

“It’s a Man’s World”?

Male and Female Election Campaigning on the Internet

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Introduction

In election campaigns, candidates rely on both “free media”, i.e., news coverage of their campaigns, and “paid media”, i.e., various forms of political advertising. A central advantage of paid media to candidates is that they have complete control over the messages conveyed to the voters. Thus, the controlled messages can be communicated to the voters without journalistic intervention. In the US, scholars have argued that this is an especially important benefit for female candidates (e.g. Johnston & White, 1994; Kahn, 1996). There are two reasons to this. First, in the news coverage – the free media – female candidates tend to be treated disadvantageously. Studies have shown that the women candidates receive less coverage than their male counterparts and that disfavoring sex role stereotypes are mirrored in the media presentations of the female candidates (e.g. Braden, 1996; Devitt, 2002; Kahn, 1993, 1996; Kahn & Goldenberg, 1991). Second, largely as a consequence of the media coverage, also voters tend to see women politicians – in particular their personal traits and competence on various issues – through the lens of gender stereotypes (e.g. Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993; Iyengar et al., 1997; Kahn, 1994, 1996).

Against this background it becomes crucial for female candidates to control the presentation of their issue concerns and the depiction of their candidate image. Up till now, women candidates have in this respect depended considerably on televised political advertising (e.g. Bystrom & Miller, 1999; Johnson & White, 1994; Kahn, 1996; Kahn & Gordon, 1997; Kern & Edley, 1994). Today, campaign web sites can be added to the candidates’ arsenal of paid media. Like televised spot ads, the candidates have complete control over the message content and form of their campaign sites. In comparison, though, web sites are more affordable than televised advertising. There is, in addition, another feature of Internet campaigning that makes it especially appealing for female candidates. As pointed out by Klotz and Broome (1998: 73–74), two characteristics of web campaigning can increase the likelihood of discussion of “women’s issues”, i.e., issues with a manifest relevance to women. Such issues are usually underreported in the news coverage during the campaign. First, unlike in spot ads, there are no length restrictions to the issue presentations on web sites. Second, the likely viewers of candidate sites may differ from the audience of televised advertising. Whereas the spot ad public is usually accidentally exposed to the advertising messages, the web audience has by itself chosen to visit the campaign

site. More often than not, these visitors are inclined to support the candidate in question. Thus, to a certain extent, female candidates can promote specific women's issue concerns on their web sites without risking pushing away voters.

Since the mid-1990s, the use of web sites as a campaign tool has been steadily increasing (D'Alessio, 2000; Greer & LaPointe, 2001). As well, in the US and elsewhere, there is a growing literature on candidates' web campaigning. However, as to gender aspects of on-line campaigning, the knowledge is unexpectedly restricted. Published studies that exclusively and systematically compare male and female web campaigning do not abound. There are, nevertheless, a couple of studies that focuses on specific gender aspects related to the Internet as a medium in election campaigns (Banwart & Kaid, 2002; Klotz & Broome, 1998). Moreover, a few analyses of candidates' web sites pay, in passing, some attention to gender matters (Greer & LaPointe, 2001; Klotz, 1998; Williams, Aylesworth, & Chapman, 2002). All these studies, which will be summarized below, focus on US campaigns. In sum, then, there is not only an obvious need to expand the research on the role of gender in Internet campaigning; there is also a need to expand this research beyond the US context.

Geographically, this paper focuses on the Nordic countries. In addressing questions about gender and web campaigning, two circumstances make this region interesting. First, in Scandinavia, the basic prerequisite for Internet campaigning is clearly fulfilled since the region is the most "wired" area in Europe (e.g. Norris, 2000). Second, the Nordic countries have, since long, the world lead in women's representation in the national parliaments. In May 2003, women accounted for 39.7 percent of all MPs in the Nordic countries.¹ Among the Nordic countries, Finland stands out as a particularly interesting case since the Finnish electoral system, in contrast to the other Nordic countries, strongly stresses the individual candidates (e.g. Farrell, 1996). The Finnish system, using proportional representation in multimember districts, is based on the voters' direct choice of individual candidates. This results in candidate-driven campaigning. Moreover, the proportion of female candidates is relatively high. In the recent 2003 parliamentary elections, 39.8 percent of the 2,029 candidates were female.² In sum, in Finland, the candidate-centered election system

¹ Source: the on-line database of the *International Parliamentary Organization*: www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm

² Source: *Statistics Finland's* elections statistics, on-line (in English): www.tilastokeskus.fi/tk/he/vaalit/vaalit2003/index_en.html

and the high level of Internet users should make the Internet an interesting device for the numerous female candidates in parliamentary election campaigns.

This paper will, therefore, empirically explore the role of gender in Finnish web campaigning in light of the recent 2003 parliamentary elections. The paper addresses three basic questions. First, is there a “digital gender gap” in candidate web campaigning? Are male candidates more likely than female ones to campaign on-line? Second, do male and female candidates differ in terms of how they take advantage of the new communication technology in their web campaigns? Third, as to the content of the sites, do male and female candidates differ in the way they profile their candidacies in terms of issue concerns and candidate images? Next, before turning to the empirical analysis, each of these questions will be fleshed out by relating them to earlier research and findings.

The digital gender gap – reflected in candidate campaigning?

On a general level, research has examined whether there are differences in men’s and women’s use of the Internet. In the US, the initial gender gap observed in Internet access has been reduced over time. For example, Ono and Zavodny, examining the period 1997–2001, reports that the gender gap in being on-line disappeared by 2000 (Ono & Zavodny, 2003; see also Bimber, 2000). In Europe, the *Flash Eurobarometer* regularly scans the Internet public in the European Union (EU). In Table 1, men’s and women’s access and use of the Internet, in the EU as a whole and in the member state Finland separately, is compared using Eurobarometer data.

Table 1. Men’s and women’s Internet access and use in the fifteen EU countries and in Finland alone, May-June, 2002 (EU: $N = 30,335$; Finland: $N = 2,000$).

	EU-15		Finland	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Share (%) having Internet access from own household	46	36	55	47
Share (%) being on-line every day or nearly	48	36	56	43

Sources: Flash Eurobarometer 135 (European Commission, 2002; European Commission/ZES/FSD, 2002–2003).

Table 1 shows that a gender gap can still be observed in the EU as well as in Finland. In particular, the daily Internet users are more frequently male than female. Is this gender gap in Internet use mirrored in the world of web campaigning as well? Surprisingly, there is no earlier research touching upon this question. However, as pointed out by Herrnson and Stokes (2003), it can be expected that candidates in general consider information about voter group characteristics as to Internet access and use when determining whether to opt for web campaigning. Hence, if the women candidates especially target the female voters, the observed Finnish gender gap in the Internet public should be reflected in the Finnish candidates' on-line presence during the campaign.

Exploiting the Internet – a male advantage?

It is usually claimed that the Internet as a communication technology is predominantly a masculine domain. According to van Zoonen (2002), such a view has been supported by the fact that the vast majority of actors in design and production are male and that the communicative practices are masculine. The Internet, rooted in the military-industrial complex, is regarded a “gendered” technology embodying male values and codes. Moreover, referring to sex differences in aptitude or skill, it has been claimed that males, generally, tend to be more interested in computer technology than females and also more comfortable with Internet technology.³

On the other hand, van Zoonen (2002), reviewing the theoretical discussion on gender and the Internet, points out that feminist scholars have declared the Internet a “woman’s medium”. This view emphasizes the communicative, consensual and community-building aspects of the Web. Inter alia, it has been noted that the Internet’s interactive capacity and ability to build on-line community is particularly relevant for individual and collective networking of women. Furthermore, van Zoonen notes, marketing studies indicates that women are more interested than men in the communicative and interactive features of the Web, i.e., e-mail, chat groups and discussion forums.

Are there, then, gender differences regarding the ways that male and female candidates exploit this communication technology in campaigning? Using the

³ Bimber (2000: 870–871) sums up the literature on the “gendered” view of the Internet, as well as the reasoning based on sex differences in skills and aptitude.

terminology of Gibson and Ward (2000): do male and female candidates differ in terms of what they do on-line (i.e., *functions* of the sites) and how well and effectively they are doing it (i.e., the *delivery* of the sites and their functions)? Are, for instance, the male campaign sites more technologically advanced than the female ones? Conversely, do female candidates, more than male candidates, utilize the communicative and interactive features of the web on their campaign sites? Hitherto, research has paid little attention to such questions. However, Greer and LaPointe, analyzing campaign sites for US senatorial and gubernatorial candidates in 1998 and 2000, did not find any significant gender differences as to the level of information, graphical elements and interactivity on the sites (Greer & LaPointe, 2001: 21–22). Male and female candidates thus utilized these features to a similar degree. Of course, one can suppose, the functions and the delivery of websites is predominantly created and managed by skilled web managers employed by the candidates. At the end of the day, though, it is the candidate that authorizes the web manager's decisions and the created sites.

Profiling the candidate on-line – running “as women”?

In previous research in the US, it has been stressed that female candidates in particular must consider voters' gender stereotypical perceptions of their candidacies when choosing campaign strategies (e.g. Kahn, 1996). These stereotypes relate to the candidates' personal traits as well as to their issue concerns (see e.g. Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993; Iyengar et al., 1997; Kahn, 1994; Kahn, 1996). Concerning personal traits, voters tend to expect that female politicians are more compassionate, sensitive, understanding, and honest than male politicians. In contrast, female politicians are perceived as possessing less competence, toughness, knowledge, and leadership abilities than male politicians. Moreover, voters also tend to expect that male and female politicians have different areas of issue expertise. Female politicians are thus seen as more competent than male politicians when it comes to dealing with “soft”, “compassionate” issues (education, child care, the environment, poverty etc). Then again, they are considered less competent than men on “hard” issues (economy, taxation, foreign trade, foreign policy, defense etc).

In this situation, female candidates have two strategies at hand: they can either try to dispel the voters' gender stereotypes, or exploit them (Kahn, 1993, 1996). It is,

though, often argued that the main challenge for female candidates is to dispel gender stereotypical perceptions of female politicians. Hence, women candidates are advised to stress “male” traits instead of “soft” compassionate qualities in their political advertising (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993: 142; Kahn, 1996: 136). Moreover, they are recommended to emphasize issues and policy concerns over personal characteristics and, in addition, to emphasize “hard” (“male”) issues in the messages (Kahn, 1993). However, if “soft” issues dominate the election campaign agenda, female candidates can exploit the gender stereotypes by stressing “female” issues (Kahn, 1996: 135–136). Recently, Herrnson, Lay and Stokes (2003), using US survey data, have shown that female candidates can, in fact, gain a strategic advantage when they run “as women”, i.e. stressing “female” issues and targeting female voters.

It can be argued that female candidates in choosing between such strategies must take into consideration the different types of campaign media. Televised spot ads are broadcasted to a large public that is usually accidentally exposed to the messages. What is more, this broad public may be indifferent or skeptical about the candidate in question. Consequently, in female campaigning, the dispel strategy may be brought to the fore in televised advertising. Web campaigning, on the other hand, may be a different story. As was pointed out earlier, by referring to Klotz and Broome (1998), the likely visitors of candidate sites may differ from the audience of candidate spot ads. In this case, the candidates’ need to persuade skeptical voters diminishes, since the web sites usually attract a more attentive and open-minded public that is, to a large extent, inclined to support the candidate in question. Arguably, then, female candidates might run “as women”; on their campaign sites; on-line they do not predominantly need to dispel public gender stereotypical perceptions of their candidacies.

The previous research is sparse also on this topic. Klotz and Broome (1998), analyzing web pages of the major-party candidates for the US Senate in 1996, indeed found that “Internet campaigning represents a modest enhancement of the discussion of women issues”. Further, they found a “somewhat greater presence of women’s issues on the Internet than in television commercials”. Banwart and Kaid (2002) compared male and female candidates’ self presentations across two media channels, televised advertisements and web sites, in the 2000 general election cycle in the US. On basis of their analysis, the authors concluded that the “differences are more likely to be based on medium constraints – or allowances – rather than gendered

differences”. Concerning the types of issues discussed, they found that both male and female candidates were more likely to discuss both “masculine” and “feminine” issues on their web sites than in their spot ads. What is more, they emphasized “feminine” issues more than “masculine” in both mediums.

However, when it comes to expressing traits, Banwart and Kaid (2002) found that both male and female candidates were most likely to emphasize “masculine” traits overall in both mediums. Still, the female candidates did, in addition, also accentuate “feminine” traits, especially on their web sites. Thus, the authors argue, in campaigning on the web, the women candidates feel a greater security to stress “feminine” traits. Similarly, female candidates were more likely to include visual images of their families – a way to soften up the candidate image – in their web sites than in their spot ads. However, also the male candidates exposed their families visually on the web, even in a higher degree than their female counterparts. Williams, Aylesworth and Chapman (2002) report a similar finding. A final research finding that is of interest in this context concerns negative campaigning, which projects a tough, “male” image. Banwart and Kaid’s analysis (2002) shows that negative attacks are present on male and female candidates’ web sites in a similar degree. Similar findings are reported, in passing, by Klotz (1998: 355) and Greer and LaPointe (2001: 26).

In sum, the sparse previous research in the US presents a somewhat blurred picture of the role of gender in web campaigning; there are gender differences as well as similarities. In addition, there are signs of dispel strategies as well as exploit strategies in the female web campaigning efforts. What, then, can be expected in the Finnish context? In a study of Finnish male and female candidates televised advertising (Carlson, 2000, 2001b), it was theoretically argued that the level of gender stereotyping by the voters should be lower in Finland than in the US due to the high representation of women in Finnish politics.⁴ Hence, it was hypothesized that the Finnish female candidates, even if they were expected to partially employ a dispel-strategy, would have a greater freedom of choice in devising the content and styles of their commercials, thus adopting an own distinct style of campaigning. However, the findings showed that the Finnish female candidates’ communication strategies

⁴ Unfortunately, there is not much Nordic research on gender stereotyping of women politicians by the voters and the media. A small number of isolated case studies, however, suggest that the increased representation of women in politics in the Nordic countries has not lead to a gender-neutral view of female politicians (e.g. Matland, 1994).

resembled those of the male candidates: “male” issues and traits, stereotypically attributed to male politicians, were emphasized over “female” ones. Thus, it was concluded that female candidates, as well as male ones, attempt to live up to the dominant norms of politics and conform to a role model of politicians and to a style of campaigning established in an era clearly dominated by male politicians. Whether this holds true also concerning the special case of web campaigning must remain a question open for the following empirical investigation.

Data and methods

The data of the empirical analysis derives from the Finnish parliamentary election in March 2003. In the election campaign, 2,029 candidates ran for office. In order to analyze the research question about the on-line presence of the male and female candidates, web sites of the candidates were accessed two weeks before Election Day.⁵ Primarily, candidate listings published on the parties’ web sites were used in finding the sites. In addition, search engines on the Internet (*google.com* and *altavista.com*) were utilized to complete the survey of the candidates’ on-line presence. In all, 883 candidate sites were found, copied and stored. With the purpose of comparing the characteristics of the web candidates with the characteristics of the candidates that did not go on-line, publicly available data on the census of candidates was gathered.

The two remaining research questions, dealing with site content and form, required an analysis design that made it possible to systematically compare male and female candidates’ web sites. Since the aim was to examine the independent effect of candidates’ gender on their site content and form, there was a need to eliminate the effects of other significant factors than gender, for instance the candidates’ age. Albeit the need to control for other explanatory variables than gender is extremely important in analyzing the impact of gender on web campaigning, it has often been neglected in previous studies, inter alia in Banwart and Kaid’s analysis (2002). In this paper, however, a matched-pairs design (or case-control design) is utilized. The matched-pairs design, usually used in medical research, aims to match subjects on the variables

⁵ The collection of sites and data about the on-line candidates and their sites was done as part of a research project on the Finnish 2003 on-line campaign. Thanks to doctoral student Kim Strandberg for managing this project and coding the largest part of the material. Thanks also to the graduate students that participated in the coding process.

which might have an effect on the dependent variable, except for the independent variable. Put simply: in this study, female candidates having a web site were paired with male on-line candidates who were identical to them as to certain explanatory variables. Theoretically, it was considered necessary to eliminate the possible effects of six explanatory variables: the candidates' party affiliation, constituency, age, socio-economic status, education, and status (challenger or incumbent).⁶ As a result of the matching process, 74 female candidates were paired with 74 male candidates who were identical to them as to party affiliation, constituency, age, socio-economic status, education, and status. These 74 pairs were used in pair-wise analyses answering the second and third research question.

The second research question, dealing with how male and female candidates use their web sites as campaign tools, was examined by means of a quantitative content analysis of the candidates' web sites. This analysis utilized a methodology proposed by Gibson and Ward (2000) for studying party and candidate web sites. They make a distinction between the *functions* of the sites (what the candidates do on-line) and the *delivery* of the sites (how effectively the candidates are doing it). In analyzing this matter, the coding scheme developed by Gibson and Ward (2000, 2002) was adapted and used. The adapted scheme categorized commonly found features of the sites into index scales measuring functions and delivery aspects. Five functions indexes were included here: information provision, campaigning, resource generation, networking, and promoting participation. In addition, five delivery indexes were distinguished: presentation/appearance, accessibility, navigability, freshness, and visibility. These indexes are explained in Appendix A.

Also the third research question, dealing with how male and female candidates profile the candidacies in terms of issue concerns and candidate images, was scrutinized by a quantitative content analysis. This analysis focused on five matters. First, it was analyzed whether the *focus* of the sites was on issues or candidate image. As in Greer and LaPointe's study (2001), this focus was measured on a seven-point scale in which one equals "all image" and seven "all issue" with a neutral midpoint at four. Second, the *issue concerns* of the candidates were registered. Here, an issue dichotomization, based on gender stereotypical assumptions as to male and female

⁶ The variable "age" was categorized in age groups of 18–29, 30–39, 40–49, 50–59, 60–64 and 65–. The variable "education" was dichotomized: no university degree or university degree. The variable "socio-economic status" was categorized in six classes: pensioners, students, workers/lower service professionals, higher "white collar" professionals, entrepreneurs/farmers.

areas of issue competence in politics, was used. As in previous studies of male and female candidates' advertising, the analysis distinguished between "male" and "female" issues (see, e.g., Carlson, 2001b; Kahn, 1993, 1996; Kaid & Banwart, 2002). These categories are presented in Appendix B. Third, in the same way, expressed *candidate traits* in the sites were coded as either "male" or "female". Again, this dichotomization is based on previous research on gender stereotyping of candidates (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993; Iyengar et al., 1997; Kahn, 1994, 1996) and has been used in previous content analyses (e.g. Carlson, 2001b; Kahn, 1993, 1996). This traits dichotomy is presented in Appendix B, too.

These three variables – focus, issue concerns and trait emphasis – were measured only for the home page of the candidate sites (cf. Greer & LaPointe, 2001; Williams, Aylesworth, & Chapman, 2002). Like the front page of a newspaper, the home page usually gives short overviews of the most important features. Depending on the content on the home page, the site visitor decides whether to look at the rest of what is offered on the site. Thus, the overall focus, the central issue concerns and trait characteristics of the candidates should, arguably, be communicated on the home page. Moreover, when the aim was to code the number of issues and traits presented, it made sense to analyze the home page only; hereby it was possible to control for the considerable variation of site sizes (cf. Ha, 2003).

The fourth and fifth analyzed aspects, finally, concern two other ways to project the candidate character: on the one hand, the visual exposure of the candidates' family that softens up the candidate image; on the other hand, the use of negative attacks, a strategy that projects a tough, "male" image. Here, in searching merely for the absence/presence of these two features, the entire candidate site was scanned.⁷

Findings

The candidates' on-line presence

The analysis of the on-line presence of the candidates in the 2003 election campaign clearly shows that web campaigning was not a predominantly male concern. Quite the

⁷ In addition, in the Finnish campaigning context, depicting the candidates' family is not an obvious home page feature. The same goes for negative attacks, since Finnish election campaigning is – at least on the surface – clearly polite (see Carlson, 2001a).

opposite, as shown in Table 2, the female candidates used web sites as a campaign tool to a significantly higher degree than the male candidates.

Table 2. The gender of the candidates and the use of candidate sites on the web ($N = 2,023$).

Having web sites	Male candidates	Female candidates
Yes	39,5 %	50,5 %
No	60,5 %	49,5 %
<i>N</i>	1,215	798

$$\chi^2 = 23.647 (df = 1); p = 000$$

In order to test whether being a woman has a significant independent influence on being on-line with a campaign site, two logistic regression analysis models are presented in Table 3. Besides gender, the models examine three central candidate characteristics that arguably are associated with being on-line in election campaigns: age (in years), status (incumbent or challenger), and party size. The party size predictor is based on a categorization by Norris (2003: 28): “major parties” are those with more than 20 % of all seats in the parliament; “minor parties” are those with more than 3 % but less than 20 % of the seats in the parliament; “fringe parties”, finally, are those that lack at least 3 % of the elected members of the parliament.

Table 3. Logistic regression models predicting the candidates’ use of web sites ($N = 2,013$).

	Model A				Model B			
	<i>B</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>Exp(B)</i>	Sig.	<i>B</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>Exp(B)</i>	Sig.
Gender	.356	.096	1.428	.000	.083	.109	1.087	.446
Age	-.031	.004	.969	.000	-.028	.004	.974	.000
Status	-1.652	.188	.192	.000	-.784	.199	.456	.000
Party size (1)	-----				2.965	.163	19.396	.000
Party size (2)	-----				1.650	.154	5.207	.000
Constant	2.564				-.033			
Cox-Snell R^2	.083				.265			
Nagelkerke R^2	.111				.335			
% Correct	62.0				73.3			
<i>N</i>	2,013				2,013			

Note: The dependent variable: 0 = candidate does not have a web site, 1 = candidate has a web site. Predictors: Gender: 0 = Male, 1 = Female; Age: years; Status: 0 = Challenger, 1 = Incumbent; Party size: 0 = Fringe, 1 = Major, 2 = Minor.

The results in Model A, predicting being on-line with a web site, show that all factors proved significant. Strikingly, when age and status are accounted for, being a woman candidate still has a significant influence on having a campaign site on the web. However, as shown in Model B, gender itself is no longer a significant predictor when the party size factor is introduced in the equation. Hence, when controlling for age, status and party size, nor being male or being female is a significant factor in explaining the candidates' on-line presence.

Exploiting the web: site functions and delivery

Once on-line, then, do male and female candidates differ in terms of what they do on-line and how well and effectively they are doing it? In answering this question, the matched-pairs design was employed. In Table 4, the matched male and female candidates and their sites are compared as to the scores on the constructed indexes measuring web site functions and delivery. Here, the paired-samples *t*-test, that compares the paired differences in the mean scores, is used.⁸

Table 4. Effects of candidate gender on the web site functions and delivery. Mean index scores. Paired samples statistics ($N = 74$ pairs).

	Male candidates' sites (mean)	Female candidates' sites (mean)	Paired differences (male – female)		
			Mean	Std.dev.	Sig.*
<i>Functions:</i>					
Information provision (0–12)	5.04	5.24	–.20	2.13	.415
Campaigning (0–9)	1.77	1.58	.19	1.20	.180
Resource generation (0–12)	1.24	1.04	.20	2.44	.477
Networking (0–n)	6.81	6.08	.73	10.63	.557
Promoting participation (0–n)	3.95	4.15	–.20	6.93	.802
<i>Delivery:</i>					
Presentation/Appearance (0–n)	10.88	9.95	.93	16.29	.624
Accessibility (0–6)	0.19	0.24	–.05	.59	.437
Navigability (0–n)	1.30	1.57	–.27	1.02	.026
Freshness (0–7)	1.78	2.11	–.33	3.30	.401
Visibility (0–n)	0.35	0.53	–.18	1.86	.419

*) Paired samples *t*-test (2-sided)

⁸ The equivalent nonparametric test, the Wilcoxon matched pairs signed ranks test, was also conducted on the paired differences. The two tests gave similar results. However, since it is more comprehensible to compare means than mean ranks, mean scores and *t*-test significances are reported in Table 4.

On a general level, the results in Table 4 shows that Finnish candidates score surprisingly low on the functions and delivery indexes (cf. Gibson & Ward, 2003). Foremost, the web sites seem to be used for providing information top-down. Most important here, there is a striking similarity between the male and female candidates' poor utilization of the new campaign tool. The only statistically significant difference is found in navigability where the female candidates have done a better job. Even in that case, however, the difference (0.27 points) is far less than dramatic. Thus, in sum, one is struck by the similarities in the male and female candidates' utilization of the new campaign tool.

Profiling the candidates on-line: issue concerns and candidate images

Do the male and female candidates differ, however, regarding the information they provide about their candidacies on their web sites? Table 5 below sheds light on how the matched male and female candidates market themselves on the home pages as to their issue concerns and candidate characteristics. Again, paired means are compared, using the paired-samples t-test.⁹ As Table 5 shows, the male and female candidates do not significantly differ concerning the overall focus; the home pages are, regardless of candidate gender, slightly more issue oriented than image oriented. However, when observing the number of issues and traits presented, the male candidates stand out as somewhat more issue oriented than their female counterparts. Moreover, the gender difference in the number of mentioned issues is statistically significant.

Do male and female candidates, then, emphasize different types of issues and traits on their home pages? In answering this question, it should be noted that the mean values for the mentioned "male" and "female" issues and traits, reported in Table 5, are low. With due caution paid to that fact, the results, nevertheless, suggest two conclusions. First, regarding the mentioned traits, male and female candidates project a similar candidate image; "male" characteristics are somewhat more stressed than "female" ones. Second, and this is a statistically significant result, male candidates emphasize "male" issues more than female candidates. Noteworthy, the

⁹ Also here the equivalent nonparametric test, the *Wilcoxon matched pairs signed ranks test*, was conducted on the paired differences. Again, this test gave similar results as the *paired-samples t-test*.

opposite does not apply: women candidates do not stress “female issues” more than their male counterparts.

Table 5. Effects of gender on the focus and the issue and trait emphasis on the candidates’ home pages. Paired samples statistics ($N = 74$ pairs).

	Male candidates’ home page (mean)	Female candidates’ home page (mean)	Paired differences (male – female)		
			Mean	Std.dev.	Sig.*
Focus: image or issues (7-point scale)	5.01	5.45	-.44	2.74	.179
Number of issues mentioned	2.96	1.82	1.14	4.33	.027
Number of traits mentioned	1.07	0.88	.19	2.02	.423
Number of “male” issues mentioned	1.45	0.70	.75	2.22	.005
Number of “female” issues mentioned	1.51	1.12	.39	2.73	.221
Number of “male” traits mentioned	0.86	0.72	.14	1.72	.459
Number of “female” traits mentioned	0.20	0.16	.04	.65	.593

*) Paired samples *t*-test (2-sided)

Finally, the male and female candidates’ use of two other ways to project the candidate character is compared. Table 6 summarizes the candidates’ publishing of family photographs, a strategy that, arguably, softens up the candidate image. Table 7, in turn, reports the results concerning the use of negative attacks, a strategy that projects a tough candidate image.

Table 6. Male and female candidates’ use of family photos on their web sites: a paired comparison, $N = 74$ pairs.

Are family photos present on the female candidate’s site?	Are family photos present on the male candidate’s site?	
	Yes	No
Yes	8	14
No	16	36

McNemar paired test; n.s.

Table 7. Male and female candidates' use of negative attacks on their web sites: a paired comparison, $N = 74$ pairs.

Are negative attacks present on the female candidate's site?	Are negative attacks present on the male candidate's site?	
	Yes	No
Yes	13	7
No	19	35

McNemar paired test; $p < .05$

Regarding the picturing of the candidate's family, no significant differences between male and female candidates can be observed (Table 6). Concerning the presence of negative attacks on the sites, on the other hand, Table 7 reveals a statistically significant gender difference: male candidates use negative attacks more often than their female counterparts.

Summary and conclusions

The empirical findings of this paper can be summarized as follows. Concerning the on-line presence, the female candidates put up web sites in a significantly higher degree than the male candidates. Candidate gender does not, however, have a significant independent influence on being on-line with a campaign site. Rather, the on-line presence is predicted by the candidates' age and status incumbent/challenger), and, above all, the size of the candidates' party. Once on-line, male and female candidates do not differ significantly concerning how they exploit the new campaign tool. For the site visitors, it is though somewhat easier to navigate on the female sites. On the whole, however, there is a striking similarity in the male and female candidates' relatively poor utilization of the new communication technology. In profiling their candidacies, the males and the females show up some similarities, too. Thus, both male and female candidates' home page focus is slightly more issue oriented than image oriented. Further, male and female candidates project a similar candidate image where "male" characteristics are more stressed than "female" ones. Moreover, there is no gender difference in the candidates' readiness to depict their family on the sites. Yet, the male and female candidates do also differ on some points. Hence, the male candidates mention more issues than their female counterparts. What is more, the men emphasize "male" issues more than the women. However, women

candidates do not conversely stress “female issues” more than their male counterparts. Finally, male candidates use negative attacks more often than the female candidates.

To return to the research questions addressed earlier in the paper, then, which conclusions can be drawn? First, the Finnish gap in men’s and women’s access and use of the Internet was not echoed in the context of candidate web campaigning. As a matter of fact, the female candidates used use the Web to a significantly higher degree than the male candidates. Thus, this finding do not readily support the expectation that women candidates would consider information about the female voters’ Internet access when determining whether to opt for web campaigning. An obvious explanation to this is that the women candidates do not narrowly target the female voter segment. Another plausible explanation is that candidates simply “go on-line” because campaign sites are considered a standard feature of modern campaigning that increases the candidate credibility in the eyes of the voters.

Second, in the context of candidate campaigning, the new communication technology is clearly not a “man’s world”; the male candidates did not use the new technology more skillfully and thoroughly than their matched female counterparts. Conversely, neither seems the web to be “a woman’s medium” in the campaign context; the women candidates did not utilize the communicative and interactive features of the web – measured by the index “promoting participation” – in a higher degree than the male candidates. Rather, in sum, one is struck by the similarity in the male and female candidates’ half-hearted utilization of the new tool. Hence, for the male as well as the female candidates it appears to be the main thing to have a web site thus maintain an image of professionalism and being up-to-date; what they do on-line seems to be regarded less important.

Third, female candidates do not, in the words of Herrnson, Lay and Stokes, “run as women” on the web. With due caution paid to the somewhat narrow analytical focus on the candidates’ home pages, the findings suggest that female candidates do not build a distinct female candidate profile on-line that would heavily stress “female” characteristics and issue concerns. Rather, the overall impression is that the female on-line profiles resemble, by and large, those of the male candidates. Thus, the conclusion drawn in the previous study of Finnish candidates’ spot advertising on TV, gains some support here, too. Female candidates, as well as male ones, attempt to live up to the dominant norms of politics and conform to a role model of politicians and a style of campaigning established in an era clearly dominated by male politicians.

However, in the 2003 web campaign, the male candidates expressed the traditional “male” campaigning model stronger than their matched female candidates. Hence, to a higher degree than their females, they concentrated on issues, emphasized “male” policy sectors, and used offensive strategies.

All in all, then, the analysis has shed some new light on the role of gender on Internet campaigning. Surely, as a new campaign tool, the web is not “a man’s world”. As shown, female candidates used the web to a higher degree than male candidates. Moreover, candidate gender itself proved not to be a significant factor for being on-line. Further, female candidates utilized the new medium in a similar way as their male counterparts. Nevertheless, as to the content, the analysis of the candidates’ issue and image profiles also suggest that the introduction of new communication technology does not automatically transform traditional gendered patterns of campaigning.

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Appendix A: The scoring system for site functions and delivery

(Adapted from Gibson & Ward, 2000, 2003)

Functions:

Information Provision

Additive index: 1 point assigned for each item present (0–12)

Values/ideology

Policies

Documents (i.e. manifesto, constitution)

Newsletters

Media releases (i.e. speeches, statements, interview transcripts, conferences)

People/Who's Who

Candidate profiles

Electoral Information (statistics, information on past performance)

Event Calendar (prospective or retrospective)

Frequently Asked Questions

Privacy Policy

Article Archive or Library

Resource Generation

Cumulative index (0-12) Three ordinal indices:

(1) Donation index 0 - 4

(2) Merchandise index 0 – 4

(3) Membership index 0 – 4

For each index (1) reference made and postal address listed (2) download form and post (3) online enquiry (specific email or online form) (4) online transaction (0) no references made.

Networking

Cumulative index 0 – n

The number of *internal links*, i.e., links to own party, local party organizations, MP's/MEPs, international branches, other candidates in the same party, organizations that are supportive of the party's goals, etc.

The number of *external links*, i.e., all other links than the internal ones; inter alia, commercial links and links to neutral or news/educational sites such as news broadcasters, newspapers, parliamentary/government sites, national libraries etc.

Extranet available from site or members only pages 1 = present 0 = absent

Participation

Cumulative index 0 – n (2 ordinal indices and two count)

Openness (0 - n) Count of email contacts listed on site. Each address = 1

Feedback index (0–3) Ordinal (1) email address on the site; (2) email address explicitly focused on soliciting comments; (3) an online form to submit views offered.

Opinion Poll (0 - n) Number of opinion polls offered.

Interaction index (0-4) Ordinal (1) games/gimmicks to play; (2) bulletin board or guest book to post views; (3) chat room for real-time discussion; (4) opportunity for online debate with leader/senior organization figures.

Campaigning

Additive index: 1 point assigned for each item present (0–9)

Election site

Negative campaigning (banner, pop-up ad etc. on home page)

Targeting marginal constituency/swing voter (explicit effort)

Cookie

Join an email update list

Become online campaigner

Information on merits and achievements

Download logo

Download offline leaflets/propaganda

Delivery:***Presentation/Appearance***

Cumulative index 0 – n (2 ordinal indices and five count)

Homepage design index, 1 point for each item present (0-2):

Graphics

Frames

Number of moving icons

Number of photographs

Number of sound files

Number of video files

Number of live streaming files

Access

1 point for each item present (0-6)

No frames option

Text only option (entire site)

Text only documents to download and print

WAP/PDA 'wireless' enabled

foreign language translation

blind/visually impaired software

Navigability

Additive index - 1 point for each item present (0 – n)

Navigation tips

Number of search engines

Home page icon on lower level pages

Fixed menu bar on lower level pages

Site map/index

Freshness

Ordinal index (0-7)

No information given (0); + 6 months (1); 1-6 months (2); monthly (3); every two weeks (4); 3-7 days (5); 1-2 days (6); Updated daily (7).

Visibility

Number of links in to the site (calculated with search engine, e.g. Google)

Appendix B: “Male” and “female” issues and traits

Issues

Initially, the analysis distinguished between three general and one specific policy sector. This categorization, used in Carlson’s analysis (2000), was adapted from a survey of Nordic research on female MPs in Scandinavia (Skard & Haavio-Mannila, 1985). *Production* pertains to transport and communication, construction, industry, business, agriculture and forestry, finance and economic policy, taxation and fiscal regulation, energy and regional policies. *Reproduction* encompasses social policy (e.g., family, health, drugs and alcohol, housing and social security, education, cultural policy, environmental and consumer policy). *System maintenance* includes criminal policy and law enforcement, foreign and defense policy, the political and administrative systems, the position of minority and interest groups and the general political, administrative and legal relations between individual citizens and the government. In addition, attention is paid to *women’s issues* comprising questions touching upon female-dominated groups, institutions and professions, women’s health, women’s position in marriage and work life, gender roles etc.

Based on the earlier discussion on the prevalence of gender stereotypical assumptions concerning male and female areas of issue competence in politics, the sectors of *production* and *system maintenance* were treated as covering “male” issues, while the *reproduction* sector and the *women’s issues* were regarded as a “female” issue domain.

Traits

Originally, the analysis distinguished between five categories of mentioned traits. To a large extent, these categories are adapted from a study by Joslyn (1986). Furthermore, according to the existence of stereotypical assumptions concerning male and female candidate traits, these categories were regarded as representing either “male” traits or “female” traits. Here, the categories *Honesty/integrity* (comprising expressions like “an honest candidate”, “trustworthy”, “ethical”, “possesses integrity”) and *Warmth/compassion* (e.g., “caring”, “sensitive”, “emphatic”, “understanding”) were seen as “female” traits. The three remaining categories were likewise labeled as “male” traits. *Toughness/strength* includes mentions like “strong”, “decisive”, “firm”, “fighter, and “aggressive”. *Competence/experience* encompasses different references that touch upon the competence of the candidate; e.g. “experienced”, “expert”, “knowledgeable”, “rational”, “capable”). *Activity*, finally, comprises expressions like “energetic”, “hard-working”, “active”, and “effective”.