galley, 2016; Dennis, 2019). Taken together, both the social logic of user groups and operational logic of the platform should be integrated more firmly in analyses of the social and political actions on social media.

However, efficient communication practices on the internet and social media require expertise and resources from both organizations (Bennett et al., 2018; Schradie, 2019) and individuals (Correa, 2016; Hargittai, 2001; Hargittai & Walejko, 2008; Malinen et al., 2020). Thus, in addition to the different aspects related to the crossing logics of social media platforms, earlier research has indicated that several social and structural factors either enable people to join these networks and participate in the formation of the sphere in the first place or disable them from doing so (Hargittai, 2001; Hargittai & Walejko, 2008; Schradie, 2019). Hence, as it is crucial to acknowledge how the platforms themselves transform social activity on platforms, it is productive to assess how social structures transform the social media sphere as well. Therefore, to understand party-related political action on social media, it is also vital to evaluate political parties as social contexts that crucially shape the forms of political activity.

3.2 The multifaceted parties: Parties as full-fledged sociological objects

Political parties provide prominent social and organizational contexts and structures for political action. Therefore, in this section, my approach involves addressing political parties as "full-fledged sociological objects" (see Mudge & Chen, 2014), elaborating on the understanding of their different positions and aims in various fields of society while assessing their relations to other political collectives and institutions. Theoretically, political parties are generally conceptualized as links that bridge the gap between civil society and the state, as well as vehicles for electoral success (Mudge & Chen, 2014; Scarrow & Webb, 2017). Therefore, as I show next, political parties should be assessed as both *organizational actors (with multiple beings)* and *organizations for actors (with multiple beings)*.

Arguably, the most essential field where parties operate is parliamentary politics. In Finland, as in Western democracies in general, parties wield hegemonic power in parliament. In essence, political parties aim to gain societal power through decisive positions in government, where they can steer political decisions and intervene in the legislature according to their political aims (e.g., Sundberg, 2012). However, to secure this dominant position in parliamentary politics, they need to overcome their rivals in obtaining the support of the electorate. So, as the parties act in different vertically assembled but interconnected fields, they can be understood as vertically connective networks across various fields and as being

primarily among the actors on these separate fields. Hence, these approaches capture important aspects of the multifaceted essence of political parties, as their collectively formed and interdependent political aims target different parts of the political field.

The ideas of political parties as actors that function simultaneously in several different societal fields and as connective links between society and the state are almost as old as the parties themselves (see Mudge & Chen, 2014). Already in the late 19th and the early 20th centuries, the authors of sociological classics such as Karl Marx and Max Weber theorized political parties as being the links within the societal sphere. First, Marx understood political parties as the outcomes of different social cleavages, especially social class. This notion sets the basis for the Marxian understanding of political parties, where party–society ties are broadly theorized, especially underlining the processes through which parties both channel political interests and act back on society (Mudge & Chen, 2014). Similarly, Weber developed the understanding of the relation between political parties and civil society as the outcome of both social class and status groups (Koivula, 2019, p. 15). Weber also shows how political parties became entangled with the state as they are transformed into an essential part of the bureaucratic apparatus (Mudge & Chen, 2014).

The many faces of political parties have also been observed by Key (1964), who distinguishes among *party-in-the-electorate, party-in-the-government,* and *party-as-organization.* According to Key, the party-in-the-electorate refers to the face pointing toward voters in democratic systems; this face exhibits actions that are directed at the public and related to organizational image and reputation. In turn, the party-in-government reveals the party's connections with the state and is the face that deals with the legislature's processes and governmental procedures within the bureaucratic apparatus. Finally, the party-as-organization is the face that is revealed to and by those who form the social fabric of the party, namely its members, employees, and campaign workers.

When assessing the party's grassroots activity on social media, the party-as-organization (i.e., the field between fields) forms a prolific subject of inquiry. Because it is important to understand the dynamics, structures, competition, and power in the fields where political parties operate, it is crucial to assess the social order within the parties as well (see Mudge & Chen, 2014; Scarrow & Webb, 2017). Organizational rules, cultural norms, and traditions form the basis for the ways in which party organizations are structured and how political power is allocated. First, the parties' organizational traditions, organizational culture, in-party democratic practices, hierarchy, and core values have been observed as having an important effect on how the parties operate in different situations (Koskimaa, 2020). However, because the parties also offer the resources and

means for various ideological and interest-based collectives and individuals to achieve their political goals, organizational rules and norms define what kinds of participatory possibilities and how much political power the individual members control within the party (see Scarrow, 2014, 2015). Thus, intraparty structures, rules, and orders modify the parties' appearances as both organizational actors and organizations for actors.

The hierarchical ways to distribute political power within parties can be perceived as offering both advantages and disadvantages for party organizations. Scholars have suggested that the decrease of members' possibilities for political participation and influence during the 20th century has reduced the incentives for membership, decreased the attractiveness of political parties, and, thus, led to the decline of the number of their members (Katz, 1990; Kosiara-Pedersen et al., 2017; Poguntke et al., 2016; Scarrow, 2019). Some scholars have argued that the diminished possibilities to participate in and influence politics do not encourage rank-and-file members to be involved in the party or on behalf of the party (see Scarrow, 2019; van Biezen & Poguntke, 2014). To tackle the problem of decreasing membership rates, it has been suggested that parties increase the ordinary members' possibilities to attract more members and mobilize them (Bennett et al., 2018; Kosiara-Pedersen et al., 2017; Scarrow, 2019).

The Finnish parliamentary parties have differences in the ways that organizational rules and party structures are assembled. Although the fundamental governmental organs—such as the party conference, party council, and party government—are generally conducted in a similar manner in all of the Finnish parties (FP, 2009; CPF, 2018; GL, 2018; LA, 2018; NCP, 2020; SDP, 2020), today, the new identity parties arguably provide more possibilities for the direct participation of their ordinary members (Koiranen, Koivula, Saarinen, & Mickelsson, 2019; Mickelsson, 2015). The difference between traditional interest parties and new identity parties is especially formed around the question of how rank-and-file members can participate at the higher levels of party democracy. The traditional Finnish interest parties—namely the SDP, CPF, and NCP—are more clearly structured as distinct hierarchies, in which the actors have clear position-related possibilities within the party hierarchy, with differing abilities to affect the organizations' goals, leaders, and modes of operation (CPF, 2018; NCP, 2020; SDP, 2020). Distinctively, the GL, FP, and LA offer their members the chance to vote on important matters, such as the election of the party chair (FP, 2009; GL, 2018; LA, 2018). Thus, it seems that similar to many other parties in Western democracies (Achury et al., 2020; Bennett et al., 2018; Scarrow, 2014, 2015; Webb et al., 2017), the new identity parties in Finland offer more

prominence and power to their members by allowing them to participate directly in decision making.[11]

Nonetheless, because the incumbents' positions in the traditional interest parties have been more static, this could have provided stability within the party organizations as well. For example, the FP split in 2017 can be perceived as being enabled by the wide distribution of political power within the party. Due to its members' possibilities of direct participation, the old party elite lost its position during that historical weekend. In this respect, organizational structures and party rules indeed play a crucial role in facilitating not only the political action within the Finnish parties and their political agendas, but also the stability within the organizations.

Additionally, earlier research indicates that the vertically and hierarchically assembled party organizations in general seem to function more efficiently and coherently on social media, especially during political campaigns (Bennet et al., 2018; Schradie, 2019). Unlike the studies in the beginning of the 2010s (see Bennett, 2012; Bennett & Segerberg, 2012), more recent research indicates that the organizations' hierarchy, level of bureaucracy, and authority generate more coherent and effective communication practices in the online sphere (Bennett et al., 2018; Dennis, 2020; Kavada, 2019; Schradie, 2019). In the end, success in the social media sphere requires both hierarchically structured organizations and empowered grassroots movements (Dennis, 2020; Gerl et al., 2018; Kavada, 2019; Schradie, 2019).

Accordingly, political parties are not solid when it comes to the ideology and political goals that they should pursue. The parties have their own ideologically and socially formed interest-based sections that compete for influence within their organizations (see Isotalo et al., 2020; Köln & Polk, 2017; Van Haute & Carty, 2012). Generally, the logic of the Finnish political system, which is based on OLPR, increases competition within the parties (von Schoultz, 2018). In this aspect, as social contexts in general, parties are paradoxically both unifying and separating. In addition to vertically separating those hierarchical structures derived from the

[11] The GL, similar to green parties in Western democracies, has embraced unconventional and more horizontal organizational structures and offers its members the chance to vote for the chair on an advisory ballot (GL, 2018; see also Koiranen, Koivula, Saarinen, & Mickelsson, 2019; Poguntke, 1993; Saarinen et al., 2018). More clearly, the FP's members can participate in the selection of the party chair, cochairs, party secretary, and members of the party council (FP, 2009). In the 2010s, the LA also enabled its members to vote for the party chair and, among others, on whether the party should join the government in 2019 (LA, 2018; see also Koiranen, Koivula, Saarinen, & Mickelsson, 2019).

organization rules, political parties can be seen as divided social spheres in the sense of being vertically binding ideological collectives as well.

However, the parties' connectivity is not limited to the vertical connection between the state and civil society or to the direct horizontal connections among citizens, but also to the connectivity among different institutions, organizations, and social movements (Berry, 1969; Heaney & Rojas, 2015; Kitschelt, 2006; Schwartz, 2010). Political parties cooperate with various political organizations outside the field of parliamentary politics. Nevertheless, the symbiotic interorganizational relationship serves both sides. For social organizations and movements, an alliance with a party provides the possibilities to integrate their political ambitions in the parliamentary field (Chadwick, 2007, 2015; Chadwick & Stromer-Galley, 2016; Heaney & Rojas, 2015; Schwartz, 2010). Then again, political parties can gain the means for political influence and various resources, such as capable labor and economic assets (Berry, 1969; Chadwick & Stromer-Galley, 2016; Hatakka, 2017; Heaney & Rojas, 2015).

Heaney and Rojas (2015) conceptualize the dynamic interrelationship between parties and social movements with their concept of the *party-in-the-street*. With reference to Key's (1964) tripartite conceptualization, the party-in-the-street refers to the multidirected interface between political parties and social movements that has become a prolific aspect for both parties and movements. Especially, new social movements and online groups that are organized through various social media platforms have become powerful influencers in the contemporary political sphere (see, e.g., Hatakka, 2019). However, as in the case of the FP split, alliances with out-party organizations and movements may increase the parties' propensity to prosper, for example, in the field of the electorate; they may also generate volatile outcomes within party organizations.

Taken together, political parties simultaneously function in different fields of society. They aim to "acquire and exercise political power" (Duverger, 2021), especially in parliamentary politics, but before doing this, they need to achieve success in the electorate. This logic sets the basis for the parties' position as the interconnected link between civil society and the state (Mudge & Chen, 2014; Scarrow & Webb, 2017). Similarly, the parties can promote these goals by utilizing the public sphere and cooperating with other organizations and movements in different fields of society. However, the parties also assume another type of being as vehicles for achieving political aims; various ideology- and interest-based collectives and individuals aim to achieve their goals by utilizing party organizations. This dual role (the party as an organizational actor and instrumental device) reveals the political struggles, where the parties are turned into both combatants and battlegrounds. Because of the various disruptions in the 21st century, political parties' characteristics, rules, structures, and positions as connective links

have undergone changes (Chadwick & Stromer-Galley, 2016). These disruptions have declared the importance of understanding the party-in-the-street in our current digitalized society (Heaney & Rojas, 2015). Therefore, in the next section, I more profoundly dissect the connections between political parties and the social media sphere.

3.3 The interface between parties and social media: Bypassing the (traditional) political organizations

In the 21st century, political parties have been facing substantial disruptions related to—or accelerated by—the changes in communication practices. These changes have affected the faces of political parties in many ways. An informative aspect is to notice the positional and functional similarities between political parties and the social media sphere. In theoretical discussions, both the political parties and public sphere are perceived as mediating actors between civil society and the state and as the prominent social contexts where politics are formed and enacted (Eley & Calhoun, 1994; Fraser, 1990; Habermas et al., 1974; Mudge & Chen, 2014; Scarrow & Webb, 2017). Similar to political parties, in theoretical discussions on deliberative democracy, the public sphere is viewed as the vessel carrying political desires back and forth between civil society and the state (Habermas et al., 1974) and as a realm in which "the public organizes itself as the bearer of public opinion" (Eley & Calhoun, 1994, p. 298).

Thus, the disruptive functions of social media are related to the shared abilities of both the public sphere and political parties: citizens' democratized possibilities to join the public sphere and form public opinion have undermined the importance of political parties' position as the connective link between society and the state. Nonetheless, these changes have provided the possibilities for the parties to overcome their rivals. The parties' propensity to wield influence on social media is formed by their grassroots support, namely their supporters and members; however, the question is how party organizations may encourage this grassroots level to act in the social media sphere. Today, the parties have indeed been able to rouse new groups of online ambassadors to promote their political ambitions (Heidar & Kosiara-Pedersen, 2019, pp. 145–148)—some parties more than others.

The various modes of internet-based political participation have been described using many concepts, such as "participatory culture" (Jenkins, 2006), "networked individualism" (Wellman et al., 2003), and "connective action" (Bennett, 2012). Together, these concepts aim to capture how the rise of digital communication has disrupted the parties' position as the connective link between society and the state. Scholars have argued that the combined new forms of participation differ from the

traditional ones in how the possibilities to participate are formed, how participation is organized, how participatory networks are structured, and how participants frame their actions (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Jenkins, 2006; Wellman et al., 2003).

New modes of online participation also differ in the ways in which traditional organizations are involved with political activity. Bennett and Segerberg (2012) present a typology for the alternative vehicles behind an organization's influence; this typology is built on three categories: 1) organizationally brokered collective action, 2) organizationally enabled connective action, and 3) crowd-enabled connective action. According to Bennett and Segerberg, traditional and organizationally enabled collective action mainly refers to the political action and participation that occur through strong organizational coordination, while new forms of connective action have little to no organizational control. Instead, connective action is more likely to be based on individuals' action frames, and political identification is more likely to be based on their lifestyles, values, and views. However, in the forms of organizationally enabled connective action, organizations hold valuable positions within otherwise decentralized networks (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). Overall, the typology suggests that today, traditional political organizations can be bypassed because citizens are able to participate and organize through more horizontal and elusive online networks.

In addition to acknowledging the relevance of political organizations in participatory practices, the shape of participatory networks has a crucial meaning as well. It seems that while traditional political collectives are organized along clear vertical hierarchies, new political collectives are more likely to be constituted as loose and horizontal networks (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Wellman et al., 2003). In this sense, the recent societal, cultural, and communication changes have indeed also transformed the participatory networks, where current political actions are actualized. However, because participatory and influential possibilities are more widely distributed within more fluid and elusive online networks, these networks have also become difficult to control if dissenting forms of actions, discourses, and aims start to emerge apart from the original political premises.

Additionally, traditional and new forms of political action differ in how the participants frame, justify, and motivate their actions. Earlier studies in the literature suggest that new connective forms of political action are more likely to be based on individual and personalized motivations, here with varying weights on different political justifications (Bennet & Segerberg, 2012). Thus, instead of gaining the fuel from explicit interest-based struggles, new digital movements are charged with various political premises that are loosely connected to broader political aims. Especially, in modes of crowd-enabled connective action, individualized motivations have partly substituted the top-down-ordered and collectively shared action frames that formerly guided political movements and, in turn, are motivated

by more individual action frames. Thus, political action can be employed through more individual motivations, and political identification is more likely to be founded on certain lifestyles, values, and views (Bennet & Segerberg, 2012).

These changes related to the formation of political participation have indeed altered political parties' relevance in the political processes but have not completely dissolved them. Arguably, when comprehending political parties as the ideological "lighthouses" that guide citizens' political orientations and actions, parties' presence in processes of social media participation could be seen as prominent, even though the participatory actions were carried apart from the party network, framed with more individual justifications, and performed without party organizational control. More likely, when participants' and party's interests and ideologies align, the participatory activities on social media are likely to benefit parties as well, even though the participants were acting "individually."

Additionally, although the contextual changes in the political field have eroded political parties' position, parties can still cooperate with digital participatory networks. Because of these aforementioned changes in possibilities, modes of organizing, network structures, and motivations, many Western European parties have adjusted their organizations and operations. With the aid of digital communication technology and social media platforms, some parties have flattened their vertically assembled structures, aiming for more participatory and deliberative modes of in-party democracy (see Bennett et al., 2018). For example, digital communication and applications have aimed to facilitate collaboration, information sharing, interaction, and connectedness among different intraparty groups (Effing et al., 2012; Gerl et al., 2018; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012; Gustafsson, 2012). Bennett et al. (2018) have described those organizations that have integrated digital technology in party operations as connective parties, here capturing how digital platforms and communication have replaced some of the key components and intraparty functions of traditional party organizations, such as affiliation management, policy generation, leader and candidate selection, and public communication. Therefore, digital communication encourages parties to assimilate novel digital network repertoires, such as including fostering novel forms of online citizen action, distributing trust in horizontally linked groups, promoting the fusion of political discourses, and creating sedimentary online networks, that earlier were typical only of social movements and interest groups (Chadwick, 2007; see also Dennis, 2019). Overall, the changes around the parties have indeed modified party organizations as well.

However, it should be noted that organizations' resources and structures still greatly impact how efficiently organizations perform in the social media sphere (Bennett et al., 2018; Schradie, 2019). For example, Schradie (2019) shows that organizational hierarchy and the level of bureaucracy correlate with the efficiency of social movements' online communication and influence. Schradie (2019) suggests

that hierarchically assembled movements and organizations enable more efficient and strategic influence on social media compared with more horizontal and not so bureaucratic organizational structures. Additionally, Bennett et al. (2018) argue that more hierarchical and authoritarian parties have managed to attain success in the era of social media politics compared with those parties that emphasize more horizontal and democratic ways to assemble their organizational structures. Thus, there is evidence that bureaucracy has maintained (at least to some degree) its prominence in the era of social media politics.

To summarize, the mechanisms affecting the faces of political parties are manifold and complex. When understanding political parties within the frame of connective fields and by drawing on the earlier disruptions that party organizations have faced, these shocks may be formed primarily in one subfield, where they spread to another field and eventually within the parties, transforming their structures, cultures, rules, and modes of operations. In this understanding, parties as meso-level actors have reacted to macro-level shocks by reconfiguring their organizational structures, interorganizational ties, and modes of operations. Anyway, with the field of parliamentary politics changing, political parties need to adapt if they wish to prosper; interestingly, the discussion on parties adapting to changes in society was already a central element in the theoretical thinking of Marx and Weber (see Mudge & Chen, 2014). In this respect, the current change of party organizations can be understood as part of the prolonged continuum of organizational, communication, and system-based evolution that has been present since the birth of political parties. Nonetheless, political parties have varying possibilities and prerequisites for implementing their political aims, functions, and structures in the altered political field. Now that I have provided the conceptual background that has shaped my theoretical perspective in the current research, in the next chapter, I theoretically scrutinize the Finnish parties' abilities to react to social media politics.

4 The distorting mirror: Theorizing the Finnish parties on social media

> "If you want to learn something that will really help you, learn to see yourself as God sees you and not as you see yourself in the *distorted mirror* of your own self-importance."
>
> – Thomas à Kempis, monk and author (1380–1471)

With the aid of this quotation from Thomas à Kempis, a Dutch monk from the late medieval era, my goal is to develop an argument by resorting (again) to the analogy of social media as a god-like creature. To be more accurate, political parties are addressed as actors (or as "you" in the quote above) and by "god," I refer to social media as the prefamiliar, omnipotent creature. This mode of self-evaluation presented more than a half-millennium ago suggests that the actors should comprehend themselves from another, somewhat omniscient bird's-eye perspective. Yet, contrary to the original metaphor, the bird's-eye perspective presented in the current dissertation could be perceived as the distorted one. Because of the growing importance of the social media political sphere in Finnish parliamentary politics, I argue that parties should be assessed from the perspective of the social media political sphere. Looking at their reflections on this distorting mirror enables parties (and other spectators) to comprehend their standings in the changing political field—and perhaps catch a glimpse of the future while doing so.

This perspective is based on the idea of interactive tension between the two social spheres, namely political parties and the social media sphere. First, the theoretical approach in the present study relies on the idea that political parties are extended in the social media sphere by the actions of their social substance matter, namely representatives, members, and supporters. In the empirical articles, I approach social media use for political purposes with the concept of *social media participation*, comprising some forms of participation, such as producing, disseminating, and curating discourses on social media platforms. From the perspective of deliberative democracy, social media participation is an effective way to clarify and negotiate material interests and moral values among social groups in societies (see Carpini et

al., 2004, p. 319). Yet, what the present dissertation especially aims to do is to provide a fuller understanding of how party–political surroundings and social media context together engage citizens to participate.

The concepts of *thrust* and *traction* provide the analytical tools for understanding the appealing and motivating tensions between political parties and the social media sphere. This thrust and traction could be understood as reflecting both the positive and negative forms of liberty (see Berlin, 1958). The platforms provide the possibilities for self-actualization (positive form) while reducing the obstacles and constraints to action (negative form). In this sense, the *liberty for something* and *liberty from something* provided by digital platforms constitute a prolific matter of theoretical inquiry through which social media platforms' disruptive mechanisms become more apparent and are tied to other changes in societies as well. Thus, the appealing (i.e., traction) and motivating (i.e., thrust) features of social media platforms are formed in relation to an actor's positional features in social networks, both online and offline. Overall, social media has become a messy setting for social action that can provide various incentives for and barriers to political action. Thus, the thrust and traction of social media can be perceived as encouraging people to join political processes on social media, but structural, contextual, and organizational surroundings, as well as cultural, social, psychological, and economic factors, bring forth not only the incentives that motivate people to act, but they also act as barriers that need to be crossed.

Accordingly, in Sections 4.2 and 4.3, I present the theoretical approaches that provide an analytical basis for my investigation of how the political party organization structures political action in the social media sphere; I do this by assessing how the parties' *social structures* and *ideological standings* may set both incentives for and barriers to individual political participation in social media. Through these two interconnected party-related characteristics, I evaluate the surface and shape of this aforementioned distorting mirror. Additionally, I focus more strictly on the Finnish political field, more specifically exploring the six largest parties' (the SDP, FP, NCP, CPF, GL, and LA) possibilities in social media politics. More precisely, my motive is to define how these Finnish political parties are turned into social contexts that—alongside the contextual characteristics on social media platforms—allocate, relocate, attenuate, and accelerate political action on social media, as well as transform citizens' online behavior and networks within these platforms. Yet, before going into political parties, I first more deeply scrutinize my fundamental assumptions related to the formation of the social media political sphere.

4.1 Building the frame: Social media as a structured field

The digitalization of societies and rise of social media have affected the functions of the public sphere and formation of public opinion, as these changes emphasize the activity of the masses within this sphere. Then, the social media sphere has emerged as a social field where individual users can access enormous amounts of information and reach out to vast crowds, but social media has also grown into a socially constructed entity in which actors with varying resources and abilities seek an advantage. Related to this development, the purpose of this section is to foreground the overarching assumptions underlying my approach, especially to the formation of social media in the individual articles. By complementing how the distorting mechanisms—namely parallel, collateral and mixed interests, aims, and logics—intersect in the social media political sphere, I approach the social media political sphere by recognizing how its various aspects—*boundaries, substance, structure*, and *order*—are assembled in it. This four-part comprehension of the social media political sphere is highly informed by the sociological understandings of fields and networks.

Figure 2 presents a sketch of these four aspects of the social media political sphere. First, as digital inequalities sieve those who can join the social media sphere and the political processes in it (Brake, 2014; Hargittai & Walejko, 2008; Hoffman & Lutz, 2021; Schradie, 2019, 2020; Van Deursen & Helsper, 2015), in the current study, I lay the foundation for how the sociostructural characteristics format the *boundaries* of the sphere and formation of the *substance* in the sphere. In this understanding, boundaries refer to the divides that indicate those who belong to the sphere (see Melucci, 1989), and the substance indicates the social mechanisms that format the production of the content in the sphere (see Carpini et al., 2004). Second, with the aid of the concepts of *structure* and *order*, I foreground how social ties and political action are assembled in the social media political sphere, which has its socially, historically, culturally, and politically formatted norms, rules, and customs—namely orders. I depart from the understanding of the socially clustered political sphere, where homophilic and selective tendencies, together with the platforms' functional logics, format the sociostructurally and ideologically segregated setup of the sphere (Chadwick, 2017; Harteveld, 2021; Iyengar et al., 2019). Below, my attempt is to provide more nuanced understandings related to these four aspects of the social media political sphere.

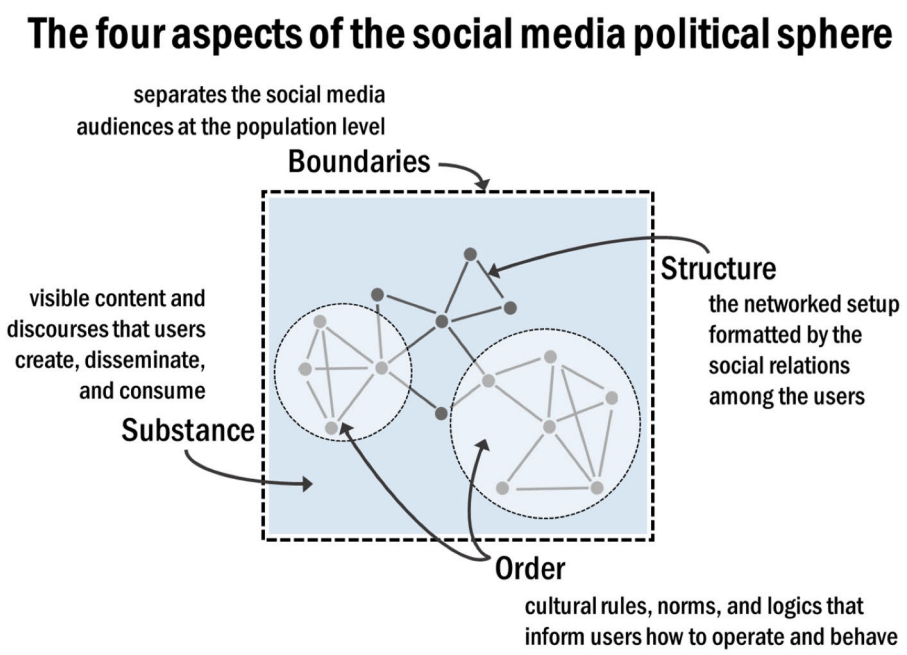

Figure 2. Theoretical frame: The four aspects of the social media political sphere.

In sociological discussions, the collective realms for social, economic, and political actions have long been described using theoretical concepts such as fields[12] (Bourdieu, 1984), organizational fields (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), and strategic action fields (Fligstein & McAdam, 2011). All of these concepts portray the idea of meso-level structures and orders in which various actors pursue their goals with common understandings about the presence of other actors in the field, the purposes of the field, the relationships in the field, and the field's rules (Fligstein & McAdam, 2011; see also Bourdieu, 1984; DiMaggio & Powel, 1983). Overall, the idea of a field in its essence aims to combine actors' strategic desires with the resources and boundaries derived from the structural, cultural, and contextual relations and orders within the field. Therefore, the theory of fields illuminates the contextual characteristics, the different positions in the fields, the actors' capabilities, and the broader contexts in which the fields are connected with one another.

[12] According to Bourdieu's (1984) political sociology, the political field is a space where political actors compete for political capital by utilizing their habitus. In this understanding, political capital involves aspects such as social skills and the capabilities to win elections or carry out policies. In turn, habitus refers to agents' internalized set of principles that guide their actions and evaluations (Bourdieu, 1984).

Then, the idea of the social media political sphere as a field turns attention to questions regarding who belongs to the field and who creates the content in the field. As social media platforms are formed around the content produced by users and the interactions among them, those users who provide content and disseminate discourses become the central actors in the formation of *substance* in the social media sphere. Accordingly, these sorts of activities could be understood as offering the means for deliberation, namely "the opportunity for individuals to develop and express their views, learn the positions of others, identify shared concerns and preferences, and come to understand and reach judgments about matters of public concern" (Carpini et al., 2004, p. 319). Accordingly, in the empirical articles, one of the primary goals has been to track the ideological standings and the sociodemographic backgrounds of those active users who participate in content production and dissemination in the field of social media (Articles I, III–V).

In addition to analyzing deliberation and content production on social media (i.e., the formation of substance), the research articles evaluate those who have access to these interactive spaces and, in this sense, have a theoretical opportunity to digitally participate in democratic processes—or at least, are influenced by the content they consume (Articles I, III–V). For example, Melucci (1989, p. 174) argues that participation itself has a double meaning; it could be interpreted as both taking part in and belonging to a system. Thus, in addition to those who fill the public sphere with visible content, it is analytically productive to evaluate those who belong to these social spaces and, thus, consume the content. In this sense, belonging to a system of the social media sphere reveals the *boundaries* that separate the social media audience at the population level. Accordingly, the empirical articles aim at unraveling the ideological and sociodemographic standings of those who belong to the social media public sphere and follow the political content as well.

In addition to the formation of boundaries and substance, the clustered network structure in the social media sphere performs crucial functions in the formation of the public sphere and public opinion. Thus, in addition to taking a clue from the theory of fields, I depart from the theoretical understanding of social networks in the formation of *structure* and *order* in the social media sphere. Together, these concepts aim to inform how social networks, together with the platforms' functional logics, format the sociostructurally and ideologically clustered setup of the sphere (Articles II, IV, & V). Then, on the one hand, structure refers more precisely to the networked setup formatted by the social relations among users. On the other hand, orders infer cultural rules, norms, and logics that inform users how to operate and behave as well regarding what is desirable and, in turn, what is allowed to do in various social spaces on social media.

For understanding *structure*, network-oriented scholars have theorized how social networks bridge the complex relations between individual action and social

surroundings (see Burt, 1976; Emirbayer, 1997; Eulau, 1986; Granovetter, 1973, 1985; Lin, 2001; Wellman, 1983). The concept of networks emphasizes structure and power relations in the context of performing individuals. Then, social networks emphasize actors' different positions within a network structure as a reservoir of resources and power (Burt, 1976; Emirbayer, 1997; Granovetter, 1973, 1985; La Due Lake & Huckfeldt, 1998; Lin, 2001), offering a particularly useful concept for thinking about the horizontal exercise of power within and across various fields (see Heaney & McClurg, 2009; Schwartz, 2010). Nonetheless, individual actions are not predetermined by the structures but rather by one's social surroundings and position in the network, which comprise the factors that determine what is possible to do (see Granovetter, 1985; Wellman, 1983). Thus, by localizing individuals and their actions within the network of relations, structurally formed aspects of power and actors' possibilities become apparent when analyzing human action. Doing so enables tracking how different social, political, and organizational realms bind, overlap, and embed themselves in each other.

Yet, the understanding of social networks only as the structural aspect may not provide a coherent comprehension of social contexts' complex features. For example, Mark Granovetter, the forerunner of the network approach in the field of new economic sociology, states, "*You can't not just analyse social networks, you also have to analyse institutions and culture and politics and all of the micro and macro elements, of which the 'meso-level' of social networks is in the middle*" (Krippner et al., 2004, p. 114)[13]. Thus, with concept of *orders*, my motive is to provide additional comprehension of social networks as concepts that not only format the immediate social surroundings of individuals, but also the meso-level structures that transmit cultural, social, and political norms and values, as well the connecting structures that bind societies' micro- and macro-levels together. Accordingly, the social networks could be understood as the function that allocates cultural understandings within the social media sphere: where the dense clusters do not have many connections to other subnetworks, distinctive subcultures with alternative ideas, values, and aims are formed (Wellman, 1983, p. 165; see also Burt, 1976; Lin, 2001). Thus, in the scattered social realms, norms, rules, values, and behaviors may start to vary among different parts of networks.

Overall, the concept of networks provides the flipside of the coin for the field-oriented perspective. Because fields theory provides the understanding of social contexts as arenas of competition that are saturated with relations of (political)

[13] Additionally, later, when Granovetter was evaluating his classical article on embeddedness, he admits, "Maybe if I had known it would be an influential paper I would have taken more care to say that there's more to life than the structure of social networks" (Krippner et al., 2004, p. 115).

power, the network perspective emphasizes the meaning of social relations and surroundings in the development of political desires, attitudes, and knowledge. Here, I depart from the idea that outlining the networked structure of the social media sphere sets a sophisticated theoretical basis for understanding socially formed political action in social media for analyses throughout the empirical articles. As Heaney and McClurg (2009) argue, "Social networks exist within the structures of institutions, in the holes between institutions, and in the spaces where institutions have not yet formed" (p. 728). Because of this ability, the concept of networks offers a concrete *structure* that reveals the connectivity among the actors, as well as the *orders* within the social realm, simultaneously bridging nested, overlapping, and hierarchically organized social fields.

When discussing the characteristics of the social media political sphere—especially the structural features in it—it is important to consider the previous academic discussions on political polarization. Today, the increased possibilities to join public discussions, the decreased importance of traditional gatekeepers, and the increased variance of public opinion have highlighted the prominence of the clustered structure, which are often described as polarized. Political polarization describes how various population groups are either intentionally or unconsciously segregated from one another based on political ideology (Baldassarri & Bearman, 2007; Harteveld, 2021). The segregated, restricted, and clustered social networks have been perceived to function as echo chambers, amplifying the shared political views and beliefs within groups, which leads to alternative information and discourses being reduced (see Colleoni et al., 2014; Sunstein, 2001). Thus, belonging to clustered social media networks may now form contradictory understandings of public opinions among different groups.

Then again, ideological polarity alone is not a negative quality of democratic systems and deliberative democratic processes. Multiparty systems, such as in the Finnish case, are built on the idea that citizens select their representatives from a variety of competing visions. In this sense, polarization only becomes harmful when it devolves from disagreement to antipathy among citizens with opposing views (Harteveld, 2021). Research shows that such affective polarization (Harteveld, 2021; Iyengar et al., 2019; Knuutila & Laaksonen, 2020) may prompt citizens to reject political claims from political out-groups, increase dehumanization, and incite political violence (Harteveld, 2021; Iyengar et al., 2019; Kalmoe & Mason, 2018). Hence, although disagreements could be comprehended as a virtue of democratic societies, dire antipathy might erode the social fabric more severely.

Notably, the phenomena of echo chambers and polarization predate the invention of social media platforms. People have tended to form ideologically clustered networks, as well as favored informational and political content supporting their previous perceptions, far before the advent of social media, and social scientists

recognized socially segregating phenomena, such as homophily and selective exposure, already in the mid-20th century[14] (Festinger, 1957; Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1954). Likewise, the current evidence related to social media platforms' impact on the realization of political polarization and echo chambers is mixed. Previous research suggests that social media increases connections and information exchange with like-minded others, as well as connections that surpass ideological boundaries (see Bisgin et al., 2012; Lee et al., 2018; Vaccari et al., 2016). In this sense, it might be that the rise of social media has just made previous clustered societal structures and networks more visible. Thus, although concepts such as post-truth or polarization help capture the crucial features of contemporary public discussions, the extent to which digital communication and social media have accelerated these developments remains unclear. Even without perceiving such processes of segregation as inherently new or unique to the contemporary public sphere, they help capture certain aspects characterizing the structures and orders in which political and social interactions occur.

Additionally, the social spaces on social media have their (designed) logics that intercept social action, which might serve as clustered forms of the public sphere by default (see Section 3.1). Thus, platforms' designs (and platform providers' economic interests) set the order for social, political, and economic actions on platforms. Although platform providers attempt to maximize their profits, the platforms themselves maximize prosumers' engagement by feeding the content and highlighting those ties that the algorithms believe will please users or raise the desired engagement among users.

Taken together, many scholars argue that the current media system deepens the divides across various publics (Chadwick, 2017; Colleoni et al., 2014; Harteveld, 2021; Knuutila & Laaksonen, 2020; Sunstein, 2001). Due to the increase in citizens' opportunities to participate in the public sphere, alongside the widespread availability of different alternative media outlets with changing political discourses, ordinary citizens' abilities to obtain information, join the formation of the public sphere, and acquire political power have increased. However, these possibilities are not equally distributed among different segments of the population (e.g., Brake, 2014; Hargittai & Walejko, 2008; Hoffman & Lutz, 2021; Schradie, 2019, 2020; Van Deursen & Helsper, 2015). There are also tempting possibilities for citizens to

[14] Homophily refers to the phenomenon where people tend to interact with those whose social backgrounds, ideological values, and beliefs are similar to theirs (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1954; McPherson et al., 2001). In turn, psychologists have argued that through the mechanisms of selective exposure and selective avoidance, people attempt to reduce their feelings of dissonance by preferring information that is in line with their pre-existing attitudes and avoiding information that challenges their beliefs (Festinger, 1957).

immerse themselves in different social realities that may have a one-sided perspective of public opinion. The tendency for forming ideologically homophilic networks is an important basis for political preferences (Zuckerman, 2005) and vice versa; arguably, political tendencies guide the formation of social relations as well (e.g., Colleoni et al., 2014; Harteveld, 2021; McPherson et al., 2001). Then, in addition to recognizing the setup of the current form of the public sphere, social media participation should also be assessed in relation to offline social and political contexts. Thus, in the next sections, I discuss how the social compositions and ideological standings of the Finnish parties may either accelerate or attenuate the political actions of party supporters, members, activists, and representatives on social media platforms.

4.2 Sociostructural filters: Social composition and digital divides

Today, political parties and politicians in Finland and elsewhere undisputedly acknowledge the importance of digital communication and widely utilize different platforms in communicating with their members, supporters, and constituents (Bennett et al., 2018; Carlson & Strandberg, 2012; Chadwick & Stromer-Galley, 2016; Strandberg & Carlson, 2020). Nonetheless, the most prominent strength of digitalization is its ability to generate extensive engagement through distributed political possibilities and power (e.g., Bennett, 2012; Jenkins, 2006; Wellman et al., 2003). Thus, for political parties and their representatives, it is crucial to be able to increase engagement, namely responses to their political messages, especially the distribution of these messages and discourses.

However, what has received relatively little attention in these debates is how these incentives for social media communication and influence are formed in relation to the intended audiences. Earlier research indicates that belonging to a system of social media and being involved in participatory activities are highly segregated among different population groups (e.g., Hargittai & Walejko, 2008; Hoffman & Lutz, 2021; Schradie, 2019). Although the internet and social media have been widely argued to narrow the participatory gap between population groups, earlier research indicates that not every citizen is able to join the participatory processes on social media or perform in a way that will make a societal or political impact (Brake, 2014; Hargittai & Walejko, 2008; Hoffman & Lutz, 2021; Schradie, 2019, 2020; Van Deursen & Helsper, 2015).

Thus, in addition to party organizations' propensity to react to digital disruption, it is essential—or perhaps even more important—to assess the prerequisites of the masses gathered around the parties, and be concerned with how the grassroots level performs on behalf of the political parties. Accordingly, the question is how parties'

sociostructural characteristics both set barriers to political activity and amplify it. The present research pushes these discussions further by showing not only how the sociodemographic backgrounds of party members and supporters affect the social media activities of representatives, but also how party incentives for social media communication and audiences' social backgrounds are intertwined in complex ways (Articles III–IV). Therefore, in this section in particular, I shed light on the parties' sociostructural characteristics by concentrating on the understanding of digital divides as sociocultural filters that crucially shape the social media political sphere in Finland.

The argument for the prominence of sociostructural explanations for parties' differences in the social media sphere is based on the impacts of social background on party preference, social media use, and political participation. First, the same structural factors that guide political party preferences (see Koivula, 2019) also highly affect the use, activities, and purposes of the internet, digital technology, applications, and SNSs (Ertiö et al., 2020; Hargittai, 2001; Keipi, Koiranen, Koivula & Räsänen, 2017; Min, 2010; Räsänen & Koiranen, 2016; Van Deursen & Helsper, 2015; Van Dijk, 2013). Second, earlier research also shows that as in the case of political preference and social media use, sociodemographic background still affects citizens' prerequisites for engaging in political processes (Kestilä-Kekkonen & Karvonen, 2016; Lahtinen, 2019). Hence, the triangulation of these three aspects provides a deeper understanding of how both the thrust for and traction of political activities on social media are formed, amplified, and attenuated.

The inequalities among population groups in the use of digital technology have been conceptualized using the theory of *digital divides*. The core of the theory is based on the perception that the effective use of the internet and digital technology requires a vast set of abilities and resources (e.g., Hargittai, 2001; Van Deursen & Helsper, 2015; Van Dijk, 2013). Academic research on digital inequalities indicates that digital divides have several stratified and distinct levels (Hargittai, 2001; Van Deursen & Helsper, 2015; Van Dijk, 2013). First, in the beginning of the era of the commercialized internet, scholars were mostly concerned about the first-level divides, namely those differences in access to digital technology and the internet (Hargittai, 2001; Van Deursen & Helsper, 2015; Van Dijk, 2013). Today, because the divide related to access has narrowed in Western countries, such as in Finland, scholars have been more concerned about the second-level divides, namely the differences in people's purposes for utilizing digital technology and how effectively they do so (Min, 2010; Schradie, 2011).

According to this strand of the literature, the internet and social media could also be utilized for several purposes, such as for entertainment, seeking information, or influencing others in a political manner (Hargittai & Walejko, 2008; Räsänen & Koiranen, 2016; Van Deursen & Helsper, 2015). In this sense, different use purposes

may provide several individual and societal outcomes. As inequalities at the material level, namely the first-level divides, filter those who have access to the field, purposes of use and skills, namely the second-level divides, determine those who are able to gain benefits (see Hargittai, 2001; Malinen et al., 2020; Van Dijk, 2013). Thus, in the end, both antecedent levels of digital divides point to the direction of the outcomes of use, which are regarded as the third-level divides (see Van Deursen & Helsper, 2015). Overall, empirical evidence related to digital divides shows that older age groups, the poorly educated, and economically vulnerable citizens do not access social media as often as the more privileged population segments, are more passive social media users, and are more likely to use social media for purposes that do not produce beneficial outcomes[15] (Hargittai Walejko, 2008; Min, 2010; Schradie, 2019; Van Deursen & Helsper, 2015).

Looking at the literature on the digital divide, social media participation could be defined as 1) *a certain purpose of use*, which 2) *requires motivation* and 3) *a vast set of skills and other resources,* and that may provide 4) *extensive benefits*, both on the individual and collective levels. In this sense, different sociostructural factors put a part of the population in an adverse position. Some citizens may lack the material or mental capabilities to access, participate in, or make an impact on the social media political sphere. Thus, in the current dissertation, I contribute to these discussions by evaluating the effects of digital inequalities on the formation of the social media political sphere in Finland (Articles I, III, and V).

Overall, these sociostructural barriers related to digital divides drastically affect the Finnish parties' ability to attain success in the social media sphere. Especially, considering that the CPF and SDP have a large number of older supporters and members (Koiranen et al., 2017; Koivula et al., 2020), these parties have been lacking the opportunities to disseminate their political content and discourses on social media when compared with the GL, FP, and LA. Similarly, especially in the beginning of the social media era, for these parties' offices, representatives, and electoral candidates, there were not that many incentives to attempt to make an impact through online communication practices because the core voter groups have not been present in the field. Thus, because of the sociostructural differences among the parties, the effects of both thrust and traction have been varying among the party organizations in relation to the current sociodemographic composition within the parties and in the social media sphere.

[15] However, researchers need to address the issue that categorizations aiming to determine what are beneficial and harmful use purposes include a normatively qualified understanding related to what is *good* and *desirable* for individual human beings (i.e., what people/citizens *should be* pursuing with their activities). Thus, these categories should be treated with a certain critical distance.

In addition to the sociostructural barriers to social media use, the thrust for and traction of social media use and various use purposes are amplified and encouraged by actors' social networks. Thus, because social background verifiably sets obstacles to some actors, social networks may help overcome these barriers and accelerate political activity for others. First, habits, norms, and innovations spread through network mechanisms (Rogers, 1962; Wellman, 1983), which is applied in the case of digital technology and social media as well (Article I; Räsänen & Koiranen, 2016). In the case of social media platforms, social mechanisms encourage individuals to join the social media sphere and stay there if a sufficient percentage of their social network has already joined that sphere (Karppi, 2018). In this sense, within party supporter groups, where a large percentage of their members with whom they have close ties use social media, both the thrust and traction are higher for those who are not (yet) engaged in the sphere when compared with those whose close contacts do not use social media.

Previous research shows that social networks "in real life" and on social media are founded on homophilic relations. People are most likely connected with similar others based on their common social background, shared social contexts, and political values, among others (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1954; McPherson et al., 2001). Similarly, earlier research indicates that on social media platforms users most likely form connections with those with whom they are familiar in real life (Dunbar et al., 2015; Phua et al., 2017; Reich et al., 2012). On the other side of the coin, people rarely meet those users in real life that they have met online.[16] Overall, it is more likely that social relations migrate from offline to online than the other way around (Phua et al., 2017; Reich et al., 2012). In this sense, it seems that in most cases, social networks start to function as virtual extensions of offline social networks through which political attitudes, claims, and discourses are diffused. So, it seems a troublesome task to detach social media networks from real-life networks and contexts—such as from a political party for example.

Additionally, social surroundings influence how people think, feel, and form their opinions (Zuckerman, 2005). This argument is based on the perception in which "political behavior is likely to vary with the type of group in which the individual is involved" (Eulau, 1986, p. 38). Thus, homophilic networks further modify people's perceptions of political issues. Overall, social network mechanisms may amplify the effect of parties' structural composition on social media political activity. Because social surroundings both encourage similar others to join the social media sphere and have a clear effect on what political content, discourses, and aspirations are circulated in these social spaces, those parties'—whose sociodemographic structures

[16] Of course, exceptions can be made, for example, in the cases of various dating apps, such as Tinder, which are primarily developed for meeting new people online.

are favorable—representation in the social media political sphere is further amplified.

Although these different aspects of social mechanisms have been widely recognized, these mechanisms' relevance to social media politics is often neglected. Therefore, in the current dissertation, I contribute to the understanding of how networked surroundings themselves become mechanisms that amplify the effect of the sociostructural differences among the Finnish political parties' prerequisites for social media communication and influencing (Articles III and V). Again, this idea could be better comprehended with the idea of the dynamic relation of thrust and traction. The parties' sociostructural propensities and organizational efforts have molded the social media political sphere for over a decade now. From the beginning, the digital divides have decreased both the thrust and traction for social media participation in some segments of the population. In turn, social networks increase the traction of joining the sphere and participation when a sufficiently large number of politicians' potential voters have accessed social media. The parties and their representatives then respond to the growing activity or do not respond if there are not enough suitable audiences. This may form loop-like dynamics, in which the visible activity of both audiences and party representatives increases each other's activity.

To summarize, because social surroundings—in "real life" and on social media—modify people's perceptions of political issues and invite them to share their thoughts and concerns (e.g., Kim et al., 2013; Wellman, 1983; Zuckerman, 2005), the social media sphere now functions as a motivating factor for political action. Comprehending this mechanism requires more precise probing into the ideological setting of the Finnish social media sphere. In the next sections, I foreground the theoretical basis for the current dissertation's empirical analyses by aiming to tame and frame the political parties' ideological prerequisites in the social media political sphere.

4.3 Ideological magnifiers: Highlighted struggles for recognition

In addition to organizational characteristics and sociodemographic structures, the Finnish parties build their organizations on divergent core ideological values and desires. As previously stated, the postmaterial and neoconservative struggles for recognition, for example, as they are related to climate change and immigration, have become more central issues in Finnish politics in the 2010s (Section 2.2). Due to this shift in political content, the new identity parties, namely the GL, the LA, and especially the FP, have become notable challengers to the traditional interest parties, namely the SDP, the CPF, and the NCP. In addition to their growing prominence,

these ideological questions have generated intensifying tension in the Finnish political sphere. Baldassarri and Bearman (2007) argue that every so often, as some ideological and political questions gain a great deal of attention in public discussions, these issues become polarized as citizens start to actively evaluate their standings on the questions. Today, the pronounced objects of attention of the postmaterial and neoconservative struggles have become these central questions in Finnish politics (Isotalo et al., 2020; Koivula, 2019, pp. 37–40; Westinen et al., 2020) and, thus, have polarized the public at large—or at least strengthened the impression of polarization among segments of the public.

Arguably, the emphasis on the struggles for recognition, generally in public discussions and especially in the social media sphere, also increases the visibility and importance of those parties whose core ideological objectives surround these debates. The increasing emphasis on the struggles for recognition on social media insists that users evaluate the discussions and form their standings based on these political aims and discourses. Therefore, the emphasis on these political struggles may reinforce people's impressions of the politically polarized public sphere, even as the actual attitudes related to other ideological questions within people's networks remain heterogeneous (see Baldassarri & Bearman, 2007, p. 785). Thus, the dynamics between the trending issues and social logic of politics (Zuckerman, 2005) in the social media sphere could be forming a self-feeding loop, where the pronounced visibility of the struggles for recognition feeds more discussion about these political issues, then molds citizens' perceptions about the issues, and eventually increases the visibility of the organizations and groups, which articulate their stance on the circulating issues more coherently.

So, how has the rise of social media amplified the ideological change in the Finnish political context, and vice versa, how has the ideological shift molded the setting in the social media political sphere, especially from the perspective of the Finnish parties? The concepts of thrust and traction provide the tools for dissecting the motivating and appealing factors: a spark of political activity on social media may be formed because of the motivating factors in actors' social and political contexts and the appealing factors in the social media sphere. When compared with the parties' sociodemographic structures, ideological values could then be comprehended as more clearly forming a dynamic constellation where political activity circulates within the social media sphere because of both motivating and appealing functions.

While I treat ideological value as a separated explanatory entity, the ideological positions are closely related to both the party organization and sociodemographic compositions of the parties. First, in Western European democracies, citizens on the political left and political right have different preferences for how the electoral linkage between society and the state should be organized (Bennett et al., 2018).

Accordingly, vertical and hierarchical organization models have dominated the parties on the right side of the party spectrum, while voters on the left have emphasized more horizontal organization models, aiming for inclusiveness, deliberation, and democracy within the parties (Bennett et al., 2018; see also Schradie, 2019). However, in the Finnish context, instead of forming clear differences between the liberal left and conservative right, these preferences related to forms of organizing are more clearly divided between the traditional interest parties and new identity parties because the new identity parties have allowed their members to participate and engage in decision making, for example, in party conferences (see Section 3.2).

In any case, earlier research indicates that within political groups, such as political parties, ideology is not just a concept that people feel and think about, but it is also something that materializes in forms of action (Schradie, 2019, pp. 148–150). For example, in addition to being comprehended as a (thin) ideology, populism has been understood as a logic of articulation (Hatakka, 2019) and rhetorical style (Herkman, 2016). Overall, these ideology-based tendencies for political communication, political action, and organizing the actions are transferred to the social media sphere as well (Bennett et al., 2018; Schradie, 2019). In this sense, the definition of ideology could be expanded to include the ideas of political organizing and modes of activity and also be linked to the affect-based motivational aspects as well.

Earlier research also indicates that although the political struggles related to social class no longer dominate the political sphere as they once did (Fraser, 2000; Hooghe et al., 2002; Norris & Inglehart, 2019), political ambitions and ideological values remain closely connected to the sociodemographic backgrounds of the Finnish parties (Koivula, 2019). Thus, although the importance of social class has diminished as a factor for allocating political preference, it does not mean that citizens have started to individually choose which party or candidate to vote for by utilizing rational calculation of the possible benefits. It is more likely that the traditional aggregate-level determinants have been (partly) supplemented with others (Beck, 1997; Dalton, 2008; Maffesoli, 1996). Then, societal position and social background do not dictate what political ideas and values are advocated for by citizens, but in the big picture, these still have a large impact.

As in the case of political participation, in the current dissertation, the aims for the formation of ideology are primarily understood as social phenomena. Then, political values do not affect the propensity to act politically as an individual psychological feature but as a socially constructed factor motivating individuals to participate in relation with others (Eulau, 1986, pp. 37–45). Accordingly, citizens acquire norms, values, and behavior as they take into consideration other information as well, namely through their social networks (Rogers, 1979; Wellman, 1983). Thus,

in the scattered public sphere, political views, aims, emotions, and practices start to vary among different political groups.[17]

In the empirical articles, I expound on these discussions by comparing how the Finnish parties' core ideological questions implicitly generate political activity on social media (Articles III and V) while emphasizing the utilization of various modes of political communication and behavior (Article IV). By articulating the participatory gap between the traditional interest parties and new identity parties, I further develop the understanding of how the ideological shift related to the rise of postmaterialism and neoconservatism is accelerated by social media political participation. In a more precise way, I shed light on how the respondents' positions on these value scales affect the formation of social media political networks (Article II) and how the ideological standings encourage users to participate on social media (Article III). By doing so, I complement how the shared political perceptions with the party in-group, confident political perceptions in relation to the in-group, and contradicting perceptions between the political in-group and political out-group may trigger the ambitions to join in the formation of the social media political sphere through various behavioral means.

As stated, in Finnish politics, the rise of the social media sphere itself has most likely accelerated the growing prominence of the struggles for recognition as focal—albeit polarizing—political questions. The emphasis on postmaterialism and neoconservatism in the Finnish social media sphere could be related to the crossing logics and mechanisms on the social media platforms. First, as social media users connect with those with whom they are already familiar (Dunbar et al., 2015) and with those whose social backgrounds, social contexts, and political values are similar to theirs (Bisgin et al., 2012; Colleoni et al., 2014; Lee et al., 2018; Lönnqvist & Itkonen, 2016; Vaccari et al., 2016), users' social spheres on social media platforms become skewed (see Sections 3.1 and 4.1). Thus, today, public discussion and deliberation tend to move away from "the real public" to homophilic clusters of wider social networks, further emphasizing the visibility of certain political debates, for example, those related to climate change and immigration. Thus, ideological

[17] Arguably, ideological incentives work in tandem with sociostructural ones. The political struggles related to postmaterialism and neoconservatism are partly highlighted on social media because of the disproportionate numbers of younger versus older users. Because active social media users in Finland mostly belong to the younger generation (Ertiö et al., 2020; Heikkilä et al., 2020) and as the postmaterial and neoconservative issues are more important to younger population segments (Koiranen et al., 2017; Koivula, 2019), these debates may gain more visibility in the social media sphere. The pronounced visibility of postmaterial and neoconservative issues may generate more discussion and visible content related to these struggles.

similarity with others within these network clusters may become an essential factor that generates the traction of social media participation.

However, the social media sphere is concurrently saturated with detrimental disputes (Jane, 2015). Interaction on social media is perceived as especially liable to such disputes because of the interactional qualities it generates. Online interaction tends to be asynchronous, lacking normal nonverbal cues, and, hence, creating an environment where other people are felt to be distant because they are not physically present (Keipi, 2015; Keipi & Oksanen, 2014). Thus, political discussions on social media easily lead to counterproductive quarrels between ideologically distinct counterparts (Jane, 2015; Santana, 2014), which can further increase the sense of political polarization among participants, as well as spectators (see Baldassarri & Bearman, 2007). Thus, in addition to the appealing mechanism of ideological similarity, dissimilarity in the users' political values becomes an abundant source of traction when it comes to social media participation.

In addition to the polarization among users, traditional media outlets, the social media platforms themselves, and fake news outlets can be perceived as contributing to the increased importance of the struggles for recognition. With traditional media outlets losing their former position as the gatekeepers of public discussion (Munger, 2020), they have been forced to assimilate the role of advertisers on social media platforms. Because of their changed economic realities, media companies are forced to utilize the social media buzz in their journalistic practices, offering journalistic content and provocative "clickbaits" concerning the trending political issues (Munger, 2020). Concurrently, the actors disseminating "alternative information" and fake news highly contribute to the mobilization of users against the moderate center parties and mainstream media (Bennett & Livingston, 2018). Similarly, the architecture of social media platforms contributes to the emphasis on postmaterial and neoconservative political questions as the current polarizing issues. Because these polarizing debates generate economically valuable social activity (i.e., elicit reactions and raise engagement among users), the platforms themselves may generate visibility for these debates by their very designs (e.g., Pariser, 2011). The logic of social buzz could then serve those political issues that build up engagement and evoke emotional responses among and between ideologically clustered audiences, further increasing the prominence of the political struggles related to postmaterialism and neoconservatism.

Together, these mechanisms form a dynamic constellation around the digital party domain on social media. Despite the disruption in party–society ties, the parties could still be understood as ideological lighthouses on which citizens reflect their political desires and actions (Koivula, 2019). In this respect, parties arguably become the ideological focal points to which citizens anchor their political activities in the social media sphere. For example, parties and their representatives are among the

most central targets of citizens' political critiques in social media discussions (see Sobieraj et al., 2020). Arguably, shared political perceptions with the party in-group and contradicting perceptions between the in-group and political out-group may increase the incentive to join in the formation of the public sphere on social media. With the public discussion polarizing postmaterial and neoconservative articulations, the new identity parties' prominence in the social media sphere has further increased.[18]

Nevertheless, it is interesting that as ideology generates the thrust for political activity, the pressure seems to be released via alternative outlets. According to Schradie, as leftist groups ideologically emphasize equality and horizontality, their collective political practices are also horizontal but fragmented as these groups pursue a variety of competing ideas and interpretations. In contrast, because right-leaning political groups are more often effectively organized according to more hierarchical structures, these groups have more precise and united ideas and aims, including consistency of vocabulary in their communication practices on social media (Schradie, 2019, pp. 222–224). Then, it seems that more individual and fragmented action frames and forms of crowd-enabled connective action (Bennett, 2012; Bennett & Segerberg, 2012) are more widely employed among the progressive left (Bennett et al., 2018; Schradie, 2019). In Finland, for example, the GL has promoted unconventional and horizontal forms of organization since its founding (Mickelsson, 2004), while the FP, similar to other right-wing populist groups in general, has ideologically highlighted the importance of authoritarianism (Donovan, 2019; Hooghe et al., 2002). Therefore, as the new identity parties' positions have become more prolific in the social media sphere, these parties—namely the FP, GL, and LA—and the online groups near them have utilized divergent means of actualizing political action.

Overall, research suggests that ideology has an important effect on how political activities are played out in the social media sphere. Similarly, in the Finnish context and generally in the Nordic context, the right-wing populist groups have been recognized as savvy and unified in utilizing digital platforms for political purposes

[18] Simultaneously, the traditional interest parties have been incapable of forming clear standings on these political questions, leading to vague and polyphonic statements by party leaders and representatives. Notably, in the beginning of the 2010s, this sort of strategic ambivalence related to the traditional interest parties' standings on postmaterial issues seemed a considerable way to cope with the problem. However, at the end of the decade, these forms of action seemed to reach the end of the road. Thus, the rise of postmaterialism and the neoconservative backlash have disrupted the connection between civil society and the traditional interest parties in Finland because these parties' leaders and representatives have been unable to clearly articulate their parties' standings on postmaterial and neoconservative issues.

when compared with other political groups (e.g., Hatakka, 2019; Horsti & Saresma, 2021; Larsson, 2020; Ylä-Anttila, 2020). The disclosure of "truth" and "informationalizing" of others have been regarded as central ideological motivators among right-wing populist groups: the FP supporters, among other right-wing populist groups, have aimed to reveal the hidden "truth" that mainstream media and other elite groups have been hiding from "the people" (Engesser et al., 2017; Gustafsson & Weinryb, 2019; Ylä-Anttila, 2020). Thus, the social media platforms' ability to bypass the traditional gatekeepers—such as traditional media, public servants, scholars, and other experts—especially suits those ideological groups that do not trust these actors (Saarinen et al., 2018). Here, the functional logic of social media platforms highly correlates with the ideological logic of populism. In their essence, both oppose elites and hierarchies, appeal to emotions, emphasize individuality, and rhetorically place "the people" in the center of their functions (Engesser et al., 2017; Gustafsson & Weinryb, 2019).

In addition to the fact that ideology retains, generates, and modifies political action, ideology-based political action is highly intertwined with emotions and affects, especially in the polarized social media context (see for more Papacharissi, 2015). As previously stated, political polarity within multiparty systems is not a virtually negative tendency, but when it turns into affective antipathy toward citizens with alternative political views and aims, polarity may yield detrimental societal outcomes (see Harteveld, 2021; Iyengar et al., 2019; Knuutila & Laaksonen, 2020). Previous research shows that in the Finnish political context, the attitudes between FP supporters and other parties' supporter groups became more negative between 2015 and 2019 (Westinen et al., 2020). Simultaneously, the ideological differences between the FP and progressive left, namely the GL and LA, slightly increased during the same period (Isotalo et al., 2020). However, the affective qualities of political polarization are aspects that need more serious consideration when assessing the formation of the social media political sphere in Finland.

In general, social media platforms generate (and exist for) a variety of emotions and feelings. Emotions, feelings, and affects are the attributes that engage users and generate economic profits for the platforms. Similarly, the generation and utilization of feelings and affects profoundly belong to political influencing on social media (Duncombe, 2019; Marquart et al., 2019; Papacharissi, 2015). For example, humor and comedy, as well as anger and frustration, are widely employed today for political purposes on social media platforms (see Bennett & Livingston, 2018; Gustafsson & Weinryb, 2019; Jenkins, 2018; Knuutila & Laaksonen, 2020; Laaksonen et al., 2021). Thus, the intersections of these platforms and political processes are especially disposed toward affective polarization among users.

It is essential to comprehend what kinds of activities are generated by various emotions and how these intersections are utilized in the Finnish social media political

sphere. For right-wing populist groups, when combined with the ideological aims of spreading the 'truth," feelings of frustration and anger have functioned as effective fuel for political activity (Knuutila et al., 2019; Knuutila & Laaksonen, 2020; Laaksonen et al., 2021). Nevertheless, these emotions are not turned into undesired modes of political behavior. According to previous research, right-wing populist groups actively practice harmful modes of political influencing online. Most of the hate speech and intimidation that Finnish municipal and parliamentary candidates confront are originally from right-wing populist online groups and users (Knuutila et al., 2019). Thus, riding with the wave of negative emotions may spur counterproductive activities aiming to incite emotions, such as fear, in their political opponents.

Overall, ideology drastically shapes the ways in which politics are enacted, especially in the social media sphere. In the social media political sphere, political ideology in general generates political activities, but it also directs the modes of these activities and intersects with various emotions that further amplify and diversify participatory practices in the ideological in-group, as well as among the opponents of these aims. It has been argued that citizens now attach themselves to society through different means. The meaning of societal class has diminished simultaneously with the rise of more fluid, horizontal, and individual categorizations of societal identity (Beck, 1997; Dalton, 2008; Maffesoli, 1996; Putnam, 2000). The rise of the internet and social media has expanded citizens' possibilities to find new reference groups on which they can build their political identities. Simultaneously, new political struggles have reached the center of the field of parliamentary politics (Fraser, 2000; Hooghe et al., 2002; Inglehart, 1990), further muddling the connections between the parties and civil society. Because of these changes, traditional interest parties have lost some of their prominence, while the political field, especially on social media, has been polarized between those who support and oppose postmaterial political aims (Baldassarri & Bearman, 2007; Hooghe et al., 2002; Inglehart, 1990; Isotalo et al., 2020; Norris & Inglehart, 2019). Thus, the ideologically scattered field of social media politics seems to especially invoke both deliberation and dispute on postmaterial and neoconservative issues.

Overall, as every party aims to reach audiences and facilitate political engagement on social media, the traction of the social media sphere is also present for all the assessed parties. Then again, the levels of traction and thrust vary among the parties and are temporally altered. The parties' organizational traditions, organizational culture, in-party democratic practices, hierarchy, and core values have been observed as having an important effect on how the parties react to various societal shocks (Koskimaa, 2020)—such as the rise of digital communication and social media. Scholars have explicated several models of digital parties that perform within unconventional structures and means (Bennett et al., 2018; Chadwick, 2007;

Dennis, 2020; Kavada, 2019). Therefore, the Finnish parties' democratic customs, organizational structures, and cultural characteristics might affect individual political action on social media. Some scholars have proposed that social media platforms bring forth communication tools for political actors who are in challenger positions (Larsson & Moe, 2014). However, the evidence is mixed, with some proof showing that social media has especially well served those actors already occupying powerful positions in the political field (Strandberg, 2012; 2016; Strandberg & Borg, 2020; Strandberg & Carlson, 2021). Similarly, the popularity—and thus the prominence of various social media platforms—vary temporally. Therefore, the traction of these platforms should be understood as changing constellations. Because of the elusive nature of the thrust for and traction of social media politics, a more nuanced understanding of parties, social media, and the dynamics between these spheres is required.

5 Research design

> "The essence of the network approach remains not in the method used but in posing questions and searching for answers in terms of structured connectivity."
>
> - Barry Wellman (1983, pp. 171–172)

In the current dissertation, I understand the political sphere on social media as a networked structure within and between overlapping fields. The concepts of social networks and fields are utilized as theoretical lenses or subconscious suppositions that implicitly guide the analytical approach in the empirical articles. Nonetheless, in the dissertation's empirical analyses, the concept of networks and its meaning in the formation of the digital public sphere remain weak. The networked relations among political actors are concretely analyzed in Article II only. However, the assumption about networks as contextual structures that guide, steer, and restrict individual action in various fields is the conceptual basis for all the studies. This is a theoretical bedrock on which I build my perceptions of the formation of the social media political sphere and political parties. Thus, to animate the aforementioned idea presented by Wellman, it is not about using the certain methods but asking the right questions and providing "answers in terms of structured connectivity" (1983, pp.171–172).

The core idea behind this reasoning is to understand both individual action and structures that enable, steer, and restrict human activities. First, I share the structural claim that the most important characteristic of political actors is their position in social networks and the ways in which the networked structure in a social system allocates political resources (see Emirbayer, 1997; Granovetter, 1985; La Due Lake & Huckfeldt, 1998; Wellman, 1983). In this sense, a theoretical concept of social networks attempts to close the gap between individualistic and holistic theoretical traditions by placing individuals within the networked structure (Eulau, 1986; Wellman, 1983). Individual actions are not determined by the structures, but rather, the social surroundings and an individual's position within the network are the factors that impose what is possible to do (see Granovetter, 1985; Wellman, 1983). Second, I use the concept of fields as the arenas where political struggles occur. I

interpret both political parties and the social media political sphere as the fields where various actors pursue their goals with common understandings about the presence of other actors in the field, the purposes of the field, the relationships in the field, and the rules of the field (Fligstein & McAdam, 2011; see also Bourdieu, 1984; DiMaggio & Powell 1983). Thus, in addition to the network perspective, the concept of fields provides analytical tools for dissecting political action as a goal-oriented but structurally restricted activity.

In this chapter, I first introduce the more precise analytical designs of the empirical articles and broader analytical aims of the present dissertation. Next, I outline the datasets, analytical techniques, and utilized measures in the present dissertation's empirical analyses of the studies.

5.1 Analytical design

In the current dissertation, I primarily seek answers to the question of *how party politics are intertwined with the social media* in the Finnish political context. Most importantly, I interpret social media use as political action. I assess how people access the social media sphere, how they follow political content, and, especially, how they disseminate and produce such content, participate in societal and political discussions, and, thus, pass on political discourses on social media. Additionally, I evaluate how people are organized within the social media political sphere and how they modify its networked structure. Through these analytical points, in the original articles, I empirically provide a more coherent image of how the social media sphere's boundaries, substance, structure, and order are formed, further theorizing how this process might generate more political activity among various political contexts.

In the research articles, these aspects are analyzed with a variety of more specific research questions. The analytical frame for the current dissertation is developed by treating the empirical articles as case studies through which I cross-expose the social media political sphere from different viewpoints. With the aid of these explicit analyses, I attempt to restructure and render the functional analytical frameworks for understanding party-related political action on social media platforms. In Article I, the evolution of the field between 2008 and 2016 is assessed. The networked structure of the field is examined in Article II. Article III deals with evaluating from which political standings the social media sphere is generated. In Article IV, the focus is on how users' behavioral tendencies shape the order and structure of the field. Finally, the connection between social media participation and social cohesion within the Finnish parties is evaluated in Article V. The original research questions of the studies are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. The original research questions in the empirical articles.

	Research Article	Research Questions
I	Changing patterns of social media use? A population level study of Finland	RQ1) How did registered social media use change in Finland during the years 2008–2016? RQ2) How did the purposes of social media use change between the years 2012 and 2016?
II	Shared contexts, shared background, shared values – Homophily in Finnish Parliament members' social networks on Twitter	RQ1) To what extent do same party affiliation, shared regional context, similar sociodemographic factors and similar political values explain parliamentarians' reciprocal following and share of mutual followees? RQ2) Are there interactions between different types of homophily and shared party affiliation when examining parliamentarians' reciprocal following and share of mutual followees? RQ3) Are there interactions between different types of homophily and shared regional context when examining parliamentarians' reciprocal following and share of mutual followees?
III	Ideological motives, digital divides, and political polarization: How do political orientation and values correspond with the political use of social media?	RQ1) To what extent does a clear party preference motivate citizens to engage in politics on social networking platforms? RQ2) How do the consistent values related to party preference motivate citizens to engage in politics on social networking platforms? RQ3) To what extent is political engagement on social media confounded by sociodemographic factors?
IV	Undercurrents of echo chambers and flame wars: Party political correlates of social media behavior	RQ1) Is politically active social media use associated with differences in users' behaviors on social media? RQ2) Is political party preference associated with differences in users' behaviors on social media? RQ3) To what extent does political active social media use modify the effect of party preference when predicting different behaviors on social media?
V	From the inside out to the outside in: Party members' extra-parliamentary activity and commitment within the party network	RQ1) How do Finnish party members utilize traditional means of collective extra-parliamentary engagement and connective forms of online engagement on social media? RQ2) How do the modes of collective and connective forms of extra-parliamentary political activity correlate with in-party commitment? RQ3) To what extent do members of various Finnish parties utilize both traditional means of extra-parliamentary collective action and new means of online connective action?

The themes of the research articles are separated into two distinct but connected phenomena: *the formation of boundaries and substance* of the social media sphere and *the formation of structure and order* in the social media sphere (Figure 3; for the analytical categorization, see Chapter 4). In addition to party preferences, the parties' prerequisites for social media politics are assessed by focusing on two explicit aspects: how the parties' *sociodemographic background* and *ideological standings* may attenuate and amplify party supporters,' members,' and representatives' social and political activities on social media (for more details, see Sections 4.2 and 4.3). These aspects form the analytical basis of the current dissertation.

First, when evaluating the formation of the boundaries and substance of the social media sphere, the questions of how people access and belong to the social media platforms, as well as how they participate in content production and dissemination, are evaluated more precisely in the research articles (Articles I, III, IV, and V). This perspective overlaps with the theoretical strand of digital divides that, in general, aims to evaluate the different levels of inequalities of digitalized human action (e.g., Hargittai, 2001; Hargittai & Walejko, 2008; Van Dijk, 2005). Thus, people who access social media both comprise the audiences in the social media political sphere and draw the boundaries of that sphere. Because digital divides exclude part of the population from social media, these separations form the boundaries of the sphere within the national population. Similarly, the digital divides allocate the formation of the substance on social media to active users. Some users produce and disseminate the content in the sphere, while others remain silent. Accordingly, I evaluate whether the political party field on social media becomes distorted in relation to the varying level of political activity on social media among the party groups.

Second, I evaluate the formation of structure and order in the social media political sphere. The research articles contribute to this discussion by studying how similar social backgrounds, shared political contexts, and shared political values affect the formation of ties on social media (Article II) and how respondents operate in clustered networks by utilizing several behavioral means (Article IV). Stratified inequalities determine the boundaries and audiences, and in line with this, previous research indicates that the audiences themselves form clustered structures and orders within the field (e.g., Chadwick, 2017; Harteveld, 2021; Iyengar et al., 2019). Similarly, functioning as an amplifier for the aforementioned homophilic and selective tendencies, the design of social media platforms also enforces the formation of the clustered sphere by its design (see Flaxman et al., 2016; Pariser, 2011; Sunstein, 2001). Within these subnetworks, people acquire information, norms, discourses, and ideological values through their connections in social networks (see Wellman, 1983; Zuckerman, 2005). Because these clustered subnetworks have fewer connections across social and ideological boundaries, distinctive subcultures are then formed (Wellman, 1983). Furthermore, these subcultures within the subnetworks may facilitate alternative forms of political action, frames for political action, behavior models, and distinctive comprehensions of the state of public opinion. Thus, in the empirical articles, we evaluate how audiences, content, discourses, and ideologies are distributed along clustered network structures.

The main independent variables in the current dissertation's empirical analyses consist of measures of sociodemographic background, ideological values, and party identification and party affiliation. We assess the connection between sociodemographic structures and the formation of boundaries and substance of the

field in Articles I, III, IV, and V. The association between sociodemographic variables and formation of structure and order are assessed in Articles II and V. The meaning of the respondents' ideological standings in the formation of the boundaries and substance of the sphere is examined in Article III. The meaning of the respondents' ideological standings in the formation of the structure and order in the sphere is evaluated in Article II. The importance of party preference and party affiliation for the formation of boundaries and substance is evaluated in Articles III and V; regarding the formation of structure and order, this is evaluated in Article IV. The associations between the cohesion of an intraparty network and social media participation are evaluated in Article V.

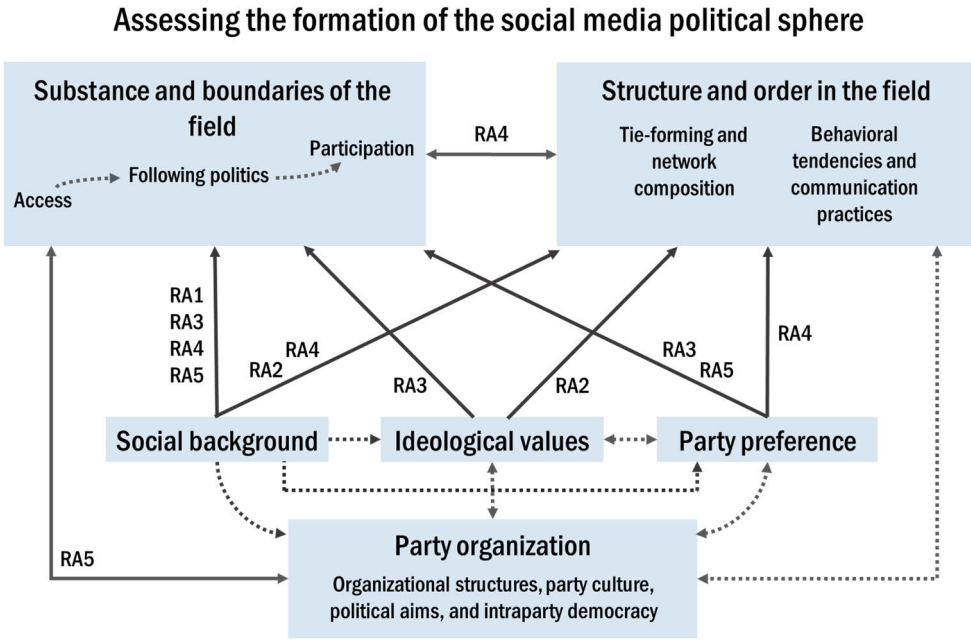

Figure 3. Analytical outline: Assessing the formation of the social media political sphere. Solid lines indicate the associations that are tested empirically in the research articles (RA). Dotted lines refer to the connections that are theoretically presumed.

5.2 Research data

In the research articles, we utilize a variety of datasets, which are presented in Table 3. The empirical analyses in Article I are based on the Use of Information and Communications Technology by Individuals (UICT), which are time-series surveys conducted in 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014, and 2016 (n = 29,214) by Statistics Finland. The UICT surveys aim at producing data about information technology usage in households and by individuals in Finland. The data are widely utilized for the

societal development projects in Finland and for compiling pan-European information on society indicators. The UICT surveys are conducted annually via telephone interviews and online forms among the Finnish population, aged 16 to 89. The survey respondents represent the Finnish population according to age, gender, province of domicile, and native language (OSF, 2020b).

The empirical analyses in Article II are based on a combination of two datasets: the Helsingin Sanomat Voting Aid Application (HSVAA, n = 11,871) data from the 2015 parliamentary elections and the Twitter Network Data (TND, nodes = 36,294; edges = 113,108) of the Finnish Parliament members' social networks. The HSVAA dataset consists of voting advice application responses by the Finnish Parliament candidates in the 2015 parliamentary elections. The dataset is also available from the Finnish Social Science Data Archive (ID number: FSD3024) (FSD, 2021). The TND data were collected February 8–17, 2017, from Finnish parliamentarians' Twitter profiles (n = 162) by using NodeXL software. Based on these two datasets, we formed a compounded dataset (nodes = 162; edges = 26,082), which was constructed as an edge list.[19] The dependent variables—the reciprocal following and share of mutual followees—were derived from the TND dataset, and the independent variables were formed based on the HSVAA data.

In Articles III and IV, we use Finland in the Digital Age (FDA, n = 3,724) survey data, which were collected between December 2017 and January 2018 by the Unit of Economic Sociology, University of Turku (Sivonen et al., 2018). The FDA survey data are based on a combination of two datasets. First, we collected representative survey data (n = 2,470), here based on a simple random sample of 8,000 Finnish citizens from the Finnish Population Register. The target population was defined as all Finnish-speaking citizens aged 18–74. Then, the population register data were combined with those from 1,200 volunteer respondents aged 18–74 from a nationally representative online panel (Sivonen et al., 2018).

The empirical analyses in Article V were based on the Party Member Survey (PMS) data (n = 12,427) collected by the Unit of Economic Sociology, University of Turku. The PMS survey respondents were 16–89-year-old members of the six largest parties in Finland—namely the SDP, FP, NCP, CPF, GL, and LA—between April and September 2016. The data were collected in collaboration with the party offices, which were responsible for the sampling methods used. In total, the unique surveys reached approximately 50,000 Finnish party members (for more information, see Koiranen et al., 2017).

[19] An edge or adjacency list refers to the data storage structure, where network data are organized as a list and in which each row indicates information related to a specific relation within the network (see Oliveira & Gama, 2012).

Table 3. Summary of the datasets, producers, target population, sample sizes, and response rates.

Article	Dataset	Producer	Target population	Sample size and response rate
I	Use of Information and Communications Technology by Individuals (UICT), 2008-2016	Statistics Finland	Finnish population aged 16-89 years	2008: N = 2883, RR = 67 % 2010: N = 2761, RR = 64 % 2012: N = 2704, RR = 63 % 2014: N = 2312, RR = 48 % 2016: N = 2255, RR = 46 %
II	Twitter Network Data (TND), 2017	Unit of Economic Sociology	Finnish MPs and their followees on Twitter	Number of MPs = 162 Number of Nodes = 36,294 Number of Edges = 113,108
	Voting Aid Application Data (HSVAA), 2015	Helsingin Sanomat	Finnish Parliament Candidates	N = 1,763 RR = 82 %
III & IV	Finland in the Digital Age (FDA), 2017-2018	Unit of Economic Sociology	Finnish speakers aged 18-74 years	Total sample: N = 3,724 Probability Sample: N = 2,452; RR = 31 % Online Panel: N = 1,200
V	Party Members Survey (PMS), 2016	Unit of Economic Sociology	Party members of the six largest parties aged 16-94 years	N = 12,427 RR = 24 %

5.3 Analysis techniques

In the empirical articles, we utilize a variety of analytical techniques (see Table 4). The overarching structure for the analysis strategies of the original articles is that the phenomena are first evaluated by exploratory analyses and further dissected using multivariate models, which is then deepened with analysis of the mediators, moderators, and confounders between the main independent variables and dependent variables. Generally, exploratory analyses in the empirical articles aim to provide descriptive information about the direct associations between the dependent and independent variables. Additionally, the original articles include several variations of factor and component analyses, which are employed to form composite variables for our empirical analyses. These analyses are presented in Section 5.4. The main methods of analysis are multivariate regression models, which aim to uncover the standardized associations between the main independent variables and dependent variables, as well as reveal the moderating and confounding effects of other explaining variables and their relevance to the questions studied. The relevance of mediators, moderators, and confounders is also studied by utilizing either the interaction models (Articles II–IV) or decomposition of the direct and indirect effects of the main independent variables (Articles I and V).

We studied the temporal variance of the registered use of social media platforms and a variety of social media use purposes among various population groups in Finland (Article I). Our interest was in the associations between sociodemographic

background variables and dependent variables, as well as the temporal changes in these associations. In Article I, the exploratory analysis techniques were based on proportional comparisons across different populations between two time points (2008–2016 and 2012–2016). We tested the temporal variance in both sections of analysis (analysis of registered social media use and utilization of various use purposes) with logistic regression models. Then, because of the rescaling problem of nested nonlinear models, we employed logit models by using the decomposition method (Karlson–Holm–Breen [KHB] method) for dissecting the direct and indirect effects of the independent social background variables and temporal change[20] (see Breen et al., 2013; Karlson et al., 2012). Accordingly, our primary aim was to determine whether the temporal variance would be visible among a variety of population segments and how the digital divides between these segments had changed during the time period under study.

We studied homophily in the Finnish parliamentarians' Twitter networks (Article II). In the study, our dependent variables—the reciprocal following and share of mutual followees—were derived from the TND dataset, and the independent variables were derived from the HSVAA data. The final dataset was structured as an edge list (N = 26,082), which, in addition to the Twitter network-based dependent variables, contained information on the homophilic attributes among the parliamentarians. These independent variables indicated shared political contexts, shared ideological values, and similar sociodemographic backgrounds among the members of parliament (MPs). We evaluated the politicians' probability of reciprocal following with the logistic regression models, and when predicting the share of mutual followees, we employed ordinary least square (OLS) regression[21] (see Hayes & Matthes, 2009). We also analyzed how shared political contexts—that is, shared party affiliation and shared region—confounded the associations between the other homophily measures—that is, status and value homophily—and our dependent variables. To test our hypotheses related to the confounding effects of the shared political contexts, we added interaction terms between the measures of shared political contexts and other independent variables within the OLS models (see Hayes & Matthes, 2009).

20 The KHB method was developed to separate the rescaling effect from the true degree of confounding or mediation in nonlinear multivariate models (Breen et al., 2013, 2018; Karlson et al., 2012). Thus, the KHB method is especially suitable for estimating the total, direct, and indirect effects in logit models, such as the models utilized in Articles I and V.

21 An OLS model is an application of linear regression analysis that estimates the association between independent and dependent variables by minimizing the sum of the squares in the difference between the observed and predicted values of the dependent variable, which is configured as a straight line (Hayes & Matthes, 2009).

The analytical design in Article III is divided into two sections. First, we studied how the Finnish parties' supporters used social media in general, as well as for politically oriented purposes, that is, following and participating in political discussions, disseminating content, and producing content on social media. In the first section of our empirical analyses, we formed multinomial logit regression models, hence allowing us to assess the likelihood of party supporters' use of social media in general and for politically oriented purposes. In addition to the main independent variable, namely the party preference, we also considered how sociodemographic factors and general interest in politics confounded and moderated these associations between party preference and social media participation. In the second phase of our analysis, we concentrated on the differences within the parties, assessing how political activity on social media was associated with the respondents' positions on ideological value scales. We first employed the statistical tests using analysis of variance (ANOVA)[22] and calculated the parameter estimates for nonparticipants' and participants' positions on the value scales within the separated party supporter groups. Then, we tested the interaction effects of party groups and online participation by utilizing OLS regression modeling. To find out whether party preference would modify the association between social media political participation and the respondents' position on value scales, we added interaction terms between these variables.

Next, we were interested in determining how political party preference and social media political participation would be associated with three different behavioral tendencies on social media: conformist, provocative, and protective behavior (Article IV). We were especially interested in exploring the extent to which politically active social media use modified the associations between party preference and various behavioral means. In the first phase of our explanatory analyses, we used separate models for each dependent variable, measuring social media behaviors by using bivariate OLS models. First, we tested the direct associations between the main independent and dependent variables. Then, we formed the multivariate regression models by adding the control variables to the models. We also conducted post hoc analyses with the different control groups of the independent variables by employing the pairwise comparisons with Bonferroni

[22] ANOVA allows for comparing the distributions among the different groups and determining whether differences exist among them (Kaufmann & Schering, 2007). Thus, analysis of multiple groups of data can determine the variability among and within different samples. In its essence, ANOVA compares the variance of various groups to test whether the variation among the groups is higher than within the groups.

corrections.[23] In the separate models, we analyzed the modifying effect of social media political participation on the association between behaviors and party preference. Thus, we executed interaction analyses by adding the interaction terms, including party preference and politically active social media use, to the OLS models.

We evaluated how different extra-parliamentary online and offline activities were associated with the Finnish party members' intraparty commitment (Article V). The dependent variable was the measure for commitment within the party network, which was based on a theoretical discussion related to the propensities of social networks and tested using principal factor analysis (PFA). In addition to the respondents' party affiliation, the other main independent variables consisted of measures for traditional extra-parliamentary collective action—that is, the members' cooperation with trade unions, the corporate sector, or nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)—and online connective action, namely participation in social media discussions. In the exploratory part of our empirical analyses, we evaluated the direct associations between the main independent variables—party affiliation and the forms of extra-parliamentary participation—and the dependent variable, here with the aid of the OLS regression models. First, we analyzed the direct associations between the forms of extra-parliamentary participation and commitment within the party network. Second, we analyzed the direct interconnections between party affiliation and these modes of political activity. Similarly, in the explanatory part of the analyses, we assessed the associations between the main independent variables and commitment within the party network, here with the aid of OLS models, when the effects of the control variables were standardized. Finally, by utilizing the decomposition of indirect and direct effects (KHB method), we explored whether the effects of connective and collective action forms varied according to party affiliation. By conducting mediation analyses with the KHB method, we estimated the mediating effects of extra-parliamentary participation on the party differences in our dependent variable by performing a Sobel test with party-level clustered standard errors.[24] With the aid of decomposition analysis, we also compared how collective

[23] Post hoc analyses with Bonferroni corrections can perform multiple t-tests on a multitude of groups using all possible pairwise comparisons (Abdi, 2007). For Article IV, the pairwise comparisons were utilized to reveal statistically significant differences among several categories within the main independent variables, that is, party preference and political use of social media.

[24] For Article V, the Sobel tests were primarily performed to determine whether the variables of extra-parliamentary participation would mediate the effects of party preference on the dependent variables. Additionally, we tested whether the forms of extra-parliamentary political activity would mediate each other's effects on the variables measuring intraparty commitment.

and connective actions also contributed to each other's effect on in-party commitment.

Table 4. Summary of the analysis techniques and statistical modeling.

	Exploratory techniques	Statistical modeling	Analysis of moderators, mediators, and confounders
I	Temporal comparisons	Logistic regression analysis	Decomposition analysis
II	Principal component analysis	Logistic regression analysis Linear regression analysis	Interaction analysis
III	Principal component analysis	Logistic regression analysis Analysis of variance Linear regression analysis	Interaction analysis
IV	Factor analysis	Linear regression analysis	Interaction analysis
V	Principal factor analysis	Linear regression analysis	Decomposition analysis

5.4 Measures

I now recap the variables used in our empirical analyses in the original articles (Table 5). Because social media participation is utilized as both a dependent and independent variable and because the construction of these variables varies among the original articles, I introduce various versions of the measure and discuss other variables, starting from other dependent variables, introducing the independent variables, and then discussing the control variables.

In the empirical articles, the measure of social media participation is utilized as both a dependent (Articles I & III) and independent variable (Articles III–V). Although being somewhat problematic, the composition of social media participation measures varies among the empirical articles. The main contribution of Article I is the assessment of the temporal changes in social media use for several political purposes (and other use purposes) during the 2010s. In Article I, among other social media use purposes, we study the *use of social media for societal or/and political issues*, *social organizations*, and *participating in phenomena, events, or demonstrations formed online.*[25] Together, these three variables form an extensive picture of the recent changes in digital participatory practices, encapsulating several

[25] The original question was as follows: "For what purposes did you use the social networking services?" Then, the respondents were asked whether they utilized these platforms for the listed activities. They could choose their answers from dichotomous categories, where 1 indicated "yes" and 2 "no." In our analyses, these variables were treated as binary measures.

different aspects of the phenomena, namely the temporal changes in access, interaction, and utilization of the modes of political action on social media (see Bennett, 2012; Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). Considering the aims of the present dissertation, in Article I, we also compare the *use of social media in general*[26] and the *use of social media for social interaction*[27] among various population groups. Together, these measures provide important information on the temporal changes, especially in the formation of the boundaries of the social media sphere.

In Article III, the empirical analyses focus more precisely on social media participation. Similar to Article I, the levels of access and interaction are involved in analysis. We evaluate the use of social media in general (access level), here following political content and discussions on social media, as well as social media participation. The measure for social media participation is formed as a composition of three different measures: how often the respondents share political content, create political content, and participate in political discussions on social media platforms. The original question was as follows: "How often do you participate in the following activities?" The respondents could provide their answers regarding their political online activity on a 5-point scale (1 = "never," 2 = "less frequently than weekly," 3 = "weekly," 4 = "daily," and 5 = "several hours per day"). The final dependent variables—social media use, following political discussions, and the composite variable measuring social media participation—were recoded as dichotomous variables, with categories for those who did not participate in such activities and for those who did, at least sometimes.

In Article IV, we utilize the same original measures as those in Article III but do so separately, forming one categorical variable measuring all the levels related (or leading to) social media participation. To form the categorized composite variable, we first tested the extent to which the variables measuring the various aspects of social media use were related to each other, here with the aid of PFA. The PFA results indicate that the variables related to participatory political use of social media have a high level of interdependence (factor loadings: 0.76, 0.78, and 0.81), and the

[26] The measure for the general use of social media was based on the question regarding whether respondents had registered a social media profile (1) in one networking site, (2) in several networking sites, or (3) do not have registered profile on any networking sites. The original question was as follows: "Next we are going to ask about the use of the internet's social networking services, such as Facebook, Twitter, or LinkedIn. Have you registered on the internet's social networking sites?" In addition, there was a clarification "Do not include direct messaging services such as WhatsApp." In our analyses, we use a binary variable, where a value of 0 represents those participants who are not registered on social media platforms and 1 represents those who are registered users.

[27] The use of social media for social interaction was also listed as one of the activities for social media use purposes (see Footnote 25).

variable measuring the following political discussions on social media does not have a clear loading to the factor (factor loading: 0.57). Similarly, because the more separate variable measures whether the respondents follow the discussions, the latter variables could be understood as conditionally related to the activity of following. Thus, in the final composite variable, the first category of the variable indicates whether the participants have access to social media. The second category determines whether the participants follow political content and/or interaction on social media. The third and fourth categories define whether and how often the respondents engage in participatory processes that include sharing political content, creating political content, and participating in political discussions. The final categories of the variable are 1) nonactive, 2) following political discussions, 3) participating occasionally, and 4) participating weekly.

In Article V, the measure for political participation on social media, called *extra-parliamentary connective action* in the article, is utilized as an independent variable. Social media participation is measured based on the party members' frequency of engagement in political discussions on social media. The initial question was as follows: "How often do you participate in political discussions on social media?" The original response options were as follows: 1) "never," 2) "sometimes," 3) "weekly," 4) "several times a week," 5) "daily," and 6) "several hours a day." We combined the last two categories to have a variable with five categories (options 1–4 and 5 = "daily").

In addition to political participation on social media, there are many other dependent variables. In Article II, the dependent variables consist of two items measuring the social structure of Finnish Parliament members' Twitter networks. First, the measure of *reciprocal following* indicates whether the MPs follow each other on the platform. The second dependent variable measures *the share of mutual followees*, which indicates the extent to which MPs follow the same users on Twitter. The core idea of these measures is to assess the extent to which MPs' social networks on Twitter are constructed on homophilic relations. Thus, analyzing the characteristics of the relations reveals the structured setting in the field. In the study, we have treated parliamentarians' following as a three-class variable (0 = "neither is following," 1 = "source node is following," and 2 = "both are following each other"). In the case of shared followees, we form a linear variable to measure the share of mutual followees, which receives values between 0 and 1 (0 = no shared followees, and 1 = all of the source nodes' followees are shared with the target node).

In addition to the formation of homophilic relations, in Article IV, we evaluate how users modify the order and structure by demonstrating various behaviors on social media. In Article IV, these behaviors are measured with three composite

variables: conformist, provocative, and protective behaviors.[28] With the aid of factor analysis, we identify and form the three dependent variables based on a variety of survey questions[29] (see also Malinen et al., 2018). The first composite variable, *conformist behavior*, is based on items regarding the desired modes of action in deliberative democracy (Santana, 2014; Wright & Street, 2007). The items include variables measuring users' 1) fear of offending others, 2) creating a good impression online, and 3) supporting others. The second dependent variable, *provocative behavior*, consists of those items related to 1) deliberately provoking others on social media and 2) the tendency to disagree with other users. These activities can be perceived as facilitating undesired outcomes, such as disputes and flame wars, in the social media political sphere (see Coles & West, 2016). The third variable, *protective behavior*, describes the behaviors aiming to protect oneself from harmful or offensive online content using selective avoidance behavior. The variable is formed based on items about 1) hiding undesirable content and 2) removing or hiding annoying persons from social networks; as such, it aims to measure those activities that may strengthen the political polarization on social media and lead to the formation of echo chambers. The final variables are treated as continuous on a scale of 1–5.

In Article V, we focus on party members' commitment to their party networks. The dependent variable is based on four different variables measuring members' propensity to contribute their resources on behalf of the party, as well as the affective aspects behind members' commitment to their parties. The initial statements were as follows: 1) "I am willing to donate financially to party activities." 2) "I am willing to volunteer for the benefit of my party." 3) "Cooperation with fellow party members makes me feel like I belong to a larger community." 4) "I can trust fellow party members with managing my personal matters and sensitive information." The respondents were able to rate themselves on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = "strongly disagree," 2 = "disagree," 3 = "neither agree nor disagree," 4 = "agree," and 5 = "strongly agree"). To form the final composite variable, we conducted PFA and tested the intercorrelations among the four items, assessing the factor loadings and

[28] The original questions were presented as statements in reply to the question, "What do you think of the following statements?" The respondents could choose their standing on a 5-point Likert scale, where they were given options such as 1) "completely disagree," 3) "do not agree or disagree," and 5) "completely agree."

[29] However, because of the maximum word count required by the journal, this factor solution is not included in the article but is available from the author upon request. Very similar analysis is presented in an earlier article (see Malinen et al., 2018). However, in another article, we utilize principal component analysis and a partially different dataset (Malinen et al., 2018).

uniqueness with respect to the composite factor. The original items had a high level of internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.80).

In the second phase of the research presented in Article III, we studied how the respondents' positions on the value scales were associated with social media participation within party supporter groups. To develop the dependent variables for ideological value scales (LEFT–RIGHT and GAL–TAN), we utilized principal component analysis with varimax rotation.[30] Regarding the initial question—"How do you feel about the following issues?"—the respondents could position themselves on a 0–10 scale (from 0 = "very negatively" to 10 = "very positively"). The LEFT–RIGHT value scale was based on issues concerning 1) cuts in social security and welfare, 2) dissolution of the welfare state, 3) privatization of public services, and 4) an increase in individual responsibility for securing one's livelihood. The GAL–TAN scale was formed from questions related to 1) abortion rights, 2) gender-neutral marriage, 3) environmental policy, 4) patriotism, 5) traditional values, 6) funding of defense forces, and 7) immigration policy.

In addition to a variety of dependent variables, the original articles contain a vast set of independent variables. Arguably, the most important independent variables are the measures of political party preference and party affiliation. In two studies, party affiliation was defined before data collection (Articles II and V); in two other studies, the respondents were asked about the party that they preferred the most (Articles III and IV). First, in Article II, focusing on the MPs, the formation of the measure of party affiliation is clear. Similarly, for Article V, party affiliation was defined before the data were gathered because separate surveys were sent via party offices to each party's member group. In Articles III and IV, analyses focus on the activities of party supporters. In these studies, political party preference was measured by asking about the party that the respondents preferred the most. Regarding the original question—"Which of the following political parties is the most important to you?"—the respondents could choose what they considered the most important from the list, here consisting of the 1) CPF, 2) FP, 3) NCP, 4) SDP, 5) GL, 6) LA, 7) SPP, 8) CD, 9) Blue Reform, 10) another party, and 11) none. Because of the small numbers of respondents who chose the last five options, they were combined into the same group (Other) in both studies.

In the study reported in Article II, those variables measuring MPs' ideological values and regional districts were employed in our analyses as independent variables. Instead of assessing ideological standings or regional districts of individual parliamentarians, we were interested in the differences and similarities among the parliamentarians. To develop our measures for value homophily, namely the distance

[30] Again, this factor solution is not included in the article but is available from the author upon request.

in the parliamentarians' positions on the LEFT–RIGHT, GAL–TAN, and CEN–PER (center-periphery) value scales, we first employed principal component analysis with an orthogonal varimax rotation. In the original questions in the HSVAA survey, parliamentarians could rate themselves on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = "completely disagree," 2 = "disagree," 3 = "cannot decide," 4 = "agree," and 5 = "completely agree"). The HSVAA questionnaire contained over 30 different statements. The original statements and the component analysis results are presented in the Appendix section of Article II. After forming the composite variables for these three measures, we calculated the MPs' individual differences in these value scales. For the measure for shared region, we coded a dichotomous variable, which indicated whether the MPs were elected as representatives of the same regional district or another one.

In the study reported in Article V, we also formed an independent variable measuring party members' extra-parliamentary collective action, indicating the extent to which they cooperated with trade unions, the corporate sector, or NGOs. Regarding the original question—"How involved are you in cooperating with the following?"—the respondents could rate themselves on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = "not at all," 3 = "somewhat," and 5 = "a lot"). In formulating the final measure, we considered whether each respondent was active in any of the assessed extra-parliamentary organization categories. As such, the respondent would be categorized as active, even if they actively cooperated only with one NGO.[31]

In addition to political party preference, party affiliation, various participatory practices, and ideological values, the empirical analyses in the original articles use a variety of measures for the respondents' sociodemographic backgrounds. The effects of gender, age, and educational level are assessed in each empirical article of the dissertation.[32] In all studies, gender is treated as a dichotomous variable. In Articles I, IV, and V, age is treated as a continuous variable, while in Article III, the respondents are grouped into six categories (age ranges: 18–29, 30–39, 40–49, 50–59, 60–69, and over 70). Educational level is treated as a categorical variable in all studies. In Articles I, IV, and V, the respondents are grouped into four categories based on their education: 1) primary, 2) secondary, 3) tertiary, and 4) higher. In Article III, the two highest educational categories are combined. In Article I, analysis includes the measure for area of residence, here divided into four categories: 1) metropolitan area, 2) city, 3) town, and 4) rural. In Articles III and IV, these

31 The original categories were 1) business sector representatives, 2) employee organizations, and 3) human rights and environmental NGOs.

32 In the study reported in Article II, we were interested in the effect of a shared sociodemographic background, not the effect of the background on the individual level, per se. Thus, we coded dichotomous variables that indicated whether two MPs had the same gender and same educational level. Similarly, we coded a continuous variable for the age difference between the MPs.

background measures were utilized as controlling and confounding variables because we were mainly interested in studying the effects of party preference, political values, and social media political participation on the formation of the political sphere on social media. Thus, we concentrated on evaluating the extent to which sociodemographic background modified or confounded the effects of the measures related to political identification and activity.

The empirical analyses in the original articles use a variety of other controlling variables. In Article III, the analytical models are controlled for with a linear variable indicating the respondents' interest in politics.[33] In Article IV, the models are controlled with a linear composite variable measuring the respondents' *general use of social media.*[34] In Article V, focusing on Finnish party members, the multivariate models are controlled for with a measure for the duration of the respondents' membership.[35] All of these measures are incorporated into the analytical models because of their suggested impact on the association between the main independent variables and dependent variables.

[33] Regarding the original question—"How do you describe yourself in relation to the following issues? Your interest in politics."—the respondents could rate themselves on an 11-point scale (from 0 = "extremely low" to 10 = "extremely high").

[34] The variable of *general social media use* was formed based on several questions. The original question was formed much like the questions on politically active social media use, here using the following categories: 1) read blogs, 2) comment on blog posts, 3) spend time on discussion forums, 4) comment on discussion forums, 5) spend time on social networking sites, 6) participate in discussions on social networking sites, 7) use instant messaging applications (e.g., WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger), 8) comment on news articles on online news sites, and 9) read other users' comments on online news sites.

[35] The party members could choose the duration of their membership from the following three categories: 1) 0–5 years, 2) 5–10 years, and 3) over 10 years. The same tripartite categorization was utilized in the empirical analyses of the study.

Table 5. Summary of the dependent, independent, control, mediating, and confounding variables.

	Independent	Dependent	Controls	Mediating
I	Sociodemographic background: *Age, gender, educational level, residential area* Year	Registered SNS use Use purposes of SNS [a]	Sociodemographic background: *Age, gender, educational level, residential area*	Year
II	Shared party affiliation Shared region Value homophily [b] Status homophily [c]	Reciprocal following Share of mutual followees	Status homophily [c]	Shared party affiliation Shared region
III	Party preference	Use of SNS Following politics in SNS Participation in SNS	Sociodemographic background: *Age, gender, educational* Interest in politics	
	Participation in SNS	Position on LEFT-RIGHT scale Position on GAL-TAN scale	Sociodemographic background: *Age, gender, educational*	Party preference
IV	Politically active SNS use [d] Party preference	Conformist SNS use Protective SNS use Provocative SNS use	Sociodemographic background: *Age, gender, educational* General use of SNS	Party preference
V	Party affiliation Participation in SNS Participation in collective organizations	Commitment to party network	Sociodemographic background: *Age, gender, educational* Duration of party membership	Party affiliation

[a] Contains categories: *Interaction with friends; Interaction with family; Hobbies; Social organizations; Work, career, and business; Following corporations, brands, and services; Participation tin fan networks and clubs; Participation in online phenomena; Societal and political issues; Something else.*
[b] Contains categories: *Difference in LEFT-RIGHT, GAL-TAN, and CEN-PER scales.*
[c] Contains categories: *Age difference, same gender, and same education level.*
[d] Contains categories: *Use of SNS; Following political content in SNS; Participation in SNS.*

5.5 Research ethics

Considering the ethical aspects in research is not always included in quantitative dissertations in the Finnish tradition of social research. Nevertheless, especially because the current dissertation is highly entangled with politics, democracy, and societal issues, ethical considerations are required. Most importantly, I need to recognize myself as an individual person with moral and ideological opinions and positions. For example, by appreciating democracy, equality, and freedom of speech, my internalized moral values have informed my assumptions, approaches, and the conclusions I have drawn during the process. For instance, my interest in studying the inequality in online participation is guided by my moral and ideological stances on the subject. By comprehending inequality as a problematic phenomenon, my analytical focus is oriented toward probing these questions. Thus, acknowledging my own position on these issues has helped me constantly test the assumptions and problematize the approaches used, considering the consequences of the knowledge produced. Then, I do not take my research subjects for granted. I aim to acknowledge

the consequences and politics pursued by these subjects, as well as question the assumptions they make and broader issues they raise.

The second important ethical consideration is related to my responsibility to ensure that the research participants' well-being is not adversely affected by the research. The most crucial ethical requirements of quantitative analysis—namely the use of personal information, confidentiality, anonymity, and informed consent—were satisfactorily met in the utilized surveys. The respondents participated voluntarily in the surveys; they were informed about the surveys' objectives and the ways in which the survey data would be used. Similarly, the participants' anonymity was highly secured. Because their answers were converted into a digital format, all identification information was erased. In the case of the PMS data, the party offices coordinated the invitation to the participants, and we did not possess information for identification in any step of data gathering. In the case of Article I, the identification information was deleted before we were allowed to analyze the data because Statistics Finland collected the data.

In the case of Article II, analyses were performed on a combination of two public datasets: social network data from Twitter and VAA data from the *Helsingin Sanomat* newspaper. As such, there was a need for ethical consideration related to both anonymity and informed consent. First, the question of informed consent of the participants was not clear. Although the parliamentarians gave their informed consent for further use of their data, both on Twitter and when answering the VAA, they were probably unaware of all the possible consequences of their agreement, such as the combination of the data (for more information, see Laaksonen, 2016). However, because we were interested in the Finnish parliamentarians, the ethical setting and standards differed when compared with studies focusing on the online activity of ordinary citizens. Professional politicians are generally considered public figures, and their online communication is regarded as a form of political campaigning (Hatakka, 2019, pp. 64–65). Permission to gather public data from social media is not required (albeit recommended) from platform providers, either (see Kosonen et al., 2018). In the end, the scientific use of such social media data related to public political figures is argued to be comparable to analyzing politicians' texts published in traditional media, such as newspapers (Hatakka, 2019, pp. 64–65). Then again, the combination of two separate datasets without the participants' consent does not necessarily meet the current legal or ethical guidelines set by the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).[36]

However, during the research, we considered these ethical issues and emphasized the protection of the parliamentarians' anonymity. Because we were not

[36] It is necessary to mention that the data gathering, combination of datasets, and analyses were performed before the GDPR legislation was enacted in May 2018.

interested in the exact relations between certain parliamentarians, we could maintain the full anonymity of the parliamentarians in the study. To protect their anonymity, we did not review the social media connections, even at the party level. Hence, because we did not identify any politicians or even parties, we could protect the participants and the party organizations from harm, such as damage to their reputation. Thus, what we perhaps overlooked in terms of informed consent, we were at least partly able to redress in terms of anonymity and confidentiality.

6 Summaries of the original articles

In this chapter, I present the key findings and contributions of the empirical articles (see Table 5). The order of these articles is arranged by how they contribute to the understanding of the formation of the social media political sphere. Thus, Articles I and II form temporal and structural frames for understanding the evolution of the social media political sphere in Finland; as such, they also serve as the empirical background on which the latter articles build. The current state of and recent changes in access to social media, as well as the utilization of social media platforms for various purposes by the Finnish population, are investigated in Article I. The mechanisms that guide the formation of the social structure of the social media sphere are evaluated in Article II.

In Articles III–V, we provide a more nuanced understanding of the formation of the social media political sphere. In Article III, we evaluate the state of the social media political sphere by assessing social media participation by the Finnish population, as well as among party supporter groups in the Finnish political field. While assessing how Finnish parties' supporters access the social media public sphere and utilize forms of social media participation, we provide an understanding of the current state of the Finnish social media political sphere. Additionally, the article contributes to the discussion on the effects of party supporters' sociodemographic background and value-based premises on social media participation.

In Articles IV and V, social media participation is understood as an explanatory mechanism associated with party supporters' behavioral tendencies on social media (Article IV) and affective aspects of party members' commitment to their parties (Article V). The construction of social spheres on social media and within the Finnish political parties is evaluated in Articles I–III. In turn, in Articles IV–V, our aim is to evaluate the social consequences of social media participation in the primary social contexts, namely political parties and the social media sphere.

Table 6. Summary of the main findings.

Research Article		Main findings
I	Changing patterns of social media use? A population level study of Finland	The study shows that sociodemographic background continues to a have high impact on how various population groups access social media, as well on how social media is utilized for different purposes. The results of the study indicate that the socializing impact of social media has diminished, while more individual, commercial, and goal-oriented use practices seem to have become more prominent foci of social media use. The results also indicate that online-based and more fluid modes of political activity have become more popular.
II	Shared contexts, shared background, shared values – Homophily in Finnish Parliament members' social networks on Twitter	The results indicate that shared political contexts, shared sociodemographic background, and shared political values have an important effect on the formation of parliamentarians' social networks on Twitter. Especially, shared party context facilitates forming ties in the social media sphere. Yet, political values have different functions in shared party contexts and cross-party tie forming. Especially, regional political values (CEN-PER) seem to connect politicians within the same party, while post-material values (GAL-TAN) facilitate connections that cross the party lines.
III	Ideological motives, digital divides, and political polarization: How do political orientation and values correspond with the political use of social media?	The study shows that supporters of the new identity parties - namely the FP, the GL, and the LA - are more likely to participate politically in social media. Parties' sociodemographic structures explain the differences among the party supporter groups but not completely. Generally, post-material and neo-conservative values (GAL-TAN) have a more important effect on political participation in social media when compared with traditional socioeconomic values (LEFT-RIGHT). Thus, the results indicate that the struggles for regocnition are highlighted in the political sphere of social media.
IV	Undercurrents of echo chambers and flame wars: Party political correlates of social media behavior	The fourth study evaluates how political identification and politically active social media use are associated with behavioral tendencies on social media. The results indicate that politically active social media use increases the requirement for all inquired behaviors, namely conformist, provocative, and protective behaviors. Supporters of the new identity parties are generally more prone to utilize behaviors but have contradicting tendencies with each other: Supporters of the FP favor provocative behavior, while supporters of the GL and the LA more often resort to protective behavior.
V	From the inside out to the outside in: Party members' extra-parliamentary activity and commitment within the party network	All sorts of extra-parliamentary activity are associated with party members' commitment to the party-network. Yet, the traditional interest parties and the new identity parties differ in how collective and connective actions are applied, as well as in the extent to which these activities are associated with in-party commitment. Among members of the SDP and the NCP, the association between traditional forms of collective and in-party commitment is pronounced, while connective action on social media more clearly serves the inparty commitment in new identity parties.

6.1 Changing patterns of social media use? A population-level study of Finland

In Article I, we examine the changing patterns of Finnish social media use during the years 2008–2016. From the perspective of this dissertation, the article especially contributes to the literature by incorporating temporal concepts into a better understanding of the formation of the social media political sphere. We assess how social media use has evolved among sociodemographic groups in Finland. The study also reveals how sociodemographic factors are associated with different purposes of social media use, such as for a variety of political purposes. Drawing from digital divides theory (e.g., Hargittai, 2001; Hargittai & Walejko, 2008; Van Dijk, 2005), we evaluate how the first- and second-level divides (i.e., access to platforms and use of platforms for various purposes) have evolved over the years 2008–2016. Our empirical analysis targets social media use and use purposes by gender, age, educational level, and area of residence. Employing nationally representative and temporally comparable UICT surveys, we analyze 1) how registered social media use changed in Finland during the years 2008–2016 and 2) how the purposes of social media use changed between 2012 and 2016.

The findings show that the differences in the overall use of social media, as well as in the purposes of social media use, have persisted among the population groups during the 2010s. The findings indicate that the likelihood of social media use has increased for all population groups from 2008 onward in Finland, representing a general technological adoption trend. Simultaneously, the use purposes have diversified. The results indicate the diminishing socializing impact of social media because more individual, commercial, goal-oriented, and political use practices seem to have become prominent parts of social media use.

Furthermore, analysis shows that educational level continues to play a significant role as a predictor of different use habits, especially when social media is used for political purposes and work-related activities. The results indicate that the highly educated are the most active group utilizing such purposes, in which societal and economic benefits are clearly recognized. These findings illustrate the sociodemographic and socioeconomic differences based on more nuanced and specialized ways of using social media. We conclude that there has been a shift in how social media is utilized: its social impact seems to have declined, while its use is increasingly tailored to consumer culture and, at an individual level, for beneficial purposes, such as career promotion and political participation.

Because the study itself aims to answer broader questions related to the evolution of social media use, more nuanced findings related to political use of social media remain to be read between the lines of the article. In this section, I dissect these results more deeply. Overall, evaluating different social media uses for political action purposes reveals interesting findings related to the changes in participatory

practices. The results indicate that *social media use for participation in social organizations* has decreased to a great extent, while *social media use for societal and political issues* and *participation in phenomena, events, or demonstrations organized online* have clearly increased.

Participation in social organizations can be understood as a form of participation, which Bennett and Segerberg (2012) describe as *organization-enabled connective action*. In turn, the latter two categories can be understood as forms of *crowd-enabled connective action* (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). Thus, it seems that as the popularity of traditional forms of political participation and citizens' connections to societal organizations have declined (e.g., Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Jenkins, 2006; Putnam, 2000), more individual and elusive forms of political action have become increasingly popular. Interaction analyses reveal that these trends have affected the Finnish population as a whole. Only participation in online phenomena seems to have increased more profoundly among the younger generations, which is in line with the results of earlier studies focusing on changes in participatory practices among youth and young adults (e.g., Vromen et al., 2015).

Overall, the study portrays the changing constellation of the Finnish social media sphere by presenting a precise timeline for the evolution of this sphere's functions and boundaries. The study reveals how the functions of social media platforms have diversified as various aspects of everyday life have been embedded in these digital spheres. The drastic growth of the social base of social media audiences during the 2010s has also increasingly expanded the social boundaries of social media.

6.2 Shared contexts, shared background, shared values—Homophily in Finnish Parliament members' social networks on Twitter

In Article II, we investigate the mechanisms that explain the premises from which Finnish parliamentarians' social networks are formed on Twitter. We also address the extent to which Finnish parliamentarians are directly and intermediately connected to one another. First, we clarify how shared structural, ideological, and contextual factors affect the formation of direct and indirect social ties between parliamentarians on Twitter. Second, we investigate how these same factors affect the formation of shared networks, namely the number of shared followees, between parliamentarians. Thus, the study illuminates the social premises for the structure of the social media political sphere.

When it comes to the current dissertation, Article II provides a case study that reveals the central processes behind the structural being of the social media sphere. Accordingly, the article contributes to the theoretical discussion about the sociodemographic, value-based, and contextual effects on the formation of social

ties on social media. The study focuses on Finnish parliamentarians, of whom over 80 percent use the platform. For the empirical analysis, we first extracted the parliamentarians' followee network connections from their Twitter accounts (36,294 nodes and 113,108 edges) and combined them with the data from the HSVAA, which include information regarding the parliamentarians' societal positions and opinions regarding social, cultural, and economic issues.

According to our exploratory analyses, the connections between the parliamentarians and their share of mutual followees are clearly based on their shared ideological values, similar backgrounds, and shared contextual factors. Here, shared political contexts have strong confounding effects on the function of value homophily in direct relations and shared networks between Finnish parliamentarians. The results show that—while being the most important context for tie formation—the shared party affiliation also weakens the meaning of some value-based questions while strengthening others. In particular, while shared political values have a greater positive influence on tie formation between parliamentarians compared with similar sociodemographic backgrounds, value homophily seems to be more complex and affected by the confounding influence of shared contexts when compared with the more universalistic and stable status homophily. Especially, the results indicate that socioeconomic (LEFT–RIGHT) and regional (CEN–PER) values seem to separate parliamentarians from each other within the Finnish parties, while shared postmaterialist (GAL–TAN) values tie parliamentarians across party lines.

These results indicate the disruptive effect of the new political questions related to postmaterial and neoconservative issues in Finnish politics, in the party context, and in the social media political sphere. The results highlight the importance of the postmaterial and neoconservative political questions as disruptive political changes in the historically shaped multipolar field of Finnish politics, which has traditionally been shaped along traditional political cleavages. Additionally, the study's results reveal the complex nature of homophily as a mechanism affecting the structure of political networks in the social media sphere. The meanings of some ideological questions as separating and connecting factors are amplified and attenuated in some shared social contexts. Overall, the results provide important information related to the formation of the social structure of the social media political sphere.

6.3 Ideological motives, digital divides, and political polarization: How do political party preference and values correspond with the political use of social media?

In Article III, we investigate how the supporters of the six largest Finnish parties use social media for political purposes, here with the aid of a nationally representative FDA survey dataset (n = 3,724). In various ways, the study contributes to the understanding of the formation of the political sphere on social media. The study frames the political party setting of political polarization in the Finnish social media sphere and discovers how consistent party preference and political values motivate citizens to engage in social media and how confounding background variables might explain these differences. Another goal is to determine whether there are differences among political party supporters when examining the political use of social media and whether confounding variables might explain these differences. In this manner, we assess how political views and values are projected onto the social media political sphere and how this transforms the broader political sphere in Finland. Thus, the study contributes to the understanding of how and from which ideological premises content and discourses are formed in the social media political sphere, as well as from what political premises audiences in the social media sphere are formed at the population level.

Most importantly, the study shows notable differences in how different parties' supporters access the social media sphere, how they follow political content, and how they participate in content production and dissemination. In general, it seems that supporters of the new identity parties—namely the FP, GL, and LA—are more likely to participate in social media. The results indicate that party preference in general boosts participation in social media because those respondents without a clear preference more rarely politically engage in social media.

The study reveals that the differences among party supporter groups are closely related to the digital divides and political extremes. First, the sociodemographic background confounds the associations between party preference and participation in social media to a great extent. Because there is substantial variation in party supporters' sociodemographic backgrounds, these differences explain the party differences in social media participation as well. This is especially the case with the CPF and SDP because these parties' supporters are generally older and, thus, less active in social media than the supporters of other parties. Overall, we draw the conclusion that digital divides are crucial in shaping the political sphere on social media. Different levels of structural inequalities filter those who create visible content and define ideological discourses from those who remain silent. In this respect, digital inequalities play a vital role when evaluating the extent to which the Finnish parties gain political benefits from the use of social media.

The second part of the study shows that value-based differences exist between those who participate politically in social media and those who do not. First, the study confirms that the more extreme values related to socioeconomic political issues (LEFT–RIGHT) have a slight polarizing effect within party supporter groups. The participants from the left-wing parties are positioned more on the left when compared with their fellow supporters, and the participants from the right-wing parties are positioned more on the right when compared with their fellow supporters. In almost every party, excluding the CPF and FP, the party supporters who participate in social media are more likely positioned closer to the postmaterial pole when compared with those who do not engage in social media. According to the study's results, postmaterial and neoconservative values do not have such clear polarizing effects on social media participation. However, the GAL–TAN value scale more clearly separates those who promote discursive participation when compared with the effect of the LEFT–RIGHT scale. Overall, the results indicate that supporters' standings on the value scales encourage them to participate in the formation of the social media sphere from different premises.

Additionally, the results show that the parties' organizational cultures and practices may motivate their supporters to participate in social media to varying degrees (see Bennett et al., 2018; Chadwick, 2007; Schradie, 2019). The results suggest that even though parties' structural differences are moderated among the party supporter groups, visible differences remain. Thus, there are differences in the extent to which different parties' supporters are embedded in the new forms of participatory culture and political action on social media. Overall, new kinds of politics related to postmaterialist values have become essential issues in Western politics (Baldasarri & Bearman, 2007; Fraser 2000; Inglehart, 1990; Koivula, 2019; Norris & Inglehart, 2019; Westinen, 2015), especially in digital environments (Schradie, 2019).

6.4 Undercurrents of echo chambers and flame wars: Party–political determinants of social media behavior

In Article IV, we examine how political party preference and politically active social media use are associated with various social media behaviors in the context of the current political sphere in Finland. With the aid of the FDA survey data (n = 3,724), we focus on three different behaviors: *conformist, provocative*, and *protective behaviors*. Overall, the study confirms notable differences in how the supporters of different political parties utilize social media behaviors. In addition to party-related differences, we evaluate how politically active social media use increases the

occurrence of the aforementioned behaviors, hence modifying the relation between party preferences and behaviors.

The motive for the study is built on the understanding that social media has been transformed into an ideologically segregated sphere where networks filled with different social, cultural, and ideological premises collide with one another in the forms of disputes and flaming (see Jane, 2015; Santana, 2014) and are simultaneously isolated from one another in the forms of echo chambers and identity bubbles (Chadwick, 2017; Harteveld, 2021; Iyengar et al., 2019; Koivula et al., 2018). Thus, our aim is to evaluate party supporters' tendencies to employ behaviors through which users modify the order and structure of the social media political sphere; this may lead to undesired social outcomes, such as flammable disputes and ideological segregation.

Different behaviors were measured using three different composite variables (see Section 5.3). Together, these variables indicate the extent to which the respondents attempt to control their own interactional activity, as well as the composition of the social networks where they belong. The study's results confirm that party supporters attempt to manage their own behavior, as well as the presence and visibility of others, by using different behavioral means. The results also indicate that political activity on social media is clearly connected to the extent to which the behaviors are applied. The users who participate in the political formation of the content on social media are more likely to apply all the studied behaviors. However, following the political content on social media is linked only to high rates of conformist behavior, while lessening provocative behavior. Overall, the users who are politically active on social media have a strong tendency to leverage various behaviors online, which could be a result of their need to counter negative consequences, such as hate speech and suppression, on social media.

In addition to politically active social media use, there are differences related to the behaviors of different parties' supporters. In general, the results indicate that the supporters of the new identity parties have a greater need for diverse behaviors. However, there are distinct differences in how the supporters of the populist right-wing party, the FP, and of the postmaterialist left-wing parties, the GL and LA, adopt various behavioral means. The FP's supporters are more likely to apply provocative behavior on social media than others. In contrast, GL and LA supporters are more likely to utilize protective behavior. Thus, the study's results concerning the behavioral differentiation between the new identity parties indicate the existence of a *defender and conqueror dynamic* on social media platforms. First, those participants supporting postmaterialist parties are more likely to try to maintain the ideological environment of their social context by restricting the content they see and moderating the composition of their social networks. In turn, the FP's supporters seem to want to conquer the social media political sphere by more actively presenting

efforts to influence attitudes and opinions with the aid of provocative manners. In this sense, the social order and ideological tensions in the field of social media politics facilitate alternative behavior models between the supporter groups, which further modify the social structure in the field.

Altogether, these conclusions emphasize the relevance of the social logic of politics (see Zuckerman, 2005) when assessing the digital public sphere. Even though the behaviors adopted on social media can be understood as strongly linked to users' psychological tendencies and characteristics, the order in the social field is a significant factor when it comes to affecting the subliminal behavioral choices made in terms of varied political backgrounds. Thus, these behavioral tendencies (that readjust the order and structures in the social media sphere) are also formed vis-à-vis actions of ideological counterparts in the field, as well as via network-based mechanisms within the ideological in-group. Overall, social and political actions on social media are related to the social order in the field where they occur. Thus, ideological positions in the political arena, especially those related to postmaterialist and neoconservative questions, suitable demographic profiles of supporter groups, and the parties' organizational characteristics, may encourage supporters to apply an active stance in the field and utilize different behaviors.

6.5 From the inside out to the outside in: Party members' extra-parliamentary activity and commitment within the party network

In Article V, we study how different modes of extra-parliamentary participation are associated with members' intraparty commitment. We assess the extent to which Finnish party members participate outside the party boundaries by utilizing both traditional means of extra-parliamentary collective action and new means of online connective action. We also contribute to the methodological discussion by forming a measurement for party members' intraparty commitment based on an earlier theoretical discussion on social networks.

In the study, we utilize the PMS data from 2016 (n = 12,427) gathered from the members of the six largest Finnish parties. We form a measure for party members' intraparty commitment based on their willingness to donate money, willingness to contribute their efforts, feeling of belonging to the party network, and social trust in the party network. The main independent variables measure the party members' activity in the forms of collective action, namely the extent to which party members cooperate with traditional societal organizations, and connective action, namely how actively members participate in political discussions on social media.

Analyses show that extra-parliamentary political activity, including connective action and collective action, is highly connected to members' intraparty

commitment. Those members who participate in social media or cooperate with traditional organizations report higher levels of intraparty commitment within every party's member group. Thus, high commitment within parties is clearly associated with political activity outside party boundaries. Similarly, the results indicate that from the perspective of intraparty commitment, social media participation has become as important as traditional modes of extra-parliamentary participation.

However, the results show (again) a wedge between the traditional interest parties and identity parties. The new identity parties'—namely the FP, GL, and LA—members participate more actively in social media, while the traditional interest parties'—namely the SDP, NCP, and CPF—members are still more clearly connected with the traditional extra-parliamentary organization. Overall, the results indicate that collective and connective modes of out-party engagement form mainly separate dimensions for party members' political participation. Because these two participatory entities do not correlate much with each other, digital platforms seem to offer alternative modes of political engagement that supersede the traditional forms of extra-parliamentary participation.

For the present dissertation, Article V especially provides more nuanced insights into the interconnections between the two prominent contexts: social media sphere and political parties. By employing the concept of the cycle of in-party commitment and out-party engagement, the study contributes to the understanding of social media platforms as separated but still closely connected participatory fields. The comparisons with the traditional extra-parliamentary organizations reveal the prominence of the social media sphere. For party members, the social media sphere has become a central arena for extra-parliamentary participation. However, this arena is more actively utilized among the members of the new identity parties, which may have improved these parties' positions in the field of parliamentary politics.

7 Discussion and Conclusions

> "Oh, you think darkness is your ally? You merely adopted the dark. I was born in it, molded by it."
>
> —Bane, a fictional villain

In the scene of the film *The Dark Knight Rises*, Batman and the main villain Bane have a violent scuffle, where they also engage in a cinematic dialog concerning *darkness* as their contextual surroundings. In the scene, Batman attempts to employ darkness as a tactical resource for overcoming his opponent. However, this effort does not pay off because the opponent masters this entity better—as the villain declares. Similar to the scene, I animate the concept of *darkness* as an analogy for the context for political struggles on social media among various political groups. According to the logic of this analogy, "darkness" can be interpreted as a metaphor not only for social media as a political sphere, but also for a marginal position in the political arena.

Social media platforms that formerly held rather marginal positions in the public sphere (i.e., the position in "darkness") are now positioned in the limelight of the public gaze. Since the social media sphere has become a central entity for political action, traditional political organizations have also become increasingly interested in utilizing this social environment for their political ends. Nevertheless, some political actors, sections, organizations, and movements were "*born in it, molded by it*" and, thus, could be observed as gaining field-related leverage because of their origins. Then, in this sense of the metaphor, the role of Batman (a figure attempting to adopt the "darkness") is left for traditional political organizations, while the role of Bane (a figure molded by the "darkness") is for those political collectives and groups that were born and raised in the social media sphere. Thus, these groups can now be comprehended as having the upper hand in the field of social media: when the masses arrived in the social media sphere, digitally born political actors were already there.

In summary, I aim to illuminate such "darkness" by discussing and concluding how Finnish parties are extended across the social media sphere and how the setting

in the social media political sphere modifies the field of parliamentary politics. In the beginning of the present dissertation, I asked how party politics are intertwined with the social media, that is, *how political action of parties' grassroots formats the social media political sphere, how political party contexts intervene in political action on social media,* and *how the political and social setting on social media and parties may further rouse political action.*

In the following, I attempt to answer these questions by concluding how the Finnish parties' grassroots actions perform in the digital public sphere and to what extent they are embedded in the social media sphere. In Sections 7.1 and 7.2, I especially conclude on the formation of the social media political sphere, as well as how the contextual aspects on social media further generate political activity. After this, in Section 7.3, my aim is to more specifically evaluate the fourth research question, that is, *how the setup in the social media political sphere is reflected in the Finnish political field and the parties within it*. Finally, in Section 7.4, I itemize the most crucial restrictions while proposing future avenues for research evaluating social media politics. Overall, in this chapter, I especially discuss how structural, cultural, organizational, and ideological features may determine how the "darkness" has been and can be allied, adopted, and employed by the Finnish political parties.

7.1 Substance and boundaries: Generating the social media political sphere

In this section, I elaborate on the main findings related to formation of *boundaries and substance of the social media political sphere*. Because the disruptive effects of social media are most profoundly related to the widened possibilities of the masses and redistribution of political power, I discuss how the parties' grassroots exercise these possibilities. From this perspective, I attempt to tease out from which political party premises the boundaries and substance in the social media political sphere are produced and, thus, how these asymmetrical processes may further distort the formation of public opinion. In the current dissertation, the most important element of inquiry is *social media participation*, comprising the extent to which Finnish party supporters and members participate in discussions on social media, curate political content on social media, and produce political content on social media. In addition to *taking part*, participation also involves *being part* of the systems (Melucci, 1989, p. 174). Therefore, I assess the extent to which Finns and members and supporters of the Finnish parties access the social media sphere and follow political content on platforms.

The empirical articles indicate that sociodemographic structures still clearly separate those who belong to the system and those who do not. Hence, the boundary that separates users from nonusers in the Finnish population functions as an interface

that distorts the social composition of social media audiences. According to the empirical articles (Articles I, III, and V), not all citizens have equal opportunities to participate effectively in social media because age, education, income level, and area of residence are clearly correlated with political use of social media platforms (see also Malinen et al., 2020; Schradie, 2019; Strandberg & Carlson, 2017; van Dijk & Hacker, 2018). Thus, because the sociodemographic factors are highly related to political preferences (Koivula, 2019; Westinen, 2015), at the population level, these sociostructural disparities are turned into filters that inform the formation of the social media political sphere. The sociodemographic background controls those who can access social media, especially those who create and disseminate the content. Then, as the social constellation among social media users alternates from the sociodemographic composition of the Finnish population, the interface could be seen as controlling the prerequisites of the Finnish political parties as well: those parties with a pronounced share of supporters and members on social media have better opportunities to gain audiences, engage with them, and obtain electoral support with the aid of social media platforms.

The findings show moderate disparities in the access level of party supporter groups but clear differences in their social media participation. Overall, the sociostructural distortion of social media audiences suits some Finnish parties better than others. Especially in this case, the differences in social media political participation between the GL and traditional interest parties are related to the sociodemographic features of the parties. The fact that the GL's supporters and members are more often younger and have higher education and that the traditional interest parties' supporters and members are more likely to be older (see Koiranen et al., 2017; Koivula, 2019; Koivula et al., 2020) partially explains the differences in social media political activity among the Finnish parties. Similarly, studies continue to indicate that educated and well-off citizens are more likely to participate in various political processes (Kestilä-Kekkonen & Karvonen, 2016; Lahtinen, 2019), which may indirectly affect the parties' prerequisites in the social media sphere as well.

When understanding the social media political sphere as a temporarily changing constellation, it is notable to pay attention to the changes in how the social basis of the social media sphere and modes of social media use have expanded in the Finnish population. The temporal changes in the formation of the boundaries of the Finnish social media political sphere are evaluated in Article I. The article shows that the proportion of Finns with registered social media accounts increased between 2008 and 2016 to a great extent, the differences in social media use among the age groups were clearly more visible, and a higher proportion of Finns utilized social media for political purposes in 2016 than in the beginning of the 2010s (see also Strandberg & Borg, 2020; Strandberg & Carlson, 2017, 2021). In sum, the social basis of social

media users has expanded, and the disparities among population groups have narrowed.

Article I also indicates that in the beginning of the 2010s, social media platforms were more likely to be utilized for their original purposes, that is, social interaction with other users, but subsequently, different aspects of people's everyday lives became increasingly embedded in the social media sphere. The share of users who utilized social media for career-related, consumerist, and political purposes was clearly higher in 2016 than in 2012. Thus, during the previous decade, the use of social media among Finns in general became more commercial, individual, and goal oriented at the expense of social motivations—or at least users have become more clearly aware of the functional purposes of the social media platforms.

As argued before in this dissertation, to theoretically itemize the effects of social media, researchers should recognize both the *thrust* and *traction* of the digital platforms and understand these in relation to the concurrent aspects of societal and cultural changes. Thus, *liberty for something* and *liberty from something,* which are provided by social media platforms, form a prolific matter of theoretical inquiry, helping understand the motivations of various actors in the changing constellation of social media politics. Indeed, as the prominence of the social media sphere grew in the past decade, it is reasonable for political parties to become increasingly interested in the communication possibilities of these social spaces. Thus, from the perspective of political parties, the traction of the social media sphere and specific platforms should be understood as changing constellations that are not only prone to temporal changes in the popularity of these social spaces, but also the sociodemographic composition of the audiences. As Article I indicates, the functions of these sociostructural inequalities changed in the 2010s. As new users joined the sphere, the differences among various population groups, such as age groups or social classes, leveled out, at least to some extent. Then, as Article III shows, social media participation is not the privilege of traditional early adopter groups alone (e.g., young and educated) but is also available for others, especially for middle-aged men.

Concurrently, some platforms, such as Facebook, are suffering from the loss of users from younger age groups, while the platform is gaining more users from the cohort of older citizens, who earlier on neglected social media (OSF, 2020a). Therefore, it seems that today, "mature" platforms, such as Facebook, increasingly entice mature population groups, which may balance the differences between the young and old in the levels of overall access to and activity in social media. Then again, this tendency may simultaneously fragment the social media public sphere by segregating different types of users from different sociodemographic backgrounds on various platforms. Altogether, from the perspective of the Finnish political parties, the sociostructural imbalance has partly evened out in the previous decade.

Due to the growing popularity of social media platforms, the differences related to access continue to narrow. Nonetheless, while effective participatory processes (i.e., actions that have influence and produce desirable outcomes) still insist on a variety of skills, the participatory gap between population groups will probably remain a crucial divide. Additionally, within the fragmented social media sphere, the demanded capabilities, such as a variety of skills, for social media participation and influence may become more context related in the future. For example, in the era of trolls, hate speech, and misinformation, good language, factual knowledge, or precise argumentation may not be necessities for effective influencing in some segregated social networks. For example, post-truth and post-trust have undermined citizens' appreciation of knowledge, expertise, and various institutions, such as administration, universities, and media (Alcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Bennett & Livingstone, 2018; Saarinen et al., 2019; Vihma et al., 2018). People all over Western societies now recommend to their peers "to do their own research," while spreading the seeds of misinformation and distrust. Among these "citizen-researchers," the bourgeois ideals of deliberation and forms of human capital that enable acting on them are not necessarily the only currencies that will provide political impact in the future.

In addition to the importance of sociodemographic factors, the meaning of users' interest in politics is evaluated in Article III. The study's results indicate interest in politics as an important predictor of political activity on social media (see also Min, 2010; Schradie, 2019). Earlier research also indicates that sociodemographic background and socioeconomic position explain the differences of interest in politics (Henn et al., 2005). Thus, the general interest in politics can be understood as an effective intermediary between sociodemographic disparities and political activity on social media, as well as in Finland.

Although sociodemographic factors explain the differences among the party supporter and member groups' political activity on social media, the effects of sociostructural features have been moderate: even as the sociodemographic differences have become standardized, visible discrepancies remain among the party groups. Thus, in the empirical articles, we also evaluate the role of ideological values in participatory activity on social media. In Article III, we demonstrate how the respondents' political values influence the extent to which party supporters participate politically in social media. According to the results, the respondents' stances on the traditional socioeconomic questions (left–right values) have a slight polarizing effect. Those respondents who support parties on the left are more eager to engage if they are positioned closer to the left pole than their party fellows are. Similarly, those respondents in favor of the parties on the right are more likely to participate if they are positioned more on the right than an average supporter of their

party. Hence, the social media sphere is filled with more extreme opinions from both ends of the left–right spectrum.

Then again, postmaterial and neoconservative values do not have such a clear polarizing effect *between* the parties. All others, save for the supporters of the CPF and FP, are more prone to engage if they are positioned more toward the postmaterial pole than average supporters of the same party. These results may indicate that postmaterial aims are (or were) more approved among wider social media audiences when compared with the popularity of neoconservative political desires.

However, issues related to postmaterialism and neoconservatism are the primary separators *within* the parties. In this sense, as in other political contexts (Baldassari & Bearman, 2007; Hooghe et al., 2002), the struggles for recognition have gained more importance within the Finnish parties and Finnish politics (see also Isotalo et al., 2020; Koivula, 2019; Westinen, 2015) and are reflected on the formation of the social media sphere as well. Altogether, the rise of postmaterialism and neoconservatism crucially renders how the political field is assembled, as well as how parties operate on social media. The emphasis on these struggles itself may increase the visibility and importance of the parties, whose core ideological objectives are closely related to these debates. The interconnections between the highlighted ideological issues (Baldassari & Bearman, 2007) and social logic of politics (Zuckerman, 2005) could be forming a self-feeding loop, where the pronounced visibility of the postmaterial questions feeds more discussion about the issues and then molds citizens' perceptions and attitudes about the political struggles for recognition. To further probe this mechanism in the social media political sphere, in the next section, I elaborate on the understanding of the Finnish social media political sphere as a structural setting.

7.2 Structure and order: Organizing the social media political sphere

The current research has animated the economic sociological theorizing of networks (Burt, 1976; Granovetter, 1973, 1985; Lin, 2001; Wellman, 1983) to explore the polarized, fragmented, and segregated terrain of social media platforms. According to the network perspective, people are firmly attached to the social relations around them, which transmit the information, ideas, and discourses that users encounter. Based on this, they form their political preferences, values, and decisions about political behavior, as well as the resources that enable them to proceed with their political ambitions (Baldasarri & Bearman, 2007; Burt, 1976; Granovetter, 1985; Lin, 2001; Wellman, 1983; Zuckerman, 2005). Yet, as argued before, social networks also allocate cultural understandings among various parts of social reality (Krippner et al., 2004, p. 114; Wellman, 1983, p. 165). Thus, where dense

communities do not have many connections to other subnetworks, distinctive subcultures with alternative ideas, values, norms, and behavior may be formed. Then, related to the concepts of *thrust* and *traction*, the structural and cultural features may rouse and attract political activity that is altered among different clusters of social media networks. Thus, in the current dissertation, structured connectivity is understood as a crucial social mechanism guiding social interaction and political behavior on social media. In this section, by accompanying this understanding, I discuss the most central empirical findings, which are related to the *structure and order of the social media political sphere* in Finland.

The present dissertation empirically strengthens how social media is socially structured and clustered. First, Article II indicates that the Finnish parliamentarians' social networks on Twitter are clearly built on a shared party affiliation. Additionally, a shared electoral district, the same gender, a small difference in age, the same educational level, and shared political values are positively associated with reciprocal connections and shared networks between the Finnish parliamentarians. Thus, similar to many other studies (e.g., Aiello et al., 2012; Bisgin et al., 2012; Laaksonen et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2018), Article II shows that the selective and homophilic tendencies, especially same party affiliation, crucially inform the formation of the social media sphere. Additionally, Article IV demonstrates how users modify the order and structures with several behavioral means. The article shows how party supporters in Finland utilize conformist, provocative, and protective behaviors, which implicitly reflect how social media users modify the sphere with their communication practices. Together, the articles indicate that similarity enhances the formation of social ties on social media platforms, while disagreement and dissimilarity in political issues facilitate disconnections among the actors.

The results from Article II suggest that social media networks are highly attached to social relations in "real life." According to previous research on social media platforms, users most likely form connections with people they already know, and it is more likely that social relations migrate from an offline setting to the online sphere than the other way around (Aiello et al., 2012; Phua et al., 2017). As Article II shows, social networks start to function as virtual extensions of offline social networks through which political attitudes, claims, and discourses are diffused. Thus, the social and political segregation of social media networks is highly entangled with real-life social networks and structures.

Article II also reveals that the entangling influences of various social contexts may generate complexity in the formation of social media networks as well. The article indicates that shared sociodemographic characteristics and similar political values function differently based on the political context. Shared party affiliation and a shared electoral district may both enforce and weaken the importance of similarity

in tie formation processes. Because of these confounding effects, on social media platforms, similarities in some apolitical characteristics or shared social contexts may connect those who support opposing ideological values and political aims, and vice versa, these contexts may also emphasize the separating effects of ideological dissimilarity. Previous research shows that belonging to multiple overlapping social contexts through social media may also restrict users' activity because collateral social expectations may become obstacles to performing social action online (Brandtzaeg et al., 2010; Davis & Jurgenson, 2014). Thus, heterophilic social networks may restrict visible political action on social media. In this regard, Article II prompts scholars to recognize the complexity related to the effects of structured connectivity between online and offline social spheres.

Earlier research indicates mixed evidence of how social media platforms contribute to political polarization at the societal level because it remains unclear just how much social media increases or decreases the social and cultural distance between population groups. First, people have probably always preferred similarity in their social relations and information in line with their pre-existing attitudes (Festinger, 1957; Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1954; McPherson et al., 2001). In this sense, the detrimental effects of political polarization are not caused by the social media platforms per se but are related to the sociological and psychological tendencies of human behavior, which have been observed for decades. Thus, because these phenomena have been present before the advent of social media, it might be that social media platforms just make homophilic social relations and clustered networks more visible, leading to distorted conclusions on social media platforms' impact on polarization. Hence, in the era of social media, a scattered variety of publics could be just easier to spot as social connections and networks materialize in visible forms on the platforms.

The pronounced visibility of political polarization could also be related to the biased emphasis on some ideological struggles in public discussions. Baldassari and Bearman (2007) argue that within populations, political polarization is ambivalent because it is both present and absent. According to Baldassari and Bearman, most of the political attitudes in the US context have not been segregated, while some issues have become polarized because of their disproportional attention in the public sphere. Articles II–V strengthen this impression of growing (and disproportional) attention to postmaterialism and neoconservatism, for example, the questions related to climate change, immigration, and minority rights. As supporters and members of the FP, GL, and LA are more active on social media (Articles III and V) and because these issues increase social media participation and separate active participants from nonactive ones within the parties (Article III), these ideological questions also seem to have a stronger effect on the Finnish parliamentarians' tie formation on Twitter, which is especially pronounced in the formation of the relations between

parliamentarians from different parties (Article II). Thus, the pronounced attention to the struggles for recognition may reinforce people's impression of the politically polarized public sphere, even as the actual attitude distribution related to other ideological questions within one's network remains heterogeneous (see Baldassarri & Bearman, 2007, p. 785).

In Article IV, the formation of the social media sphere is evaluated by assessing the ways in which people modify the structure and order of the sphere. The study's results indicate that supporters of the new identity parties, who are generally more connected to the questions related to postmaterialism and neoconservatism and are more embedded in the social media sphere, utilize a variety of behaviors more actively. Interestingly, the results reveal that the new identity parties' supporters' ways to utilize these behaviors are clearly contrasting. The FP's supporters are more likely to behave in a *provocative* way; the supporters of the GL and LA are more likely to resort to behave in a *protective* way. Thus, as stated in the article, these modes of behavior seem to form some sort of *conquer and defender dynamics* among the new identity parties in the Finnish social media political sphere: although the supporters of the GL and LA are more likely to attempt to protect their social sphere from harmful and distressing content, the FP's supporters are more likely to actively cross ideological boundaries and are less hesitant to produce content that might hurt others.

Overall, Article IV proposes that social media participation, political party preference, and the ways to perform on social media constitute analytically interesting relations. First, on social media, the need for alternative ways to behave and control the sphere increases alongside political activity. In general, within all of the party supporter groups, those supporters who participate politically are also more likely to utilize the mentioned behaviors than those users who do not utilize social media for political purposes[37]. Second, users react to the content and discourses they see. Users supporting opposite political desires aim to both provoke their opponents and restrict connections with them. Therefore, the imbalance in the proportion of active participants between and within the parties itself perhaps strengthens the segregation of different ideological clusters on social media platforms. The fact that more extreme political values encourage users to participate in the formation of the public sphere (Article III) may highlight the differences between ideological groups as the visibility of more extreme outcomes becomes the basis for the formation of the image of other parties' supporters. Thus, the emphasis of the gap between rival political groups may reinforce the negative image of political out-groups, especially between the clearest political opposites.

[37] The only exception is related to FP supporters' protective behavior: the increase in political activity does not amplify protective behavior among FP supporters.

These conqueror and defender dynamics have also been recognized elsewhere. First, the emphasis on provocation within the FP's supporter group could be related to collectively shared ideological motives for political activity in the right-wing populist groups. Earlier research indicates that in their essence, the right-wing populist organizations and movements are built on the strong comprehension of boundaries between "us" and "them" (Donovan, 2019; Hatakka, 2019; Herkman, 2016). This ideologically employed categorization itself possibly drives the separating wedge between political in-groups and others. Additionally, earlier research indicates that disclosure of a "hidden truth" is an essential motivator among right-wing populist groups (Engesser et al., 2017; Hatakka, 2017; Ylä-Anttila, 2020). Therefore, the social media platforms' ability to overtake the traditional information elites and gatekeepers suits those populists groups, which do not trust these actors, oppose traditional hierarchies, and (at least rhetorically) place "the people" in the center of their functions (Engesser et al., 2017; Gustafsson & Weinryb, 2019; Saarinen et al., 2019; Ylä-Anttila, 2020). Then, as Article IV shows, the core ideological premises and participatory ideals may facilitate provocative political behavior among the right-wing populist groups in the social media political sphere.

In the same vein, the ideologically oriented aims for equality touted by the political left are also seen to trigger not so productive outcomes. For example, Brown (2002) argues that the progressive left in the US context has turned from the more productive aims of equality and social justice to detrimental political moralism. According to Brown, the left-wing groups seek a particular nonfluid and non-negotiable political truth, which itself becomes an antilife, antipolitical, and anti-intellectual force of political moralism. This dogmatic stance toward political struggles may then turn the postmaterial political movements and groups into exclusive types because they restrict and reject disagreeing voices from deliberative processes (Brown, 2002). Altogether, it seems that these alternative, ideologically oriented behavioral tendencies between right-wing and left-wing collectives are present in the Finnish social media political sphere as well.

Overall, the results reported in the articles of the current dissertation contribute to the discussion on how political activity and confrontation are reflected in the order and structures of the social media political sphere in three key ways. First, political preference for the new identity parties, coherently formed political views, and general interest in politics clearly provoke political participation in the social media political sphere (Articles III and V). Second, attachment to party networks encourages them to participate in social media (Article V). Third, these active social media participants, who are acting on behalf of their supported parties, modify the social space by provoking others and restricting content and users (Article IV). Because of this cycle of political activity and formation of the sphere, it could be argued that in addition to the assemblage in the Finnish parliamentary field, the

distorted political party setting on social media itself highly affects the formation of the structure and order of the political sphere on social media.

Then, the formation of the social media sphere is highly driven by tensions between individuality and communality. Individual benefits or gratifications that social media use generates may not be aligned with broader societal benefits, such as societal cohesion or wide deliberation among citizens. As the economic logic of social media platforms are designed to primarily serve individual users, they may neglect the benefits for communities and societies. The platforms' algorithmic design may work to amplify users' gratification by reinforcing the segregated social realm, thus further separating the perceptions of public opinion among various ideological groups. Overall, as Baldassarri and Bearman (2007) argue, "Social structural changes that give rise to segregation or integration shape interaction dynamics by shaping the probability of encounters" (p. 787). Accordingly, these dynamics are amplified in the interactional social context on social media platforms, where social relations themselves become visible and where visible interactions are allocated to a clustered structure for large audiences. For this reason, because social media has become a relevant part of the public sphere, it has "real-life" consequences as well.

7.3 Outcomes within and around: Reshaping political parties

Although in the previous sections I have focused on the formation of the social media sphere in Finland, in this section, I discuss how the emphasis on social media politics might be reflected in the Finnish political field and the parties within it. Social media platforms have enabled parties and their representatives to communicate their objectives directly to large audiences (Bennett et al., 2018; Dennis, 2020; Kavada, 2019; Koc-Michalska et al., 2021; Schradie, 2019). In addition to how parties and politicians carry out digital communication, political parties' prerequisites for political influence are also related to how they can facilitate their grassroots' action on social media and how they manage to collaborate with online groups, movements, and actors. For example, in the Finnish context, earlier studies have shown that the traditional interest parties' candidates have utilized various modes of online campaigning in more active ways (Strandberg, 2012, 2017; Strandberg & Borg, 2020; Strandberg & Carlson, 2017, 2021). Hence, the results of the empirical articles of the current dissertation reveal an interesting tension between party-coordinated communication and party grassroots responses in Finland because the new interest parties' grassroots foundation is visibly more present in the social media political sphere when compared with supporters and members of "the traditional big three" (Articles III–V). Thus, the discordant relation between party-coordinated

communication and audience-based engagement forms a fruitful avenue for analytical reasoning.

On social media, the control of the communication partly escapes the grasp of political parties. Since political participation has found alternative channels and as possibilities for influential communication have been democratized, parties' and their elite members' possibilities to control the aims, themes, and discourses of political struggles in the public sphere have weakened (see Hatakka, 2017; Ylä-Anttila, 2020). For this reason, parties have lost some of their power to define their political goals, narratives, discourses, and ambitions in public discussions (Hatakka, 2017, 2019). In this sense, the parties are forced to adapt different requirements arising from outside the formal political sphere and have a greater need for accommodating their political desires with new digital movements' and groups' objectives.[38]

This reshuffle of communication possibilities and power has altered parties' positions as intermediaries between civil society and the state: citizens are now better able to carry out political action, if not more individually, then at least from a longer distance from political parties' collective action frames (see Bennett, 2012; Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). Article I contributes to this discussion by evaluating the changing constellation of the social media sphere in Finland, showing that Finnish citizens' online activities in traditional social and political organizations decreased during the 2010s as citizens' engagement switched over to more fluid online-based social movements and phenomena. Thus, the current dissertation's results align with those of international research emphasizing new online movements and connective forms of political action (see Bennett, 2012; Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Chadwick, 2007; Jenkins, 2006; Vromen et al., 2015).

The increased importance of out-party groups, movements, and actors shifts the focus to the interconnections between parties and extra-parliamentary political activity. Article V contributes to these discussions by evaluating *the cycle of intraparty commitment and out-party engagement*, specifically the extent to which Finnish party members' commitment to the party network is associated with their extra-parliamentary political activity. The results from Article V indicate that extra-parliamentary political activity is connected with high levels of intraparty

[38] For example, the Tea Party movement in the US and Hommaforum in Finland have had tremendous impact on the political parties. In the case of Hommaforum, the group has offered parties effective ways to communicate their political aims, prolific visibility, means to attract potential voters, capable human resources, as well as discursive and rhetorical assets (Hatakka, 2017; see also Chadwick & Stromer-Galley, 2016; Heaney & Rojas, 2015; Ylä-Anttila, 2020). Thus, as the political prominence of political parties has partly dissipated, they are also provided with alternative channels for political influence and organizational resources for reaching the electorate.

commitment within all of the six largest parties in Finland. Regardless of whether the members participate in traditional organizations, such as labor unions and civil rights organizations, or participate in social media, they are more likely to attach themselves more closely to their party network if they carry political activity outside party boundaries. Thus, it can be assumed that the social cohesion within the parties is transformed into various forms of political activity outside parties and, vice versa, that extra-parliamentary activity enhances members' commitment to their party network.

Because of the positive correlation between intraparty commitment and out-party engagement, parties can improve their standings in the political sphere by emphasizing social cohesion within their organizations. Earlier empirical studies back up these assumptions by showing that attachment and commitment are related to the participatory possibilities offered to party members (Achury et al., 2020; Bennett et al., 2018; Scarrow, 2014, 2015; Webb et al., 2017). Overall, for their part, these results bind together the interrelations among different political fields. Social cohesion within party organizations are associated with the extent to which members participate outside party boundaries, which may affect parties' positions in the electorate; and in turn, this most likely influences parties' positions in the parliamentary field and, eventually, in the state. Altogether, as parties' connections with civil society have become more complex, the social networks that connect parties with the electorate have indirectly become more valuable assets in political processes.

The results reported in Article V also indicate that when comparing different modes of out-party engagement, social media participation has as strong association with intraparty commitment, much in the same way that engagement in traditional extra-parliamentary organizations has. The article also shows that social media participation substitutes for some of the traditional forms of out-party engagement and is not just an addition to the traditional practices. Thus, today, the positive outcomes for party members' intraparty commitment can be achieved without the aid of traditional extra-parliamentary organizations. The study's results show that the expansion of communication abilities derived from digital platforms has been able to fulfill the functions of extra-parliamentary organizations, at least in the Finnish political context. Thus, although political parties had prominent allies in the extra-parliamentary field before the era of social media (e.g., Berry, 1969; Raunio & Laine, 2017), the changes in participatory practices and culture now emphasize the forms of online political participation among party members as well.

The connective forms of political action and out-party political groups bring forth questions about the means for parties to take advantage of these changes. In general, two opposing arguments are related to the effects of parties' organizational structures on performances on social media. On the one hand, some scholars suggest

that horizontality and democratized possibilities provide benefits for political parties (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Chadwick, 2007; Heidar & Kosiara-Pedersen, 2019; Vaccari et al., 2016). On the other hand, research also indicates the lasting prominence of hierarchical structures and top-down controlled communication practices within political organizations (Bennett et al., 2018; Dennis, 2020; Schradie, 2019).

In the light of the results of the present dissertation, horizontality within party organizations facilitates social media participation. As the importance of those members who actively promote political parties' agenda has increased, previous research shows that parties have begun to provide more incentives for their members while simultaneously lowering the obstacles to subscribing by decreasing membership costs (Achury et al., 2020; Bennett et al., 2018; Scarrow, 2014, 2015; Webb et al., 2017). Regarding its role in this, digital technology is seen to provide effective tools for increasing participatory possibilities and cohesion within parties. Digital communication has opened a significant platform for party members' participation practices within organizations, effective tools for facilitating collaboration without hierarchies, information resources, and a feeling of connectedness among political groups (Baym, 2010; Bennett et al., 2018; Effing et al., 2012; Gerl et al., 2017; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012; Gustafsson, 2012). Overall, international research suggests that the increase in members' possibilities and power within organizations may enhance participatory activity within and beyond party boundaries, leading to the required political influence on the electorate.[39]

Then again, the question is by which means parties can promote bottom-up political activity but still retain these communicative practices under their control. The connection between party-based communication efforts and grassroots political activity may be related to how communication is carried out. Recent research indicates that the emphasis on responsivity in parties' social media communication practices can increase the required interactivity and engagement among the audiences (Koc-Michalska et al., 2021). Thus, it can be presumed that also in the Finnish context, there may be differences in how online political action is

[39] However, earlier research also indicates that the resources, structures, and forms of organizing in political groups have a high impact on how organizations' grassroots perform on social media (Bennett et al., 2018; Schradie, 2019). For example, Schradie (2019) shows that organizational features, such as hierarchy and the level of bureaucracy, are correlated with the efficiency of movements' online communication and influence. Schradie (2019) suggests that hierarchically organized groups enable more efficient influencing on social media (see also Bennett et al., 2018; Chadwick, 2007; Dennis, 2020). Additionally, varying ideas related to how the electoral linkage between society and state should be organized might be reflected on right- and left-wing political groups' performances on social media as well (Bennett et al., 2018).

coordinated within the parties, how the party culture facilitates activity, and, thus, to what extent the parties manage to transform online spaces to serve their purposes.

According to the results reported in the original articles (Articles III–V), those parties that provide their members with more means to be involved within their parties also facilitate greater participation in social media. In Finland, there are differences in how parties provide participatory possibilities for their members: members of the new identity parties have broader means to engage in important decisions within the party organizations. Thus, as the new identity parties have gained more electoral support in the Finnish social media sphere, it can be seen that more hierarchical party structures do not provide profitable prerequisites for members' and supporters' social media engagement. However, the new identity parties—namely the FP, GL, and LA—are, in the end, structured hierarchically as well. Then, presumably, from the perspective of grassroots political engagement and influence, the optimal form for political parties' organizational structures could be positioned somewhere between horizontal and highly hierarchical forms. Effective influencing and engagement require strategically coordinated practices and hierarchically assembled structures—but not too much.

When assessing parties' prerequisites for social media influencing, it is crucial to consider how the ideological shift in the political field connects with the growing importance of social media politics. As postmaterial and neoconservative struggles have moved to the center of the political sphere in the Finnish context, the traditional interest parties have had to reconsider their stances on these "takeoff" issues, such as immigration, minority rights, and sexual identity. Because traditional interest parties were not originally formed around these questions, the standings of party supporters, members, and representatives on these questions have varied to a great extent. Thus, because there have not been collectively shared opinions and because of the fear of alienating some segments of the supporter base, party-coordinated communication may have been tentative and vague. Altogether, the rise of postmaterialism and neoconservatism in public discussions, especially on social media, places the struggles for recognition within the parties as well, which might have weakened the traditional interest parties' inner cohesion and performance among the electorate.

7.4 Widening the scope: Restrictions and future directions

Although I have aimed to comprehend the social complexity of both political parties and the social media sphere, multiple features could not be empirically tested in the original articles. Mostly, these restrictions are related to deficiencies of the methodological approaches. Survey data do not allow for employing fine-grained

analysis of the nuances of these contextual factors and are not intended to do so. When evaluating analytical implementations of the original articles retrospectively, the formation of the measures could have been more precise and uniform, the number of cases in the data could have been greater, and alternative choices could have been made when developing the questionnaires. Nevertheless, the data and measures still "hit the target" satisfactorily, and it would not be that lucrative to dissect all the technical flaws that emerged during the process. That being said, in this section, I more precisely itemize the major restrictions and propose future avenues for evaluating social media participation and the formation of the political sphere on social media.

In the light of the results of the present dissertation, social media communication continues to be a slippery slope for political parties in Finland. Therefore, within the framework of the dissertation, it is a difficult task to offer some sort of either-or type of generalization related to social media platforms' influence on the Finnish political field, as well as how parties should alter their operations and organizations. Overall, in assessing social media politics, we deal with complex questions in complex social settings, where it is impossible to provide simple answers. Some political party organizations have been challenged by new parties in the field of the electorate, new social movements in the field of civic engagement, and rival groups within the parties. Some of the new contenders have gained advantages and power (Larsson & Moe, 2014), while some incumbents have held their influential positions in the social media sphere as well (Strandberg, 2013; Strandberg & Carlson, 2021). Thus, the answer to the question of considering whether social media has normalized or equalized the power relations in the Finnish political field depends on what phenomena and actors are observed in which contexts. Then, there is a lasting demand for versatile research concerning online political activity.

Although sociodemographic features and ideological standings explain significant parts of the differences among party members' and supporters' political activity on social media, the results of the current dissertation indicate that party preference and affiliation themselves have a prolific position as predictors of such activity. These notions emphasize the meaning of the organizational, cultural, and social setup within the parties. As Koivula (2019) argues, political preference can be perceived as one of the "structural factors" that reflects behavioral and attitudinal tendencies, here in a manner similar to traditional sociodemographic predictors, such as education and professional status (pp. 72–73). As such, the parties' organizational features—such as party culture, organizational structures, modes of operations, and social setting within the parties—most likely have prominent indirect effects on the activities of supporters and members.

Article V offers some answers about the importance of intraparty features. According to the article, committed party members participate in social media more

actively. Thus, the social cohesion within the parties seems to facilitate political activity outside party boundaries as well. Then again, our analyses have not empirically tested the relevance of the organizational assemblages and, thus, can only provide "black-box" explanations for the party differences. Because of the limitations of the study, it is impossible to empirically prove that organizational characteristics or participatory culture among party supporters and members can explain the differences between the traditional interest parties and the new identity parties. Therefore, future studies should integrate parties' organizational features more firmly into empirical analyses and delve deeper into the questions related to the organizational structures' relevance to the parties' social media performances.

Similarly, when assessing social media participation, it would be crucial to more precisely specify the digital contexts where participatory activities occur. The operational logics of various social media platforms—such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok—differ from one another to a great extent; these features also generate alternative social contexts for participatory actions, such as deliberation and information dissemination (see Kalsnes et al., 2017; Kim & Lee, 2021; Phua et al., 2017). Additionally, because audiences form several small niches and communities within both restricted and open social spaces, it is a difficult task to reach these complex settings with the aid of survey research methodologies. For this reason, in the current dissertation, I have aimed to elaborate on the broader understanding related to the formation of the sphere from the perspective of the national population. Hence, I am not interested in analytically dissecting the social media sphere but in acknowledging complexity as a feature of these spaces and evaluating from which social and ideological positions citizens engage with these spaces. However, these questions open crucial future avenues for research on political participation in social media, where it would be essential to more precisely acknowledge the social features of the digital contexts, where participation, discussion, and information dissemination occur.

In the future, questions related to the advancing technology are probably going to be pronounced as well. For example, it is to be expected that the role artificial intelligence (AI) could be highlighted because state actors and political organizations may start to utilize and become affected by more sophisticated means for creating and spreading political content—truthful, distorted, and fabricated—in the social media sphere. These innovations may be related to things such as reliably and coherently discussing social media bots or deep-fake videos that visibly seem real. Then, in the future, it would be highly crucial to assess in which ways and in which extent the evolving AI-based technology and its applications confront or consolidate party politics, that is, how parties are both challenged by the occurring technological innovations, how parties are able to implement these technologies for supporting their own goals and desires, and, most importantly, what wider societal

implementations these technologies bring forth as they intertwine with political parties.

Additionally, the lack of temporal comparisons related to political participation in social media brings forth analytical obstacles. For example, it is difficult to evaluate the effects of social media on social and political polarization in Finnish society in general. First, when understanding polarization as a living phenomenon, this should be assessed in a temporal manner. Because the data of the empirical studies do not allow for the evaluation of temporal changes in tie-forming processes or (among others) political groups' perceptions of others (see Harteveld, 2021), it is impossible to empirically evaluate the political polarization on social media or in Finnish society as a living phenomenon.

The thrust for and traction of social media are temporarily changing constellations as well. Therefore, the results of the present dissertation that are related to the setting in the field may become outdated within a short period of time—or even before this dissertation is published. As previously argued, the appeal—namely *the thrust for* and *the traction of*—of social media campaigning on certain platforms is associated with the user population on the platform, parties' resources, and parties' position in the political field. Thus, changes in the contextual surroundings, both offline and online, provide for constantly converting the subjects of research, which requires a continuing evaluation.

For future studies, it would also be crucial to more specifically recognize the growing prominence of complex intermediary networks between political parties and influential online political groups and actors (see, e.g., Hatakka, 2019). In addition to various political online collectives, it would be important to study the relations between parties and social media influencers, mediators, and moderators, namely those individual users who have been able to materialize their vast social media networks in influential positions and forms of concrete material value (see, e.g., Malinen 2021). Interestingly, several Finnish social media influencers have also entered the political sphere in the form of candidates, especially in the 2021 Finnish municipal elections (e.g., Rantavaara, 2021). Simultaneously, many candidates have been able to win in the elections with the aid of communication strategies taken from social media influencers (Niemonen, 2021; Rantavaara, 2021; Takala, 2021). Overall, in the 2021 municipal elections, Finns have truly witnessed how social media consumer networks can function as influential channels for political campaigning. Thus, collaboration between political parties and individual but

influential users opens interesting future avenues for research about the social media political sphere.[40]

Notably, the general masses around political parties do not just comprise a random miscellany of individual supporters but collectively organized groups and movements as well. Earlier research suggests that the close interconnections with these kinds of online movements and groups have also produced volatility within party organizations (Hatakka, 2017; Heaney & Rojas, 2015). As previously stated, the intermediary networks between parties and out-party groups are two-way roads. These interdependencies between parties and their ideologically close out-groups may affect the forms of organizational structures of parties and, thus, their functions as vertically connective networks (Chadwick & Stromer-Galley, 2016; Heaney & Rojas, 2015). For example, in Finland, the FP experienced a drastic act of diffused political power when the members supporting Jussi Halla-aho, who were highly connected with the anti-immigration online community *Hommaforum* (Hatakka, 2017; Ylä-Anttila, 2020), overthrew the former party elite, leading to the party split after its conference in the spring of 2017. Therefore, this example encapsulates how parties are now affected by new contenders from marginal groups within the parties and, in some cases, even from outside the organizational boundaries (see Chadwick & Stromer-Galley, 2016; Heaney & Rojas, 2015; Ylä-Anttila, 2020). Thus, because the empirical articles do not include various forms of online participation and complex ways of attaching to online movements and groups, in future studies, it would be important to more precisely assess party members' and supporters' connections with online groups, the roles within these groups, and various modes of digital political action by using more accurate measures.

It is also notable that parties' performances (e.g., in elections) and visibility in public discussions are partly beyond the grasp of these actors. As in the case of social media networks, political discussion on these platforms is not apart from "real-life" public discussion. Therefore, it is essential to consider whether the online sphere is truly its own social political entity. For example, among the youth and young adults, social media is integrated into their everyday lives, to the extent that it is a

[40] Moreover, the connections between parties and various social media parody communities would provide interesting avenues for future research. In the Finnish context, social media communities, such as Päivän Byrokraatti (Today's Bureaucrat) and Häiriköt Päämaja (The Troublemaker Headquarters), are interesting examples of social media actors/communities with a notable share of followers (+20,000 on Facebook) and that are apart from parliamentary politics but still have prominent political influence. For example, Päivän Byrokraatti, which tends to emphasize market-liberal, right-wing, and conservative-value discourses with the aid of parody, shared endorsements for candidates during the elections and attempted to influence the selection of the NCP head. Thus, it would be fruitful to evaluate parties' connections with such social media communities as well.

troublesome task to separate the digital social sphere from the "concrete" one. Similarly, the political content on social media is founded on "real-life" politics. For example, the success of the new identity parties is related to broader societal changes and the rise of the struggles for recognition. Thus, as political contents are derived from real-life developments, such as the acceleration of climate change and immigration—hence being outside the field of party politics—the success of the parties cannot be understood as simply derived from their performances in the political field, forms of organizing, or, for example, the utilization of social media platforms.

However, it is still crucial to continue dissecting the political parties themselves. Notably, the aforementioned examples related to *Hommaforum* and the Tea Party movement also indicate the remaining prominence of political parties. Although new digital movements and groups may have gained a great number of participants, in the end, these movements' and groups' activities are aimed at influencing the formal sphere of parliamentary politics. Thus, although the contextual changes have partly reduced parties' abilities to control the public sphere, parties in general have maintained their connections with the state and legislature, mostly in the same manner. Parties still "shape state composition, diversify forms of authority, and insert partisan interests into the otherwise rational–legal arenas of modern politics" (Mudge & Chen, 2014, p. 308; see also Chadwick & Stromer-Galley, 2016; Scarrow & Webb, 2017). In this sense, although party–society ties have been partly demarcated in the era of social media politics, party–state connections have remained strong, indicating the lasting prominence of political parties. Therefore, political parties continue being the focal points when analyzing the social media political sphere as well.

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