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## **Convergence or Intermediality? Finnish Political Communication in the New Media Age<sup>1</sup>**

Modern politics has been described as mediatized politics in which the logic of the mass media has become central to political agency and agenda setting (e.g. Mancini and Swanson, 1994; Scammell, 1995; Mazzoleni and Schulz, 1999). However, there is no question that, since the late twentieth century, the Internet and the so-called social media have also challenged mediatized political communication in many ways. For example, the online media have created new forms of political campaigning (e.g. Spaeth, 2009; Strandberg, 2009; Lilleker and Malagón, 2010), while the Internet has facilitated fresh modes of civic engagement (e.g. Xenos and Moy, 2007; Tryon, 2008; McKinney and Rill, 2009).

In his well-known study entitled *Convergence Culture* Henry Jenkins (2008: 2) has called the remarkable changes caused by digitalization and the Internet as a move towards a 'convergence culture, where old and new media collide, where grassroots and corporate media intersect, where the power of media producer and the power of the media consumer interact in unpredictable ways'. Even though Jenkins is more interested in popular culture than in political culture, he suggests that in the age of convergence culture, 'the lines between the two have now blurred' (ibid.: 12).

However, as many commentators have shown, there are several problems in talking about overall media convergence (see Storsul and Stuedahl, 2007). One of the most critical is perhaps the empirical fact that, instead of 'coming together', as the term convergence suggests, today there is more variety than ever before in communication and media technologies, gadgets, devices, formats

and standards. There are also several historical, social, aesthetic and institutional reasons why separate medium identities stubbornly persist (Fetveit, 2007: 63-71). Because of the huge variation among local political cultures and their relations to national media systems, political communication constitutes a good example of continuity tendency opposite to convergence (cf. Hallin and Mancini, 2004). Even if the US model of political communication affects and inspires political agencies in all western democracies, there are still significant differences between European and American traditions of political communication, for example, and between various European countries and their political cultures and media systems (see Isotalus, 2001: 11-13; Farrell et al., 2001: 19-20; Nord, 2007: 91-92).

This article considers political communication in the age of digital media and the Internet by testing how the idea of a convergence culture has emerged in Finnish political campaigning. The concept of convergence is completed here by the concept of intermediality. Instead of 'melting into each other', intermediality asserts that political communication takes place by increasing number of media channels and communication technologies, which are inherently linked to each other, but which also have histories and traditions of their own – traditions that cannot be reduced to one concept of convergence (cf. Fagerjord and Storsul, 2007: 26–27). Therefore, I will first briefly introduce the histories and definitions of convergence and intermediality. Secondly, I will discuss their relation to each other and consider their usability in analysing political communication. And thirdly, I will test how the empirical research on political campaigning supports my thesis on convergence and intermediality. Here the empirical analyses are primarily based on Finnish political culture, especially the presidential elections of 2006, but I will also compare these analyses with research from other European countries and the US.

The context of the 2006 presidential elections was special for several reasons. *Politically* the elections were unique in their composition having both the sitting president and prime minister as candidates, but also because next parliamentary elections were carried out in 2007. Parties had therefore special interest in setting up their parliamentary campaign with the nation-wide publicity of their president candidate achieved in the 2006 elections. *Economically* Finland faced a most successful boom since the depression of the early 1990s, and there was not yet on the horizon the world-wide depression and the national crisis of political funding, which both upset the political system of Finland since the year 2008. *Political public sphere* was not any more so confused by television entertainment shows or advertising. This was the third time the president was elected by the direct voting system, and voters were already familiar with political TV ads and entertainment shows, which had some kind of shock-value when appearing the first time in the Finnish public sphere in the early 1990s (see Moring & Himmelstein 1993: 6–7). *Technologically* so-called social media and Web 2.0 raised their heads simultaneously with the elections and challenged the traditional forms of political communication.

### **Histories of convergence and intermediality**

The histories of convergence and intermediality resonate with one another. Mikko Lehtonen (2000) observes that, as phenomena, convergence and intermediality are old, but as systematically developed concepts for media research, each is fairly new. Their early histories date back to the nineteenth century's techno-cultural utopias, but both convergence and intermediality raised their heads in earnest in the wake of digitalization during the 1960s and 1970s. However, as academic concepts they were not considered analytically before the 1990s. From the beginning the idea of convergence has been anchored more in technological developments than in the idea of

intermediality, whose roots can be found in the humanities and in theories of art (see Elleström, 2010).

The media historian Erkki Huhtamo has observed that, already in the early twentieth century, fantasies and suspicions appeared of human beings controlling the whole world from one location through various media technologies (Huhtamo, 1995: 92-93, see also Geduld and Gottesman, 1978: 123). Nevertheless, it is usually the Canadian medium theorist Marshall McLuhan whose idea of ‘an electronic global village’ is thought to be the first explicit theorization of the converging impact of media technologies. In the late 1970s Nicholas Negroponte transferred McLuhan’s ideas to the new computer age, when he realised that digitalization was emerging as a key aspect in the converging communication and media technologies. Ithiel de Sola Pool identified technology-driven convergence as a key aspect of media and communication industries in his book *Technologies of Freedom* as early as 1983. (Mueller, 1999: 12; Iosifidis, 2002: 28; Jenkins, 2008: 10-11) The term ‘convergence’ has thus been used in various contexts at least since the 1960s, although its widespread use among communication and media industries as well as among scholars did not become common until the 1990s, when the ‘digital revolution’ showed its real potential (Briggs and Burke, 2002: 267-273; Fagerjord and Storsul, 2007: 19-20; Jenkins, 2008: 5).

Christopher Marsden and Stefaan Verhulst (1999: 3-5) describe convergence as an ‘umbrella concept’ that covers variations in technological and economic changes in media and communication industries. A certain vagueness and intangibility has characterised the discourse on convergence, which has included not only technological and economic forms of convergence but also organisational, systemic, structural and cultural forms (see Murdock, 2000: 36; Iosifidis, 2002: 28-29). Nevertheless, the main focus of the convergence discourse has been on the technological changes that digitalization forces upon the media and communication industries (e.g. Pool, 1983;

Cottle, 1999; Mueller, 1999; Küng et al., 1999). Milton Mueller (1999), for example, linked convergence to the developments of integrated circuits. According to Mueller, convergence will spread hand-in-hand with the increasing speed of information-processing technology.

The great utopia of convergence has been the assumption that various communication technologies – telecommunication, broadcasting and the Internet – will merge in the future into one and the same ‘super-medium’ (e.g. Baldwin et al., 1996: 2-3; Küng et al., 1999: 30; Sauter, 1999: 65). So far, however, technological development has done quite the opposite: new devices, standards and formats come up in accelerated speech, but do not necessarily communicate with each other. This race between new gadgets and technologies has characterised the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries’ media and communication markets, whose growth has been inherently tied to the so-called technological innovations (Fagerjord and Storsul, 2007: 21-23; Fetveit, 2007: 65-66). As consumers, we have witnessed technological divergence rather than convergence (cf. Jenkins, 2001). Henry Jenkins has therefore called the utopian idea that ‘all media content is going to flow through a single black box into our living rooms’ the ‘black box fallacy’ (Jenkins, 2008: 14).

This is also the reason Jenkins (2008: 15-18) talks about the ‘convergence culture’ or the ‘cultural logic of convergence’ instead of technology. As Jenkins (ibid.: 15-16) states:

Media convergence is more than simply a technological shift. Convergence alters the relationship between existing technologies, industries, markets, genres, and audiences. Convergence alters the logic by which media industries operate and by which media consumers process news and entertainment. Keep this in mind: convergence refers to a process, not an endpoint.

From Jenkins’ perspective convergence means ‘both a change in the way media is produced and a change in the way media is consumed’. Talking about a convergence culture instead of technological convergence makes it possible to understand that ‘the hardware is diverging while the content [simultaneously] converges’. (Ibid.) Thus Jenkins broadens the technological definitions of

convergence with cultural dimensions that take seriously the role of human agency in media and communication industries and practices.

The history of intermediality also dates back to the computerization of the 1960s and 1970s, but its roots are in art movements and art theories rather than in technological utopias. Dick Higgins (1938–1998), a member of the Fluxus group of artists, is often mentioned as a creator of the term ‘intermedia’ in the 1960s. For him and his fellow artists intermediality meant artistic projects in which aspects of established art and media forms were combined to create new forms. An example of this kind of intermediality was Higgins’ ‘visual poetry’, which combines both poetry and graphic design. Higgins was well aware that there was nothing new in this kind of artistic intermediality, which basically meant anti-formalism favoured by number of artists before him, including Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Gertrude Stein and the Dadaists. (E.g. Higgins and Higgins, 2001)

The term intermedia was adopted as the name of a hypertext project at Brown University in 1985, but it is not clear whether there was any connection between the project and Higgins’ work. However, a systematic conceptual analysis of intermediality dates back to the discussion on digitalization and the Internet and particularly their impact on textuality. In the early 1990s the German text theoreticians Jürgen Müller and Ernest Hess-Lüttich started developing the concept as part of hypertext theory (Hess-Lüttich, 1999: 688–689). Through the notion of intermediality, the theory of intertextuality was expanded to apply to the analysis of new digital, Internet-based textual forms. Since then, intermediality has been a common concept in German and Scandinavian art and communication studies, and it has been especially favoured by literary scholars, musicologists and information scientists (e.g. Rajewsky, 2002; Heitmann 2003; Elleström 2010).

Among media studies the concept of intermediality has been addressed especially by the cultural scholar Mikko Lehtonen (2000), who refers to developments such as digitalization, the concentration of media ownership, globalisation and the orientation to synergy, as emphasising the new relevance of intermediality as an analytical category for media studies. The above processes of transformation are important because they change the cultures of production, distribution and consumption and, as a consequence, influence the intermedial construction of the media. Such an understanding of intermediality resembles that of convergence and also resonates with Jenkins' idea of convergence culture.

However, Lehtonen (2000: 11, 16) also anchors the intermediality approach particularly in textual analysis and defines intermediality in relation to textual theory as 'intertextuality transgressing media boundaries'. For Lehtonen, as for many users of the term, intermediality has been a political weapon against formalist purism and hence for interdisciplinary studies. Nevertheless, there is no reason to reduce intermediality merely to a dimension of intertextuality. More recently, some scholars have demonstrated that intermediality can be a productive concept if it is understood more broadly as the cultural, economic and social relationships among various media (e.g. Fornäs, 2002; Fornäs et al., 2007; Nikunen, 2007).

### **Convergence, intermediality and political communication**

Even if convergence has been used to describe various changes in the media and communication industries, it has emphasised technology as a key element of its explanations. Therefore, the problem in the convergence hypothesis has been that it represents a classic case of technological determinism and, accordingly, overestimates the technological aspects of digitalization and of the new communication networks (cf. Williams, 1975: 13). The social history of the media has proved

that the historical change is far from being a linear development and not at all solely technology-driven (e.g. Williams, 1975; Winston, 1998; Briggs and Burke, 2002). Another problem with the term convergence has been that it has often served as an industrial and political buzzword that legitimises the economic strategies of the media and communication industries and information society policies rather than being an analytical concept as such (Hassan, 2000; Sampson and Lugo, 2003; Fagerjord and Storsul, 2007).

In this respect Jenkins' (2008) notion of a convergence culture has been a necessary enlargement of the concept and has allowed a rethinking of multimodal digital media and communication as cultural and social phenomena more than as purely technological or economic phenomena. However, relying so heavily on fan theory, 'participatory culture' and 'collective intelligence', Jenkins perhaps puts too much weight on bottom-up, consumer-driven practices and totalizes convergence culture in a way that does not entirely coincide with the empirical reality – at least in the case of political communication. As Jenkins (2008: 220) remarks, it is true that the 2004 and 2008 presidential election campaigns in the US experimented with 'the use of new media technologies and popular-culture-based strategies', such as blogging and Photoshop or YouTube parodies. Nevertheless, it is not at all clear how 'bottom-up' or 'grassroots' these strategies were or how profoundly they differed from traditional political campaigning in the US and, finally, what their ultimate influence on the elections was (see McKinney and Rill, 2009: 402-403).

Jenkins (2008: 258) claims to be a 'critical utopian' as opposed to a 'critical pessimist', such as a leftist or Marxist scholar of political economy and critical theory. His utopia consists of 'popular democracy', in which we will 'be able to participate within the democratic process with the same ease that we have come to participate in the imaginary realms constructed through popular culture' (ibid.: 245-255). One can argue whether democratic processes or politics should really be as easy



and entertaining as popular culture, but few would disagree with Jenkins in his call for more deliberative and participatory democracy. However, highlighting utopian dimensions of converging media culture discounts those traditions, institutions, structures and practices that tend to maintain continuities in media culture and politics. In spite of the increasing number of connections among politics, popular culture and individual lifestyles as well as the growing popularity of the Internet and the social media, there are still astonishingly stubborn traditions and habits in political communication. For example, cultural forms and statuses of different media do not melt away even if the Internet creates new forms of political campaigning or allows us to participate in content production more easily than do the traditional media. In analysing political communication, we have to be sensitive to these kinds of differences and continuities, which are not clear if we talk about an overall transition to a convergence culture or a converged media system.

The concept of intermediality may help in this task. However, defining intermediality as an art form that crosses media boundaries or as a mode of intertextuality does not take us much further either. At least for an analysis of political communication, the concept of intermediality should be defined more broadly, because election campaigns and voter behaviour, for example, contain several dimensions other than the textual (cf. Fornäs, 2002: 101). Communication can be used for different purposes, and especially in political campaigns differentiated communicative functions and interests are emphasized in a particular manner. It is therefore important to understand intermediality as a relationship among various media, in which social, technological and economic dimensions have real effects.

Raymond Williams's well-known concept of 'cultural form' can be useful here. Williams (1975: 10) analyses media technologies, especially television, as particular cultural technologies whose institutions, forms and effects are constituted historically in relation to society and to the uses of

these technologies. Even though the convergence theory suggests that digitalization and the Internet break down the differences between particular cultural forms, it is evident that different media still have different institutionalized forms and traditions, more or less. Contemporary political communication consists of the network of these forms rather than of some converged media culture, where all media boundaries collapse or where there is no difference between professional and grassroots content production. According to Jenkins (2008: 222), contemporary political culture is divided into two media 'systems': that of the common culture run by the traditional mainstream media and that of the grassroots Web culture, which is more local and responds to common culture, even if these 'systems' are more and more closely linked.

I will thus define intermediality as an approach that examines the relationships between various media in a particular historical context. These relationships include economic, social and cultural forms of various media technologies. Intermediality thus offers a different kind of approach for analysing social and cultural impacts and the consequences of the technological developments in the media than does the concept of convergence, for example. The concept of intermediality pays more attention to the continuity of media forms and to the articulation and re-articulation of the media through the change of social and cultural contexts. Intermediality emphasises the analysis of continuity and the change in the media as intermedial relationships. As an empirical method, it stresses intermedial relationships between the media in particular historical contexts. Thus intermediality alerts us to the historical conjunction of media technology, economy, society and culture (see Lehtonen, 2000: 13).

A good example of intermediality has been the historical conjunction between entertainment television and the tabloid press in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. As the most popular medium of the era, television has set the agendas and established cultural forms for a

tabloid press that has tried to sell its product by using the exchange value of popular television (Herkman, 2010a). However, digitalization and the fragmentation of television as well as the spread of the Internet have downsized the status of television in the last few years to the point that the intermedial relationship between television and the press is also challenged. The changes in the status of different media may also have devastating effects on political communication, which in many countries has been dominated by television and newspapers, but which today is increasingly reshaped by new communication networks. Yet these changes do not mean a sudden or total transition to a convergence culture. Intermediality pays therefore attention to the specific historical context in which political communication is realised, not just to the utopian potential of communication technology.

Research in political communication is usually focused on specific media forms, such as political news in the serious press and television. More entertaining genres and media forms are too often left out of such analysis, even though they have generated increasing interest among political communication scholars in the early twenty-first century (e.g. Corner and Pels, 2003; van Zoonen, 2005). Intermediality focuses on the whole palette of political communication without resorting to homogenising it in a way that traditional political communication studies or the term convergence tend to do.

### **(Inter)mediatization of politics**

Since the 1990s, there has been a great deal of discussion about the so-called mediatization of politics (e.g. Asp, 1990; Mancini and Swanson, 1994; Scammel, 1995; Mazzoleni and Schulz, 1999). The mediatization of politics has involved at least three factors in the relationship between media and politics: the increased significance of media publicity for politics, the increased

professionalism of political communication and the increased personalisation of politics. According to the mediatization theory, these changes have forced political agencies to rethink their actions through the media insofar as the logic of today's politics is determined by the so-called 'media logic', which has also increased the significance of professionalism in communication.

However, there is no simple truth about the different forms of mediatization (Kunelius et al., 2009: 48–75). It is possible, for example, that the mediatization thesis is too often taken as a matter-of-course, whereas political institutions are not at all as mediatized as they are assumed to be.

Paradoxically, political decision-making processes may become more hidden with the increasing number of political media performances and scandals (Herkman, 2009: 86). Thus, there are several levels in mediatization, and it is an open question as to which serve as the key elements (see Strömbäck, 2008). Yet what is clear is that almost all citizens depend on media content for information about politics and politicians, both during elections and at other times. And since the 1960s, opinion polls published by the media have been a central feature of western political communication. Thus there is no question, but that today, most voter decisions are made on the basis of media content.

Mediatization has taken place at the same time as political agencies, such as political parties, have assigned their power to market forces, political ideologies have converged on multiparty systems and voter volatility and political cynicism have increased. Bernard Manin (1997: 218-237) has described these changes as a transition from 'party democracy to audience democracy', whereby the ideological differences between parties have become obscure, and parties and politicians have turned into agents whose decisions are often based more on pragmatism than on ideology. Such technocratic and bureaucratic politicians are known and judged by their media performances. In

‘audience democracy’ the significance of the party has diminished, while the significance of the individual politician and his or her persona has increased.

It is clear that focusing on the candidate as a public figure emphasises the variations in media publicity, since different genres and media forms construct different kinds of publicity. This is true especially in Finnish presidential elections campaigns because votes are given directly to individual candidates who compete against each other. Even if in the ‘postmodern public sphere’ the differences between high and low or serious and entertaining have diminished (e.g. Hartley, 1996: 155–157) and increasingly there is a ‘middlebrow’ culture between (Gripsrud, 2000: 291), it is still easy to distinguish serious election discussions, for example, from entertainment shows in television programming. These different genres also stress different dimensions of the candidates’ personae and have distinct ‘functions’ in campaigns and election publicity (Herkman, 2008a: 11).

The Finnish media system has also changed towards more commercial and tabloidized form. Even though Finland can be called as one of the ‘democratic-corporatist’ countries, as Daniel C. Hallin and Paolo Mancini (2004) have put it in their prominent comparison of European and North-American media systems, similarly than in many other West European countries, the relative status of public service broadcasting has diminished, political press declined and commercial entertainment media strengthened its market share in Finland since the late 1980s. The structural transformation of the Finnish media system has meant a transition from partisan to commercial media and the increased de-regulation and re-regulation of media markets, changes that can be described as the overall marketization of the Finnish media (Herkman, 2009). As a result politicians and campaign teams as well as their ‘audiences’ (i.e. voters) are today more aware of the various roles and the status of different media in political campaigns. This highlights the significance of intermediality in political communication.

## Intermediality and political campaigns

Thematic interviews conducted after the Finnish presidential elections in 2006 demonstrated that the campaign staff was highly aware of the intermedial dimensions of the campaign. Immediately after the elections I discussed the role of various media forms and genres in the 2006 election campaigns with fourteen interviewees. They included three candidates (from a total of eight), five campaign managers and six media personnel from the key media corporations and productions during the campaign. As a whole, the interviewees' perspective on the intermedial relationships between different media was amazingly consistent. For that reason the role of the various media in the campaigns as represented in the thematic interviews can be summarised as follows (see table 1):

**Table 1.** The role of various media in the elections campaigns

Media	Role in campaigns	Public focus on	Characterisation
<i>Television</i>	Visibility, being well-known	Personae	"Show business"
<i>Radio</i>	Wisdom, opinion	Personae, affairs	"Substantive"
<i>Press</i>	Backgrounds, opinion	Affairs, personae	"Conservative"
<i>Internet</i>	Interaction, opinion	Personal affairs, feelings	"Communicative"

The interviewees in general, and especially those who worked in television, stressed that television is a medium for show business: it accentuates a candidate's external features, favours short statements – 'one-liners' – and requires immediate reaction. Therefore, television performances promote certain types of politicians. Radio, by contrast, enables more profound discussions and longer statements and does not highlight the external features of a candidate. The power of television is its high publicity value. One interviewee even called society today a 'television society', even though he admits to the increasing significance of the Internet. Yet one interviewee predicted that 'television will certainly roll on in the next decade of political communication', even if multimedia platforms will increase in popularity.

However, the interviewees also stressed the meaning of the genre or platform at least as much as the significance of the media themselves. The Internet as a medium, for example, was inherently linked to direct interaction between candidates and voters, but the forms of interaction were seen completely differently in the case of candidates' blogs, party web-pages, candidate selectors, media company web-pages or debates in social media forums. The official web-pages of parties, campaigns and media companies were seen as continuations of more traditional forms of election publicity and political marketing, whereas candidate selectors, blogs and discussion forums were thought to realise the idea of interactivity and voter participation.

The content analysis of press publicity also supported the differences between genres and media forms. In order to compare different forms and genres to each other the data included material from serious and popular newspapers, periodicals and magazines. It became clear that the sample journals covered the elections strictly within the framework of their audience segments and did not seriously try to cross the media boundaries (Herkman, 2010b: 15-17). There seemed to be a kind of mutual understanding among the various media about their roles in political publicity and the media sphere in general, and this understanding was determined by the commercial logic of audience segmentation. Corporate intermediality was defined by media markets, whereby media companies try to find cross-media synergies and simultaneously differentiate various media from each other (cf. Croteau and Hoynes, 2001: 116-120). Thus, media companies are keen to construct differentiated media identities or brands for purposes of marketing, even if at the corporate level they rely on organisational and technological convergence (Fetveit, 2007: 65).

The interviewees saw candidate blogs as *the* phenomenon of the 2006 elections. Blogs were taken up in Finnish campaigns in the wake of the US presidential elections of 2004, where they proved to be a fresh way of creating communicative interaction between campaigns and voters (Trammell,

2006). Blogs seemed to fit especially well in presidential elections in which only a few candidates compete with each other. In the 2007 parliamentary elections, for example, blogs were even more common, but they were buried by the large number of candidates.

However, interviewees' impressions of the blogs in the 2006 elections may have been coloured by their perceptions of the Internet and the use of blogs in the US elections as well as by their own commitment to campaigns. In reality only four of the eight candidates launched blogs, and only a very limited number of voters read them (see Carlson, 2007). The real effect of the blogs was more in the attention they awakened in traditional news media. Thus, the most important aspect of the blogs was that they served the candidates as a forum for setting agendas without 'journalistic filtering' (ibid.: 62), but their effectiveness was still connected to their intermedial relationship or 'remediation' to more traditional political journalism (cf. Bolter and Grusin, 2000).

Even though an empirical analysis of candidate blogs has shown that their contents were focused mostly on the campaigns and political questions (Carlson, 2007: 68–69), the impression of the interviewees was that the blogs consisted more of the candidates' personal statements and experiences. The interviewees saw blogs particularly as an intimate 'forum between the candidate and the voter'. Blogs as a forum for 'person politics' has been a commonly held view in political communication research and arose in the course of the 2006 elections by the fact that the candidates really wrote the blogs themselves, unlike in the candidates of the US elections 2004 (ibid.: 63, 72). However, in reality candidate blogs did not amplify the dialogue between candidates and voters, mainly because the blogs lacked this kind of interactive quality.

According to some interviewees, the most important effect of new network communication technologies was in the work of campaign, not in their roles as forms of publicity: the Internet and



mobile devices enabled online communication between candidates and campaign staff and thus intensified the 'team-spirit'. This, in turn, created an inspired atmosphere, which enabled constant comparison between the self-image of the campaign team and media representations.

According to the theme interviews, intermediality was recognised in campaign teams, but fixed schedules and old habits pushed the media strategies towards traditional forms of political communication. Especially the programming schedules of the most well-established television channels significantly defined the schedules of campaign teams. Politicians themselves seemed to be conservative rather than innovative in their views of the various media. A large-scale survey of the Finnish establishment supports this result: politicians and executives followed and appreciated the most traditional and prestigious media, such as the leading newspaper of a country and the largest national television channels (Kunelius et al., 2009: 266-269). Blogs were taken up in the 2006 campaigns more as trendy aftermaths of international (American) experiences than as forums for genuine dialogue with voters. Election debates televised on the main national channels were judged to be the most important forms of publicity, while the significance of political advertising and news were also highly rated. Intermediality as the systematic strategic foundation of political campaigns was understood quite traditionally, and the idea of a convergence culture was not fully realised in the campaign perspectives.

### **Intermediality and voting behaviour**

Right after the first and second rounds of the 2006 presidential elections, TNS Gallup Finland carried out surveys of 1,049 voters (Moring and Gallup Finland, 2006). The sample was a demographic representation of Finnish voters. According to the survey, television was still the most important medium in the 2006 elections; traditional and serious forms of publicity – news and

television discussions – were thought by all age groups to be the most important sources of information during the elections and campaigns. However, there seemed to be a clear divide between voter generations and their relationship to sources of information: whereas television was popular among all age groups, newspapers and radio were emphasised especially by older voters, while the Internet was emphasised by younger voters. Younger age groups were also proportionally more interested in entertainment genres than were older people.

A similar divide between generations can be found in the motives behind voting decisions. The older voters were in general more ‘critical’ and rationalised their voting decisions with traditional political arguments about foreign and domestic politics as well as by a candidate’s party connections. Younger voters put proportionally more emphasis on a candidate’s characteristics and his or her ability to win the elections. However, an equally important motif in all age groups was the candidate’s characteristics, which more than half of all voters considered important.

At least two conclusions can be drawn from by the survey responses. First, the survey results support the general view that the traditional political media genres and forms still dominate election campaigning. However, the results also suggest that this view might be problematic from the perspective of voter generations. Younger voters showed so much interest in network communication and in non-traditional forms of election publicity that the role of these media forms in the intermedial whole of political communication should be seriously reconsidered.

Second, it is evident that the different forms of publicity and a variety of media were important factors in creating a pluralistic and diverse public sphere in the elections, but older voter groups seemed to stress especially the intermedial relationships among television, newspapers and radio, whereas younger voter groups were more interested in the connections between television and the

Internet. All voters linked the media-inspired information to the peer group discussions and made their decisions on the basis of both serious political arguments and the personal characteristics of the candidates.

An analysis of the voter survey suggests that voters were actually not very aware of the intermedial dimensions of the campaigns, and their experience with political media publicity was constructed unconsciously rather than analytically. However, younger voters seem to take more naturally to the new channels of political communication such as social media, interactive Internet applications as well as entertainment genres. Whereas older voters take traditional politics more seriously and also rely on traditional political media, younger voters are more critical of the traditional political media and more interested in various intermedial forms of political communication. It can therefore be claimed that voters' increasing awareness of intermediality correlates with their growing disagreement with traditional forms of politics, and vice versa.

## **Conclusions**

Empirical analysis of Finnish political culture in the election campaigns of 2006–2008 supports some aspects of convergence, but it also demonstrates that no overall shift to converged media system or neither to a convergence culture in political communication had occurred. Even if Finland has been one of the leading countries in the development of an information society, with the exception of blogs, the so-called social media did not yet have an important role in the 2006 campaigns and elections. The social media increased their significance in the 2007 parliamentary elections and in the 2008 local elections, but it was not until the US presidential elections in 2008 and Barack Obama's campaign that the possibilities for the social media in political communication became evident internationally (cf. Kaid, 2009; McKinney and Rill, 2009; Spaeth, 2009). As a

result, the social media were more inherently included in Finnish campaign strategies in the 2011 parliamentary elections, in which the national populist party (True Finns) succeeded extremely well and became the third largest party of the Finnish parliament. It has been claimed that one reason for their success was the spread of immigration critical communities and discussion groups in the social media, even though there is not yet academic research on the causality between these groups and elections results.

However, the traditions and institutions in local political cultures and media systems prevent the total 'Americanization' of political communication, which is always customised for a particular context (Isotalus, 2001: 11-13; Nord, 2007: 91-92). There is still, for example, a clear difference between the West European and the US campaign organisations; the former rely more on traditional party organisations, whereas the latter rely on a looser network of political consultants and other communication professionals (Farrell et al., 2010: 23-26). The regulation of campaign financing and political communication may also set limits on the professionalization of political communication in some European countries. For example, political television marketing is even today prohibited in Sweden (Nord, 2007: 84). In Finland political television advertisements and candidate performances in entertainment shows during the campaigns have been permitted since the early 1990s, which has made these cultural forms so familiar to Finnish voters that there was no longer even any reliance on their significance in the 2006 elections (Herkman, 2008b: 94). Instead, the first ever televised live debate between the leaders of the main parties was aired during the general election of 2010 in the United Kingdom, which highlighted this debate in public discussions. In Finland the public debate on unclear campaign funding and connections between financiers and politicians was raised in 2008 and led to national political crisis and to renewal of the election legislation. These kinds of contextual elements are fundamental determinants of political communication, and they also direct intermedial relationships in a particular way.

It is possible that the convergence culture has had a more fundamental influence on political communication in the US than in the European context, which would at least partly explain the disparity between Jenkins' utopianism and the North European criticism of convergence (cf. Charles, 2009). Barack Obama's success, for example, has been explained by his rhetoric which enables more interactive and communicative politics than pure audience democratic practices (Bang, 2009), but Obama has also been thought to demonstrate late-modern 'liquid celebrity' (Redmond, 2010), a more typical trait of audience democracy than of convergence culture. One has to keep in mind that social media and so-called convergence culture create also very feasible forums for 'negative' or devastating political endeavours such as racism, xenophobia, sexism, national and religious fundamentalism, even fascism, among others. Convergence culture as such does not guarantee more dialogical or democratic political communication.

The lesson learned from analysing the intermediality of the 2006 Finnish elections is that television continues unabated even if its self-evident status as the medium of elections has eroded. In Finland – as in many other multi-party democracies – the majority of the votes are still based on parties and traditional political ideologies. Newspapers and television news and debates are the most important sources of political information for most voters. Candidate performances in these media forms are essential to the election results. Manin's (1997) idea of 'audience democracy' is therefore explicitly manifested in contemporary political campaigns. However, increasing voter volatility and passivity suggest that it is perhaps not the loyal voters, but those unreliable or 'sleeping' citizens who may be the audience more interested in new communication technologies, social media and entertainment genres. In this respect there is an increasingly large group of people living in a convergence culture, as Jenkins (2008) suggests. The 2011 parliamentary elections in Finland demonstrated that this group might also have significant impact on election results, even though there is no clear evidence

about the causality between elections and political activity in social media. The success of populist parties in many European countries can also be explained as a part of audience democratic performances rather than as a result of convergence culture.

Nevertheless, in many democracies there seems to be a divide between voter and media generations – a divide that also implies a legitimacy crisis both in the political system itself and in the political public sphere determined by traditional media. The global economic crisis and the national scandal of Finnish party and campaign financing furthermore deepened this crisis since the year 2008 in Finland. The emphasis placed by younger as well as many volatile voters on interactive network communications and on personal characteristics of candidates instead of on party ideologies indicates that the authoritative forms of political journalism and communication do not satisfy those who want more dialogical forms of communication.

The problem is that parties and traditional media respond to the legitimacy crisis by defending their authority in the face of voter participation. The web-blogs in the 2006 presidential elections in Finland, for example, – unlike in the US elections – concentrated on candidates' own statements with no interactive dialogue with their readers (Carlson, 2007: 72). In using this approach candidates sought new, alternative forms of communication to avoid journalistic control in the political agenda setting, and, vice versa, journalists tried to control the media publicity at the cost of the politicians in order to underpin the status of journalism as the 'watchdog of democracy'. The result was authoritative political performances by both politicians and journalists, but no genuine dialogue between them and citizens. A convergence culture with emphasis on bottom-up, consumer-driven practices had not really flourished in Finnish politics, even though communication technology made this quite possible. In Finland – and in many other countries – the traditions of political and civic cultures have not encouraged these kinds of participatory practices.

I agree with Jenkins that one should seriously re-think the role of new communication technologies as a part of political communication. This is especially important because the legitimacy of the political system has been low and voter passivity high among the younger generations, who in many western democracies constantly emphasise more digital network communications at the cost of traditional news media (e.g. Vahlberg et al., 2008). The younger generations are used to dialogical and interactive forms of network communication, which obviously collide with authoritative traditions of political journalism and promotion culture, as Jenkins' term 'convergence culture' suggests. If we really yearn for a way out of the legitimacy crisis of contemporary political systems, then we have to understand politics once again as attending to ordinary affairs instead of just struggling for political power in an 'audience democracy', in which citizens' participatory roles are confined to voting for the smoothest candidate performances. This would actually challenge the very fundamentals of contemporary representative government. However, I am not sure if YouTube parodies and Facebook groups really have the potential to break down this vicious circle. As long as the convergence culture is concentrated merely on popular cultural practices and private communications, it is just a given part of political campaigning practices and does not really challenge the performances of 'audience democracy'.

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