

# Three Attitudes to 140 Characters: The Use and Views of Twitter in Political Party Communications in Sweden

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Digital media in general, and social media in particular, are a distinctive feature of contemporary election campaign strategies. This article adds to the ongoing discussion of the political power of social media by exploring political party strategies behind the usage of social media. In this study we specifically focus on Twitter (a micro blog) during the latest National Election Campaign in Sweden in 2010. The study exams the degree and character of Twitter usage among parties and prominent party members, and relates content to the declared communication strategies regarding the role of Twitter in the campaign. Methodologically, the paper is based on a quantitative content analysis of all party tweets and on personal interviews with all party campaign managers. The results show that most political parties officially declare a considerable interest in using social media as twitter for diverse campaign purposes. However, the content analysis confirms only a modest party use of Twitter messages and Twitter patterns where messages are most often related to current news media activities and are of a one-way character, with more focus on information dissemination than on interactive dialogue with voters.

## Twitter goes politics

Twitter entered world politics on 2 May 2011 when the former chief of staff of Pentagon in the Bush administration, Keith Urban tweeted: “So I'm told by a reputable person they have killed Osama Bin Laden. Hot damn.” Urban had broken the news at 9:45 ET and had done so using Twitter. Mainstream media confirmed his statement 20 minutes later and President Barack Obama spoke to the nation two hours later.<sup>1</sup>

Generally speaking, digital media are of course not a new phenomenon in political communication. Gradually, the Internet has developed and the uses of communications channels have evolved. In the mid-1990s, there were party web sites and one-way dissemination of political messages. In recent years, social media like Facebook, YouTube and Twitter offer new tools for interactive dialogue and sharing of information during election campaigns (Panagopoulos 2009; Murthy 2011; Fox & Ramos 2012). Thus, it is interesting to investigate how governments, politicians and political parties actually use social media, and which strategies they develop for these media platforms.

This article focuses on the role of Twitter during election campaigns. Twitter is a micro blog that was introduced 2006 and is based on the sharing of ‘tweets’ not exceeding 140 characters. Twitter appeared for the first time in an election in the presidential race in the US in 2008 (Johnson 2011). It is well known that the Obama campaign utilised Twitter but the

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<sup>1</sup> (<https://twitter.com/#!/keithurbahn/statuses/64877790624886784>).

medium also formed a key part also of the campaigns for Joe Biden and John Edwards. It has subsequently been used in elections in other countries such as Germany, the UK, Nigeria, Spain, Sweden and Finland (cf. Tumasjan et al. 2010, Gasser & Gerlach 2012).

The main reasons for focusing on Twitter are its afore-mentioned unique character, as well as its relatively recent introduction, which makes it interesting to explore in an electoral context. It not only raises questions about the possibility of contributing to public discourse in such a condensed form, but also its appropriateness and efficiency as a strategic tool for political parties and candidates in their efforts to target voters and mobilise their support. In many countries, tweets and re-tweets are already distinctive features of political elite discourse and are intensively followed by politicians, journalists and lobbyists (Gasser & Gerlach 2012). However, the perceptions of the strategic role of Twitter in political party communication during the election campaign need further attention.

## **Twitter and strategic political communication**

In Western democracies, the use of digital media and, in particular, of social media, has been a distinctive feature of contemporary election campaign strategies (Panagopoulos 2009; Johnson 2011). However, the potential importance and effectiveness of such media as a political force remain disputed among media scholars (Fox & Ramos 2012). In essence, the theoretical discussion of digital media potentials continues revolves around the well-known argumentation between cyber ‘optimists’, focusing on the availability of greater informative and participatory opportunities, and ‘pessimists’, claiming that existent inequalities in society will solely be reflected by the new ‘digital divide’ (Norris 2001; Bentivegna 2006; Johnson 2011).

The optimists argue that online media actually provide new opportunities to vitalise public discourse and political participation, thereby ultimately changing the political culture in the future (Perlmutter 2008; Schweitzer 2008). This is particularly true when citizens use the Internet in an open-minded way and not merely seek information that reinforces their political preferences. The Internet may also strengthen political participation in geographically dispersed societies or among people who cannot leave their homes easily (Polat 2005). The pessimists claim that online media mainly attracts the citizens already interested in politics and functions to maintain existing gaps. This guarantees political control over the on-line messages, as those citizens who distance themselves from politics off-line will turn to other content than politics on the web (Prior 2007). They also perceive the digital discourse as an arena that serves to reinforce existing ideologies than promote the exchange of values and beliefs (Heinderyckx 2010; Morozov 2011).

To date, these diverging perspectives on digital media democratic potentials have generally focused on the possible effects on public deliberation and participation. However, there is increasing scholarly interest in the actual roles of digital media in strategic political communications during election campaigns. One main reason for this interest is the ongoing professionalisation of election campaigns, where an increasing number of strategic tools are regularly used for reaching specific segments of the electorate (Moring et al. 2011; Tenscher et al. 2012). Taking into consideration both the dissemination and the interaction potentials of social media, it is easy to imagine them as very useful campaign tools when implementing party strategies aimed at informing, targeting or mobilising the electorate. The new technology offers greater opportunities to interact directly with voters through applications on social networking sites. In addition to facilitating interaction with citizens/voters, social media sites have aided digital networking with supporters, reached new parts of electorate

outside mainstream media, adjusted views expressed by filtering mainstream media and boosting independent political agenda, reinforced campaigns' core messages and increased commitment of active party supporters. Social media has consequently been perceived as 'a feature of modern campaigning that cannot be ignored' (Panagopoulos 2009: 9).

Still, there may be reasons for party campaign strategists to display caution when entering the social media scene. Voters in most countries still consume mainstream media to a larger extent and are more easily reached through these outlets (Panagopoulos 2009; Grusell & Nord 2009). The lack of control over content in social media has meant that it is not always in line with party interests. Political stories therefore may develop in unpredicted ways and within a newly framed context (Stromer-Galley 2000). As a result, most campaigns need to adapt to social media opportunities and evaluate their role in conjunction with more traditional campaign tools. A key issue for political parties may be to reach a balance between increased interactivity based on digital innovation and maintain control of content in social media (Panagopoluos 2009).

Twitter may serve as a good object for such strategic campaign considerations. Obviously, Twitter has the capacity to break news, organise an impressive amount of followers and link directly between politicians and citizens. However, the significance of Twitter in politics is more than a matter of technological possibilities and peoples' access to it; it is linked to fundamental considerations about the current campaign strategy. To what extent should this tool support other means of campaign communication? Which voters are supposed to be reached in this way? To what extent is Twitter included in the overall campaign philosophy?

Success with social media in election campaigns may depend on the ability to use them in an unconventional and additional way, as argued by the *Blue State Digital* founder Joe Raspers, whose company directed Obama's social media campaign in the US in 2008:

You can have Twitter and email but it doesn't necessarily mean you are doing things differently. There are political organizations whose strategies are just to use these new channels to play the same old game – to spin the press. You must use these channels to speak to people in a two-way conversation and really engage at a human level.  
(Joe Rospars, as cited in Johnson 2011, p. 17)

The Obama election campaign in 2008 perceived a strong social media presence as an important tool for reaching voters without using the traditional top-down communication perspective. The social networks developed by Blue State Digital included 'tweeting' over 200 times during the campaign while the Republican competitor John McCain made 25 tweets. Statistics showed that Obama had 112,474 followers on Twitter November 3, 2008 and McCain had 4,603 followers at that time (Jaeger et al. 2010).

To date, scholars in media and communication studies have undertaken limited examinations of Twitter in electoral contexts. In a recent study of Twitter usage among Congress members in the US between 2008 and 2010, there were no clear predictions of such usage to be found. However, minority party members and younger members seemed to be more likely to Twitter adoption, while electoral vulnerability, in terms of internal party challengers or loss in public opinion support, seemed to be unimportant (Lassen & Brown 2010). A study of e-campaigns in Austria, Germany and Switzerland concluded that many politicians still lack experience in the use of social media, and that many Twitter accounts were "barely responsive" and not particularly interactive during the campaigns. Still, the number of politicians using Twitter is gradually increasing in recent elections in the three countries

(Gasser & Gerlach 2012).

Given the limited amount of research on Twitter in political communication studies, it is still difficult to identify any dominant approaches or perspectives in previous studies. There is an interest in the way Twitter content relates to election outcome, and there is also an interest in the way Twitter content is produced by political parties (Tumasjan et al. 2010; Gasser & Gerlach 2012). This article seeks to shed more light on Twitter as a part of strategic political communication, using the latest national election campaign in Sweden in 2010 as a case study. The case of Sweden is motivated by different reasons. Firstly, global statistics confirm that Internet penetration in Sweden is among the highest in the world, and social media is used on a weekly basis by almost one-third of the whole population (Bergström 2010). Secondly, empirical studies indicate that political parties in Sweden have become more professionalised in election campaigns and more open to the use of new communication technologies (Grusell & Nord 2009; Moring et al. 2011).

## **The Study**

The article relates to the ongoing discussion of the political potential of social media by exploring political party Twitter usages and Twitter campaign strategies during the latest National Election campaign in Sweden (September 2010). The objective of the article is to compare actual party Twitter content with declared party Twitter strategies and to examine the political role of Twitter in the latest election campaign in Sweden. The degree of Twitter usage among parties and prominent party members, and the character of their tweets with regard to one-way or interactive messages, is analysed. The political communication strategies with regard to Twitter in the campaign are compared and discussed. The following four research questions are asked:

RQ1: To what extent did Swedish political parties and party leaders use Twitter during the National Election campaign in 2010?

RQ2: What was the dominating character of political tweets during the National Election campaign in 2010?

RQ3: How were social media perceived in party strategic communications during the National Election campaign in 2010?

RQ4: How did actual Twitter activities and declared social media party strategies relate to each other during the National Election campaign in 2010?

The study is explorative in nature and aimed to stimulate further development of theories on the role of Twitter in strategic political communication, by focusing on the interplay between strategies and social media content during election campaigns. Patterns of content and strategy in this case study may be useful for comparisons with other national contexts.

Methodologically, the study is based on a combination of quantitative content analysis and personal interviews. In the content analysis a total of 2,559 tweets (1,737 from political parties and 822 from party leaders) have been coded and analysed during the election campaign in 2010. The content analysis covered the last three weeks of the campaign (26 August to 17 September in 2010). All tweets written, answered or re-tweeted by the leading political parties and their party leaders were downloaded and analysed (see Appendix A for the complete coding scheme). The material was collected at 8 am in the morning and printed out on paper. Tweets from Fridays through to Sundays were downloaded and printed out on Mondays. The coding scheme included, among others, time for tweeting, the topic of the post (election related, final debate related, economy, unemployment and if post was of private

nature), and whether any other politician was named in tweet. The overall means of communication were coded as dialogue if the party/party leader was engaged in conversation or retweeted a tweet. The post was coded as one way if the tweet was a status update. The material includes tweets from the Social Democrats, the Moderate Party, the Centre Party, the Liberal Party, the Christ Democrats, the Green Party, the Left Party, the Sweden Democrats and the Feminist Initiative. Interviews were also conducted as semi-structured personal interviews with the officers who were responsible for the respective parties' campaign strategies. This person had the title of Party Secretary or Campaign Manager. The interviews took place at interviewees' workplaces and took between 60 and 90 minutes. The interviews were recorded and transcribed *in extenso* (Interviewed persons in Appendix B).

## Usage of Twitter and character of tweets

In 2010, Twitter was introduced in a national election campaign in Sweden for the first time. It quickly became a campaign tool for political parties. Although the very first entrance of Twitter actually happened in a smaller scale in the EU Parliamentary Election campaign in 2009, the national election in the following year may be considered as the real – and most important – breakthrough. Twitter was now more available and spread in the Swedish society. An illustration of this development is showed in the table below (Table 1).

Party	Followers		Following	
	2009	2010	2009	2010
Social Democrats	1733	4012	1185	3668
Green Party	1266	3753	1321	3983
Left Party	1019	2887	1058	1796
Center Party	937	2462	913	2309
Sweden Democrats	34	9	11	327
Christ Democrats	536	1679	39	535
Moderate Party	1446	4157	1700	3843
Liberal Party	595	2181	0	2181
Feminist Initiative	917	1326	1928	1882
TOTAL	8483	22466	8155	20544

**Table 1.** Numbers of political party followers and party following in The EU Parliamentary Election 2009 and The National Election in Sweden 2010 (Source: DEMICOM Election Campaign Studies, Mid Sweden University (2009/2010). Comment: The numbers presented is per political party, but it is highly likely that a follower follows several parties.)

Based on this comparison, the most interesting result is that the amount of followers for the political parties practically tripled in the year between the two elections. It should be noted that EU Parliamentary Elections are second-ranking in nature in most European countries, and it is plausible that the 2009 campaign functioned as a test for the more important campaign the following year. It is worth noting that Twitter as a social arena was also expanding rapidly during these years.

The political parties and their leaders produced a total of 2,556 tweets during the national election campaign in 2010. Overall, the numbers of political tweets were fairly equally divided between the different parties. However, there were two important exceptions, the Green Party and the Liberal Party (Table 2). They both stand out with 20 and 18 percent of the total posts respectively. The remaining parties, the Feminist Initiative, the Centre Party, the Christ Democrats, the Moderate Party and the Social Democrats had tweets between 10 to 13 percent of the total posts. Compared with the Twitter activity level in 2009, it can be observed that the Green Party consolidated their top position. It is also interesting to note that the Liberal Party went from no activity in 2009 to become one of the top of Twitter users a year later. The Sweden Democrats started to use Twitter in the 2010 national election, but were not so active on this platform.

Party		Party leader	
The Social Democrats	13	Mona Sahlin	9
The Green Party	20	Maria Wetterstrand Peter Eriksson	0
The Left Party	3	Lars Ohly	1
The Centre Party	11	Maud Olofsson	0
The Sweden Democrats	2	Jimmie Åkesson	16
The Christ Democrats	11	Göran Hägglund	11
The Moderate Party	12	Fredrik Reinfeldt	0
The Liberal Party	18	Jan Björklund	0
Feminist Initiative	10	Gudrun Schyman	63
TOTAL	100	TOTAL	100
N=	1,734		822

**Table 2.** Political parties' and party leaders' share of tweets in National Election campaign in Sweden 2010 (percent) (Source: DEMICOM Election Campaign Study 2010, Mid Sweden University)

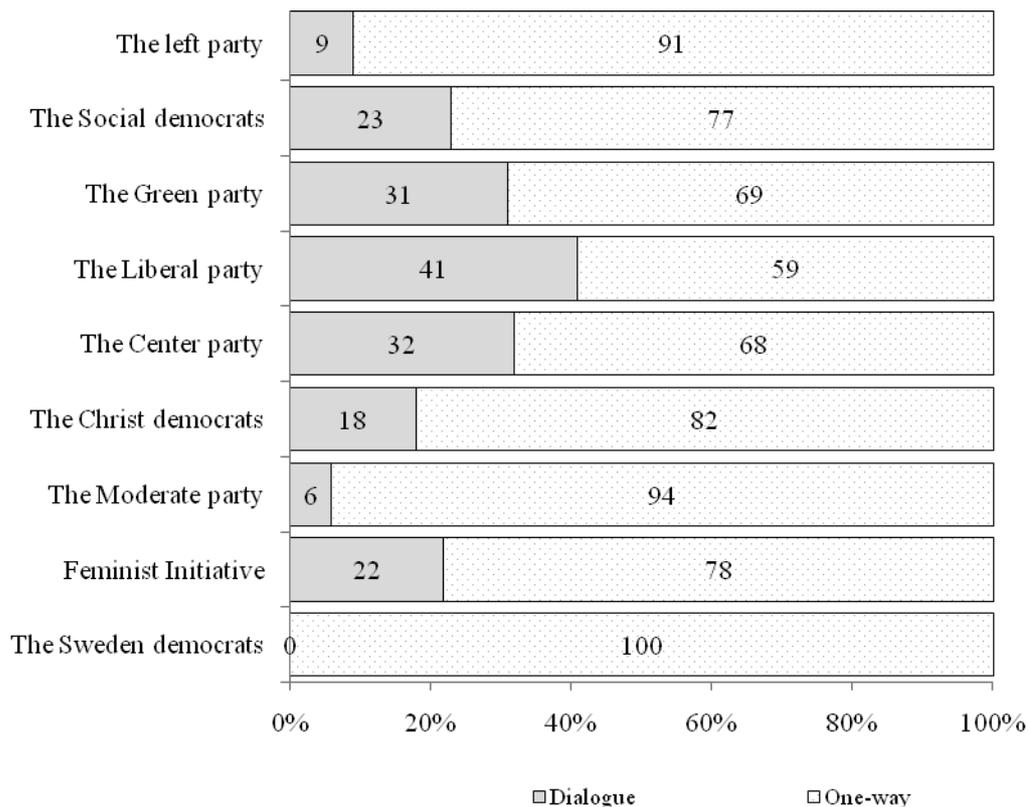
Shifting focus from parties to party leaders, it is clear that there were great differences in the number of tweets produced. First, it is worth noting that not all of the party leaders had opened a Twitter account in 2010. Fredrik Reinfeldt (Prime Minister, the Moderate Party), Jan Björklund (the Liberal Party), Maud Olofsson (the Centre Party) and Maria Wetterstrand and Peter Eriksson (the Green Party) deliberately avoided Twitter as a communication channel for personal messages. Lars Ohly (the Left Party) and Mona Sahlin (the Social Democrats) opened Twitter accounts, but had their staff tweeting for them. Among the users, Gudrun Schyman (Feminist Initiative) was the party leader using Twitter the most, producing 64 percent of all the tweets. Jimmie Åkesson (the Sweden Democrats) had 16 percent and Göran Hägglund (The Christ Democrats) had 11 percent of the posts. Lars Ohly (The Left Party) was the party leader with the lowest activity.

For the period under investigation, the last three weeks of the campaign revealed that the parties used Twitter on a relatively similar basis. On average, the parties tweeted

approximately ten times a day. It is interesting to note that the number of posts on Twitter correlated with mainstream news media highlights during the campaign. For example, the amount of political Twitter posts increased dramatically during the political TV shows *Debatt*, *Kvällsöppet* and the final party leader debate. This result indicates that party tweeting is conducted in close connection with traditional media highlights such as national political TV events. There was also a considerable peak on 12 September 2010, when the political opposition parties arranged a specific activity called 'the Red-Green Day'. During this specific activity, the Social Democrats composed 55 tweets. However, when analysing activities of party leaders during the campaign, there was no such correlation between the amount of tweets and mainstream news media activities. One obvious explanation is of course that the party leaders usually are the ones actually representing the party at these TV events.

The most active party leader was Gudrun Schyman, who tweeted regularly every day. Göran Hägglund and Jimmie Åkesson also used Twitter, but not with the same frequency. When comparing party and party leader tweets more closely it could also be noted that party leader tweets were generally produced after business hours, mostly in the evening. It seems that Twitter was an extra activity when the ordinary working day was over. The opposite result can be seen for the political parties; Twitter was a part of the regular communication process during the final weeks of the campaign and mostly used daytime.

By using social media, such as Twitter, as an election campaign tool the parties and the party leaders have introduced a new form of communication channel with considerable interactive potential. However, it is an open question as to whether this new tool is actually used in a truly interactive way in communication with voters or rather as an additional channel for one-way political messages. In order to examine the character of the tweets, content was analyzed with regard to the nature of the political message expressed. This study showed that an overwhelming part of the party communication was characterised by one-way communication (Figure 1). Most of the tweets were information on political public events and information about the campaign.



**Figure 1.** Political parties, the character of the tweets (percent) (Source: DEMICOM Election Campaign Study, Mid Sweden University (2010) (N=1737))

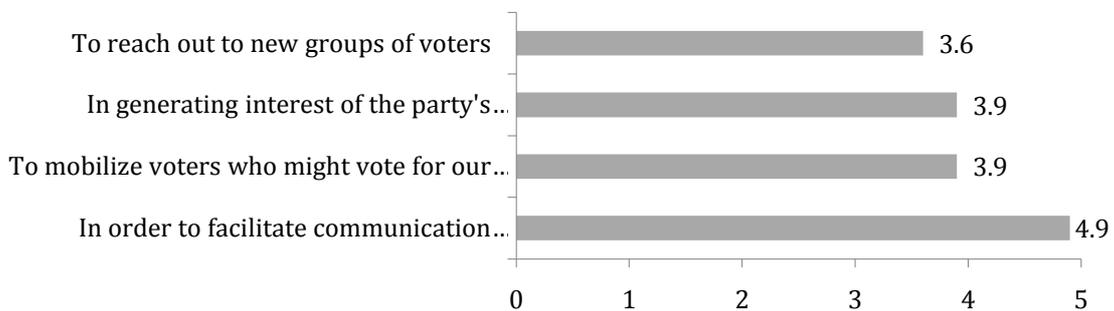
The party with the highest share of dialogue in Twitter communication was the Liberal Party, which in 41 percent of the communication offered a dialogue perspective. The Centre Party and the Green Party also showed tendencies to use a dialogue approach as every third of their conversations could be labelled as dialogues. The political parties that were least inclined to use a dialogue approach were the Left Party and the Moderate Party. The Sweden Democrats had no dialogue with the voters on Twitter at all.

When looking at the party leaders' tweets, the pattern was somewhat different. Lars Ohly (the Left Party) and Mona Sahlin (the Social Democrats) had no dialogue conversations at all. This can be associated with the fact that staff members in these cases actually were the ones updating the Twitter accounts. These two party leaders decided to use Twitter primarily as a one-directional information channel. As a contrast, almost 90 percent of Göran Hågglund's (the Christ Democrats) tweets were dialogue tweets. Gudrun Schyman (Feminist Initiative) was not far from this amount. As Gudrun Schyman had the largest number of tweets, she emerges as the party leader that made the greatest use of dialogue tweets. Jimmie Åkesson (Sweden Democrats) used dialogue in 39 percent of his tweets.

### Twitter as part of strategic party communications

The analyses of Twitter usage confirm that all Swedish political parties are now exploring the potentials of social media as a communicative campaign tool. However, the fact that Twitter is used in an extensive way does not necessarily mean that the political purposes of Twitter are clearly defined, or that the use of social media is part of an overall campaign strategy of the political parties. Therefore it is important question to ask how the political parties themselves evaluate the use of different social media tools in the campaign. As the figure

below shows, social media is generally perceived as an effective tool for diverse political purposes (Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** The parties' assessment of the use of social media in the election campaign in 2010 (Source: DEMICOM Election Campaign Study, Mid Sweden University (2010) (N=8) Comment: The answers is based on a 1-5 scale (1 = not at all, 5 = a great extent)

Social media are perceived as a useful tool to facilitate communication between formal party members. Social media were also appreciated in other aspects: as a channel to mobilise voters who might vote for the party, to generate interest for the party's activities in the election campaign, as well as a campaign tool to used for reaching out to new groups of voters. The general evaluation of social media confirms that they are still perceived as most efficient for internal party purposes, but with additional mobilisation potentials outside the party organisation. In personal interviews with Swedish campaign managers, these results were to a large extent confirmed. Twitter was often referred to as a channel connecting supporters or politically interested to each other, but with more limited ability to convince or persuade other segments of the electorate in a distinct direction. Pär Henriksson, Head of Campaign Communications in 2010 for the ruling Moderate Party says:

Twitter is a quite limited forum. It's pretty much an elite discussion, I would say. I think I have about 960 persons who follow me on Twitter. Few of these followers are ordinary citizens. In fact, the majority of followers are professionals and actually paid to discuss different aspects of politics (Interview, October 2010).

This image of Twitter is more or less shared by the other dominant party in Swedish politics, the Social Democrats, who also intend to pay less importance to social media as a factor explaining electoral success. Bo Krogvig, Head of Campaign Communications for the Social Democrats in the election in 2010 summarises his view:

When it comes to social media, like Twitter, you will not win many new voters. As an internal mobilisation tool, it works fine, but otherwise it is mostly hype and drama (Interview, October 2010).

Both statements may be perceived as confirmations of the fact that Twitter basically attracts a specific group of citizens that are already politically active that and may not be representative of the electorate as whole. However, Twitter still can play important roles in particular areas of political communications, such as mobilising important voter segments or influencing the mainstream news media agenda.

Accordingly, social media are generally perceived as effective tools for diverse political purposes, but mainly for internal party functions. But how do the political parties judge the different forms of social media on the Internet? When asked to rate the importance of the

party's participation in different Internet channels/social media (party homepages, blogs, Twitter, Facebook and You Tube) in the election campaign, some discernible differences between the political parties appear (Table 3).

	<i>Home- pages</i>	<i>Blogs</i>	<i>Twitter</i>	<i>Face- book</i>	<i>You Tube</i>	<i>Tot al</i>
The Left Party	5	5	5	5	5	25
The Social Democrats	5	5	5	5	5	25
The Green Party	5	4	2	3	3	17
The Centre Party	5	4	2	3	4	18
The Liberal Party	3	3	3	3	3	15
The Moderate Party	4	4	3	4	4	19
The Christ Democrats	5	5	5	5	5	25
The Sweden Democrats	5	5	5	5	5	25
Total	32	30	25	28	29	

**Table 3.** The perceived importance of different Internet channels during the National Election campaign in Sweden in 2010 (Source: DEMICOM Election Campaign Studies, Mid Sweden University (2009/2010). Comment: A five -point scale was used where 1 means not important at all, and 5 means very important.

The Left party, the Social Democrats and the Christ Democratic Party all rank the different social media as highly important, while the Liberal Party stands out for ranking the different forms of social media on internet as only moderately important. Comparing different digital media channels, the political parties themselves generally rank party web sites as the most important channel to participate in during the campaign. Homepages are followed by blogs, You Tube and Facebook, while Twitter is ranked as the least important internet channel. Twitter stands out because the Green Party and the Centre Party do not consider it to be important. Both parties rank this channel below average. This result, together with the ranks from the Moderate Party and the Liberal Party, reveals Twitter to be the channel that is generally considered to be of least importance of the party's participation in the election campaign in comparison with other Internet party campaign activities.

## Conclusion and Discussion

This examination of the Swedish political parties' use and views of Twitter as a communication channel during the National Election campaign 2010 offers some contradictory results. On one hand, the amount of tweets and Twitter followers reached a record level in this campaign, and Twitter was generally considered to have multi-dimensional potentials with regard to both internal and external political communication. As with other social media used in the campaign, Twitter had the primary function of an in-house branding tool for campaign workers, with a perceived additional potential to mobilise already loyal segments of the electorate. However, this platform was considered to be less important as a tool for convincing swing voters or reach strategic target groups of the electorate. At the same time, much of the communication on Twitter consisted of one-way messages rather than invitations to interactions between voters and parties or candidates. Consequently, the majority of the parties' usage of Twitter was more of a traditional mass media approach: *talking at* the voters, rather than *talking with* them.

In reality, Twitter was mainly used in a 'broadcast' mode, serving information dissemination functions rather than used for dialogue with voters. The interactive capacity of Twitter was

only used to limited extent. However, a comparison of party communication strategies and actual usage of this platform showed some different patterns.

Some parties had a more coherent perspective on Twitter than others. The Liberal Party was the most typical example in this category, while both the Social Democrats and the Christ Democrats also had a slightly coordinated attitude to this platform. All of these parties shared a common view that Twitter was central for campaign activities, and they lived up to their ideas by being, more or less, active in practice.

Other parties showed less official enthusiasm for Twitter, but used it frequently during the campaign. The reasons for this behaviour may vary, but one possible explanation is that even sceptical parties tend to join the groups of users to avoid being perceived as lagging behind in adopting new communication practices and platforms. Another reason may be that nobody knows how successful Twitter may be in forthcoming campaigns and that is necessary to “be there”, no matter why. In this study, the Green Party, the Moderate Party and the Centre Party belonged to this category.

Finally, there were two parties – the Sweden Democrats and the Left Party – that did not use Twitter as much as others, but at the same time viewed Twitter as a very important channel. Both parties can be described as more or less extreme in relation to mainstream parties; the Sweden Democrats are rightwing populists, and the Left Party is a former communist party. Both are smaller parties with limited campaign budgets and thus probably keen on using social media in efforts to by-pass traditional channels, as more or less hostile news media and expensive paid media. However, an active presence on social media platforms demands huge personal resources that these smaller parties often do not have.

In conclusion, a majority of political parties during the National Election campaign in Sweden in 2010 display a rather paradoxical attitude to Twitter as part of campaign communications. In most cases, the declared view of the role of Twitter and the actual usage of this platform do not match. One possible explanation for the contradictory role of Twitter in Swedish election campaigns so far is that most politicians and parties have not yet mastered the new channel, and do not fully realise how to exploit the opportunities that social media may allow. An accurate and effective use of Twitter is also very time consuming and has to be taken into account when parties are planning their activities. Some parties see the opportunities and potentials of Twitter, but do not yet have resources to manage it as an effective campaign tool. Other parties are more sceptical to the platform, but do not dare to refrain from being present.

As the study shows, Twitter is already an established tool of campaign practices, but it is at the same time generally not yet fully integrated in the overall communication strategies. A successful party strategy for using social media is probably in interaction with news media. The results in the study also showed that the impact of Twitter became important in relation to traditional news media events in the campaign. When spread to a larger amount of people in a second step, Twitter might have its greatest impact in the political communication process. There is no doubt that Twitter will remain as an important communication channel in future Swedish election campaigns, and its reasonable to expect its role to be even more central if the current mismatch between Twitter use and Twitter views gradually disappears.

Finally, this study confirms the potential of comparing party communication strategies and party communication practices when the usage of Twitter during election campaigns is analysed. Party or candidate approaches to Twitter may vary along different dimensions and

successful political usage of this social media platform is not just a matter of being accurate in 140 characters but more about integrating Twitter in overall campaign and media strategies.

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## Appendix A

Id nr		
Sender	Party	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Left Party</li> <li>2. The Social Democrats</li> <li>3. The Green Party</li> <li>4. The Liberal Party</li> <li>5. The Centre Party</li> <li>6. The Christ Democrats</li> <li>7. The Moderate Party</li> <li>8. Feminist Initiative</li> <li>9. The Sweden Democrats</li> </ol>
	Party leader	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Lars Ohly</li> <li>2. Peter Eriksson</li> <li>3. Maria Wetterstrand</li> <li>4. Mona Sahlin</li> <li>5. Jan Björklund</li> <li>6. Maud Olofsson</li> <li>7. Göran Högglund</li> <li>8. Fredrik Reinfeldt</li> <li>9. Gudrun Schyman</li> <li>10. Jimmie Åkesson</li> </ol>
Gender		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. female</li> <li>2. man</li> <li>3. party</li> </ol>
Party		
Following	Checked once a week	
Followed by	Checked once a week	
Date for tweets	20100828 –20100917	
Time for tweets		
The post topic		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. election related</li> <li>2. final debate related</li> <li>3. economy</li> <li>4. unemployment</li> <li>5. private nature</li> </ol>
Other politicians named in tweet		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. yes</li> <li>2. no</li> </ol>
Valuation of other politicians		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. positive</li> <li>2. negative</li> <li>3. neutral</li> </ol>
Overall means of communication Dialogue – one way		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. one way</li> <li>2. dialogue</li> </ol>

Party	Party leader	Informant	Role in party
The Left Party	Lars Ohly	Anki Ahlsten	Party Secretary
The Social Democrats	Mona Sahlin	Ibrahim Baylan Bo Krogvig	Party Secretary (interview 2009) Head of Campaign

			Communications (interview 2010)
The Green Party	Peter Eriksson Maria Wetterstrand	Agneta Börjesson	Party Secretary
The Liberal Party	Jan Björklund	Erik Ullenhag	Party Secretary
The Centre Party	Maud Olofsson	Michael Arthursson	Head of campaign/ Party Secretary since fall 2010
The Christ Democrats	Göran Hägglund	Lennart Sjögren	Party Secretary
The Moderate Party	Fredrik Reinfeldt	Pär Henriksson	Head of Campaign Communications
Feminist Initiative	Gudrun Schyman		
The Sweden Democrats	Jimmie Åkesson	Björn Söder	Party Secretary