Personal Branding by Politicians:

Investigating The Effect Of Personalized Communication As A Personal Branding Strategy Used By Politicians To Influence Individuals 'Intention To Vote.

Maria Asmarianaki

ANR 257290

Master's Thesis

Communication and Information Sciences

Specialization Business Communication and Digital Media

Faculty of Humanities

Tilburg University, Tilburg

Supervisor: Dr. S.F. van der Land

Second Reader: Dr. A.P. Schouten

January 2017

Abstract

Politicians' main concern is to find a personal branding strategy that will influence the individual's intention to vote. The style of communication plays an important role and this study focused on personalized communication. Personalized communication is divided in low and high level of disclosing information and emotions on social media by politicians, therefore this study focused on providing empirical evidence in the different levels of personalized communication. The gender of the politician is also taken into account since in politics women are overshadowed in numbers by men. The main purpose of this research was to answer the research questions: "*To what extent do levels of personalized communication of politicians as a strategy of personal branding affect the individuals' intention to vote?*" and "*To what extent is this effect contingent upon the politicians' gender?*". An online experiment was conducted in the shape of a 2 (personalized communication: low personalized versus high personalized) x 2 (gender of the politician: male versus female) between subject factorial design in order to shed light into the different effects this experiment had. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

Keywords: Online personal branding; politics; personalized communication; social media; gender

Words: 182

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

In the closing weeks of their campaigns for the presidency of the U.S., Democrat Hillary Clinton and Republican Donald Trump, "became notable" how social media defined their strategy by posting continuous updates on their social media accounts. The results of these elections showed that online personal branding through social media has changed the landscape of political campaigning (Lee & Lim, 2016). Although a lot of commentators dismiss Trump's strategy of continuously disclosing information in Twitter, his online personal branding techniques appear to have been more personalized in comparison to his opponent (Baker, 2016).

   Personalized communication online is that which "includes the sharing of information from one's own private life, and the sharing of emotions on social media" (Kruikemeier, 2014, p.131). According to Kruikemeier (2014) and other scholars (i.e. Kruikemeier, 2014; Van Santen & Van Zoonen, 2010; Adam & Maier, 2010, etc.), when a politician is communicating with individuals in a direct manner, by disclosing personal information, is an attempt to gain approval and potential votes. By delving deeper into the theory of personalized communication (Kruikemeier, 2014) one can see the link between personalized communication and self-disclosure theory (Cozby, 1973). Self-disclosure theory is "the act of sharing any personal information to an individual" (Cozby, 1973, p.73).

       Computer-mediated communication, such as social media significantly reduce the availability of non-verbal cues present in offline communication, which aid understanding the difficulty of establishing interpersonal relationships (Walther, 2011). More specifically, establishing credibility and positive attitude (Walther, 2011). Regardless of the challenges computer-mediated-communication systems (CMC) face due to the lack of available cues, scholars perceive that it is possible to establish warm interpersonal relationships (Walther, 2011). Two theories have been central in terms of this view that it is possible to form relationships via CMC; Social Presence Theory and Social Information Processing Theory (SIP). For instance, according to social presence theory, interpersonal interactions can be

perceived better by setting a one-dimensional continuum; placing face-to-face communication as the one with the most social presence and text-based communication as the least (Short, Williams, & Christie, 1976). SIP theory posits that the individuals share information online via the style, content and timing of the messages (Walther & Parks, 2002).

Furthermore, the U.S. elections also shed light on the gender gap in politics. This was the first time a female candidate was given a chance to the presidency (McGregor, Lawrence, & Cardona, 2016). This phenomenon is observed not only in politics, but also in various domains, e.g. working, environment, education, etc. (Badgett, Lau, Sears, & Ho, 2007; Butler & Preece, 2016). In the past, female politicians have been criticized, discriminated against and portrayed as political outsiders (Galligan & Clavero, 2008; McGregor, Lawrence, & Cardona, 2016; Simien, 2015; Fridkin & Kenney, 2014; Åström & Karlsson, 2016; Braden, 2015), as such, it is a challenge to determine how online personal branding may influence the attitude and perceived credibility of female politicians.

To the best of the researcher's knowledge, there is a gap in literature regarding the personalized communication of male and female politicians and what effect it has on the perceived credibility or the attitude of the individuals (Lombardo, Meier, & Verloo, 2009).

Therefore this study focuses on answering the following questions:

RQ1: To what extent do levels of personalized communication of politicians as a strategy of personal branding affect the individuals' intention to vote?

RQ2: To what extent is this effect contingent upon the politicians' gender?

The scientific relevance of this study is threefold. First, although previous research has been conducted on personal branding strategies of politicians (Kruikemeier, 2014; Braden, 2015; Nielsen, 2011) these studies do not test the effects on important outcome variables like the public's attitude and politicians' perceived credibility. Second, previous studies have focused on the gender of the politician,

the personal branding effects and how the gender influences an individual's intention to vote in an offline context (Gidengil & Everitt, 2003; Fukuyama, 1998; Sanbonmatsu, 2002). This study, therefore, will focus on the same concept but in the online context. Lastly, it has not been researched how different levels of personalized communication of male and female politicians affect the public's intention to vote in the online context.

The societal relevance of this study is to examine whether or not the online context is generating a positive effect towards the politician through personalized communication. Moreover, the representation of female politicians online in order to gain a better understanding of the gender gap in an attempt to seclude it.

In this study to answer the research questions, an experiment was conducted by generating an online political campaign on social media. Profiles of fictional male and female political candidates were created followed by a survey.

The outline of this thesis is as follows. First, the theoretical framework is provided (chapter 2). Second, the methodology is illustrated (chapter 3). Subsequently, the results are described (chapter 4). Finally, the discussion and the implications are given (chapter 5).

2. Theoretical Framework

In this section, the main concepts of this study are discussed and the hypotheses are developed. The elaboration likelihood model (Cacioppo & Petty, 1984), a model of attitude change, credibility and persuasion are used as a theoretical point of departure. This model of persuasion contributes significantly to forming the mediating variables of this research, namely, the attitude of electorates towards the politician and their perceived credibility towards the politician. Based on this theoretical framework, a conceptual model is established that integrates the discussed literature and visually displays the relationship between the variables. This conceptual model offers a theoretical answer to the research questions: "*To what extent do levels of personalized communication of politicians as a strategy of personal branding affect the individuals' intention to vote? and "To what extent is this effect contingent upon the politicians' gender?"*

2.1 Online Personal Branding for Politicians

In this section, the discussion centers on online personal branding, social processing theories, and the elaboration likelihood model. As these concepts are connected with our research, an analysis will be provided and then the hypotheses will be developed that are linked with these theories. Online personal branding can be defined as *"how someone presents oneself and how this self-representation becomes the digital footprint that characterizes that person"* (Lampel & Bhalla, 2007, p. 441). Online personal branding is used by politicians in order to promote their qualifications and uniqueness which is directed to the individuals that use social media (Kaputa, 2005). Previous studies indicate that the action involved in generating a unique name and image in the public's mind, mainly through advertising practices, is characterized as branding and it focuses on establishing a dominant and differentiated presence in the market, maintaining and attracting customers (Aaker & Fournier, 1995; Escalas, 2004).

The practice of personal branding was pioneered by celebrities (Preston & Rogers, 2011). This practice started primarily by using offline media, namely television, radio and every other form of offline communication and later on stepped into the online context (Silvera & Austad, 2004). In his study, Schneider (2004) claims that the next group that utilized the personal branding techniques were politicians with the ultimate goal to influence the voting decisions of the public thus branding themselves and the political parties by becoming active online, imprinting the desired image they wanted to convey and ultimately gaining votes.

According to Rubinstein and Griffiths (2001) personal branding is of higher significance online and this is mainly due to the numerous launches of new sites every day, the vast number of internet connections and the plentiful purchases made online by individuals. This significance of the online environment puts forward the view that online branding has been a vital tool for politicians in order to communicate their points of view, to inform citizens and by many is considered to be the cornerstone of a successful campaign (Kruikemeier, van Noort, Vliegenthart, & de Vreese, 2013).

Similar to online branding, online personal branding involves seizing and promoting a person's assets and uniqueness to a target audience (Kaputa, 2005; Schwabel, 2009; Shepherd, 2005). Although acquiring employment is sometimes the purpose of personal branding, it is not limited there; the motivation for individuals to self-brand includes also establishing friendships, dating, or for self-expression (Shepherd, 2005). Many personal brand advocates see the process as similar to online branding (Kaputa, 2005; Schwabel, 2009), which begins by defining a brand identity and then actively communicating it to the marketplace through brand positioning.

To gain more knowledge and in order to understand how these processes are generated, this study builds on computer-mediated-communication theories (CMC). Further, the elaboration likelihood model is introduced as the theoretical frame of the current work. Social presence theory translates to the

feeling of being with someone else in the online environment; social presence is captured as a continuum and it places face-to-face interaction as the one with the most social presence and word-based text as the least (Short et al., 1976). More specifically, it describes that the effect a means has depends on the perceived intimacy it transfers (Tanis, 2003). Walther (2011), in his study underlined the importance of non-verbal cues online -such as speed of the message, language, grammar, style, etc.- more specifically the fewer cues a system has the less "warm" the interaction is. Moreover, the cues that can enhance the sense of being with another person in an online environment can be a smiling face, a voice through a speaker or a message shown in the screen of a chat window (Biocca, Harms, & Burgoon, 2003).

Social information processing theory (SIP) explains how people interact online without non-verbal cues and develop and maintain relations in a computer-mediated environment (Walther, 1992). Moreover, individuals in social media experience pressure; the greater control over self-presentational interaction and self-disclosing in CMC the more strategically they manage their online image. Further, it posits that individuals in their interactions are motivated to establish interpersonal impressions and liking towards the other individual regardless the medium (Walther, 2011). In addition to that, SIP proposes that communicators adapt their interpersonal communication to whatever cues remain, meaning that the encoding and decoding of the information turns to language and timing of the messages namely non-verbal cues (Walther, 2011). Furthermore, when Tidwell and Walther (2002) conducted an experiment in order to investigate the communication phenomena taking place in CMC, they concluded that individuals will work towards the limitations the medium has as they get to know each other more. Moreover, they demonstrated that the participating individuals developed personalized relations regardless of the limitations the channel had and thus forced them to make up for the lacking cues (Tidwell & Walther, 2002).

The elaboration likelihood model (ELM) of persuasion is a process theory that describes the modification of attitudes and it proposes two routes in order to persuade an individual: the central and the peripheral (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). As reported by Petty and Cacioppo (1986) the central route of persuasion is a result of a person's considerate thought of the message and it involves a high level of elaboration and cognition namely the rational way of thinking. On the other hand, under the peripheral route, persuasion stems from an individual's relation to negative or positive cues that are displayed in support of an advocacy and involves attractiveness or credibility of the source (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986, p.126).

Research has shown that online personal branding of politicians plays a significant role in the public's attitude, perceived credibility and intention to vote. It is claimed that it could stimulate politically inactive individuals (Barber, 2001) or further stimulate active ones (Polat, 2005). More and more citizens now use social media in order to stay informed about politics, form opinions and, in general, be active in their participation as political human beings (Howard, 2006). Politicians should therefore put great consideration on how they represent themselves online.

2.2 Personalized communication and attitude

Social media can be conceptualized as a stimuli-based decision making environment (Tam & Ho, 2005, p. 272). In this environment stimuli can take the form of personalized communication, which refers to the level of self-disclosure or images that constitute various persuasive efforts in order to influence the individual (Tam & Ho, 2005). Personalized communication is intentions to influence the voters (Kruikemeier, 2014). This is achieved by creating a positive public image, fostering positive attitudes and establishing credibility (Tam & Ho, 2005). Therefore, personalized communication can be considered as a persuasive message since it has a clear goal to influence the target audience (Tam & Ho,

2005). In line with Kruikemeier's (2014) definition of the practice, self disclosure theory posits that the more an individual reveals about themselves, the more positive the attitude of the other party will be.

Nowadays, the source of personalized communication in politics is the politician and not the political party (Van Santen & Van Zoonen, 2010). This presents the struggle politicians face in deciding how personalized the communication with the public should be (Kruikemeier, 2014). It is claimed that a high personalized communication facilitates and strengthens the tie between the politician and the individual (Van Santen & Van Zoonen, 2010). Regardless of the level of personalization in the communication, personalized communication is most commonly used on social media; due to the great amounts of voters it can reach (Kleinnijenhuis, Maurer, Kepplinger, & Oegema, 2001). Therefore, politicians choose social media and more specifically, Twitter to voice their opinions and emotions because it addresses a larger audience thus their persuasive messages do not focus on a target audience but to everyone (Kruikemeier, 2014).

According to Van Santen and Van Zoonen (2010), personalized communication offers a direct connection between the politician and the citizen. That also enables politicians to profile themselves and bring them closer to the citizens and therefore mold a positive attitude towards them (De Vreese, 2007). In the online environment, there are certain cues, such as timing of the message, grammar, level of disclosure, that individuals assess that define their attitude towards an individual (Van der Land & Muntinga, 2014). In addition to that, previous studies (e.g. Derlega, Metts, Petronio, & Margulis, 1993; Chelune, 1976; Cozby, 1973; Goodstein & Reinecker, 1974) indicate that the individual that is disclosing, tends to be liked by the individuals he chooses to disclose to, thereby, positively influencing attitudes through disclosure.

If we focus on the studies regarding the effects of personalized communication in political contexts, the results depict positive outcomes namely positive attitudes and positive evaluations towards

politicians. More personalized communication, thus more disclosure has a positive impact on attitude

due to the fact that politicians represent the voice and face of their party (Brettschneider, 2008). In other

words, the concentration on the politician, rather than the party, makes politics more accessible.

Recently, Han (2009) has proposed that disclosing personal information has affirmative outcomes on

policy support. Several publications have appeared documenting that personalized communication has a

positive impact on engagement and can affect positively the attitude of the electorate (Green & Brock,

2000; Van Noort, Voorveld, & Van Reijmersdal, 2012). Attitudes are regarded to be general evaluations

individuals hold relating to themselves, other individuals and concepts (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993).

According to the ELM (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) the likelihood of elaboration of this evaluation is

predicted by an individual's incentive and ability to assess the communication displayed. Taking this

into consideration the following hypothesis was formed:

H1: *More personalized communication leads to a more positive attitude towards the politician*

2.3 Moderating effect of Gender on the relationship between personalized communication and Attitude

There has been a significant increase in female politicians recently worldwide (Simien, 2015). This

increase has helped to form a positive attitude towards politics and a more active political involvement

of the public (Campbell & Wolbrecht, 2006). Although the discrimination against women from the

media is high, the opportunity of self-disclosure has given them a platform from which to represent

themselves and foster positive attitudes (Braden, 2015). In fact, Gaia (2013) found that it is more

socially acceptable for women to disclose information online than men. On the other hand, however,

evidence shows that even though female politicians might be more qualified than their male

counterparts, this is not enough for the voters to perceive them as equals (Black & Erickson, 2003). That

can be explained due to the assumption that women are seen as more soft, caring and selfless while men

are seen as the exact opposite (Gaia, 2013). The evidence for that notion is also supported by the Gender

Role Theory (GRT) (Eagly, Wood, & Diekman, 2000) which posits that the beliefs individuals hold

reflect the gender hierarchy of society.

Braden (2015) in his study is claiming that this bias against female politicians is stemming from

the image women have displayed over the years that is a more caring and delicate one. Further research

on this matter has determined that the attitude formation and likability will increase if females in politics

will have low level personalization in their actions and are on the qui vive of how they portray

themselves (Bligh, Schlehofer, Casad, & Gaffney, 2012). A recent study by Åström and Karlsson (2016)

indicates that female politicians have less impact in attitude change and intention to vote when

disclosing information than their male counterparts and they attribute this to gender stereotypes people

have. Nevertheless, strategic stereotype theory posits that women appease stereotypes that associate their

male counterparts with leadership attributes while taking advantage of the traits that associate them with

warmth and intimacy (Fridkin & Kenney, 2014). Moreover, McGregor, Lawrence, & Cardona, (2016) in

their research by applying strategic stereotype theory (Fridkin & Kenney, 2014) demonstrate that female

politicians receive less benefits when disclosing information about themselves suggesting that self-

disclosure and personalized communication of the female politician does not contribute to a positive

attitude formation. Moreover, another study by Huddy and Terkildsen (1993), demonstrates that

masculine characteristics (i.e. tough, aggressive and assertive) are preferred when a higher level of

office is at stake and that females lack of these characteristics thus they are portrayed less competent.

Taking the aforementioned into consideration this study hypothesizes that:

H2: *Being a woman weakens the relationship between personalized communication and positive attitude
towards the politician*

2.4 Personalized communication and Perceived credibility

Creating a positive public image, fostering positive attitudes and establishing credibility by politicians is achieved by personalized communication (Tam & Ho, 2005), which is a crucial characteristic of online communication for them (Gibson & McAllister, 2006). The shift of focus from the political parties to the politicians is conceived to be one of the traits of personalized communication (Adam & Maier, 2010). Van Santen and Van Zoonen (2010) indicate that the rise of social media made political candidates use more and more these online platforms in order to share their messages with the public.

Self-disclosure online entails several cues like image, style, language, that relate to the source's credibility (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Ohanian (1990) describes perceived credibility as the concept that an individual is seen as an expert on an issue, which, in turn, relates to the level of believability one portrays. Moreover, Ohanian (1990) in her study suggests that trustworthiness and attractiveness of the source are dimensions of the source's credibility. As reported by Gefen and Straub (2004) in their research, when the cues are not sufficient individuals rely on trust and familiarity in order to reduce social uncertainty. The results of this research showed that the speed of interactions online, influence social presence on the dimension of trust and purchase intentions (Gefen & Straub, 2004). In addition to that, in order for a person to be seen as credible, there needs to be a clear connection between the individual's knowledge and the brand this individual is connected to (Wright, 2002). This is known as the match-up hypothesis and can also affect the attractiveness of the individual that wants to be perceived as credible and behavior intention of the public (Till & Busler, 1998). This match is deemed crucial in self-representation online. Winter, Kramer, Appel and Schielke (2010) found that the online authors who disclosed practicing a relevant occupation in regards to what they are writing were perceived to be more credible. Self disclosure online plays a significant role in the development of relationships among individuals and leads to trust and higher credibility (Winter et al., 2010). Mazer,

Murphy, and Simonds (2009) found similar results, participants perceived the teacher who used higher levels of self-disclosure more credible than the teacher who disclosed less (Mazer et al., 2009). This determines that revealing more information online namely personalized communication puts a stronger emphasis on the perceived credibility, therefore:

H3: *More personalized communication leads to a greater perceived credibility of the politician*

2.5 Moderating effect of Gender on the relationship between personalized communication and Perceived credibility

As mentioned previously, politics is a domain where men prevail (Kaufmann & Petrocik, 1999). A great factor according to Kaufmann and Petrocik (1999) that plays a role is the association of politics and men but also the relatively late entry of women in politics.

Perceived credibility online, for both male and female candidates, is judged by the profiles they hold on social media (Fawley, 2013). Due to the fact that the majority of social media profiles are user-generated, there is evidence of personalized communication which in turn is subjective. Thus, politicians devote a lot of time in building their profiles and constructing the messages that will be put across, in order to leave a positive impression (Hwang, 2013). Thus they engage in impression management. That is, the process of engineering others' impressions of the self, in a preferable way (Kluemper & Rosen, 2009). Given that the content is mostly user-generated on social media, impressions can be manipulated in order to increase perceived credibility (Krämer & Winter, 2008).Although according to Gaia (2013) it is socially acceptable for women to reveal information online that might be more personalized even in the context of politics this might differ. This is because personalized communication affects credibility perceptions (Kruikemeier, 2014). This relates to the portrayal of the female candidate as a caring and weak persona by the gender hierarchy of society (Eagly et al., 2000). Therefore the female candidate

needs to have a more explicit and cold profile namely the level of personalized communication in order for her to be perceived as credible needs to be low (Rosener, 1990).

Recent research on how politicians communicate suggests that women and men do not differ significantly when campaigning, the differences they have when communicating are based on the party that the politician belongs to and such factors rather than the gender (Druckman, Kifer, & Parkin, 2009). However Fridkin and Kenney (2014), in their most recent study regarding senators find that female senators tend to emphasize more on their agentic traits, such as authoritative or masculine characteristics. They attribute this behavior to strategic stereotype theory in which politicians capitalize on gender stereotypes that serve their political goals while counterbalancing the ones that affect them negatively (Fridkin & Kenney, 2014). As a result we expect a contradictory behavior of female politicians when personalized communication takes place (Fridkin & Kenney, 2014). More specifically, we anticipate a lower level of personalized communication on social media from a female politician. This is due to the fact that a high-level of personalized communication might link her to unfavorable gender stereotypes (being soft, weak, nurturing and emotional) linked more so with the private than public life. It follows then that in this case, the high personalized, female politician will be perceived as emotional rather than credible, due to her use of nurturing rather than agentic traits (Fridkin & Kenney, 2014). Thus we hypothesize the following:

H4: *Being a woman weakens the relationship between personalized communication and perceived credibility of the politician*

2.6 *Attitude and intention to vote*

Politicians disclose information about themselves and opinions in an effort to motivate individuals to vote for them therefore self-disclosure can be seen as a persuasive message (Kruikemeier, 2014). This

disclosure made by politicians (high or low) is personalized communication (Kruikemeier, 2014). The

main objective of personalized communication is to trigger an action that politicians use in order to gain

votes within the electorate (Kruikemeier, 2014). According to the ELM (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986),

attitude changes when an individual elaborates and processes the message. Deep and thoughtful

consideration of the message generates more enduring persuasion and attitude change when the

individual takes the central route, while when the individual takes the peripheral route the attitude

change is temporary (Jones, Sinclair, & Courneya, 2003). The ELM is rather a process than a variable

approach regarding persuasion (Areni, Ferrell, & Wilcox, 2000).

      The messages generated by politicians are processed differently by each individual and this has

to do, as mentioned before, with the cognitive effort each one puts (Areni et al, 2000). If the individual's

attention is very low then the stimuli (messages) yields few or no effects (intention to vote) (Tam & Ho,

2005). The ELM postulates that an individual's decision is derived by a continuum of elaboration, some

of them might process a message to a great extent and some others might rely on simple decision rules

in order to respond (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). For instance when the peripheral route is taken, the

person might take into consideration the image of the politician and come to the conclusion that the

politician is credible therefore he forms a favorable attitude and the chance of voting for the politician is

higher (Areni et al., 2000). In the central route, the individual will take into consideration all the

available cues, for example the message, the image of the politician and the social media interface and

after careful examination will arrive at the decision to vote for the politician (Walther, 2011).

      Attitude and intention to vote are more likely to happen when the arguments are self-generated-

as opposed to being explicitly told the arguments by the politician-and when high relevance is involved

(Angst & Agarwal, 2009). When low relevance is involved attitudes tend to be influenced by the

source's attractiveness/credibility and although the likability is increased it is not significant enough to produce a behavioral intention (Bhattacherjee & Sanford, 2006).

Furthermore, a recent study by Lee and Shin (2012) indicated that attitude change may occur due to the medium and the non-verbal cues it offers for example photos, speed, grammar, style of communication. In the case of politicians the most prominent one being Twitter, increases social presence and the chance of voting for the particular politician is higher. The non-verbal cues Twitter offers are emoticons, grammar and self-disclosure (Rao, Yarowsky, Shreevats, & Gupta, 2010).

More specifically in terms of politicians evidence supports that the attitudes towards them are positively affected and lead to vote when the individuals have a high need for cognition (Cacioppo & Petty, 1984).Therefore we hypothesize the following:

H5: *A more positive attitude towards the politician positively influences the public's intention to vote for this politician*

2.7 Perceived credibility and intention to vote

Under the peripheral route, perceived credibility can lead to behavioral intention hence people are more prone to vote for the politician opposing people who follow the central route and elaborate carefully the argument (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Although perceived credibility is thought to affect attitude, the extent to which this is true cannot be determined. Reasonably enough, when relating a message with a credible source a positive attitude will be formed (eg. Aristotle's rhetoric) (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986).

Due to the asynchronous nature of CMC, and the fact that CMC highlights the linguistic and verbal cues over less controllable non-verbal communication cues, when self-presentation and self-disclosure happens online the individuals are more prone to judge people in the online environment than

in face-to-face interaction (Walther, 1996). This greater control over self-presentation and self-disclosure does not necessarily lead to misrepresentation online. Due to the visual anonymity present in CMC (Joinson, 2001), under certain conditions social media may capacitate individuals to disclose more than in face-to-face interactions, thus establishing a much more credible and likable profile. According to a study by Ellison, Heino, and Gibbs (2006) when individuals represent themselves online in an effort to make up for the lack of cues, that computer-mediated-communication systems generate they tend to pay attention to smaller cues, like grammar, style of writing, punctuation points, in an attempt to establish interpersonal relationships. In addition to that due to the lack of non-verbal cues online, media interactants try to represent themselves in the most accurate way possible by being truthful in order to infuse trustworthiness (Ellison et al, 2006), which according to Ohanian (1990) is a dimension of perceived credibility. Moreover, Lee and Oh (2012), in their study argue that personalized communication might generate greater interest into politicians, due to the fact that this self-disclosure stemming from personalized communication can draw greater attention towards the message. This generated interested in, for example, a political candidate will then lead to more votes.

Perceived credibility is a peripheral cue that allows a judgment of the advocacy without engaging in elaboration of the arguments. The available sources seem to suggest that the source's credibility is a vital cue for behavioral intentions and, in this case, the electorate's intention to vote. Therefore the following was hypothesized:

H6: *Perceived credibility positively influences the public's intention to vote*

2.8 Conceptual model

For an outline of the relationships among the variables of this study see Figure 1.
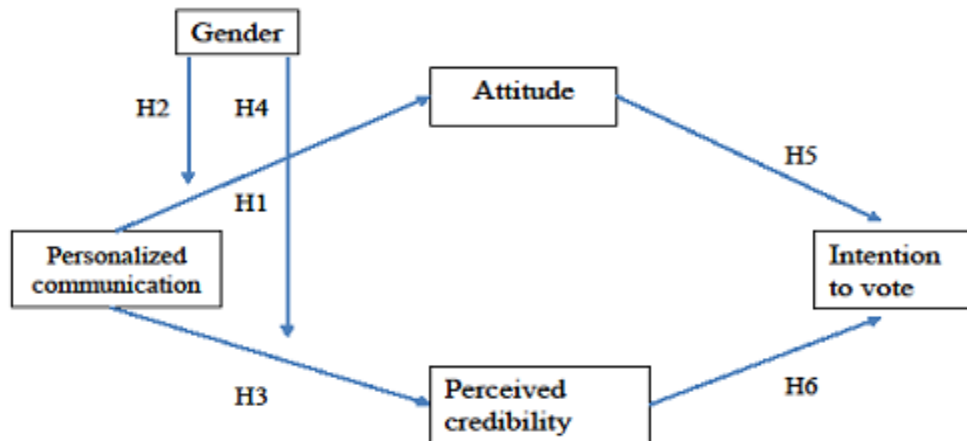
Figure 1 Conceptual Model

The conceptual model illustrates how different levels of personalized communication as a strategy of personal branding might influence the public's attitude towards the politician and perceived credibility, which in turn leads to the public's intention to vote for the politician. The more favorable the attitude held by the public, and the more credible the politician is perceived as, might also be affected by the politician's gender. Furthermore, the public's response to different levels of personalized communication could be determined by the expectations people have regarding male and female politicians, given that politics is a male-dominated field.

This study will seek to validate the aforementioned relationships by formulating different experimental conditions and testing the variables using an internet-based survey that endeavors to answer the research questions: *"To what extent do levels of personalized communication of politicians as a strategy of personal branding affect the individuals' intention to vote?" and "To what extent is this effect contingent upon the politicians' gender?"*

3. Method

3.1 Sample

To test the hypothesis graphically depicted in Figure 1, a 2 (personalized communication: low

personalized versus high personalized) x 2 (gender of the politician: male versus female) between

subject factorial design was conducted by assigning it to participants through a non-probable technique.

The sampling technique used is convenience sampling due to time constraints as well as volunteer and

network sampling (Treadwell, 2014). Convenience sampling fits the purposes of this research for

various reasons namely a bigger audience can be reached thus providing more accurate results,

availability of the participants and the accessibility of them as well (Ferber, 1977).

Due to these sampling techniques, the sample was mostly homogenous. In total 170 respondents

participated in this experiment of which 140 were retained for analysis. The remaining 28 participants

were not included because they did not complete the survey and 2 of them were under the impression

that they knew the politician (which is unlikely because fictitious characters were created for the

purposes of this research). Thus they were not included in the analysis in order not to affect the validity

of the results. The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 56 (M_{age}=26.79, SD=5.75) and the gender

division was almost equal (56% female and 46% male). The majority of the respondents were of Greek

nationality (53%), followed by Dutch (17%). The rest (30%) consisted of various nationalities namely

Irish, Bulgarian, Hungarian, Romanian, Luxemburgish, Spanish, British, Italian or British. Of all the

respondents 42% had a Bachelor degree, 41% had a Master degree, 11% were high-school graduates and

6% had another degree. Furthermore, the greatest part of the respondents uses internet in order to

determine who to vote for (69%) and the majority of them uses Twitter (76%) consistently.

3.2 Experimental design

In this 2 (personalized communication: low personalized versus high personalized) x 2 (gender of the politician: male versus female) between subject factorial design the participants were randomly assigned to one of the four experimental conditions. A random sample was chosen in order to avoid any bias in demographics and in order to ensure that the participants assigned to the four experimental conditions are probabilistically the same on average. An experiment was chosen as a research design, because it employs manipulation and controlled testing to gain a deeper understanding of the causal processes among the dependent and the independent variables (Kirk, 1982).

The study was conducted by carrying out a quantitative research in the form of a survey online; this provides several advantages and fully contributes to the purposes of the research. Namely, access to people that is difficult to reach and access to a much bigger sample (Wellman, 1997). Therefore convenience sampling paired up with internet-based survey really fits the purposes of this research for the reasons stated above. Moreover, in order to reach a bigger sample the concept took place in the European Parliament, this ensured that no limitations would be enforced to participants that were not from the Netherlands.

Personalized communication was manipulated by providing the respondents a Twitter page in which high-level of personalized tweets or low-level of personalized tweets were presented. Twitter was chosen due to the fact that is used as a platform of political deliberation (Tumasjan, Sprenger, Sandner, & Welpe, 2010). The public uses Twitter in order to determine who to vote for and politicians use it as an election pole (Tumasjan et al., 2010). Moreover, according to Kruikemeier (2014) Twitter reflects many nuances of an election campaign. Although Twitter is a microblogging website (only 140 characters allowed) the tweets are visible to the public and serve as a real-time information stream of more than one million messages per hour (Tumasjan et al., 2010). Further, Twitter has emerged as a

crucial part of political campaigning especially after Barack Obama's successful social media driven

campaigns (LaMarre & Suzuki-Lambrecht, 2013).

The politician's gender was manipulated by portraying a photo and a name of either a male or a

female politician. By merging these manipulations the four experimental conditions are generated,

namely high personalized communication female, low personalized communication female, high

personalized communication male and low personalized communication male.

3.3 Pre-test and Development of the Manipulation Material

Development of the Twitter interface

For the experiment, the four conditions were generated as follows. Firstly, the online platform employed

by this research was Twitter since it is established and tested by various studies as the online tool by

politicians to communicate with their electorate (eg. Kruikemeier, 2014; Kruikemeier et al., 2013;

Tumasjan et al., 2010). Therefore the standard Twitter profile format was used with two tweets by the

politician. In order to construct these conditions, the research made use of the PowerPoint software (for

the screenshots see Appendix A). The conditions were only depicting the name and the tweets by the

politician. This was deemed important since the study did not wish to bias positively or negatively the

participants by depicting for example number of retweets, number of mentions and number of likes

(Bakshy, Hofman, Mason, & Watts, 2011).

Pre-study high personalized/ low personalized communication and credibility

In order to illustrate the high or low level of personalized communication, the primary concern was to

operationalize it accordingly. For that reason, several profiles on Twitter of real politicians were

analyzed; these politicians were members of the European Parliament. The criteria for the selection of

profiles were made in terms of the politician's activity; how regular it was and the level of personalized

communication (high or low) they conveyed. Thorough investigation resulted in the final profiles

(n=20), that matched the aforementioned criteria and were used for further analysis in order to compose

the manipulation material. Almost six out of twenty politicians were women and this was anticipated

since the majority of the members of the European Parliament are male (63%) and the rest (37%) are

females.

The selection of these profiles was based on how active and popular they were on this platform.

The analysis concerned the type of tweets they were generating through their profiles. All of the

politicians were sharing personalized tweets and tweets that concern the European Union. According to

Kruikemeier (2014), personalized communication of politicians is the "share of information of their

private life and emotions" and that was ubiquitous throughout these profiles. Moreover, the degree of

self-disclosure is evaluated along the dimensions of depth (quality) and breadth (quantity). Depth refers

to the intimacy level of the disclosure, whereas breadth refers to the amount of information that is shared

(Altman & Taylor, 1973). One common method of operationalizing self-disclosure is to measure or

manipulate its level of intimacy (depth), for instance, one's feelings about everyday routine, are

considered higher levels of disclosure than are less intimate topics (e.g., one's opinion about a political

issue) (Collins & Miller, 1994). Disclosure breadth is operationalized as the amount of time spent

speaking about oneself or the number of self-relevant messages made during an interaction (Collins &

Miller, 1994). In terms of credibility the profile pictures of the politicians were predominantly

professional shots demonstrating the nature of their job.

Summing up, taking the aforementioned into consideration, the study concluded based on

Kruikemeier's (2014) definition of personalized communication and Collin's and Miller's (1994)

research on self- disclosure that the manipulation material should consist of two tweets, one about

private life and one concerning emotions in different levels of breadth and depth. Regarding the profile

picture, it was decided to use a professional headshot in order to avoid any bias that non-verbal cues might give away as in an online context due to the reduction of the cues even small details contribute to attitude formation and intentions (Walther, 2011).

Selection of the high personalized/low personalized tweets and profile picture

Consequently, the next concern was to develop the appropriate tweets for this study. In the scenario of high personalized communication private lives and emotions were the most important factors to convey. On the other hand when low personalized communication took place the focal point was information about the European Parliament and causes around this concept in order to ensure low depth and breadth of the disclosure. There is substantiate evidence that when incorporating formal references the tweet becomes low personalized thus reducing the depth and breadth of self-disclosure (Thamm & Bleier, 2013). On the other hand in the high personalized communication scenario the tweets had to do mainly with the politician's private life and emotions thus were deemed fit for their high-level of depth and breadth of self-disclosure (see Appendix A). According to Grant, Moon and Busby Grant (2010) politicians that disclose more regarding their personal life are employing this method in order to engage the potential voters.

All in all, several studies contributed in composing these tweets. Van Dijck (2013) determined that the assembly of one's professional identity relies on the promotion of oneself online which in turn will demonstrate and emphasize their skills. Moreover, self-disclosure in the high personalized scenario, elaboration on emotions and active participation in sports strengthens the engagement with the public; therefore, related tweets were constructed in order to amplify the difference between the low personalized communication scenario (Bak, Kim, & Oh, 2012).

Lastly, only one picture per condition was employed so as the participants would focus on the tweets. Perceived credibility was portrayed in these pictures by depicting the candidate in a professional

headshot in the high and low personalized scenario. As the primary focus of this study is personalized

communication, which is embodied through the tweets more photos would enhance the cues and that

would have an impact on the validity of the results which is undesirable (Walther, 2011).

Qualitative pre-test

In order to determine if the experimental conditions were indeed different, a qualitative pre-test was

conducted. In order to do so, ten people were asked to analyze the conditions and if they could notice

substantial differences between them. More specifically, they were presented with the Twitter pages and

observed if there is difference between the low personalized condition and high personalized condition.

The participants indeed distinguished the differences between the conditions. Namely, in the high

personalized condition ten out of ten people reported that "the politician is sharing a lot of information

on his private life". Whereas in the low personalized condition the participants reported that "the

politician seems more distant and impersonal". Subsequently, the qualitative pre-test was deemed

successful for analyzing the contrasting conditions of the personalized communication.

Quantitative pre-test

Subsequently, after the qualitative pre-test, a quantitative pre-test was carried out for several reasons.

Firstly, due to the fact that this study will be carried out in a quantitative way as well; with an internet-

based survey, a quantitative pre-test could give accurate predictions. Moreover, when conducting the

qualitative pre-test the participants could see the other conditions and compare. Thus, in order to have

more valid results the quantitative pre-test randomized the conditions and showed only one scenario per

respondent.

  To establish whether the manipulation of the personalized communication was successful

participants (n=56) were asked four questions. In the beginning, it was asked from the participants to

elaborate on what they consider the politician to be doing. This would provide sufficient evidence that the construction of the conditions was indeed accurate and answers entailed "luring voters by sharing information", "greeting participants who motivated her and supported her", "campaigning, declaring points of political agenda" etc. The responses to this open-ended question reported the accuracy of the materials generated for the purposes of this research. The concept was clear and conveyed the accurate amount of information which was precisely the ultimate goal of the experiment.

Furthermore in order to detect the differences between the high personalized condition and the low personalized condition two questions were asked. Firstly "To what extent do you find the politician is sharing personal information about her private life in these tweets?" and "To what extent do you find the politician is sharing her emotions in these tweets?". These questions were the most crucial ones since these would determine if there was indeed a clear difference between the conditions. The difference between the low personalized *(M=3.35, SD=.880)* condition and high personalized *(M= 2.22, SD=.960)* condition were indeed clear therefore the manipulation of the materials was successful.

Manipulation of the politician

The manipulation of the politician required a lot of attention. Firstly, due to the fact that the politicians would be compared regarding their gender, the photos should be exactly the same but different as well. The selected photos had to be as neutral as possible in order to avoid bias due to ethnic background (Appiah, 2001). Moreover, it should include only their face in order to avoid nonverbal cues that body language of the politician might emit (Walther, 2011). Apart from that, the photos should share the same background, angle and light in order to make them as similar as possible, see Figure 4.

In terms of the names chosen for the politicians, several studies have shown that the most common names are read faster and are more familiar therefore the politician is perceived more credible

and trustworthy (Burton & Bruce, 1993). For this reason, a thorough research was conducted to generate

the most common names[1] among males and females in the Netherlands, see Figure 4.

Manipulation of the tweets

The manipulation of the tweets was the most crucial factor because the message conveyed would

determine if a high level of personalized communication or a low level of personalized communication

influences the attitude, perceived credibility and ultimately the intention to vote the participant. Acting

accordingly with the self-disclosure theory in terms of breadth and depth in the scenario of high

personalized communication, more intimacy was achieved by disclosing feelings and everyday

interactions and in the low personalized communication self-disclosure was achieved by reporting

opinions and neutral information about the European Parliament. The cornerstone of the formulation of

these 140-character-messages was also the qualitative analysis conducted before with the real-life

members of the European Parliament, this way the manipulation material is more authentic and credible

(see Appendix A).

Lucas Jansen
@LucasJansenMEP

Eva Jansen
@EvaJansenMEP

Figure 2 Photos of the politicians

---

[1] Used names for the politician: (http://www.behindthename.com/top/lists/netherlands/2011).

3.4 Procedure

As it has been briefly explained in the material part of this section, the procedure that the respondents had to follow in order to complete the online questionnaire was simple. To begin with, all of them received an online invitation with the link that led to the survey at the Qualtrics website (version 2016). This link was also distributed across social media platforms as well using the snowball method. The survey began with an introduction that included a thank you note, participants had to agree to the terms in order to proceed, and a scenario would follow. More specifically, they were presented with the concept that elections would be held soon all over Europe for the European Parliament and that the participants should decide which candidate was most fit (Appendix B). The survey started with one of the experimental conditions then different questions about the variables were brought up and these were measured in seven-point Likert scale and semantic differential scales. The questionnaire ended with some demographic and general behavioral questions regarding age, nationality, gender, educational level, and Twitter use frequency. A thank you note was displayed to the participants at the very end which was accompanied by an open-ended question about concept of the study and a question about further suggestions (Appendix B).

3.5 Measures

One survey was constructed with four experimental conditions with the same questions that would measure the variables (see Appendix B). More specifically, questions about the accurate manipulation of the material (namely low versus high personalized), perceived credibility, attitude and intention to vote for the politician in the upcoming elections of the parliament were measured. The scales used were 7-point Likert scales and semantic differentials, ranging from negative (1) to positive (7). See appendix C for the rotated varimax factor loadings per variable and eigenvalues.

In order to measure the degree of *personalized communication* of the politician, three items were

constructed. Example items are: "To what extent the politician shares personal information about the

private life in these tweets?", "To what extent the politician shares emotions in these tweet?" and "To

what extent you feel that you know more about the politician behind the Twitter page?". Kruikemeier's

(2014) research was the stepping stone to construct the first two items and the last item was constructed

based on Rutten (2016). A principal components analysis (PCA) showed that the items together form a

one dimensional scale with an eigenvalue exceeding 1 (Eigenvalue= 1.70). The Cronbach's alpha

showed a moderate reliability of the scale (a= .61) (Privitera, 2012). Further analyses indicated that the

reliability of the scale could not significantly be improved by deleting items. Therefore, the scale was

kept as is.

For the construct of *perceived credibility*, we acted in accordance with Ohanian (1990) by using

the three dimensions of perceived expertise, attractiveness and trustworthiness on 7-point semantic

differential scales. More specifically, for expertise respondents were asked to answer to what extent they

find the politician to be "unprofessional/professional", "incompetent/competent", "inexpert/expert",

"unskilled/skilled" or "unqualified/qualified". Expertise in total had a high scale reliability (a=.90) and

an eigenvalue exceeding 1 (Eigenvalue= 3.57). Trustworthiness was measured with the following

semantic differential items: "unreliable/reliable", "insincere/sincere", "dishonest/honest",

"undependable/dependable" and "insincere/sincere". Trustworthiness scale was reliable, (a=.90) with an

eigenvalue 3.67. Finally, attractiveness was measured with semantic differential items like

"unattractive/attractive", "not classy/classy", "ugly/beautiful", "not sexy/sexy" and "plain/elegant".

Attractiveness scale is reliable (a=.83), with an eigenvalue exceeding 1 (Eigenvalue= 3.02). The scale of

attractiveness served for the manipulation check of the gender. The analysis of the scale of *perceived*

credibility showed that the scale as a whole was reliable (a=.93) and no further improvements could be

made. Principal component analysis revealed the presence of three components with an eigenvalue

exceeding 1 (Eigenvalue= 7.28); we named this variable perceived credibility.

Attitude towards the politician was measured using a 7-point differential scale and consisted of 5

items from Spears and Singh (2004). This scale has been used in a lot of studies in this field and was

therefore deemed appropriate in this case. For instance "To what extent do you perceive the politician on

this Twitter page to be: "unlikable/likable", unpleasant/pleasant", "unfavorable/favorable",

"unappealing/appealing" and "bad/good". The reliability of the scale was good (a= .95) and the

eigenvalue exceeded 1 (Eigenvalue= 4.16). The scale could not be further improved.

The dependent variable of the study was the intention to vote and it was measured by the

likelihood of voting the specific candidate ("How likely is it that you would vote for this politician?"

and "If given the chance, to what extent would you be interested in voting for this politician?") in the

beginning of the survey and at the end and was adapted from Fishbein and Ajzen (1975). The scale was

reliable (a= .84) and the eigenvalue was above 1 (Eigenvalue= 1.72). The scale could not be improved

further.

4. Results

4.1 Control Variables

To determine if the control variables, gender and education level, had any influence on the dependent

variable intention to vote and the mediating variables; attitude and perceived credibility towards the

politician some tests were conducted. To compare attitude, perceived credibility and intention to vote,

independent T-tests were conducted. To determine whether there are any statistically significant

differences between the means of intention to vote, attitude and perceived credibility regarding the

education level, one-way analyses of variance were conducted.

An independent T-test was conducted to compare attitude scores for males and females. There

was a significant difference between males *(M=4.50, SD=1.21)* and females *(M=5.09, SD=1.33), t*

(138) =-2.74, p =0.003. Females' attitude was more positive towards the politician than men

($M_{Difference}$=-.60, p=0.003). There was no significant difference in scores regarding intention to vote and

perceived credibility.

The education level of the respondents had no effect in the dependent variable, intention to vote

and the mediating variables; attitude and perceived credibility. For an overview of all the means and

standard deviations for each condition, see Table 1. Table 2, shows the effects between the variables

using Process Macro.

4.2 Manipulation checks

In order to ensure that the manipulation was successful, we tested whether the levels of personalized

communication were indeed recognized by the respondents. Therefore, an independent-samples t-test

was conducted which showed significant differences between the high personalized communication

(M=4.92, SD=1.17) and the low personalized communication *(M=3.64, SD=1.10),* t (138) = 6.65,

p=.000 with high personalized communication receiving the highest scores. Respondents who saw the

high personalized conditions recognized that the politician discloses information about personal life and

emotions and thought that they knew more about the person behind the twitter page.

   Moreover, to check whether the politicians were of equivalent attractiveness, an independent-

samples t-test was conducted. Results demonstrated that the male politician *(M=4.36, SD=1.21)* and the

female politician *(M=4.64, SD=1.17)*, *t (138) = -1.34, p= .18* were of equal attractiveness to the

respondents (regardless of gender) therefore the manipulation of the different levels of politicians was

successful. For an overview of all the means and standard deviations for each condition, see Table 1.

Table 1. Means and standard deviations of variables per condition

	High-Personalized communication				Low-personalized communication			
	High-personalized communication female politician (N=36)		High-personalized communication male politician (N=35)		Low-personalized communication female politician (N=35)		Low-personalized communication male politician (N=34)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Intention to vote	4.22	1.13	4.15	1.39	4.51	1.29	4.20	1.37
Personalized Communication	5.34[a]	1.28	5.68[a]	1.05	3.34[b]	1.09	3.26[b]	1.22
Attitude	4.70	1.20	5.29[a]	1.29	4.66	1.26	4.35[b]	1.33
Perceived Credibility	4.39	.96	4.87	1.16	4.51	1.00	4.30	1.04

Notes. Different superscripts within rows relate to significant differences between conditions, p <.05

4.3 Mediation

The mediating variables in this study are the *attitude* towards the politician and the *perceived credibility* and the moderating variable is the politician's *gender*. To test whether our mediating variables *attitude* and *perceived credibility* mediate the relationship between our independent and our dependent variable, we followed the Baron and Kenny (1986) approach. There are four steps to this approach, according to which mediation is present when (a) there is a significant effect between the independent variable, *personalized communication* on the dependent variable, *intention to vote*; (b) there is a significant effect between *personalized communication* and the mediators *attitude* and *perceived credibility*; (c) the mediators *attitude* and *perceived credibility* are significantly related to the dependent variable namely *intention to vote*; (d) when the mediators, *attitude* and *perceived credibility*, are included in the model the effect between the dependent and independent variable is reduced in magnitude.

Moreover, the mediating and moderating relationships were explored using Process Macro for SPSS (Hayes, 2013). A statistical significance of .05 was maintained using a one-tailed test. As the tests are one-tailed, we divided the statistical significance by two when necessary (Field, 2013). The *X* in the Process model is the independent variable *personalized communication.* The *Y* stands for the dependent variable *intention to vote*. *M1* and *M2* are respectively the mediators, *attitude* and *perceived credibility*. The mediator *gender* is *W*. The *XW* shows the interaction between *personalized communication* and *gender*. Table 2 shows the effects between W and M1, W and Y, XW, and M1 and M1 and Y.

Table 2. Mediation and Moderation using PROCESS Macro

	M₁ (attitude)			M₂ (perceived credibility)			Y (intention to vote)		
	Coeff.	SE	p	Coeff.	SE	p	Coeff.	SE	p
X (personalized communication)	.38	.11	<.05	.11	.08	.19	.15	.10	.11
M₁(attitude)	--	--	--	--	--	--	.16	.62	<.05
M₂ (perceived credibility)	--	--	--	--	--	--	.72	.09	<.05
W (gender)	.94	.73	.20	.54	.58	.35	.16	.62	.80
XW	-.28	.16	.09	.11	.13	.39	.02	.13	.91
Constant	3.30	.48	<.001	3.89	.40	<.001	.36	.54	.50
	$R^2=.096$, $F_{(3,136)}=$ 4.83,$p=$ <.001			$R^2=.013$, $F_{(3,136)}=$ .629,$p=$ .59			$R^2=.351$, $F_{(4,135)}=$ 18.30,$p=$ <.001		

4.4 Hypotheses Testing

In this section the mediating and moderating relationships will be explored and the hypotheses will be tested by conducting an independent-samples t-test, one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA), two-way between groups analyses and a multiple regression analysis. In terms of structure, the tests will be described per hypothesis.

Our first hypothesis (H1) posed that more *personalized communication* will lead to a more positive *attitude* towards the politician. To test H1 and if there is a statistically significant difference, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare *attitude* scores for the *high personalized communication* and the *low personalized communication conditions*. The results demonstrated a significant difference between *high personalized communication (M=4.52, SD=1.32)* and *low*

personalized communication (M=5.08, SD= 1.24), t (138) = -2.55, p=.003, 95%CI[-.983,-124].

Therefore, H1 is accepted.

The second hypothesis (H2) posed that gender is a moderator and being a woman weakens the relationship between *personalized communication* and positive *attitude* towards the politician. To test H2, a two-way between-groups analysis of variance was conducted in order to explore the interaction effect of the *personalized communication* and the politician's gender on the *attitude* towards the politician. All effects were statistically insignificant apart from the different levels of *personalized communication.* G*ender* yielded *F (1,136) =1.25, p= .27* indicating insignificant difference between male *(M=4.93, SD=1.38)* and female *(M=4.68, SD=1.22)* politician. The main effect for different levels of *personalized communication* yielded an F ratio of *F (1,136) = 6.93, p=.01* indicating that the effect for low personalized communication *(M=4.52, SD=1.33)* and high personalized communication *(M=5.08, SD=1.24)* was significant; the effect size was small $\eta^2=.04$. The interaction effect was significant, *F (1,136) = 6.05, p = .01.* An analysis of simple effects showed that the *attitude* effect was significant for the levels of *personalized communication, F (1,136) = 5.96, p =.000, η^2=.086* but not for the gender, *F (1,136) = .88, p = 0.34, η^2=.06* .Thus, the politician's gender does not seem to moderate the significant relationship between showing different levels of *personalized communication* and the *attitude* towards the politician. H2 is rejected.

The third hypothesis (H3) suggests that more *personalized communication* leads to a greater *perceived credibility* of the politician. In order to test H3 a one-way analysis of variance was performed with *personalized communication* as an independent variable and *perceived credibility* as the dependent variable. The results showed that there is no significant difference in scores for *perceived credibility* regarding *high personalized communication (M=4.41, SD=.98)* and *low personalized communication (M=4.41, SD=1.02), F (1,138) =.00, p= .988.* Thus, H3 is rejected. Subsequently, the second step of the

Baron and Kenny approach is not met; there is not a significant effect between the different levels of *personalized communication* and the mediator *perceived credibility*.

Hypothesis four (H4) posed that being a woman weakens the relationship between *personalized communication* and *perceived credibility* of the politician. In order to test this, a two-way analysis of variance was conducted to investigate the interaction effect of the different levels of *personalized communication* and the politician's *gender* on *perceived credibility*. As p> .05, we can conclude that we have not violated the homogeneity of variances assumption. The results showed that there were no significant interaction effects between the levels of personalized communication for perceived credibility $F (1,136) =.514, p= .48$. Moreover, the effect size was weak $(\eta^2=.04)$. The politician's gender thus not moderates the significant relationships between the different levels of personalized communication and the perceived credibility towards the politician. H4 is rejected.

The fifth and sixth hypotheses posed that *attitude* (H5) and *perceived credibility* (H6) significantly influenced the dependent variable; participants' *intention to vote*. To check H5 and H6, a multiple regression was conducted. Preliminary analyses were performed in order to ensure the assumptions of normality, linearity, multicollinearity and homoscedasticity were not violated. The regression model of the participants' *intention to vote* was set as the dependent variable and the *attitude* and *perceived credibility* as the independent variables. A multiple linear regression was calculated to predict participants' *intention to vote* based on their *attitude* and *perceived credibility*. *Attitude* and *perceived credibility* were found to be positive predictors for *intention to vote*. A significant regression equation was found $F (2,137) =40.05, p<.000$ with an R^2 of .369. The analysis showed that *perceived credibility* significantly predicted intention to vote $b=.536, t (137, 2) = 4.73, p= .000,$ and *attitude* as well $b= .256, t (137,2)= 2.99, p=.003,$ therefore H5 and H6 is accepted. By accepting H5 and H6, the third step of the Baron and Kenny approach is met.

The purpose of steps 1 through 3 of the Baron and Kenny approach (1986) is to establish that zero order relationships among the variables exist. If one or more of these relationships are not significant, it is concluded that there is no mediation. Further, since no significant relationships existed from step one through three in our case, step 4 of the Baron and Kenny (1986) approach was not necessary to be conducted due to the fact that there is no full mediation.

Summing up, the results confirm the prediction that *high personalized communication* leads to a more positive *attitude* towards the politician. However, the results do not confirm the prediction that *attitude* and *perceived credibility* fully mediate the relationship between showing different levels of *personalized communication* and the participants' *intention to vote* the politician because the criteria of Baron and Kenny (1986) approach were not met. On the other hand, *attitude* and *perceived credibility* do predict the participants' *intention to vote*. For the overview of the significant relationships see Figure 4.
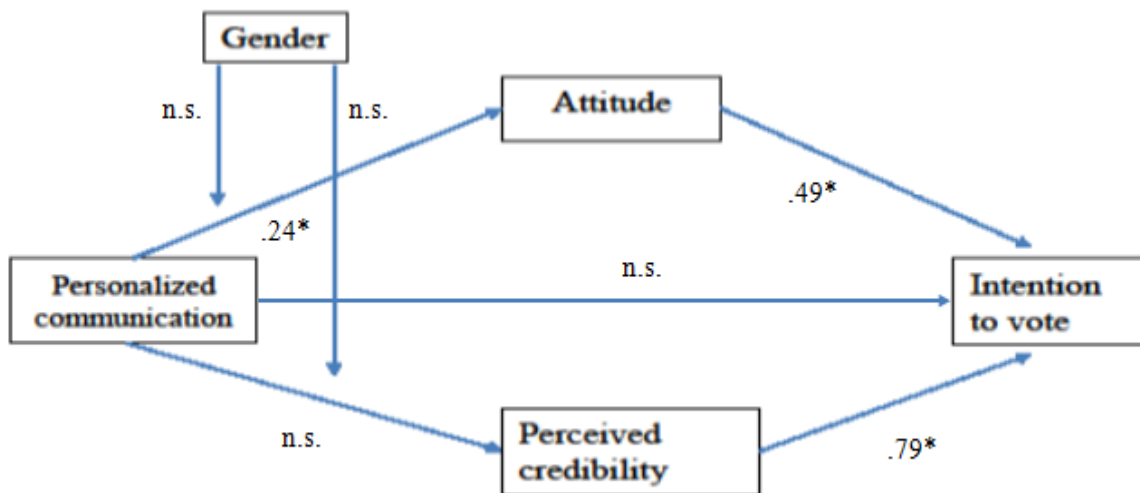
Figure 4 Conceptual model with significant relationships

Note. (*) Significance on .05 level

    (**) Significance on .01 level

The conceptual model illustrates how different levels of *personalized communication* as a strategy of personal branding influenced the public's *attitude* towards the politician and *perceived credibility*, which in turn led to the public's *intention to vote* for the politician. Although the public had a favorable *attitude* towards the politician they did not perceived the politician as *credible.* Moreover, *attitude* and *perceived credibility* was not affected by the politician's *gender.* There was found a significant relationship between *attitude* and intention to vote. *Perceived credibility* led also to *intention to vote.*

This study researched the aforestated relations by formulating different experimental conditions and tested the variables using an internet-based survey that endeavored to answer the research questions: *"To what extent do levels of personalized communication of politicians as a strategy of personal branding affect the individuals' intention to vote?" and "To what extent is this effect contingent upon the politicians' gender?"*

5. General Discussion

The main goal of politicians is to get the electorate to vote for them and it is strongly related with

effective self promotion and personal branding (Kruikemeier, 2014). Therefore, the aim of this study

was to answer the following research questions: *"To what extent do levels of personalized*

communication of politicians as a strategy of personal branding affect the individuals' intention to vote?

and "To what extent is this effect contingent upon the politicians' gender?" To answer the research

question, a 2 (personalized communication: low personalized versus high personalized) x 2 (gender of

the politician: male versus female) between subject factorial design was conducted.

5.1 Discussion

The first hypothesis (H1) was supported by this study's findings. This hypothesis stated that more

personalized communication (high personalized communication) would lead to a more positive attitude

towards the politician than disclosing less information (low personalized communication). However, the

expectation (H2) that this relationship would be contingent upon the politician's gender, and that it

would only apply to the male politician, was not supported. Results indicated that for female as well as

male politicians, more personalized communication leads to a significantly more favorable attitude

towards the politician. These results are in a similar vein with existing literature on personal celebrity

brands stating that self-disclosure leads to a more positive attitude (Sprecher, Treger & Wondra, 2013;

Hahn & Lee, 2014).

On the other hand, disclosing more information (H3) did not lead to a greater perceived

credibility of the politician and this effect was not contingent upon the politician's gender (H4). The

gender of the politician does not weaken the relationship between personalized communication and

perceived credibility. Subsequently, a high level of personalized communication or self-disclosure does

not help or hinder perceived credibility. Although the findings suggest that self-disclosure leads to a more positive attitude, it does not appear to help the politician to be perceived as credible. Recent research also claims that self-disclosure can sometimes prove to be harmful (Rappert & Coopmans, 2015). A study by Imlawi and Gregg (2014) illustrated that when instructors want to increase their credibility online and engage the students more, they should disclose information only regarding the topic at hand. When the instructor was disclosing personal information or emotions the credibility was affected significantly thus decreasing the student's engagement (Imlawi & Gregg, 2014).

Attitude (H5) and perceived credibility (H6) were found to play a significant role on an individual's intention to vote. These assumptions were supported by the data. More specifically, in order for a person to vote for a politician, liking, and perceiving the politician as credible, may indeed be important factors to take into consideration when communicating on social media. For online personal branding by politicians to be effective on intention to vote, positive attitude should be fostered through personalized communication. More elaboration and possible explanations will follow in the upcoming paragraphs.

First, the research endeavored to explain the impact of different levels of personalized communication of the politician on the electorate's intention to vote through mediation, using the Baron and Kenny approach (1986). Unfortunately, the criteria of this approach were not met. Therefore, there is no full mediation. A possible explanation for this might be the contrasting results of the mediating variables. We found that disclosing more (high personalized communication) or less (low personalized communication) has some indirect impact on the electorate's intention to vote. This impact is dependent on attitude but not on perceived credibility. The absence of a direct effect of perceived credibility on intention to vote might be explained through Social Information Processing theory (SIP; Walther, 1996). SIP theory posits that in order for credibility to be established individuals need more time than in face-to

face communication due to the fewer cues available (Walther & Bunz, 2005). Because the participants

in this study only saw one picture and two tweets of the politician and there was no interaction between

the politician and the participant, it is possible that the respondents may be uncertain of the politician's

credibility.

Surprisingly, perceived credibility did not appear to be influenced by personalized

communication. A possible explanation for this is that the respondents carefully considered the message,

which according to the ELM (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), is taking the central route of persuasion. Under

the peripheral route, cues like attractiveness and credibility of the source of the message play a

significant role in an individual's decision making process (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Another

explanation might be due to the fact that in order for the politicians to be perceived credible, source

credibility should be present as well (Westerman, Spence, & Van Der Heide, 2012). Source credibility

on Twitter accounts for the number of followers, the number of follows and the number of retweets;

having too few connections (absent in our case) result in lower judgement of expertise. Moreover,

according to SIP theory, in order to establish trust and to perceive someone as credible in a computer-

mediated environment, small cues matter because they make up for the lack of cues that contribute to an

individual's perceived credibility (Walther, 2002). However, taking into account the previous elections

in the U.S., scholars have explained Obama's victory partly due to the positive nature of his social media

accounts (LaMarre & Suzuki-Lambrecht, 2013). This would indicate that spreading positive attitudes

among the public might be more crucial during a political campaign than perceived as credible

(Baumgartner, Mackay, Morris, Otenyo, Powell, Smith, & Waite, 2010).

Moreover, we assumed that the gender of the politician would play a significant role in terms of

attitude and perceived credibility but -to our surprise- this was not the case. It seems that the participants

did not take the gender of the politician into consideration when forming a judgement. This might be due

to the influence and the rapid development of the internet that bridges the gender gap. As previous

research supports, no gender differences were found regarding the attitude participants held, about males

and females (Shaw & Gant, 2002; McGregor et al., 2016). Moreover, nowadays the practices of online

personal branding of female politicians allow to overcome entrenched stereotypical views of what a

woman in politics 'should' be, thus bridging the gender gap (Sanghvi & Hodges, 2015). In fact, strategic

stereotype theory confirms this notion as female politicians endeavor to break their connection with

societal stereotypes women have and enhance their agentic traits which further helps in bridging the

gender gap (Fridkin & Kenney, 2014). This finding is also in line with the "queen bee phenomenon" that

claims that the further females rise on the leadership ladder, the more "agentic", authoritative or

masculine, characteristics they embrace (Derks, Van Laar, & Ellemers, 2016). The study by Faniko,

Ellemers, and Derks (2015) supports this finding as well, as they asked males and females in junior and

senior positions to present themselves, finding that women in senior positions would portray themselves

with more leadership qualities and ambitions than women in junior positions, and that they would feel

more equal to their male associates.

　　　　However the most interesting finding emerging from this study, is that the style of

communication (levels of personalized communication) seemed to affect respondents' attitudes and

subsequently their intention to vote. This might be due to the fact that disclosing more personal

information and emotions on social media leads to more positive attitudes, according to self-disclosure

theory (Braden, 2015). This explanation is supported further, as, as mentioned before, social media also

contributes to forming a positive attitude towards the politician (Ko & Kuo, 2009).

　　　　This study also contributed to existing literature in several ways and the results have some

important theoretical implications. First, although previous research shows that social media, and

especially Twitter, are popular among politicians, using them to engage the electorate, there has been

little empirical research into the style and strategies of personal branding political candidates use on social media. Second, attitudes might be more influential than perceived credibility on intention to vote when mediating the effect of personalized communication. This might be true as self-disclosure theory indicates that when a person reveals information or emotions, then this is likely to have a positive effect on attitude (Ko & Kuo, 2009).

Third, when looking at perceived credibility as an influencer and not as a mediator its effect is predictive of intention to vote. Positive attitude of the voter towards the politician also may affect intention to vote when communicating on Twitter. Moreover, this study contributes to literature on political communication via social media by offering findings -when high-level of personalized communication is present- suggesting that perceived credibility may not be as important as the fostering of positive attitudes in electorates. This conclusion was drawn because although perceived credibility was not found to be a significant predictor, this did not affect intention to vote.

 Further, another implication is that contrary to the study of Kruikemeier (2014), that claimed personalized communication does not lead to intention to vote, our findings support the opposite. This suggests an inconsistency in the literature, calling for a more in-depth investigation of the effects of these variables. More specifically, personalized communication had an impact on attitude and attitude led to the voting of the candidate. These opposing findings by our study and Kruikemeier's research (2014) might be due to the level of personalized communication. In our study self-disclosure of information and emotions was prominent in the tweets in both conditions (high personalized communication and low personalized communication), which according to literature leads to positive attitude formation (Ko & Kuo, 2009).

This study has several implications for practice as well. First, currently there is no best-practice guideline in terms of how personalized a politician's message should be. For politicians who struggle

with perceived credibility, these findings indicate that they can still gain votes by generating positive attitudes through personalized communication. Revealing information and emotions online contributes to the establishment of a positive relationship and therefore based on our results politicians gain voting approval.

Second, gender should not be taken into account when developing online personal branding techniques. Our findings suggest that the participants do not judge the politician's gender and therefore, the online personal branding techniques should be formulated accordingly. To our surprise social media contribute to the bridging of the gender gap, therefore female politicians should not consider that they will be evaluated differently from their male counterparts. Third, regardless of communication style, perceived credibility and attitude seem to increase intention to vote. Thus politicians that do not wish to disclose information or emotions on social media should focus on building a credible image and fostering a positive attitude among their public.

To conclude, the results of this research answer a fundamental question about the effectiveness of online political campaigning: Using social media matters, especially when the communication is personalized.

Limitations and Future Research

As with every study, this research has some limitations as well. First, regarding the sample, the experiment was conducted in the concept of a European Parliament election. We therefore cannot conclude that these practices will be effective in other regions besides the European Union or other cultural contexts. Second, the social media platform employed by this study was Twitter, and although it is used by many scholars to conduct their research in politics (e.g. Kruikemeier, 2014; Huber & Arceneaux, 2007; Lee & Shin, 2012; etc.) research should be conducted in other social media platforms as well. More specifically, the analysis does not enable us to determine whether the medium (Twitter) is

the message. Further, another limitation is that this study did not account for cues online that relate to the source's credibility namely Twitter; cues like the number of followers, the number of follows and the number of retweets was not present thus we cannot conclude what the outcome would be if present and if it would influence the politician's perceived credibility. The findings, regarding the absence of full mediation when the Baron and Kenny (1986) approach is employed, is another limitation of this research. According to literature, absence of full mediation might occur if more than one mediators are employed (MacKinnon, Fairchild, & Fritz, 2007). More specifically MacKinnon, Fairchild and Fritz (2007) in their study, concluded that this might be due to the different signs the mediated effects might have.

Based on this limitation, a future study might include investigating attitude and perceived credibility separately. Second, it would be interesting to see what the results are of a similar study in other countries that are not part of the European Union. Third, applying such elements as visual communication and gendered communication styles, such as the use of "agentic" characteristics in females, as in the theory of strategic gender stereotype, could yield interesting results. Further investigation should be conducted on the circumstances under which attitudes are more influential than perceived credibility, such as, for example, whether social media mediates their effects.

The rise of social media is constant and politicians use every channel in order to communicate therefore further research is encouraged (McGregor et al., 2016). Future research should also be conducted on the different communication styles, this study employed personalized communication with the form of disclosure thus it is important to investigate other kinds of styles politicians adopt on social media and examine their effectiveness. In addition to that, the surroundings of this experiment were set before the elections; future researchers could investigate the effects of social media in a timeframe that does not involve electorate decision.

The next stage of a research agenda would be to employ a longitudinal study to investigate whether the effects on these variables are consistent over time. Future researchers should investigate personal branding techniques by politicians by taking into consideration the interactivity social media offer and how this variable affects intention to vote. More research on social media platforms is still necessary before obtaining a definitive answer to whether different levels of personalized communication of politicians as a strategy of personal branding affects the individuals' intention to vote. Another intriguing point for future research would be to investigate source credibility, for example investigate the source credibility of social media platforms like Twitter and how it affects important outcome variables like intention to vote. Last, given the outcome of the recent U.S. elections and the controversy it generated worldwide a study case and sentiment analysis on Twitter would also be of interest.

5.2 Conclusion

This study focuses on the effect of personalized communication (low personalized communication versus high personalized communication) as a personal branding strategy used by politicians to influence individuals' intention to vote and took into account the politician's gender. The data obtained indicated that a high level of personalized communication plays a significant role in the molding of a positive attitude. These results imply that a personal branding strategy is important with regard to the voter's decision making process. This statement is supported by the result showing that positive attitude of the voter towards a politician increases the likelihood of voting for that politician.

This research was also concerned with the politician's gender. However, the participants did not appear to judge the female politician differently from her male counterpart. Participants did not appear to form different attitudes towards the politician based on gender, nor did they perceive one politician as more credible than the other. This finding was rather surprising and positive since politics is a male-

dominated sector and also due to the gender stereotypes females are commonly subjected to (Braden, 2015). For politicians, disclosing and using personalized communication has positive effects on attitude. However, based on the findings of this research, there needs to be a balance on how much is disclosed since revealing too much can affect their credibility. Establishing credibility and positive attitude are two important factors for the electorate since they are determinants of intention to vote according to our results. Personalized communication as a style of communication used by politicians was the primary focus of this research and more specifically the online personal branding strategy politicians should follow in order to influence the public's intention to vote.

References

Aaker, J., & Fournier, S. (1995). A brand as a character, a partner and a person: three perspectives on the question of brand personality. *NA-Advances in Consumer Research Volume 22*.

Adam, S., & Maier, M. (2010). Personalization of Politics A Critical Review and Agenda for Research. *Annals of the International Communication Association*, *34*(1), 213-257.

Ajzen, I., & Fishbein, M. (1975). A Bayesian analysis of attribution processes. *Psychological Bulletin*, *82*(2), 261.

Altman, I., & Taylor, D. (1973). Social penetration theory. *New York: Holt, Rinehart &\ Mnston*.

Angst, C. M., & Agarwal, R. (2009). Adoption of electronic health records in the presence of privacy concerns: The elaboration likelihood model and individual persuasion. *MIS quarterly*, *33*(2), 339-370.

Appiah, O. (2001). Black, White, Hispanic, and Asian American adolescents' responses to culturally embedded ads. *Howard Journal of Communication*, *12*(1), 29-48.

Areni, C. S., Ferrell, M. E., & Wilcox, J. B. (2000). The persuasive impact of reported group opinions on individuals low vs. high in need for cognition: Rationalization vs. biased elaboration?. *Psychology & Marketing*, *17*(10), 855-875.

Åström, J., & Karlsson, M. (2016). The feminine style, the male influence, and the paradox of gendered political blogspace. *Information, Communication & Society*, 1-17.

Badgett, M. V., Lau, H., Sears, B., & Ho, D. (2007). Bias in the workplace: Consistent evidence of sexual orientation and gender identity discrimination. *The Williams Institute*.

Bak, J. Y., Kim, S., & Oh, A. (2012, July). Self-disclosure and relationship strength in Twitter

conversations. *Proceedings of the 50th Annual Meeting of the Association for Computational*

Linguistics: Short Papers-Volume 2 (pp. 60-64). Association for Computational Linguistics.

Baker, K. (2016). Thanks Trump! (cover story). *New Republic*, *247*(12), 16-21.

Bakshy, E., Hofman, J. M., Mason, W. A., & Watts, D. J. (2011, February). Everyone's an influencer:

quantifying influence on twitter. In *Proceedings of the fourth ACM international conference on*

Web search and data mining (pp. 65-74). ACM.

Barber, B. (2001). The uncertainty of digital politics: Democracy's uneasy relationship with information

technology. *Harvard International Review*, *23*, 42–48.

Baron, R. M., & Kenny, D. A. (1986). The moderator–mediator variable distinction in social

psychological research: Conceptual, strategic, and statistical considerations. *Journal of*

personality and social psychology, *51*(6), 1173.

Baumgartner, J. C., Mackay, J. B., Morris, J. S., Otenyo, E. E., Powell, L., Smith, M. M., & Waite, B.

C. (2010). *Communicator-in-chief: How Barack Obama used new media technology to win the*

White House. J. A. Hendricks, & R. E. Denton Jr (Eds.). Lexington Books.

Bhattacherjee, A., & Sanford, C. (2006). Influence processes for information technology acceptance: An

elaboration likelihood model. *MIS quarterly*, 805-825.

Biocca, F., Harms, C., & Burgoon, J. K. (2003). Toward a more robust theory and measure of social

presence: Review and suggested criteria. *Presence*, *12*(5), 456-480.

Black, J. H., & Erickson, L. (2003). Women candidates and voter bias: do women politicians need to be

better?. *Electoral Studies*, *22*(1), 81-100.

Bligh, M. C., Schlehofer, M. M., Casad, B. J., & Gaffney, A. M. (2012). Competent enough, but would you vote for her? Gender stereotypes and media influences on perceptions of women politicians. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, *42*(3), 560-597

Braden, M. (2015). *Women politicians and the media*. University Press of Kentucky.

Brettschneider, F. (2008). The news media's use of opinion polls. *The SAGE handbook of public opinion research*, 479-486.

Burton, A. M., & Bruce, V. (1993). Naming faces and naming names: Exploring an interactive activation model of person recognition. *Memory*, *1*(4), 457-480.

Butler, D. M., & Preece, J. R. (2016). Recruitment and Perceptions of Gender Bias in Party Leader Support. *Political Research Quarterly*, 1065912916668412.

Cacioppo, J. T., & Petty, R. E. (1984). The elaboration likelihood model of persuasion. *NA-Advances in Consumer Research Volume 11*.

Campbell, D. E., & Wolbrecht, C. (2006). See Jane run: Women politicians as role models for adolescents. *Journal of Politics*, *68*(2), 233-247.

Chelune, G. J. (1976). Reactions to male and female disclosure at two levels. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *34*, 1000–1003.

Collins, N. L., & Miller, L. C. (1994). Self-disclosure and liking: a meta-analytic review. *Psychological bulletin*, *116*(3), 457.

Cozby, P. C. (1973). Self-disclosure: a literature review. *Psychological bulletin*, *79*(2), 73.

Derlega, V. J., Metts, S., Petronio, S., & Margulis, S. T. (1993). *Self-disclosure*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Derks, B., Van Laar, C., & Ellemers, N. (2016). The queen bee phenomenon: Why women leaders distance themselves from junior women. *The Leadership Quarterly*.

De Vreese, C. H. (2007). Digital renaissance: young consumer and citizen?. *The annals of the american academy of political and social science*, *611*(1), 207-216.

Druckman, J. N., Kifer, M. J., & Parkin, M. (2009). Campaign communications in US congressional elections. *American Political Science Review*, *103*(03), 343-366.

Eagly, A. H., & Chaiken, S. (1993). *The psychology of attitudes*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers.

Eagly, A. H., Wood, W., & Diekman, A. B. (2000). Social role theory of sex differences and similarities: A current appraisal. In T. Eckes, H. Martin & M. Trautner (Eds.), *The developmental social psychology of gender* (pp. 123-174). New York: Taylor & Francis Group.

Ellison, N., Heino, R., & Gibbs, J. (2006). Managing impressions online: Self-presentation processes in the online dating environment. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *11*(2), 415-441.

Escalas, J. E. (2004). Imagine yourself in the product: Mental simulation, narrative transportation, and persuasion. *Journal of advertising*, *33*(2), 37-48.

Faniko, K., Ellemers, N., & Derks, B. (2015). Queen bees and alpha males: Who is more likely to distance from same-gender colleagues? *Manuscript in press*

Fawley, N. E. (2013). LinkedIn as an information source for human resources, competitive intelligence. *Online Searcher*, 31-50.

Ferber, R. (1977). Research by convenience. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *4*(1), 57-58.

Field, A. (2013). *Discovering statistics using IBM SPSS statistics*. Sage.

Fridkin, K., & Kenney, P. (2014). *The Changing Face of Representation*. University of Michigan Press.

Fukuyama, F. (1998). Women and the evolution of world politics. *Foreign Affairs,* 24-40.

Gaia, A. C. (2013). The role of gender stereotypes in the social acceptability of the expression of intimacy. *The Social Science Journal*, 50(4), 591-602.

Galligan, Y., & Clavero, S. (2008, April). Prospects for Women's Legislative Representation in Postsocialist Europe: The Views of Female Politicians. *Gender and society* , pp. 149-171.

Gefen, D., & Straub, D. W. (2004). Consumer trust in B2C e-Commerce and the importance of social presence: experiments in e-Products and e-Services. *Omega*, *32*(6), 407-424.

Gibson, R. K., & McAllister, I. (2006). Does cyber-campaigning win votes? Online communication in the 2004 Australian election. *Journal of elections, public opinion and parties*, *16*(3), 243-263.

Gidengil, E., & Everitt, J. (2003). Conventional coverage/unconventional politicians: Gender and media coverage of Canadian leaders' debates, 1993, 1997, 2000. *Canadian Journal of Political Science/Revue canadienne de science politique*, *36*(03), 559-577.

Goodstein, L. D., & Reinecker, V. M. (1974). Factors affecting self-disclosure: A review of the literature. In B.Maher (Ed.), *Progress in experimental personality research* (*Vol. 7*, pp. 49–77). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.

Grant, W. J., Moon, B., & Busby Grant, J. (2010). Digital dialogue? Australian politicians' use of the

    social network tool Twitter. *Australian Journal of Political Science*, *45*(4), 579-604.

Green, M. C., & Brock, T. C. (2000). The role of transportation in the persuasiveness of public

    narratives. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, *79*(5), 701.

Han, H. (2009). *Moved to action: Motivation, participation, and inequality in American politics*.

    Stanford University Press.

Hahn, K. H., & Lee, E. J. (2014). Effect of psychological closeness on consumer attitudes toward

    fashion blogs: the moderating effect of fashion leadership and interpersonal LOV. *Journal of

    Global Fashion Marketing*, *5*(2), 103-121.

Hayes, A. F. (2013). *Introduction to mediation, moderation, and conditional process analysis: A

    regression-based approach*. Guilford Press.

Howard, P. N. (2006). *New media campaigns and the managed citizen*. New York: Cambridge

    University Press.

Huber, G. A., & Arceneaux, K. (2007). Identifying the persuasive effects of presidential

    advertising. *American Journal of Political Science*, *51*(4), 957-977.

Huddy, L., & Terkildsen, N. (1993). The consequences of gender stereotypes for women candidates at

    different levels and types of office. *Political Research Quarterly*, *46*(3), 503-525.

Hwang, S. (2013). The effect of Twitter use on politicians' credibility and attitudes toward

    politicians. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, *25*(3), 246-258.

Imlawi, J., & Gregg, D. (2014). Engagement in online social networks: The impact of self-disclosure and humor. *International Journal of Human-Computer Interaction*, *30*(2), 106-125.

Joinson, A. N. (2001). Self-disclosure in computer-mediated communication: The role of self-awareness and visual anonymity. *European journal of social psychology*, *31*(2), 177-192.

Jones, L. W., Sinclair, R. C., & Courneya, K. S. (2003). The effects of source credibility and message framing on exercise intentions, behaviors, and attitudes: an integration of the elaboration likelihood model and prospect theory1. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, *33*(1), 179-196.

Kaputa, C. (2005). *UR a brand! How smart people brand themselves.* California: Mountain View.

Kaufmann, K. M., & Petrocik, J. R. (1999). The changing politics of American men: Understanding the sources of the gender gap. *American Journal of Political Science*, 864-887.

Kirk, R. E. (1982). *Experimental design*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Kleinnijenhuis, J., Maurer, M., Kepplinger, H.M., & Oegema, D. (2001) Issues and personalities in German and Dutch television news. *European Journal of Communication* 16(3): 337–359.

Kluemper, D. H., & Rosen, P. A. (2009). Future employment selection methods: evaluating social networking web sites. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, *24*(6), 567-580

Ko, H. C., & Kuo, F. Y. (2009). Can blogging enhance subjective well-being through self-disclosure?. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, *12*(1), 75-79.

Krämer, N. C., & Winter, S. (2008). Impression management 2.0: The relationship of self- esteem, extraversion, self-efficacy, and self-presentation within social networking sites. *Journal of Media Psychology: Theories, Methods, and Applications*, *20*(3), 106

Kruikemeier, S. (2014). How political candidates use Twitter and the impact on votes. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *34*, 131-139.

Kruikemeier, S., van Noort, G., Vliegenthart, R., & de Vreese, C. H. (2013). Getting closer: The effects of personalized and interactive online political communication. *European Journal of Communication*, 0267323112464837.

LaMarre, H. L., & Suzuki-Lambrecht, Y. (2013). Tweeting democracy? Examining Twitter as an online public relations strategy for congressional campaigns'. *Public Relations Review*, *39*(4), 360-368.

Lampel, J., & Bhalla, A. (2007), "The Role of Status Seeking in Online Communities: Giving the Gift of Experience," Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 12, 2.

Lee, J., & Lim, Y. S. (2016). Gendered campaign tweets: The cases of Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump. *Public Relations Review*, *42*(5), 849-855.

Lee, E., & Oh, S. Y. (2012). To personalize or depersonalize? when and how politicians' personalized tweets affect the public's reactions. *Journal of Communication*, 62(6), 932–949.

Lee, E. J., & Shin, S. Y. (2012). Are they talking to me? Cognitive and affective effects of interactivity in politicians' twitter communication. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 15(10), 515–535.

Lee, E. J., & Shin, S. Y. (2012). When the medium is the message: How transportability moderates the effects of politicians' Twitter communication. *Communication Research*, 0093650212466407.

Lombardo, E., Meier, P., & Verloo, M. (Eds.). (2009). *The discursive politics of gender equality: stretching, bending and policy-making*. Routledge.

MacKinnon, D. P., Fairchild, A. J., & Fritz, M. S. (2007). Mediation analysis. *Annual review of psychology*, *58*, 593.

Mazer, J. P., Murphy, R. E., & Simonds, C. J. (2009). The effects of teacher self-disclosure via Facebook on teacher credibility. *Learning, Media and Technology*, *34*(2), 175-183.

McGregor, S. C., Lawrence, R. G., & Cardona, A. (2016). Personalization, gender, and social media: gubernatorial candidates' social media strategies. *Information, Communication & Society*, 1-20.

Nielsen, R.K. (2011) Mundane Internet tools, mobilizing practices, and the coproduction of citizenship in political campaigns. *New Media & Society* 13(5): 755–771.

Ohanian, R., (1990). Construction and validation of a scale to measure celebrity endorsers' perceived expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness. *Journal of advertising*, *19*(3), 39-52.

Petty, R. E., & Cacioppo, J. T. (1986). The elaboration likelihood model of persuasion. *Communication and persuasion* (pp. 1-24). Springer New York.

Polat, R.K., (2005) The Internet and political participation: Exploring the explanatory links. *European Journal of Communication* 20(4): 435–459

Preston, P., & Rogers, J. (2011). Social networks, legal innovations and the "new" music industry. *info*, *13*(6), 8-19.

Privitera, G.J. (2012). *Statistics for the behavioral sciences*. London: Sage.

Rao, D., Yarowsky, D., Shreevats, A., & Gupta, M. (2010, October). Classifying latent user attributes in twitter. In *Proceedings of the 2nd international workshop on Search and mining user-generated contents* (pp. 37-44). ACM.

Rappert, B., & Coopmans, C. (2015). On conveying and not conveying expertise. *Social studies of science*, 0306312715595297.

Rosener, J. (1990). How women lead. *Harvard business review*, *68*(6), 119-125.

Rubinstein, H., & Griffiths, C. (2001). Branding matters more on the internet .*Journal of Brand Management*, *8*(6), 394-404.

Rutten, L. (2016). *How much should you show? An Investigation of Personal Branding Effects in the Electronic Dance Music Industry* (Unpublished master's Thesis). Erasmus University, Rotterdam, Netherlands

Sanbonmatsu, K. (2002). Gender stereotypes and vote choice. *American Journal of Political Science*, 20-34.

Sanghvi, M., & Hodges, N. (2015). Marketing the female politician: an exploration of gender and appearance. *Journal of Marketing Management,* 31(15-16), 1676-1694.

Schneider, H. (2004). Branding in politics—manifestations, relevance and identity-oriented management. *Journal of Political Marketing*, *3*(3), 41-67.

Shaw, L. H., & Gant, L. M. (2002). Users divided? Exploring the gender gap in Internet use. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, *5*(6), 517-527.

Short, J. A., Williams, E., & Christie, B. (1976). *The social psychology of telecommunications*. London: Wiley.

Silvera, D. H., & Austad, B. (2004). Factors predicting the effectiveness of celebrity endorsement advertisements. *European Journal of marketing*,*38*(11/12), 1509-1526.

Simien, E. M. (2015). The Changing Face of Representation: The Gender of US Senators and Constituent Communications. By Kim L. Fridkin and Patrick J. Kenney. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014. 256 p. $65.00 cloth, $40.00 paper. *Perspectives on Politics*, *13*(03), 868-869.

Spears, N., & Singh, S. N. (2004). Measuring attitude toward the brand and purchase intentions. *Journal of Current Issues & Research in Advertising*, *26*(2), 53-66.

Sprecher, S., Treger, S., & Wondra, J. D. (2013). Effects of self-disclosure role on liking, closeness, and other impressions in get-acquainted interactions. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, *30*(4), 497-514.

Tam, K. Y., & Ho, S. Y. (2005). Web personalization as a persuasion strategy: An elaboration likelihood model perspective. *Information Systems Research*, *16*(3), 271-291.

Tanis, M. A. (2003). *Cues to identity in CMC: The impact on person perception and subsequent interaction outcomes*.

Thamm, M., & Bleier, A. (2013). When politicians tweet: A study on the members of the German Federal Diet. *arXiv preprint arXiv:1305.1734*.

Tidwell, L. C., & Walther, J. B. (2002). Computer-mediated communication effects on disclosure, impressions, and interpersonal evaluations: Getting to know one another a bit at a time. *Human communication research*, *28*(3), 317-348.

Till, B. D., & Busler, M. (1998). Matching products with endorsers: attractiveness versus expertise. *Journal of consumer marketing*, *15*(6), 576-586.

Treadwell, D. (2014). Sampling (2nd ed.) *Introducing communication research: paths of inquiry*

(174-190). Thousands Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Tumasjan, A., Sprenger, T. O., Sandner, P. G., & Welpe, I. M. (2010). Predicting Elections with

Twitter: What 140 Characters Reveal about Political Sentiment. *ICWSM*, *10*, 178-185.

Van der Land, S., & Muntinga, D. G. (2014, June). To Shave or Not to Shave?. In *International

Conference on HCI in Business* (pp. 257-265). Springer International Publishing.

Van Dijck, J. (2013). *The culture of connectivity: A critical history of social media*. Oxford University

Press.

Van Noort, G., Voorveld, H. A., & van Reijmersdal, E. A. (2012). Interactivity in brand web sites:

cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses explained by consumers' online flow

experience. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, *26*(4), 223-234.

Van Santen, R., & Van Zoonen, L. (2010) The personal in political television biographies. *Biography*

33(1): 46–67.

Verba, S., Burns, N., & Schlozman, K. L. (1997). Knowing and caring about politics: Gender and

political engagement. *The Journal of Politics,* 59(04), 1051-1072.

Walther, J. B. (1996). Computer-mediated communication impersonal, interpersonal, and hyperpersonal

interaction. *Communication research*, *23*(1), 3-43.

Walther, J. B. (1992). Interpersonal effects in computer-mediated interaction a relational

perspective. *Communication research*, *19*(1), 52-90.

Walther, J. B., & Parks, M. R. (2002). Cues filtered out, cues filtered in. *Handbook of interpersonal communication*, 529-563.

Walther, J. B. (2011). Theories of computer-mediated communication and interpersonal relations. *The handbook of interpersonal communication*, *4*, 443-479.

Walther, J. B., & Parks, M. R. (2002). Cues filtered out, cues filtered in. *Handbook of interpersonal communication,* 529-563.

Walther, J. B., & Bunz, U. (2005). The rules of virtual groups: Trust, liking, and performance in computer-mediated communication. *Journal of Communication*, *55*(4), 828-846.

Westerman, D., Spence, P. R., & Van Der Heide, B. (2012). A social network as information: The effect of system generated reports of connectedness on credibility on Twitter. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *28*(1), 199-206.

Wellman, B. (1997). Structural analysis: From method and metaphor to theory and substance. *Contemporary Studies in Sociology*, *15*, 19-61

Winter, S., Kramer, N. C., Appel, J., & Schielke, K. (2010). Information selection in the blogosphere: The effect of expertise, community rating, and age. In *Proceedings of the 32nd annual conference of the cognitive science society* (pp. 802-807). Austin, TX: Cognitive Science Society.

Wright, P. (2002). Marketplace metacognition and social intelligence. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *28*(4), 677-682.

APPENDIX A

Eva Jansen
@EvaJansenMEP
Member of the European Parliament

Tweets   Tweets & replies   Media

Eva Jansen @EvaJansenMEP
119 mln ppl in #EU still at risk of poverty or social exclusion. Towards more social Europe that leaves no one behind.

Eva Jansen @EvaJansenMEP
A full life means giving back to the community and to Europe #plantingtrees

High Personalized Communication x Female Politician[2]

Eva Jansen
@EvaJansenMEP
Member of the European Parliament

Tweets   Tweets & replies   Media

I was very, very pleased-really- to see so many young, inspiring and motivated people in today's gathering with such bright ideas #emotional

Eva Jansen @EvaJansenMEP
Back to training again today. I am expecting my #trainer to toughen up the fitness regime #fitintheparliament

---

[2]Photo of Female Politician:
 http://washingtondcphotographer.squarespace.com/storage/blog-may-14-2013/Virginia%20Photographer%20Executive%20Portraits%200004.JPG?__SQUARESPACE_CACHEVERSION=1369410715425

Low Personalized Communication x Female Politician

Lucas Jansen
@LucasJansenMEP
Member of the European Parliament

Tweets   Tweets & replies   Media

Lucas Jansen @LucasJansenMEP
119 mln ppl in #EU still at risk of poverty or social exclusion. Towards more social Europe that leaves no one behind.

Lucas Jansen @LucasJansenMEP
A full life means giving back to the community and to Europe #plantingtrees

Low Personalized Communication x Male Politician[3]

Lucas Jansen
@LucasJansenMEP
Member of the European Parliament

Tweets   Tweets & replies   Media

Lucas Jansen @LucasJansenMEP
I was very, very pleased-really- to see so many young, inspiring and motivated people in today's gathering with such bright ideas #emotional

Lucas Jansen @LucasJansenMEP
Back to training again today. I am expecting my #trainer to toughen up the fitness regime #fitintheparliament

High Personalized Communication x Male Politician

---

[3] Photo of Male Politician:
https://static.squarespace.com/static/502537df24ac921b4551c8dc/5331d0a4e4b0b0f006165cc8/5331d0aae4b0b0f006166247/1322764290072/1000w/Virginia%20Headshot%20Executive%20Portrait%20Photographer%20.jpg

APPENDIX B (Welcome, Introduction and Outro Text)

<div align="center">

Welcome Text

</div>

Dear respondents,

Thank you for participating in this survey. As part of my MSc thesis, I am conducting research on how people determine who they vote for. Rest assured that all your answers are confidential as the completion of the questionnaire is anonymous. The questionnaire will take approximately 5 to 10 minutes.

 If you have any questions or concerns please contact me at m.asmarianaki@tilburguniversity.edu. Your participation is voluntary; if you agree with the above mentioned information and you are 18 or older please proceed.

To continue to the survey, and to acknowledge you understand above noted terms, click the button with the two arrows in the right-hand corner.

Introduction Text

Imagine that you are investigating which candidate to elect for the European Parliament.   Please carefully review the profile picture and tweets made by the politician below as you will be asked detailed questions about them. Note that there is a timer which will allow you to proceed after 15 seconds.

Outro Text

Thank you for completing the survey, - I sincerely appreciate your participation!-. If you happen to have

any suggestions regarding my research, please feel free to write them down in the empty field below.

Thanks again!

APPENDIX C (Questionnaire Items)

Construct	Items	Factor Loadings (Varimax Rotation)
Expertise	The following questions refer to your impression of the candidate. How would you rate this candidate on a scale ranging from 1 to 7 on the following topics? Unprofessional/ Professional	.82
	The following questions refer to your impression of the candidate. How would you rate this candidate on a scale ranging from 1 to 7 on the following topics? Incompetent/ Competent	.82
	The following questions refer to your impression of the candidate. How would you rate this candidate on a scale ranging from 1 to 7 on the following topics? Inexpert/ Expert	.86
	The following questions refer to your impression of the candidate. How would you rate this candidate on a scale ranging from 1 to 7 on the following topics? Unqualified/ Qualified	.87
	The following questions refer to your impression of the candidate. How would you rate this candidate on a scale ranging from 1 to 7 on the following topics?	.84
	Cronbach's alpha: .90 **Eigenvalue: 3.57**	
Attractiveness	The following questions refer to your impression of the candidate. How would you rate this candidate on a scale ranging from 1 to 7 on the following topics?	.80

Unattractive/ Attractive

	The following questions refer to your impression of the candidate. How would you rate this candidate on a scale ranging from 1 to 7 on the following topics?	.78

Not classy/ Classy

	The following questions refer to your impression of the candidate. How would you rate this candidate on a scale ranging from 1 to 7 on the following topics?	.83

Ugly/ Beautiful

	The following questions refer to your impression of the candidate. How would you rate this candidate on a scale ranging from 1 to 7 on the following topics?	.84

Plain/ Elegant

	The following questions refer to your impression of the candidate. How would you rate this candidate on a scale ranging from 1 to 7 on the following topics?	.61

Not sexy/ Sexy

Cronbach's alpha: .83

Eigenvalue: 3.02

Trustworthiness	The following questions refer to your impression of the candidate. How would you rate this candidate on a scale ranging from 1 to 7 on the following topics?	.73

Unreliable/ Reliable

	The following questions refer to your impression of the candidate. How would you rate this candidate on a scale ranging from 1 to 7 on the following topics?	.79

Dishonest/ Honest

	The following questions refer to your impression of the candidate. How would you rate this candidate on a	.63

scale ranging from 1 to 7 on the following topics?

Undependable/ Dependable

The following questions refer to your impression of the candidate. How would you rate this candidate on a scale ranging from 1 to 7 on the following topics?	.72

Insincere/ Sincere

The following questions refer to your impression of the candidate. How would you rate this candidate on a scale ranging from 1 to 7 on the following topics?	.81

Untrustworthy/ Trustworthy

Cronbach's alpha: .91

Eigenvalue: 3.67

Attitude

The following questions refer to your impression of the candidate. How would you rate this candidate on a scale ranging from 1 to 7 on the following topics?	.92

Unlikable/ Likable

The following questions refer to your impression of the candidate. How would you rate this candidate on a scale ranging from 1 to 7 on the following topics?	.92

Unfavorable/ Favorable

The following questions refer to your impression of the candidate. How would you rate this candidate on a scale ranging from 1 to 7 on the following topics?	.94

Unpleasant/ Pleasant

The following questions refer to your impression of the candidate. How would you rate this candidate on a scale ranging from 1 to 7 on the following topics?	.91

Unappealing/ Appealing

	The following questions refer to your impression of the candidate. How would you rate this candidate on a scale ranging from 1 to 7 on the following topics?	.86
	Bad/ Good	
	Cronbach's alpha: .95	
	Eigenvalue: 4.16	
Intention to vote	How likely is it that you would vote for this politician? Not very likely/ Very likely	.92
	If given the chance, to what extent would you be interested in voting for this politician? Not very likely/ Very likely	.92
	Cronbach's alpha: .84	
	Eigenvalue:1.72	
Personalized Communication	The politician shares personal information about the private life in these tweets. (Reversed)	.68
	The politician shares emotions in these tweets. (Reversed)	.80
	You feel that you know more about the politician behind the Twitter page. (Reversed)	.79
	Cronbach's alpha: .61	
	Eigenvalue: 1.70	

Convergent validity and reliability statistics (n = 140)