Tampere University

Camilla Halinoja

INFLUENCE OF DIGITALISATION IN CITIZEN-INITIATED POLITICAL PARTICIPATION
Online epistemic governance cases in Italy and Finland

ABSTRACT

Camilla Halinoja: Influence of digitalisation in citizen-initiated political participation. Online epistemic governance cases in Italy and Finland
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Digitalisation has influenced nearly all aspects of people's everyday lives, from online grocery shopping to working remotely and enjoying novel forms of virtual entertainment, to mention a few. Political practices, however, have still remained relatively unchanged in the past decades, and digitalisation has more often been seen as a threat to politics than an opportunity. Meanwhile, the forms of 'classical-modernist governance' have started to suffer from a lack of authority, as citizens' trust in traditional institutions has declined and the decision-making dynamics of representative politics have been questioned.

To counter these problems, citizen-initiated digital political movements have started to appear. Also defined as 'platform parties', these movements are reshaping the ways in which political participation is understood and organised: they challenge both traditional governance and scepticism towards online politics by founding their principles in digital political participation and collective decision-making. Research on the implications of platform parties and digital political participation is still, however, in its early stages. This thesis aspires to contribute to the emerging tradition of digital political participation research by exploring how platform parties are able to gain legitimacy in relation to traditional governance. The research question is, *how do MoVimento 5 Stelle (M5S) and Liike Nyt (LN) legitimise themselves in relation to forms of classical-modernist governance and seek to shape the course of social change towards digital political participation?*

A qualitative discursive study was conducted to answer the research question. The dataset comprised of an extensive amount of blog texts that had been published between March and September of 2019 on M5S and LN's websites. The data regarding LN was complemented with an interview conducted with a key person from the party. The data was then analysed with the conceptual framework of epistemic governance that guides to understand how actors pursue social change in desired directions. The framework provided analytical tools to identify the discursive ways through which M5S and LN seek to legitimise themselves, counter representative politics, and promote e-participation.

According to the empirical findings and the pertinent literature, M5S and LN pursue to implement new concepts in political discussions, such as digital citizenship, and establish new operational models of political organisation that are characterised by Internet-based direct or hybrid governance. The platform parties promote these intentions particularly through three discursive ways: 1) the juxtaposition between classical-modernist or "outdated" forms of governance, and the "developed" digitalised form of political governance, 2) the internal and external identifications by which the parties seek legitimation from their audiences, and 3) 'anti-ideological' decision-making combined with digital fundamental rights as value base. As a whole, the study indicates that citizen-initiated digital political participation is more advanced and nuanced than what current popular accounts and studies would seem to suggest.

Keywords: digitalisation, digital political participation, Epistemic Governance, social change

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TIIVISTELMÄ

Digitalisaation vaikutukset yltävät nykyään lähes jokaiselle elämän osa-alueelle, päivittäistavarakaupan siirtymisestä internettiin ja etätyöskentelyyn sekä uusiin virtuaaliviihteen muotoihin. Poliittiset käytännöt ovat kuitenkin pysyneet suhteellisen ennallaan viime vuosikymmeninä ja digitalisaatiota on pidetty ennemmin uhkana kuin mahdollisuutena politiikalle. Samalla 'klassis-modernistinen hallinnointitapa' on alkanut kärsiä auktoriteetin puutteesta, koska kansalaisten luottamus perinteisiin instituutioihin on heikentynyt ja edustuksellisen poliittisen päätöksenteon dynamiikka on kyseenalaistettu.

Näiden ongelmien ratkaisemiseksi on alkanut syntyä kansalaislähtöisiä, myös 'alustapuolueiksi' kutsuttuja poliittisia liikkeitä, jotka muovaavat käsityksiä politiikan määritelmästä ja organisoimisesta. Alustapuolueet haastavat sekä perinteiset hallintotavat että epäluuloisen suhtautumisen internetpohjaiseen politiikkaan juurtamalla periaatteensa digitaaliseen poliittiseen osallistumiseen ja kollektiiviseen päätöksentekoon. Alustapuolueiden ja digitaalisen poliittisen osallistumisen vaikutuksia tarkasteleva tutkimus on kuitenkin vielä alkutekijöissään. Tämän pro gradu -tutkielman tavoitteena on edistää digitaalisen poliittisen osallistumisen tutkimusperinnettä kartoittamalla, miten alustapuolueet, hakevat legitimiteettiä suhteessa perinteisiin hallintomuotoihin. Tutkimuskysymys on, *miten MoVimento 5 Stelle (M5S) ja Liike Nyt (LN) legitimoivat itsensä suhteessa klassis-modernistisiin hallintomuotoihin ja pyrkivät vaikuttamaan yhteiskunnallisen muutokseen kohti digitaalista poliittista osallistumista?*

Tutkimuskysymykseen vastattiin toteuttamalla laadullinen diskursiivinen tutkimus. Aineisto koostui blogiteksteistä, jotka oli julkaistu M5S:n ja LN:n verkkosivuilla vuoden 2019 maaliskuun ja syyskuun välillä. LN:ää koskevaa aineistoa täydennettiin haastattelemalla erästä puolueen avainhenkilöä. Aineisto analysoitiin episteemisen hallinnan viitekehyksellä, jonka avulla voidaan ymmärtää, kuinka toimijat pyrkivät ohjaamaan sosiaalista muutosta haluttuun suuntaan. Viitekehys tarjosi analyyttisia työkaluja tunnistamaan diskursiiviset keinot, joilla M5S ja LN pyrkivät legitimoimaan itsensä, vastustavat edustuksellista poliittista hallintoa ja sen käytäntöjä sekä edistävät digitaalista poliittista osallistumista.

Empiiristen havaintojen ja kirjallisuuskatsauksen perusteella voidaan osoittaa, että M5S ja LN pyrkivät tuomaan poliittiseen keskusteluun uusia käsitteitä, kuten digitaalinen kansalaisuus, sekä luomaan uusia poliittisen organisaation toimintamalleja, joille on ominaista Internet-pohjainen suora tai hybridihallinta. Alustapuolueet edistävät pyrkimyksiä erityisesti kolmella diskursiivisella tavalla: 1) vastakkainasettelu klassis-modernistisen tai "vanhanaikaisen" hallintomuodon sekä "kehittyneen" digitalisoidun poliittisen organisoinnin muodon välillä, 2) sisäiset ja ulkoiset identifikaatiot, joiden avulla osapuolet pyrkivät legitimoimaan itsensä, ja 3) "anti-ideologinen" päätöksenteko yhdistettynä digitaalisiin arvolähtöisiin perusoletuksiin. Tämä tutkimus osoittaa, että kansalaislähtöinen digitaalinen poliittinen osallistuminen on edistyneempää ja moniulotteisempaa, kuin mihin nykyiset näkemykset ja tutkimukset viittaavat.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Technological innovations have significantly shaped societies throughout the course of time (e.g. Harari 2017). Now, in the 21st century, digitalisation has revolutionised almost all aspects of people's everyday lives, from online grocery shopping to working remotely and enjoying novel forms of virtual entertainment, to mention a few examples. Political practices and participation, however, have so far remained relatively untouched by digital developments in the past decades. Although politicians and citizens do indeed interact more and more often through social media, for example, the big picture of political participation has so far remained much the same: voting still requires physical presence and is executed mainly in the same fashion as before with ballot slips and envelopes, political decisions are made through traditional procedures by pressing 'aye' or 'nay' buttons in the parliament, and the opportunities for citizens to influence political decisions are relatively restricted to the instances of elections or occasional general referenda. Recently, however, political movements utilising digital tools to organise political participation have started to emerge, reshaping the ways in which political governance is understood and organised.

This thesis focuses on analysing the influence of digitalisation in citizen-initiated political participation. In the following sub-chapters of the introduction, the phenomenon and research design of this thesis are introduced in more detail. First, social changes taking place in political participation are portrayed. Then, accounts of citizen-initiated digital political participation (hereafter e-participation[1]) are presented. Finally, the aim and scope of the study as well as the structure of the thesis are presented.

1.1. Political participation in digital social change

Nowadays, it is hard to think of life without the Internet or any of the digital[2] gadgets that accompany us in our everyday realities. The world is in constant process of digitalisation, and both local and global actors push the progress forward. From citizens to organisations, we all depend from and trust in developing technologies and the Internet to bring about desired progress. For example, the European Commission has launched its own 'Digital Europe

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[1] The concept of digital political participation and its abbreviation of e-participation are defined more precisely in Chapter 2.3.

[2] In this thesis, the concept of digitalisation is understood as defined in the Cambridge Dictionary (2019): "to change something such as a document to a digital form --" and "to start to use digital technology such as computers and the Internet to do something".

Programme' that aims to construct a "European Union that nurtures and supports digital technology industries --" (Digital Europe 2019), while the OECD (2019) regularly publishes a series of 'Digital Government Studies' that analyses the "trends in digital government policies and practices across OECD and partner countries" and provides "advice on the use of digital technologies to make governments more agile, innovative, transparent and inclusive".

Although digitalisation has eased many aspects of daily life, new challenges have also emerged. On the institutional level of society, the same organisations that have promoted digitalisation have also taken measures against the alleged risks caused by the implementation of digital tools. As one example of many, in April 2019, the European Commission published a press statement entitled "Code of practice against disinformation" in responses to fears regarding the integrity of the European parliamentary elections that were to take place that same spring (European Commission 2019a; Reuters 2019). The statement was an attempt to reach out to the major online platforms Google, Facebook and Twitter and make them commit to the prevention of "disinformation -- ahead of the European elections" (ibid.).

On the citizen level, people have become gradually more and more concerned about fake news, phishing, censure, and polarisation of the digital social sphere due to algorithms notoriously utilised in social media platforms. Cases where online manipulation and politics have been mixed – such as the one regarding the company Cambridge Analytica that found to have harvested 50 million Facebook profiles with the alleged intention to influence the outcome of the United States' elections (The Guardian 2018) – have significantly affected citizens' trust in governmental and traditionally authoritative actors. These issues have caused what has also been called the 'democratic deficit' as citizens have started to distance themselves from politics and political forums of active engagement (Hennen et al. 2020, 4).

In the meantime, digitalisation and the Internet have affected politics in another sense as well: politicians' actions are no longer only communicated through a selected few official media, such as national broadcasting companies that have traditionally acted as loyal 'messengers' "reporting to the public what happens in the political domain" (Hajer 2009, 25). News are now scrutinised also on unofficial, often online media where information about political events and decisions does not come out as a coherent story but can be portrayed in different, often conflicting ways about what *really* happened. The shattered view of politics has degraded even more citizens' willingness to take part in political discussions which has also affected the

legitimacy[3] of traditional representative politics and the official media (Hennen et al. 2020, 3–4).

To counter the problems traditional politics are facing, several actors, from governments to new social movements and ordinary citizens, have started to combine political participation with digital tools – despite the hesitant tones regarding online politics. Examples can be found from Argentina and Mexico (*DemocracyOS*) to the United States (*PlaceAVote*) as well as Brazil (*Loomio*) and the United Kingdom (*Loomio*) (Ladendorf 2016). In addition, there are also nation-states, such as Estonia (Republic of Estonia 2020) and Switzerland (eGovernment.ch 2020), that have promoted the digitalisation of politics from the government level (Hartleb 2015, 48).

Moreover, new citizen-initiated movements that base their activities on digitalisation endorsing e-participation have also started to emerge. As Gerbaudo (2019, 191) describes, "[t]he profound shifts in the mode of production [of politics] signalled by the diffusion of social media and of apps, and by the rise of Web 2.0 companies such as Facebook, Twitter, Uber, Airbnb and many others, is engendering the rise of a new party type" – the digital platform party. Among the most illustrative digital platform parties are *MoVimento 5 Stelle* in Italy, *Podemos* in Spain, the *Pirate Party* in Northern European countries, *La France Insoumise* in France, and organisations such as *Momentum* in the UK (ibid., 188). These parties and organisations are combining digital measures with political participation which, whether it was intended or not, transforms the field of politics in ways unseen before.

The intensifying process of digitalisation does not have only practical effects regarding the application of new technological tools. It also influences how people interact with each other and is, hence, a comprehensive social change that can shape the ways in which people perceive the world, themselves, and what they value in life. Therefore, the processes of digital and social change should be examined attentively.

1.2. Citizen-initiated digital political participation

This thesis seeks to map and make sense of the impact digitalisation has on citizen-initiated political participation. In order to do that, two platform parties are taken under closer examination: the Italian *MoVimento 5 Stelle* (Five Star Movement, hereafter M5S), and the

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[3] In this thesis, legitimation is understood as a "process in which social acceptance is sought for the validity of the authority of a ruling group or the existence of a nation-state" (Oxford Reference 2020).

Finnish *Liike Nyt* (Movement Now, hereafter LN). These two cases have been chosen because of both individual reasons as well as their transnational connections.

M5S is taken under scrutiny because it has been found to portray an extraordinary example of a platform party due to three specific reasons (Federici et al. 2015). First, despite the aforementioned distrustful atmosphere regarding the mix of politics and digitalisation, M5S has "garnered major influence in Italian and European politics in a very short time" (Federici et al., 296). M5S started as a movement that was laughed about in public but currently sits in the Italian government and holds several ministerial positions (ibid., 287–288). Second, the party was created by people who were not originally part of the established political elite and has ever since attracted people from outside of politics. Third, M5S utilises ICT-tools as practical as well as discursive instruments in its politics and governance, while endorsing e-participation and direct interaction between citizens and politicians (Gerbaudo 2019, 188). These tools enable "the possibility of an open dialogue process about how the movement should react" to central political issues (Korthagen et al. 2020, 243). For example, M5S operates on its own online platform called *Rousseau*[4] that has been estimated to have around 150,000 registered subscribers (The Guardian 2019). Rousseau contains different functions for voting, debate, knowledge sharing, e-learning, through which M5S communicates with its followers (Rousseau 2019).

The second research case of this thesis, the Finnish party LN, was established shortly after M5S's electoral success, in April 2018. There are clear similarities between M5S and LN, many of which are explicitly said to have been inspired by the Italian party (interview 2019[5]). For example, inspired by M5S's Rousseau-platform, LN has also developed its own Internet-based interaction system that it utilises to organise online referenda and collect comments from its followers (Liike Nyt 2020a). The system was launched in April 2018 under the name of *Nettiparlamentti*, i.e. the Internet-parliament, and it currently has around 12,000–15,000 subscribed followers there (interview 2019).

Even though LN has not attracted as much attention as M5S to this day, the parties' notable similarities suggest that political participation is been developed in increasingly digitalised

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[4] The name of the platform, Rousseau, derives from the French Enlightenment philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau who was one of the first social theorists to incorporate the idea of citizen-influence into the theories of the political system (Delaney 2020).

[5] As part of this study, an interview was conducted in Helsinki in December 2019 with a key person in the party (hereafter referred to as informant). The interview is a complementary addition to the research data regarding LN and is presented in more detail in the Chapter 4.3.

directions. The connections between the two parties can also shed light on the growth in popularity of the Internet-based platform parties and political participation happening in-between official elections and referenda. After all, M5S and LN are at the forefront of digital politics.

1.3. Aim and scope of the study

In line with the connections between digitalisation and political participation, it seems clear that two emerging coexist, despite of their opposite stances: the one of scepticism towards online politics, and the one of increasing digitalisation of political participation. But how? The aim of this thesis is to solve the puzzle by mapping how digitalisation influences citizen-initiated political participation and, more specifically, how online-based platform parties are able to gain legitimacy in relation to traditional governance – thereby providing analytical insights into the interplay between traditional governance and online based political participation, decision-making and interaction. In practice, the study is realised by analysing two platform parties, the Italian M5S and Finnish LN, with the conceptual framework of epistemic governance.

The approach of epistemic governance, as explained by Alasuutari and Qadir (2019, 149), is "--a new way of understanding social change as epistemic governance, or governance that functions by taking into account how people conceive the world, their place in it, and what is good or desirable to do". In other words, all actors seeking to influence the course of social change utilise a limited number of discursive strategies to convince their audiences. These discursive strategies concentrate in shaping their audiences' perceptions of three specific aspects of social world: 1) ontology of the environment, i.e. 'what the world is', 2) actor identifications, i.e. 'who we are', and 3) norms and ideals, i.e. 'what is good and desirable'. (Ibid., 21.) Therefore, the theory of epistemic governance can also shed light on how platform parties challenge the position of traditional politics and instead promote Internet-based political participation. In practice, the three abovementioned objects are utilised as analytical tools to identify specific discursive elements that M5S and LN apply online to influence their audiences' opinions and justify chosen ways of governance. Based on these empirical premises and theoretical foundations, the research question of this thesis is as follows:

> *How do MoVimento 5 Stelle and Liike Nyt legitimise themselves in relation to forms of classical-modernist governance and seek to shape the course of social change towards digital political participation?*

The research question requires answers through meticulous analytical examination, not the least because research analysing the discursive tools through which citizen-initiated e-participation is promoted is still relatively uncommon. Thus, the research design of this thesis, including the cases of M5S and LN and the conceptual framework of epistemic governance, provide a fascinating window of analysis for making sense of how platform parties construct a need for digitalised collective e-participation. Moreover, this thesis sheds light on the identifications, norms and values that the platform parties utilise to legitimise their agendas.

This thesis is organised into six chapters. Following the introduction (Chapter 1), where a scene of the current political participation in the digital environment is outlined and the research aim and scope are introduced, Chapter 2 presents a review of previous research about traditional, classical-modernist political organisation and e-participation. Chapter 3 discusses the Italian and Finnish research cases of this thesis. Chapter 4 presents the research approach, the conceptual framework of epistemic governance, the methodology and data applied to study the research subjects. The findings are then revealed in Chapter 5. Finally, Chapter 6 discusses these findings in relation to the pertinent literature and concludes the thesis by answering the research question, suggesting theoretical implications and proposing subjects for further research.

2. FROM CLASSICAL-MODERNIST GOVERNANCE TO DIGITAL POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

The focus of this chapter is on providing an overview of the key concepts that are utilised in comprehending the traditional premises of political organisation in the form of the classical modernist-government and then the field of political participation in relation to digitalisation. First, a traditional approach to political governance and its key characteristics is presented (Chapter 2.1.), followed by accounts of contemporary network governance (Chapter 2.2.). Then, a review of research on digital political participation and its relations to traditional forms of governance are presented (Chapter 2.3.). Finally, the concept of the 'platform party' is addressed as a recent development in the research field of e-participation (Chapter 2.4.). The attention is on these concepts because they provide an encompassing picture of how the traditional organisation of governance and the influence of digitalisation in political participation have been understood in previous research.

2.1. Traditional classical-modernist governance

Defining politics is a challenging task as the concept is often used ambiguously in countless contexts and meanings. In this thesis, politics is comprehended as defined by Hajer (2009, 74) who states that "[p]olitics is best understood as a sequence of enactments, taking place at many different places, including constitutional and non-constitutional stages, through which meaning is given to societal events". In other words, politics is here seen as multi-directional interaction which takes place in different forums and media between involved stakeholders. Meanwhile, politics is not something purely limited to, for instance, places like the parliament, events such as broadcasted campaign debates, or speeches held by Members of Parliament. On the contrary, this definition broadens the spectrum of potential political instances and people from conventional settings to the ones that traditionally have not necessarily been considered as political. For example, bloggers influencing others' views about the world on social media platforms can be seen as political actors.

The institutions that are traditionally considered as 'political' and have attained positions with authority do not come to be as naturally legitimate actors but are, instead, always inherited from specific eras (Hajer 2009, 24). For example, the current institutions, such as the parliament and representative democracy, are inherited from the twentieth century and form a governance model that Hajer (ibid.) calls the 'classical-modernist government'.

The classical-modernist government has seven distinctive principles (Hajer 2009, 24–25). First of all, it is based on territorial order, typically seen as dating back to the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. Second, democratic institutions are nested, meaning that they have their own spheres of authority with designated areas of responsibility that legitimise their existence. Third, the classical-modernist governments gain the mandate of political leadership through elections and universal suffrage. Fourth, this type of government is established on sharp, Weberian distinction between politics and bureaucracy. In relation, there is also need for public participation as well as the media functioning as 'messengers' reporting to the public what happens in the political domain, which are the fifth and sixth elements. Finally, the classical-modernist government leans on a positivist model of 'science-for-policy' which, consequently, leads to knowledge production for the benefits of enhancing the government's legitimacy and authority. (Ibid.)

This model of governance has been at its strongest in the post-war period that was "the era of multi-party democracy, the welfare state, and mass consumption", where also territorial synchrony became popular. In the synchronisation of territories, nation-states started to imitate each other in policymaking and cherish similar institutional choices, values and norms. (Hajer 2009, 26.) The shared institutional choices, values and norms, in turn, gain increasing authority due to their unquestioned hegemonic position. This kind of historical construction of authority reveals that there is nothing 'natural' about 'our' current political institutional systems (ibid., 23–24).

The classical-modernist order has functioned for several decades without many major outbreaks. Lately, however, problems have been starting to emerge. Relying on previous literature, Hajer (2009, 27–29) identifies issues that the classical-modernist governments have had to face, such as the economy slipping away from nation-states, societal and economical processes spreading across territorial spaces, as well as the birth of the 'network society' and 'spaces of flows'. These issues have hindered the previously solid position of classical-modernist institutions. Moreover, the fragmentation of unified public spaces caused by the multiplicity of media and target specific channels for communication has posed challenges. (Ibid.) In the end, these problems have resulted in a 'triple deficit' in the authority of the classical-modernist institutions and policymakers:

1) Implementation deficit, i.e. policy may be agreed upon but not implemented in practice
2) Learning deficit, i.e. policymakers have less knowledge than needed
3) Legitimacy deficit, i.e. policy problems do not respect territorial scales and the system breaks down. (Hajer 2009, 29–30.)

The triple deficit highlights that the classical-modernist institutions suffer from problems on different levels, such as loss of effectiveness and legitimacy (Hajer 2009, 27). At the same time, however, the decline in the authority of traditional institutions has left room for novel forms of political organisation to rise.

2.2. Contemporary network governance

To tackle the above-presented issues of classical-modernist governance, Hajer (2009, 30–33) notes that a new form of governance has started to emerge and attain legitimacy from traditional institutions: the network governance. Nowadays, citizens want more accessible and direct options to influence political decision-making and governance than before (Oni et al. 2017, 317). Network governance is a new, more flexible approach to governing that can be adjusted according to the issue at hand (Hajer 2009, 170–171). More specifically, network governance is an approach to public problem-solving where people do not simply rely on or expect the state to come up with and impose solutions to collective issues. Instead, the solutions are results of collaborative processes where networks formed by different actors, including both state and non-state organisations, participate. (Ibid., 30–31.)

Hajer's (2009, 43) argument is that network governance is a reaction to the struggles of politics in increasingly mediatised and digitalised realities where information flow intensifies, and political decision-making lack a unified political centre. In addition, however, the approach of network governance is also a result of the increasing awareness that institutions, such as the parliament and the education system, are more and more interdependent of each other and the people (Bäcklund et al. 2017, 312). Therefore, there has also been an increase in the willingness to move past the barriers of decision-making and explore potential routes for cooperation and mutual gain (ibid.). The factors of interconnectedness and willingness to co-operate "determine how politics 'meets the eye', thus influencing what people expect from a government and what they accept as authoritative from those who (try to) govern" (Hajer 2009, 50).

It is important to note, however, that network governance does not directly follow or erase forms of classical-modernist governance. In fact, previous research has noticed that characteristics from both approaches of governance can be found in policymaking situations (Bäcklund et al. 2017). Nevertheless, there are clear implications of the increasing popularity of network governance as it has spread both as a specific strategy for problem solving and, more broadly, as an empirical phenomenon (Hajer 2009, 171).

Based on the detected transformation of politics, Hajer (2009, 32–33) poses a challenge to social sciences to examine more accurately both the evolving modes of governance and forms of social change within them. At the same time, however, researchers need to pay attention to the fact that "--academic disciplines are vulnerable to naturalizing institutions that they have helped to create, stabilize, and promote, a priori refuting the possibility that these institutions could ever be reinvented" (ibid.). Consequently, the task for research is also to minimise the risks that could lead to the naturalisation of the analysed institutions and reveal why specific structures are authoritative instead of others in particular situations. (Ibid.)

Especially after the deficits in classical-modernist governance started to appear, phenomena related to the intertwinement of politics and digitalisation started to receive more widespread attention from both the general public and the scientific community. This interest gave way to a rapidly expanding, interdisciplinary body of literature concerning a wide range of implications of ICT for the political process (Lindner & Aichholzer 2020, 15). New research addressed, for example, the increasing influence of media in politics (e.g. Berglez 2008; Hjarvard 2008; Strömbäck 2008; Ojala 2011; Hamdy & Gomaa 2012) where especially social media was at the centre of attention because it "can be understood as a new and important discursive space that has an enormous impact on which political issues are raised in the formal sphere of politics, what issues are reported on by traditional media, and what discourses are spread and popularized--" (Koiranen et al. 2020, 2). To mention another example, studies were conducted about citizens' volatile trust in traditional politics (e.g. Citrin 1974; Hetherington 1998; della Porta 2000; Bowler & Karp 2004; Grönlund & Setälä 2012). Therefore, online interaction between governmental institutions, political actors, and citizens gained more and more ground as research subjects in social sciences.

2.3. Digital political participation

In literature, online interaction between citizens and political actors has been described with several concepts. Some of the most widely used are 'e-government', 'e-democracy', 'digital government' and 'e-governance' (Helbig et al. 2009, 89–90). These notions range from descriptive to value-laden ones and are often utilised as synonyms with each other (ibid., 90). However, they mostly concentrate in the 'top-down' approach of politics where governments are seen as the enactors of online communication towards citizens, and citizens, in turn, are perceived as the passive recipients of the information. This perspective has long been at the centre of e-government studies (Reddick 2008, 27).

To refer instead to the reciprocal online interaction between the state and the citizens, the concept of 'electronic[6] political participation' (hereafter shortened as e-participation) has been widely applied in previous research. The concept has also noted to be broader than 'digital democracy' or 'e-democracy' (Van Dijk 2012) and is therefore apt for this thesis. Here, e-participation is understood as defined by Lindner and Aichholzer (2020, 18) who state that the notion "--encompasses all forms of political participation, making use of digital media, including both formally institutionalised mechanisms and informal civic engagement." Therefore, it also includes the 'bottom-up' view to the phenomenon that is here perceived as citizen-initiated attempts of influencing political decision-making and take part in political participation (Van Dijk 2012, 52–53).

More specifically, the concept of e-participation entails the utilisation of information and communications technology (ICT) in a way that enables citizens to participate better in political decision-making processes (Veit & Huntgerbruth 2014, 137). In other words, e-participation is a sum of procedures and structures that are supported by digital technologies and that are usually aimed to facilitate political interaction between public organisations, governments, and citizens (Federici et al. 2015, 287). As e-participation concerns policy, "it can be related to the well-known phases of the policy process: agenda setting, policy preparation, decision making, policy execution and policy evaluation" (Van Dijk 2012, 56).

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[6] In this thesis, the concept of 'electronic' is replaced with the noun 'digital' which, as defined in the introduction, covers a wide range of processes and phenomena related to and facilitated by digital technologies. The abbreviation of 'e-participation' is left original due to the general usage of the prefix 'e-' that "refers to information technologies, business, and almost anything connected to or transmitted over the Internet" (dictionary.com 2020).

Following previous research, Reddick (2011, 168) has identified three different forms of e-participation in governments: managerial, consultative and participatory. These three forms can be represented as a continuum of one another: the managerial version has least amount of citizen input and is categorised as 'one-way interaction' in which the government provides (online) information to citizens but does not expect or even allow participation. Consultative e-participation, in turn, is seen as more interactive, meaning that citizens have a counselling role towards the government. An example of this could be a referendum organised by the government in order to have the opinion of the public which then acts as a guideline when the final political decision needs to be made. Finally, the "highest form of e-participation" (ibid., 168) is the participatory model of e-participation where interaction between citizens and the government happens in both ways. Here, citizen interaction is seen critical to the development of policies, and actual change can be initiated in a bottom-up way, by the citizens. (Reddick 2011, 168–171.)

Even though Reddick (2011, 169) does not suggest that governments should "work their way up the ladder", both global organisations and local governments are intentionally implementing digitalising processes in various societal fields. For example, the OECD (2019) regularly releases a research series analysing trends in digital government policies and practices, with the addition of suggestions for improvements, and the European Union has its own strategy for constructing a 'digital single market' (European Commission 2019b). In a similar way, there are new social movements and political parties that represent the participatory model of e-participation described by Reddick and that explicitly push for the participatory model of e-participation.

As a whole, current research on e-participation has not reached a clear consensus on the possible impacts the Internet may cause to political participation, nor on the influence these changes might have in organising politics (Hindman 2009, 12–13). Accordingly, Susha and Grönlund (2012, 379–380) state that more research should be conducted from the viewpoint of citizen-initiated forms of e-participation instead of government-initiated perspectives. They continue by asserting that, from a general conceptual perspective, the research field of e-participation currently "suffers from a lack of comprehensive theoretical contributions, insufficient depth, and inconsistency in definitions of central concepts" (ibid.). Moreover, research on e-participation has found to contain biased assumptions regarding the nature of the influence of digitalisation to political participation (ibid.). As Albrecht (2006, 63–67) notes, existing

research on e-participation consists of mainly two lines of theoretical discussion: the utopian and sceptical accounts.

The utopian accounts look at the potential the Internet may provide to political processes (Albrecht 2006, 63–64; Bäcklund et al. 2017, 311). In fact, research has often focused on assessing the 'democratising' effects of the Internet (e.g. Hindman 2009). Looking at the broad picture, these views see the Internet as a prospective answer to the 'crisis of representation' in the current political system (Albrecht 2006, 63–64). The potential is seen particularly in the distribution of information and the Internet being a new medium of communication. As a novel medium for interaction, the Internet has been seen to provide universal, unconstrained access to information to a broader range of people and, thus, construct a virtual public sphere.

Albrecht (2006, 64) explains that the hopes regarding the potential of online politics are based on an assessment that the Internet could change the preconditions of democratic practices for the better. In fact, some have portrayed that the usage of technologies can bring a 'new stage of democracy' where new technologies deepen democracy's vitality and legitimacy on multiple levels (Shane 2004, xi). This has also been noted by Chandler and Fuchs (2019, 2) who state that "[d]igital optimists assert that digital technologies have radically transformed the world, promising new forms of community, alternative ways of knowing and sensing, creative innovation, participatory culture, networked activism and distributed democracy."

On the other end, the people with sceptical accounts argue that digital technologies have, instead of bringing about positive change, intensified and deepened the structures of domination by providing new forms of control to the ones in power (Chandler & Fuchs 2019, 2). The sceptics speak of "networked authoritarianism, digital dehumanisation, alienation 2.0, networked exploitation and the rise of the surveillance society" (ibid.). Moreover, as Oni et al. (2017) note, people's individual attitudes towards e-participation are influenced by their surrounding political culture (e.g. democracy or totalitarianism) and the amount of political information they readily possess.

Additionally, digital pessimists have identified the 'digital divide' as an outcome of Internet usage in politics (e.g. Bailo 2015). The digital divide means that a broader range of non-traditional forms of participation increases the chances of participation only for those who are already active in politics (Albrecht 2006, 66). As Oni et al. (2017, 317) state, the indicators that traditionally suggest elevated levels of political activity, such as the level of political awareness, political efficacy, and the amounts of recruitment networks, are found to be significant

predictors of intention to use e-democracy as well. In the meantime, the marginalised individuals still remain at the outskirts of decision-making. This polarisation is seen to be due to the issue that, in the end, e-participation requires similar socioeconomic resources that are required offline (Albrecht 2006, 66).

All in all, the sceptical research results seem to indicate that the Internet fortifies existing problems regarding the traditional unequal access to politics instead of balancing out the inequalities (Albrecht 2006, 64, 67). As Hindman (2009, 142) highlights, "[t]he persistence of the digital divide makes the failures of pluralism and online deliberation even more salient", meaning that the fundamental flaws of traditional representative politics have become more prominent in times of the Internet. As an example, research on replacing paper voting with an online election system has proven that the move causes digital disenfranchisement, meaning that some people came under the risk of losing their possibilities to vote, especially in the long run (Goodman et al. 2018). To conclude, the negative results regarding the influence of digitalisation in politics suggest that neither the political debates nor the people taking part in or being left out from the debates differ much online or offline (Albrecht 2006, 68).

Even though the sceptical research results have gained much support, Albrecht (2006) notes that it might be too early for definite conclusions, especially leaning on two reasons. First of all, "-- empirical evidence from studies in computer-mediated communication is by far not as robust as required for basing scientific judgement on it" (ibid., 69). Indeed, even after Albrecht's research, many studies have concentrated in assessing only the official 'top-down' perspective of digital politics, meaning that they concentrate in evaluating the online information that governments offer to citizens and how citizens as 'recipients' perceive the changes of digital politics (as argued by Reddick 2011, 167). The second reason is that, during the time of Albrecht's research "--the number of serious attempts to engage citizens in online political deliberation is still very small" (Albrecht 2006, 69). Since then, however, increasing amounts of 'serious attempts' in online-citizen-engagement have emerged.

To conclude, Talia (2019, 89) affirms that "[t]he relationships between new technologies and politics are much more complex than it seems to be of interest to both the world of politics and that of information technology." In a similar vein, Medaglia (2012) suggests in his longitudinal study on e-participation from 2006 to 2011 that the focus of e-participation research should be shifted from the 'top-down', government-based perspective to examining the e-participation initiated by citizens and other grassroot stakeholders (ibid., 356–358).

2.4. E-participation and the platform party

Following the direction suggested by Talia (2019) and Medaglia (2012), research has started to be conducted on the 'grassroots producers' of e-participation. This new angle addresses the phenomenon of digitalised politics from the side of political parties and has, thereafter, resulted as the identification of a new party type: the 'platform party', or otherwise called, 'digital party' (Gerbaudo 2019). The scholar suggesting the concept, Gerbaudo (ibid.), sustains that this new party type "incarnates the new forms of organisation, the new values and social relationship that are dominant in a digital society" (ibid., 187–188). The platform party can also be described as 'digital' because it typically utilises digital technology for both internal communication as well as external organisation (ibid., 188). Even more importantly, Gerbaudo emphasises by citing Van Dijck (2013) that such 'digital character' is part of the platform parties' core in a profound and systemic sense:

> "These parties pursue a far-reaching restructuring of their organisational forms and their philosophy in ways that are coherent with the nature of a digital society and its drive towards directness, disintermediation, interactivity, adaptability and instantaneous responsiveness (Van Dijck 2013). These formations betoken an attempt to mend and simplify politics, thus responding to the perception of a yawning gap between the citizenry and the political process. They strive for customisation, adaptability and interactivity, in a way that makes them resemble social media and app platforms such as Facebook, Airbnb or Uber." (Gerbaudo 2019, 188–189.)

Following this line, Gerbaudo (2019, 189) brings to light the concept of 'participationism' in the process of reorganisation of the political field mobilised by the platform parties. By this he means that the platform party stands on the premise of engaging ordinary citizens from all classes into politics (ibid., 191). The participation is then organised indeed on the new platform logic that underpins the world of apps and social media (ibid., 193). Additionally, the platform parties rely on the promise of a radical new democracy "beyond the deep crisis of existing democracy" (ibid., 195–196).

However, there is a paradox. In reality, the platform parties are often found to have highly centralised power distribution and be unified by charismatic leadership. In addition, several other issues and sceptical accounts have been expressed about the combination of politics and digitalisation. (Ibid.) Yet, these two trends of scepticism towards politics online and increasing

digitalisation of political practices seem to coexist. But how – that is a question in need of an enlightening case study. In this thesis, the cases of the Italian M5S and Finnish LN are examined with the conceptual framework of epistemic governance to solve the puzzle.

3. THE CASES OF MOVIMENTO 5 STELLE AND LIIKE NYT

In this thesis, two platform parties, the Italian M5S and Finnish LN, are taken under examination to understand the influence of digitalisation to political participation, especially from the viewpoint of citizen-initiated action. The cases are introduced in more detail in the following sub-chapters. The emphasis is on M5S because it has been operating significantly longer than LN and, thus, there is naturally more material on the party. In addition to news reporting, relevant literature is included. Accounts of LN mostly concentrate in the party's life cycle presented on its websites and news reporting, the similarities found between LN and M5S, and the remarks risen from the interview conducted with a key informant from the party. This thesis is the first study analysing LN.

3.1. MoVimento 5 Stelle's path from birth to the Italian government

It all started in 2005 when M5S's leading figure at the time Giuseppe 'Beppe' Grillo began writing a political blog criticising Italian politics and the ways in which major social and economic issues were handled (for an extensive layout of M5S's history, see e.g. Korthagen et al. 2020 and Tronconi 2018). The blog formed the basis for M5S, and when the party was officially established in 2009, its self-proclaimed aim was to counter the vast problems Italy was facing with corruption, the Mafia, and a highly hierarchical, non-functional policy-making system by introducing a new way of conducting politics (Federici et al. 2015, 287–288). The founders of the movement, Grillo and web strategist Gianroberto Casaleggio, asserted that the movement would be cemented in the principles of direct political participation, digitalisation, and assisting the people in issues which required political intervention. As such, it would also not position itself on the left-right paradigm but would respect the will of the followers. (Ibid.)

Initially, the party was in many instances thought of as a public joke – not only because it was led literally by a comic, but also because it was fundamentally based on digitalisation and the implementation of digital tools to bring the decision-makers and citizens closer to each other. Since then, however, the party has in many ways been able to construct an authoritative and legitimate figure of itself – as seen from the 2013 and 2018 general elections. The 2013 elections were the M5S's first major breakthrough which was "one of the most remarkable political transformations in recent years [in Italy]" (Caruso 2017, 586). M5S did not get through to become part of the government, but it still gained such a solid support from the people that

it caused a crisis to the Italian party system that pushed it from a 'bi-' to a 'tri-' polar power competition (Bordignon & Ceccarini 2015, 454).

Then, in the latter elections of 2018, the party won all other parties in number of votes and consequently became a government party which currently has several ministries under its rule. The win was a significant milestone for the party since, as Korthagen et al. (2020, 247) point out, "[t]he electoral successes of the movement seem to prove the hypothesis that by providing an online infrastructure that gives voice to citizens, political initiators can in fact organize and mobilize voters."

> *We are 21ˢᵗ century citizens doing our very, very best to interact with 19ᵗʰ century designed institutions, that are based on an information technology of the 15ᵗʰ century.*
> – Pia Mancini (Rousseau 2019, introduction video)

Nowadays, M5S still aims to appear as a fresh, digitally based option to traditional politics and decision-making, while challenging the traditional and allegedly outdated forms of governance (Rousseau 2019). The party's main objective "is to achieve active citizen involvement in politics throughout the decision-making process, from agenda setting to policy evaluation" (Federici et al. 2015, 291). According to M5S, the aspiration to enable constant dialogue between the party members and common citizens is connected to the ideals of transparency and just political decisions (Rousseau 2019). Furthermore, combining politics with digitalisation is, to the party, a way of bringing politics to the current age – as expressed by Pia Mancini in the above quotation.

In practice, M5S seeks to meet its goal by basing its activity mainly on digital tools: in addition to the not-so-unusual factor of having a website containing official information about the party, as well as social media accounts, M5S communicates with its followers through an official blog and formulates its parliamentary decisions based on regular elections conducted on its own digital platform available on the Internet called 'Rousseau' (Rousseau 2019). Rousseau is the operational system of M5S, a specific platform created by the founders of M5S where, in theory at least, all decisions needed to be taken by the party, from law initiatives to government coalitions and everything in between, are voted by the followers registered to the platform. More specifically, Rousseau contains several functions[7] for specific purposes of political

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[7] All functions available on Rousseau are *'Lex Parlamento'*, *'Lex Regionale'*, *'Lex Europa'* for interacting with the party's Members of the European Parliament, voting, fund raising, *'Scudo della Rete'* for legal assistance to bloggers and other citizens challenged due to things they have written online, activism, sharing, e-learning, *'Lex Iscritti'*, 'Call to Action', *'Open Comuni'*, 'Open Candidature' and *'Portale Talenti'* (MoVimento 5 Stelle 2019).

participation, such as voting, debates, knowledge sharing, e-learning, and more (Rousseau 2019).

Practically speaking, M5S's followers register online on Rousseau using a computer or mobile device connected to the Internet (Deseriis 2017, 53). The registration is available to all Italian citizens who are at least 18 years old and are not already affiliated with other political parties. Official figures of the numbers of subscribers on Rousseau have not been published. However, Federici et al. (2015) claim that at the moment of their study's publication, M5S had 800,000 followers of which 100,000 certified subscribers (ibid., 288), while in 2019 Gerbaudo assessed that there would be around 150,000 subscribers (The Guardian 2019). After the registration, the followers acquire the right to participate in the platform's participatory processes that include, for example, voting about current political topics. The results of the votes then should dictate how the party conducts its policymaking in parliament. (Ibid.) Of all registered followers, an estimate of 30,000–40,000 people are said to usually participate in M5S's main online discussions and votes on Rousseau (Federici et al. 2015, 291, 294).

By organising their activity through Rousseau, M5S affirms that direct and continuous participation is possible between its representatives and supporters. Moreover, the party insists that Rousseau has the potential to revolutionise the ways in which politics have been arranged as it is a critically different form of conduct compared to traditional political parties. (Rousseau 2019.) Paradoxically, however, Rousseau has been criticised over transparency and data security issues: "[b]ecause voting in Rousseau is not based on an end-to-end auditable voting system, which is currently considered the most resistant system to vote tampering, the integrity of the vote is hardly guaranteed", as explicated by Deseriis (2017, 54). Still, due to their successful efforts of mass-mobilisation and e-participation, M5S has been said to represent an exemplary case of platform party that has not only challenged the political status quo in Italy but has gained authority on the EU-level as well (Federici et al. 2015, 287–288).

Of course, not everything has gone down smoothly in M5S's journey. Throughout the following years after M5S formed a government coalition with *Lega*[8] as a result of the 2018 elections, the still fairly novel government faced regular challenges in fulfilling the promises made during the electoral campaign. Contradictions and inconsistencies shadowed both M5S's and Lega's decision-making, but especially M5S's followers seemed to not be content with the decisions the government made. In fact, research on M5S found that throughout its time of working in

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[8] *Lega*, also called *Lega Nord* (Northern League) is a right-wing to far right political party in Italy.

and under the influence of the governmental institutions, such as the parliament, M5S has been struggling with maintaining its own identity of resistance and adjusting to more conventional political stances (Bordignon & Ceccarini 2015).

The negative change in M5S's spirit became particularly tangible in the results of the 2019 European elections when M5S lost to Lega and *Partito Democratico*[9] (Corriere della Sera 2019). The election results were quickly interpreted as a statement from M5S's supporters indicating that the confidence towards the party was degrading. As such, it sparked intensive disputes about the legitimacy of M5S. Three days after the publication of the European election's results, Luigi Di Maio, the head of the party at that time, announced that a public consultation on his position would be arranged on the Rousseau-platform and that he would resign if the party's followers would desire so. Indeed, a confidence referendum was conducted the very next day on Rousseau, ending with clear results: Di Maio won with an undisputable majority of votes in his favour and his position as M5S's political chief was reconfirmed. In fact, according to *La Repubblica*[10] (2019), for example, Di Maio came out of the situation as a more legitimate leader than perhaps ever before, meaning that the referendum on Rousseau reinforced and re-legitimised his position.

This episode illustrates both the dynamics inside M5S as well as the party's relations to external actors. It also shows how M5S utilises Rousseau and applies the principle of direct participation. During its years of activity, the interaction between M5S and its followers has in many cases been similar, even though not all referenda have attracted as much participation as this one. The position of M5S and other anti-establishment parties in Europe are not seeing a decline in their popularity but, instead, offer "a (more) radical rejection of traditional party politics and represents a desire for change that comes from outside the system of modern, representative democracy" (Hartleb 2015, 47–48). In fact, M5S's way of organising its activity has been adopted also in Finland, for example, where a very similar movement was established in 2018.

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[9] *Partito Democratico* (Democratic Party) is a social-democratic political party which previously held the title of biggest party and the position of prime minister from 2014 until 2016.
[10] *La Repubblica* is the second-most-circulated daily newspaper in Italy.

3.2. Connections between MoVimento 5 Stelle and Liike Nyt

The influence of digitalisation in political participation is not characteristic solely to Italy. A case of platform party that mirrors the course of action of M5S has also emerged in Finland: *Liike Nyt* (LN). LN was established shortly after M5S's second electoral success, in April 2018. Although LN has not gained as much attention as M5S, it still has a notable presence in the Finnish political spectrum. LN has currently one representative in the government, the party's leader Harry 'Hjallis' Harkimo, and an estimate of 14,000 subscribed followers on its online platform, *Nettiparlamentti*, i.e. the Internet-parliament (Liike Nyt 2020b; Interview 2019; Harrinvirta 2019). The operational logic of the Internet-parliament is mirrored from M5S's Rousseau-platform as it is utilised to collect comments and opinions from the party's followers (Liike Nyt 2020a). The Internet-parliament is currently being developed into a separate platform, as M5S has also done with the Rousseau-platform (interview 2019).

Even though the official relationship between M5S and LN is complicated (Helsingin Sanomat 2019), LN and M5S form an exceptionally interesting research subject because they have notable similarities, especially related to their Internet-based participatory systems but also in their general arguments. For example, the video material utilised to promote LN in the Finnish parliamentary elections in 2019 (e.g. Harkimo's Youtube channel since 2017, "Hjallis") has clear connections to the arguments and language utilised by M5S. Resemblances can be seen in, for instance, word choices that are not so commonly utilised in the Finnish political discourse, such as "the Mafia" (e.g. Youtube video by LN 2019a), as well as entire political themes adopted from the vocabulary of M5S. For instance, the topics of 'fighting against corruption' and shifting political power from traditional institutions to network-based communities have always been part of M5S's core political themes (Federici et al. 2015, 295). Interestingly, the themes were also visible in LN's campaigning, such as in a video that was titled "Finland is a corrupted country" (Youtube video by LN 2019b).

The influence of digitalisation in the Finnish political landscape can be seen in also other cases than LN. For instance, politicians have started to use social media tools increasingly more frequently to communicate with their supporters. Another example is the online form of participation called 'citizen's initiative' that the Finnish government took into use already in March 2012 (Kansalaisaloite.fi 2019) that is promoted as a form of 'bottom-up' political participation (Leino-Sandberg 2019). The bottom-up approach as not, however, been as functional as hoped for because most citizen's initiatives have not been approved in the

government (Nieminen 2018). Hence, other research subjects are needed to examine the influence of digitalisation to citizen-initiated e-participation. LN, M5S and their interrelated connections pose an exceptional setting to conduct such research.

This thesis is the first study examining LN which poses both challenges and possibilities. On the one hand, lack of previous research may reflect as uncertainty in the analysis and results. However, this can be tackled by a vast enough dataset as well as the comparative element in the analysis of M5S. On the other hand, and perhaps more importantly, the absence of previous literature provides a unique opportunity for novel research results that provide an additional layer to understanding the influences of digitalisation to political participation.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DATA

The objective of this thesis is to map how the two platform parties, M5S and LN, legitimise themselves in relation to traditional politics and justify their own agendas. Thus, a qualitative study is conducted by analysing the discursive ways in which the parties justify these topics on their blogs. In this chapter, the research design is presented by introducing first the research approach, followed by an outline of the conceptual framework of the study, Epistemic Governance. Epistemic governance is chosen as both the theoretical and methodological approach for the study because it enables to explore the construction of meanings in social interaction and illuminate the patterns and mechanisms that are utilised to influence others' views in that instance (Alasuutari & Qadir 2019, 11). Then, the dataset of the study is presented. Finally, the chapter is concluded with methodological remarks, explaining how the study has been conducted in practice.

4.1. Research approach

This thesis is a qualitative discursive research that is based on the tradition of social constructionism according to which perceptions about reality are constantly constructed, de-constructed and re-constructed in social interaction (e.g. Berger & Luckmann 1994). Social interaction, in turn, is based on widely shared and often hegemonic understandings, categorisations and definitions about the phenomena at hand (ibid.). Language is the classic example of this: by choosing to utilise certain concepts, people do not purely describe the discussed issue – they also construct it by emphasising specific aspects and enforcing (or challenging) socially accepted viewpoints about it (Van Leeuwen 2014, 145). These categorisations and assumptions form generally accepted, hegemonic discourses.

In this setting, discourse is understood as "an ensemble of notions, ideas, concepts, and categorisations through which meaning is ascribed to social and physical phenomena, and that is produced in and reproduces in turn an identifiable set of practices" (Hajer 2009, 60). In other words, discourse is a relatively coherent set of meanings that is built on social practices and that, simultaneously, constructs perceptions of reality in socially determined ways (Jokinen, Juhila & Suoninen 2016, 34, 234). The constructionist characteristic of discourses comes from the idea that discourses do not merely indicate what something such as kindness *is* but are ultimately based on what kind people *do* (Van Leeuwen 2014, 145).

Utilising certain discourses can significantly affect people's ideas about, for example, what the world is, who they are, and what is good or desirable. Social change is, in fact, pursued by actors who rely on specific generally accepted categorisations and try to promote their own views by influencing others' perceptions about the issues at hand (Boli & Thomas 1997). Understanding the dynamics between social interaction and the social construction of hegemonic categorisations is vital for making sense of the changes that are taking place in the world. These perceptions become defined and modified through interaction at multiple levels, become embedded in objects, organisations, as well as people. They are then institutionalised and spread around the world through internationally influential actors and organisations. (Ibid.)

Thus, this thesis focuses on examining the discourses that the research subjects, M5S and LN, utilise when promoting their legitimacy, opposing the current state of affairs, and justifying the utilisation of e-participation. The analysis is mainly theoretically driven and concentrates on the content of the texts instead of particular word choices or phrase structures that are utilised. Moreover, this study is a combination of both inductive and deductive approaches. In general, qualitative research is often characterised by either of the analysis approaches. The inductive approach starts from a specific observation risen from the analysis, begins to detect patterns and regularities, and then sums them into general conclusions or theory of the phenomenon at hand (Raatikainen 2004, 18). Deductive reasoning, on the other end, starts from a general theoretical viewpoint, moves towards analysing more specific empirical observations, and often concludes by determining whether a hypothesis is correct or not (ibid.). Even though this type of dichotomy is relatively common, and it often also implies a choice between a theoretically or data driven analysis, the practical division between the two approaches is not as simple (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018, 83).

In this thesis, the choice of approach between inductive or deductive approach depends on the specific phase of the study: in the moment of data analysis, the study is strongly guided by the theory of epistemic governance and the objects of epistemic work, meaning that the reasoning is deductive. The approach of epistemic governance is explained in more detail in the following sub-chapter. When findings are summed and formulated into more generalised interpretations of the phenomenon, in turn, inductive reasoning comes into play and allows to transform individual observations into more cohesive conclusions. This combination gives room for detecting different interpretations, meanings and symbols rising from the data that could remain unseen if only one of the two phases of reasoning would be implemented.

4.2. Epistemic Governance as theoretical framework

Attempts to influence the course of social change are manifested in countless everyday instances, from contemporary governance to struggles of power relations and more specific attempts of influencing other people. The approach of epistemic governance, also described as the 'politics of policy-making', is a framework designed to provide in-depth understanding of this social change (Alasuutari & Qadir 2019; Alasuutari 2016; Syväterä & Qadir 2016; Alasuutari et al. 2015; Alasuutari & Qadir 2014). More specifically, it helps to depict the ways in which actors seeking social change influence their audiences, either unintentionally or by design, in their efforts to convince other about the appropriate actions or way of thought in a given situation.

Grounded in qualitative Foucauldian discourse analysis, the approach of epistemic governance is a three-dimensional model that helps to make sense of "all kinds of operations and struggles by which different actors aspire to affect the direction social change takes locally or globally" (Alasuutari & Qadir 2019, 11). Therefore, the theory is suitable for shedding light specifically on the dynamics of how specific aspects of social interaction, such as collectively accepted identifications, are used to influence others' views (Alasuutari & Qadir 2019; Alasuutari 2016; Alasuutari et al. 2015; Alasuutari & Qadir 2014; Syväterä & Qadir 2016).

Epistemic governance is not a specific type of governance differing from other types of control (Alasuutari & Qadir 2019, 149). Rather, as Alasuutari and Qadir (ibid., 11) emphasise, "all acts that aim to change the existing conditions in society are intertwined with people's perceptions and beliefs", meaning that all processes of governance and attempts of social change are epistemic. Consequently, the theory of epistemic governance provides a fruitful viewpoint to pose interesting questions, such as, 'what aspects of social interaction allow certain statements to be made or social structures to be supported instead of others', 'how are these statements and structural issues justified in a society', or 'how actors pursue to change to the hegemonic state of affairs and bring forth their ideas and interests' (Alasuutari & Qadir 2019, 158–160).

According to the theory, social change can be approached and made better sense of by approaching it from three different viewpoints: imageries, authority and epistemic work (Alasuutari & Qadir 2019). Actors seeking social change and justification for their actions rely on, first of all, collectively accepted *imageries* of the social world (ibid., 163). While working on the perceptions of others, the actors pursuing social change reveal the imageries they assume would resonate with their audience regarding the imagined environment. The choice of these

imageries or their reveal is often not intentional, meaning that actors often apply these subconsciously. (Ibid.) Even though the imageries are not fixed, there are still specific ones that seem to appear regularly in different instances of social change. For the moment, three key imageries have been identified in previous research: 1) modernisation, 2) hierarchy, and 3) competition (Alasuutari 2016; Alasuutari & Qadir 2019).

The imagery of modernisation portrays society as a systemic whole where "social change is routinely called development, differences between countries are placed within an evolutionary continuum by talking about developing countries, and existing practices may be deemed as 'outdated'" (Alasuutari 2016, 31). The imagery of social hierarchy, in turn, depicts the social world as organised in bureaucratic chains of command where "legitimate, formally instituted organizational rules [apply, and] to which all members are expected to conform" (ibid., 36). Finally, the imagery of competing camps appeals to the idea that the world is "divided into camps or blocks that pursue their own interests and compete against each other. This is such a naturalized and self-evident conception of the world system that it is known as the 'realist' paradigm in political science" (ibid., 38). As powerful symbolic tools, these imageries are utilised as justification for all kinds of decisions and actions in, for instance, global power relations.

In addition to appeal to the above-presented social imageries, it has been identified that actors seeking social change support their claims by referring to authorities. *Authority* has a key role in influencing others because it can either make or break the efforts of succeeding in influencing others. In other words, actors who want to affect others' views must present themselves as authoritative figures, appeal to other authorities, or both (Alasuutari 2016, 45). For example, international organisations have gained increasing authority as producers of scientific knowledge during the past decades due to the increasing 'scientisation' of the social world (Zapp 2017). In practice, this means that social change is emphasised by referring to some authority and borrowing their credibility (Alasuutari & Qadir 2019, 163–164). This credibility, in turn, is most often rooted in four specific modes or bases of authority: ontological, moral, capacity-based, and charismatic (Meyer et al. 1997, 157; Alasuutari 2018, 167–168; Alasuutari 2016, 46–47; Alasuutari et al. 2015, 60–61, 63–68; Alasuutari & Qadir 2014, 73).

The notion of ontological authority conceptualises the situation where actors strive to entail respect based on expertise related to knowledge claims (Alasuutari et al. 2015, 61, 63–65) with the aim of "affecting the shared view of what is a truthful and accurate picture of the situation

at hand" (ibid., 73). Moral authority, in turn, is based on widely respected principles, morals or values which then are utilised as legitimation of authority, while capacity-based authority rests on an actor's perceived ability to change the conditions for other's moves on a practical level (Alasuutari 2018, 167; Alasuutari et al. 2015, 66–68). Finally, charismatic authority may be applied through actors' charisma, meaning that they have gained the consent of the public and can influence their views about what the world is, who we are, and what is good or desirable (Meyer et al. 1997, 157; Alasuutari et al. 2015, 60).

Lastly, in addition to social imageries and authority, actors aiming at social change exercise forms of *epistemic work*. Practically speaking, actors engaged in epistemic governance exercise epistemic working in order to influence others' perceptions about the issue in question and promote their way of social change. Even though epistemic work is not always intentional but can also be conducted unwittingly, it is generally focused on three main objects: 1) ontology of the environment, 2) actor identifications, and 3) shared values and norms (Alasuutari & Qadir 2019, 161–162; Alasuutari 2016, 41–43; Alasuutari & Qadir 2014; Meyer et al. 1997, 157). In other words, the audience needed to be convinced about the necessity of a specific change is most likely influenced by making arguments that lean on these three objects that, in turn, are all connected to each other as seen in Figure 1.
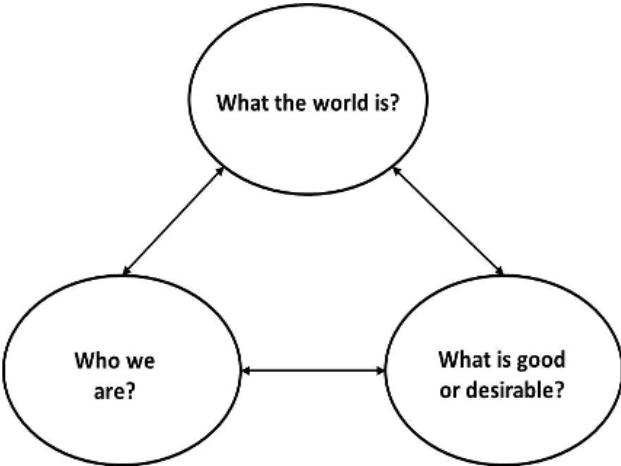
Figure 1 Objects of Epistemic Work (interpreted from e.g. Alasuutari 2016)

The first object of epistemic work, ontological perceptions of the environment, refers to people's views and ways of constructing ideas about what the world is. Ontological beliefs are strong tools of epistemic work because they entail the premise that, generally speaking, "-- a

particular definition of a situation [must be] accepted broadly enough to be used when influencing others" (Alasuutari 2016, 41). Therefore, arguments are most effective when rooted in ontological claims, meaning that their foundations lay in generally accepted ideas or they themselves provide an overall conceptual context where both the actors seeking social change and their audience argue about the issue at hand (ibid.).

Epistemic work on actor identifications, in turn, focuses on the factor of who people themselves believe to be, and to what proposed group they identify or strengthen their associations with (Alasuutari 2016, 42). Moreover, actor identifications concern the question of what actors do *not* believe to be and to what categorisations or groups they are not willing to be associated with or wish to be detached from. The choice of identifications can influence actors' activities as the hegemonial categories that people identify with are often seen as natural. Hence, they are a powerful tool to promote social change. As Alasuutari illustrates, "[f]or instance, well-established objects of identification such as the nation-state, gender, class, ethnicity, and religion often appear to be so self-evident that the epistemic work entailed in defining and hailing the audience as a community is easily ignored; yet it forms the foundation for justification of national policies" (ibid., 42).

Finally, epistemic work can be conducted based on norms and values, meaning that it focuses on the legitimation of moral assumptions such as what is thought to be good or desirable in a society. Again, in Alasuutari's (2016, 42–43) words, "[i]f and when an actor is able to convince others about the right thing to do by appealing to a general ideal or principle and what it obliges or allows people to do in a given situation, it is a persuasive way to steer their behaviour". These normative aspects are here understood as implicit rules and guidelines that dictate the 'proper way' of action at, for example, a job interview or at a birthday celebration. Norms and values act as self-evident maps or mental frameworks that affect the ways in which society is constructed in practice. (Schofer et al. 2012, 2.)

4.3. The datasets

As explained in Chapter 3, both M5S and LN have several online tools that they make use of when practicing and promoting e-participation. In this thesis, the focus is on the parties' blogs[11].

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[11] Blogs are here understood as defined by Hill et al. (2013, 8) as "periodically updated sites managed by an individual or group to provide information or opinion on a range of topics. […] Blogs vary in length, frequency of post, topics and formality."

In practice, the data is compiled by blog posts that have been published in original language (Italian and Finnish) on M5S and LN's official websites[12]. The posts usually contain a headline, body text, a photograph, and occasionally a video. Here, only the headlines and body texts are included into the analysis. Ruling out the pictures and videos could be considered as a limitation of the data until, however, realised that a coherent dataset is assured only by concentrating on one of the blogs' elements. Here, the chosen element is textual content which allows to identify precise observations and then formulate general categorisations and interpretations of the arising ontological conventions, justifications, and values.

The selected timeframe for the blog texts is seven months, from the 1st of March to the 30th of September 2019. This timespan has been chosen to ensure that the data covers the parties' ways of communication as broadly as possible. The year has been chosen to guarantee a timely data, analysis and results. Additionally, it has been deliberately decided that the same timeframe is applied to both parties in order to minimise any possible irregularities in the data caused by, for instance, events attracting international attention. The European elections held in May 2019 are expected to be visible in the data and act as a consistent element in both parties' posts. On a national level, the Finnish general elections held in April 2019 are also likely to be seen at least in the dataset regarding LN. The data was collected from the parties' websites between November and December 2019.

As a whole, the data consists of 236 blog texts which count as a total of 543 pages[13], 68 % of them Italian and 32 % Finnish (Table 1). For the part of LN, the data is complemented with a one hour and 15 minutes long interview of a key representative of the party. The interview is presented in more detail below. All the texts are readily categorised by the parties with different 'tags' indicating a specific theme that the text is related to according to the party. In other words, the parties themselves have chosen to "label" their texts with specific words or phrases that, to them, reflect the content of the texts. These tags will also be presented in more detail below when the dataset of the respective party is explained: first, the data of M5S and then the one regarding LN.

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[12] The website of M5S's blog is https://www.ilblogdellestelle.it, and the one of LN is https://liikenyt.fi.
[13] The number of pages is calculated by estimating the amount of text without taking into account possible pictures or main headlines in the text. If they would have been taken into consideration, the sum of pages would have been higher. This means that the exact number of pages can vary and is dependent on the method of calculation. Therefore, the number of pages is intended as an indicative evaluation.

Table 1 The dataset of the study

Data by party	Amount of texts/interview	Number of pages	Percentage %
MoVimento 5 Stelle, blog texts	161	355,5	68
Liike Nyt, blog texts	75	187,5	32
Total	**236**	**543**	**100**
+ Liike Nyt, interview of 1h 15 min	1	17,5	-

M5S communicates with its followers through several online media. The information produced by the party is divided and spread through their social media accounts, own website, the Rousseau platform, and the official blog *Il Blog delle Stelle* (i.e. The Blog of the Stars). As the party itself writes (Il Blog delle Stelle 2020),

> *[t]he Blog of the Stars is the official blog of MoVimento 5 Stelle. It is managed by the Rousseau Association with the objective of giving life to a space of information and of interaction between activists and elected representatives of MoVimento 5 Stelle on all levels. An open and participative instrument that connects the Movement with the most relevant phenomena and changes in the world that surrounds us.*

> *The Blog of the Stars reports about the daily work that we do on the territory and in the institutions, the commitment we put to denouncing corruption, malpractice and criminal organisations, and to amplify our political battles, to reflecting and confronting on MoVimento's central political choices and its future: the Blog of the Stars represents the virtual and multimedia place for participation and call to action that goes hand in hand with the organisation meeting, moments of confrontation and discussion in the territories, the commitment of the citizens for the citizens, in our villages and cities.*[14]

In this thesis, the blog content is at the centre of the analysis, while the content on other media have been utilised for forming a background understanding about the party's way of

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[14] Translated from Italian into English by the author.

organisation. The content of M5S's blog can be filtered with specific tags[15] of which the most central for this study are 1) digital citizenship, 2) direct democracy, 3) 5 star Italy, 4) *MoVimento 5 Stelle*, and 5) Rousseau. From all the tags available, these five are selected because they are most suitable to understand how the party portrays, first of all, the forms of political participation and perceptions of the surrounding reality (tags 1 and 2), itself (tags 3 and 4), and, finally, the online medium through which they operate (tag 5). In total, 161 blog texts form the data of M5S. They are listed based on the tag with the date of publication and title in Appendix 1. Table 2 indicates the division of M5S's texts according to the tags as well as the numbers of pages and percentages.

Table 2 The dataset regarding MoVimento 5 Stelle

Tag of blog text	Amount of texts	Number of pages	Percentage %
1) Digital citizenship	27	56	15,75
2) Direct democracy	2	6	1,69
3) 5 Star Italy	33	41,5	11,67
4) MoVimento 5 Stelle	30	62,5	17,58
5) Rousseau	69	189,5	53,31
Total	**161**	**355,5**	**100**

It is important to note that both M5S and LN's individual texts might include topics that could fit under several other tags as well, regardless of the pre-issued tags chosen by the parties. To illustrate, a text marked by M5S under the tag of digital citizenship might include accounts of Rousseau, while a text by LN marked under climate change might well concern general issues, too. Due to the overlapping nature of the tags and the fact that they have been readily determined by the parties themselves, the tags are not utilised in the process analysis. Correspondingly, it needs to be noted that almost all the texts both by M5S and LN have gathered tens, even hundreds of comments from the parties' followers of the parties and also other visitors, and it would be extremely intriguing to analyse them as well. In this study, however, the focus is

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[15] The complete list of tags is *ambiente* (environment), *amministrazione* (administration), *cittadinanza digitale* (digital citizenship), *cultura* (culture), *dal mondo* ([news] from the world), *dalla rete* ([news] from the web), *dalle regioni* ([news] from the regions), *democrazia diretta* (direct democracy), *futuro del lavoro* (the future of work), *governo 5 stelle* (5 star government), *informazione* (information), *innovazione* (innovation), *istruzione* (education), *l'editoriale* (editorial), *la buona notizia* (the good news), *MoVimento 5 Stelle* (Five Star Movement), *Rousseau*, *smascheriamo le fake news* (let's unveil the fake news), and *storie dai territori* (stories from the territories).

particularly on the voice of M5S and LN because the objective is to understand what kind of discursive ways they make use of when seeking legitimation from their audiences. Therefore, the comments are left out of the analysis.

In a similar way to M5S, LN also communicates with its followers through social media, the Internet-parliament, as well as the official website that also has blog post -like publications. As with M5S, the main corpus of the data concerning LN is a collection of texts that the party posted on its website. Because LN has published less texts in the above presented timeframe, all texts published during the selected timeframe have been taken under analysis. Similarly to M5S, the texts of LN have also been filtered by tags[16]. In total, 75 texts form the main dataset regarding LN and can be found as a list in Appendix 2 with the date of publication and title. Table 3 shows the division of LN's texts according to tags as well as numbers of pages and percentages.

Table 3 The dataset regarding Liike Nyt

Tag of blog text	Amount of texts	Number of pages	Percentage %
1) Blogs	20	62	33,07
2) People	7	11	5,87
3) Climate Change	2	9	4,80
4) Sote	8	32,5	17,33
5) General	38	73	38,93
Blogs, total	**75**	**187,5**	**100**
+ 1 interview of 1h 15 min		**17,5**	**-**

In addition to the blog texts, the research data regarding LN is complemented with an interview that was conducted in Helsinki in December 2019 with a key person in the party (hereafter referred to as informant). The interview lasted for one hour and fifteen minutes and it has been transcribed to a total of 17,5 pages of text. It was conducted mainly as an unstructured in-depth interview even though some key themes and questions were prepared (but not given to the informant) beforehand. The list of questions posed to the informant during the interview can be found in Appendix 3. The focus of the interview was specifically on the informant's views –

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[16] The complete list of tags in Finnish is *blogit* (blogs), *ihmiset* (people), *ilmastonmuutos* (climate change), *sote* (which concerns the process of reform of the national healthcare and social welfare system), and *yleiset* (general).

not on the factual processes – because the goal was to gain an understanding about the social and symbolic elements that take part in the party's reality. Respectively, the goal was not to portray an all-encompassing picture of the procedures in the party. The interview plays a complementary role in understanding the dynamics of LN and its connections to M5S.

The interview concerned the informant's accounts of the governance conducted in, around and by LN. More specifically, the informant provided viewpoints about their understanding about different aspects of LN's history, current state of affairs and future developments as well as political systems and participation in general, including possible pros and cons in them. Additionally, notions about what might have influenced the birth of the movement were raised, as well as perceptions about the current position and identity of the party in relation to other parties and forms of political participation. The informant also shared their thoughts on the identities of the followers of the party and if there is something specific that seems to attract their attention and resonates with them. Another major theme was the informant's perceptions about the outside influences or icons that may affect the party on different levels, both locally and globally. At this point, M5S was raised as a clear connection to LN. Finally, the informant talked about their perceptions about the future of the party and possible changes in the aforementioned themes.

4.4. Methodological approach of analysis

In this study, the above-outlined data is analysed through the three-dimensional framework of epistemic governance because, in addition to functioning as the theoretical framework of this thesis (Chapter 4.2), it also functions as a methodology that can provide concrete analytical instruments for understanding and making sense of contemporary governance and social change (Alasuutari & Qadir 2019). These methodological approach provides the possibility to analyse what kind of issues M5S and LN raise as ones that should be at the core of politics, what kind of general political agenda they aim to construct through their online blog texts, and how the parties identify themselves as promoters of this agenda. Additionally, they allow to examine what norms and values the parties appeal to when suggesting the agendas and identifications while also pondering transnational connections. As the activity of the parties is based online, finding answers to these questions can expand the understanding about the influence of digitalisation in the field of politics. The data is analysed with three practical objectives in mind.

The first objective is to examine how the parties portray their surrounding political scheme and legitimise themselves, particularly in relation to traditional forms of political governance. The second objective is to examine the categories and actors to which M5S and LN identify to, as well as the ones they distance themselves from. Isolating the elements related to these two objectives permits to identify the discursive ways through which the parties pursue to increase their legitimacy and authority in the eyes of the citizens. The third objective is to map what the parties portray as being good or desirable, i.e. the values and norms the parties enforce, and the values that they possibly detach from. By examining these value-based objects of epistemic work, the hope is to find out on what basis these parties construct differing local problems while responding to them with matching answers. This question is particularly interesting because the parties' cultural surroundings, Italy and Finland, are in many ways radically different from each other.

In practice, the analysis of both datasets regarding M5S and LN was guided by the three objects of epistemic work in the sense that they helped to identify the instances in which the parties have aimed to influence others' views and the ways in which this persuasion has been done. The reading process was conducted by systematically examining all texts, one at a time. Whenever a form of epistemic work was identified, it was highlighted, extracted from the text and filed into a separate file. The file was organised horizontally based on the individual texts, and vertically based on the three objects of epistemic work. The outcome was two vast matrixes of isolated observations, one regarding M5S and one LN, that included both direct quotations as well as more broad themes that were identified from the texts. These individual observations were then analysed to compose more coherent interpretations of M5S and LN's modes of epistemic work. In addition to epistemic work and its objects, the interpretation of the results includes also notions the imageries and authority. The findings of the analysis are defined in detail in Chapter 5 and the interpretations in Chapter 6.

4.5. Research validity, reliability and equivalence

This thesis has been conducted entirely independently from any political groups or movements and without any external sponsoring or stakeholders' participation. Because both Italian and Finnish are the author's mother tongues, the empirical data has not required external translation but has instead been analysed in its original form and the quotations have been translated from Italian or Finnish into English by the author. For objectivity reasons, the parties' online

platforms, Rousseau and the Internet-parliament, have not been accessed because they would have required subscription and to become a member of the parties.

The intention of this study is not to test a specific hypothesis, nor it is to support any ready-made assumptions or naturalise specific forms of governance. Accordingly, the objective is not to normatively evaluate or judge the analysed parties or to determine whether their modes of conduct are better or worse than other ways of organising political participation. Moreover, the point is not to provide all-encompassing or 'complete' illustrations of everything that is taking place in the chosen cases, let alone in all the field of increasingly digitalised political participation. Rather, the purpose of this study is to map the discursive ways in which M5S and LN pursue e-participation by isolating the elements that the parties utilise to construct their image, legitimise themselves and oppose the current state of affairs.

The comprehensiveness of the research data has been made sure of by extracting it from different sources, i.e. analysing the chosen blog texts and other online content published by the parties, the interview, as well as previous literature. Hence, the data can be considered reliable. Additionally, without taking into account the interview, the data exists without the input of the author and is publicly available on the Internet which means that it is naturally occurring. This ensures that the study can be replicated at any time by using the same or similar sources from the chosen timeframe. The results can be assumed similar.

5. MOVIMENTO 5 STELLE AND LIIKE NYT'S ONLINE EPISTEMIC GOVERNANCE

The objective of this study is to analyse citizen-initiated political participation that has traditionally functioned by the terms of classical-modernist governance but, under the influence of digitalisation, has recently taken characteristics described in the theory of network governance. As discussed in Chapter 4.2., actors seeking social change conduct epistemic work to influence others' perceptions about a phenomenon or situation at hand, and this epistemic work, in turn, mainly concentrates on the following objects: 1) ontological perceptions about the environment, 2) identifications, and 3) norms and ideals. These three objects have been taken as guiding indicators in analysing the two platform parties, M5S and LN.

Based on the analysis, the epistemic work done by M5S and LN concentrates in assessing *the relationship between citizens and politicians in traditional governance* and *the ways in which political participation should be organised.* Both themes include aspects related to all three abovementioned objects of epistemic work. They are scrutinised in more detail in the following sub-chapters, one object of epistemic work at a time. First, the discursive ways in which the M5S and LN construct a division between the "old" and the "new" forms of politics are analysed. Then, the identifications made by the parties are scrutinised to understand, for example, how they portray themselves and who they depict as being the "rightful decision-makers". Finally, the parties' perceptions on what is "good and desirable" or "unwanted behaviour" are examined to see on what value basis they try to convince their followers about the necessary changes in politics and legitimise their own existence as political forces.

Each sub-chapter includes the remarks found from both parties' writings as well as quotations that illustrate the modes of epistemic work conducted by them in practice. Even though the chosen quotations intend to demonstrate one specific object of epistemic work in question, in reality, however, the quotations may include elements from other objects of epistemic work as well. This is due to the fact that, in real life situations, the objects of epistemic work are often utilised jointly in actors' arguments for change and become intertwined with each other.

5.1. Traditional classical-modernist governance opposed by e-participation

After having examined M5S and LN's blog texts, it was possible to identify seven central discursive ways in which the parties construct perceptions about traditional governance as well as new forms of governance that they themselves aim to portray. The first four discursive ways

entail the ways in which the parties construct perceptions of the "old way" of doing politics: 1) the traditional governance system is outdated and opaque; 2) power is centralised and only a few have real opportunities to influence decision-making; 3) quality information is hard to find; and 4) the role of the media is problematic. To promote the "new form" of politics that the parties themselves claim to represent, three discursive ways were found: 5) power needs to be distributed more widely; 6) the Internet and other new technologies can provide the facilities to implement participatory decision-making; and 7) decisions need to be made collectively but based on accurate information and educated opinions. Interestingly, these core discursive ways are surprisingly similar both in Italy and Finland even though, in practice, the parties operate in remarkably different cultural contexts and deal with distinct spectrums of political issues and agendas.

On a general level, both parties criticise the traditional, representative policymaking and its fundamental characteristics in several ways. In Italy, M5S argues that the old political system opaque as only few people have real power to influence issues and decisions that affect people. Consequently, the party states that the system is polarised as decisions are said to be made based on personal interests or the ones of the party instead of the ones of the community. M5S also argues that, in time, the organisation of governance has become inefficient due to complicated relations in decision-making. In the meantime, M5S seeks to present its model of governance as the new accurate way of performing politics. Here is an example of how M5S contrasts the old situation in Italy with the new situation, after the party has done its work (1.30[17]):

> *10 years ago, Italy was in pieces, devoured by malpractices and by the lobby. [...] Today, after five years of extremely hard opposition and of hard work defending the interests of the community against those who defended the interest of the few, we are at the Government. We catalysed the anger and the will for Change of millions of citizens that in other parts of the world has provoked conflicts, even violent ones, and realised it as an unprecedented, gentle revolution. No one will ever be able to deny that MoVimento 5 Stelle has shaken the political landscape in a State that was on its relentless way to its decline. We have made the difference.* [18]

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[17] The numbers refer to the appendices where the articles utilised in the analysis have been listed. The first number before the dot indicates the appendix: 1 for M5S and 2 for LN. The second number refers to the actual article in question. Hence, in this particular example, the quotation is from the blog text number 30 from M5S, Appendix 1.
[18] All quotations extracted from the data are translated from the original language (Italian or Finnish) by the author.

In this quotation, the juxtaposition between the "old" and the "new" system becomes explicitly tangible as the party describes the process of change that has taking place from their point of view during the past years. The references to unity and collectiveness in this quotation are manifold and the notion of a successful but peaceful revolution encompasses the idea of turning from the outdated system to a new and functional way to organise politics and collective decision-making. These types of arguments are present in several texts of M5S and they create a sense of agency and community inside the party.

Following the line of M5S, LN criticises the traditional model of politics as being an old and outdated system that does not answer to the needs or possibilities of current, technologically and digitally developed times. Throughout the dataset, LN diverges slightly from M5S's argumentation in highlighting particularly the outdatedness and inefficiency of the current political system, and demanding reforms to it: while M5S focuses more on discussing particular problematic sectors of the society and proposing new measures to fix them, such as laws or campaigns where they act as the 'good example', LN concentrates in the problems concerning particularly the traditional political decision-making system. This kind of discursive difference may be due to the fact that the two parties are in different stages in establishing their position in the political landscape. M5S has already been operating in Italy for several years and has reached a position in the government coalition and can perhaps due to that concentrate in more particular issues. LN, in turn, is at the early stages of its journey and thus concentrates in underlining the general problems of the system instead of delving into more specific questions at this point. Here is an example of how LN describes the situation (2.24):

> *The structures and modes of operation of our 100-year-old representative democracy do not correspond to the needs of current, let alone future, needs. Above all, citizens do not have the possibility to participate in decision-making except for elections. The parliament still runs with the rules of procedure and annual planning cycle originating from 1906 which is why it is not able to keep the pace with the strategically driven government work. Time is also wasted: three months are used for budget proceedings even though the changes are ultimately cosmetic.*

Regarding the general problems of the 'outdated' political organisation, LN also claims that 'real political interaction' is lacking between decision-makers and citizens. Except for the right to vote in national and regional elections, the current representative forms of governance are portrayed to leave citizens with little opportunities to influence the decision-making processes on the institutional level, and few possibilities to react if the political choices are appreciated

by the citizens. These statements strengthen the sense of centralised power and opaque processes in which collective choices are made. As can be seen from the quotation below (2.46), LN emphasises the participation gap by stating that 94 percent of citizens are currently left out of the political discussions.

> *In Finland politics has never been so uninteresting than today according to people. Only 6 percent of Finns belong to political parties. Liike Nyt provides a channel for influencing for the rest 94 percent. Liike Nyt changes decision-making by including people in it and by basing decisions on researched information. Let's decide together.*

M5S also discusses the problems related to people's disinvolvement in politics, as well as the aspiration to include more citizens into political decision-making. However, unlike LN, M5S ties also the problematic role of mainstream media and inaccessibility to accurate information to the lack of citizen-initiated involvement in politics. Particularly after the media accused M5S about spreading dishonest information about their Rousseau-platform, M5S started to question the trustworthiness of the media and portray them as "carriers of false news" as well as spreaders of fragmented and inaccurate information. Moreover, M5S claims that the media depict the party's actions in negative light because it represents a novel option to the traditional parties and can, thus, challenge the traditional parties' hegemonic position in the Italian political landscape.

To sum the arguments of M5S and LN presented above, both parties portray their views in a critical tone towards traditional representative governance. The problems highlighted by the parties include the concentration of privileges and decision-making power to a secluded group of people as well as the disregard of the needs of the community. These are seen to increase citizens' mistrust and even disinterest in political decision-making. Moreover, the actual practices in which politics are conducted are criticised as being outdated and, thus, in need of strong reforms. Finally, the media are repeatedly portrayed as biased actors that reveal only partial pictures of the phenomena in question. These arguments are utilised by the parties as tools to convince their followers to resist the "old" ways of conducting politics, while also affirming the necessity of new reforms.

In order to restore people's trust and the legitimacy in politics, both parties call for tighter interaction between citizens and politicians and a future where collective participation and citizen-initiated political participation become the norm. More specifically, the parties promote the idea of direct or hybrid governance where the decision-making power is distributed more

broadly, quality information is available, and people both educate themselves and participate actively which would ensure a varied and cultured public opinion. In addition, the parties describe that these objectives could be met by utilising online platforms for political participation and interaction. Illustratively, M5S describes the change from the "old" to the "new" mode of politics as a 'cultural turn' (1.144):

> *"It is first of all a cultural revolution, rather than a technological one, and for this, often, it is not understood correctly, or it becomes trivialised", continued Gianroberto.*

According to M5S, citizens' interests should be considered as the most important factor in forming the political agenda and that these interests are only found out by allowing people to express their ideas openly and directly. Instead of talking politics amongst career politicians and making the decisions in private groups, M5S declares that politics should be conducted as a service instead of a way to achieve privileges. Moreover, real action should be taken to realise the common interests, as expressed in the following quotation (1.79):

> *The programs, the themes, the choices, they are the real protagonists of politics. We have grown up with the awareness that politics is service. A spirit that led us to be the first political force of the country and of Parliament. And in these past years, our goal has always been to change by looking at a project of great scope for Italy, a project that would put the people and the essential common goods back at the centre: water, school, infrastructure, the environment, health, culture, economic development.*

In a similar way to M5S, LN suggests that a more interactive and participatory model for political governance is needed to address the problems that traditional politics are seen to face. LN particularly stresses that, in order to reform the current political system, all people and especially the younger generations should be more involved in politics. The prevailing perception behind this idea is that too few people take part in decision-making in the current organisation of politics which weakens the functionality, transparency and legitimacy of the system. Here is how the informant expresses LN's vision and stand regarding political participation (interview 2019):

> *The point is to find a good way and practices to do politics so that more people would really join. This is important because, if we look at the figures, the second largest political party is the group of people that does not vote. […] We can ask why. And how could we get them to join. The problem is also that young people are less and less interested in politics.*

They do not know, and do not even want to know what it is. Because they have a certain kind of impression about it.

[...]

That is why we do quite a lot of things with the technology, on social media. We do politics a little differently than traditional parties. For example, we have our own Youtube-channel just to get young people more interested about these things and, kind of, tell them a bit more what is happening in politics and why. I believe that people can be reached through social media, especially the younger. [...] So, yes, social media is our number one thing. It is easy for people to engage through the Internet. To listen and comment.

To realise the objectives of interactive e-participation and educated public opinion, both M5S and LN state that the Internet needs to be harnessed as a tool for real-time, transparent, and diverse decision-making. To ensure more interactive participation between citizens and politicians, M5S has established the Rousseau-platform where they have tens of thousands of registered followers. The platform includes, in addition to voting, several other characteristics as well (for more information, see Chapter 3.1.). Here is an example of how the party emphasises the role of the platform (1.120):

We imagine a world where anyone can vote online on the issues most important that concern the life and the future of the planet but also on the choices that affect the territories and the community in which they [the voters] live in.

Today, a voting took place on Rousseau to decide the priority actions that our future Spokespersons in the European Parliament will carry out in Europe. The choice of making the members decide reflects what is the DNA of the MoVimento 5 Stelle and confirms that direct democracy is one of our polar stars.

Following M5S, LN emphasises that the manner of making decisions is as important as what is being decided (2.25). That is why the party has established the Internet-parliament where they currently have around 14,000 subscribed followers (interview 2019). There, they have voted about issues such as the government programme, LN's roadmap, and the climate change initiatives that the subscribers would want the party to promote. In addition, LN deliberated whether it should remain an unofficial movement or go through the process of becoming an official party. In the end, after discussing the matter both offline and online with its followers, LN announced that they will go through the process of transformation from a social movement to a traditional party.

Differing from M5S's accounts in favour of direct democracy, LN talks particularly about a hybrid model for political organisation and decision-making. The hybrid model stands between direct and representative politics. To put it bluntly, this means that in the hybrid model all the power is not given to the citizens (direct politics) nor to the politicians (representative politics) but, instead, would have a triangulated approach to power where the parliament, the juridical system and the people all have the possibilities to influence decision-making, as argued in the extract from the interview (2019):

> *This entire Movement is not like direct democracy, nor does it stand for representative democracy. It is something in between. A hybrid, actually. Because we have our representative(s) [in the parliament] who make the final decisions. And there we come to the point that the power is segmented. […]. It is not only in one set of hands. […] Moreover, in our decision-making processes [in the Internet-parliament] we have also a lot of experts. On our website you can join as an expert of a certain field. And then, when decisions are made, the expertise and facts are the ones that count. The decisions and votes are really not anything based on feelings.*

Even though the Internet is seen as the core enabler for a participatory political system, Internet access, however, is not taken as a naturally occurring resource in the writings of M5S: while the party highlights the necessity of Internet connection, it notes that only 62 % of Italians have it (1.2). This imbalance of Internet access in the population is, according to the party, one of the biggest causes for the 'digital divide', for example, and the issues related to it highlight the necessity for the construction of an inclusive and just society. In consequence, M5S urges for the construction of new infrastructures that would provide an Internet access to as many people as possible (1.24):

> *The application of direct democracy involves the introduction of electronic voting, that is, the possibility of voting from home, but to do this we must guarantee a[n Internet] connection to all citizens. Think, however, that Italy ranks third last in Europe and only 62 % of the population has access to the Internet. So, first we need to close this gap between those who have a connection and those who don't.*
>
> *Electronic voting from home would also encourage the participation of people with mobility problems. The slogan that I have chosen for direct democracy is: "You decide!", indeed, to underline the fact that every citizen will be able to decide first-hand the political draws and, consequently, their own future.*

In these statements, M5S constructs an ideal of inclusion and that everyone is taken into account and taken care of. M5S calls for more regulation and governance of the actual online domain and digital information. M5S presents ideas for regulation from laws regarding digital rights, to online platforms coherently containing data. As opposed to having personal data and services fragmented in several platforms, M5S proposes that, for example, people's health care information (1.16 and 1.20) or the state's online services (1.17) should be concentrated into respective platforms. In a similar tone, political participation is also presented as a function that should be provided on one platform – in the case of M5S, the Rousseau-platform. To address the data security concerns, M5S has proposed to utilise the Blockchain technology[19] that is believed to ensure anonymous but verified access to the platforms as well as assure data security when, for instance, voting about the issues at hand on the platform (1.7):

> *The blockchain-based solutions will allow citizens to have greater control and security over their data. Today the essential problem of data security is that personal, navigation, biometric information is stored on servers that are subject to various cyber-attacks. The blockchains represent a paradigm shift by not having a single repository of data, they do not have a "single point of failure", as the Americans say. On the other hand, they allow a combination of encryption of public and private keys which will certainly represent a higher level of security and therefore also efficiency for identity systems.*

Indeed, M5S portrays that the system can be renewed and made more functional by encouraging people to engage in public discussions and debates and to influence the process in which collective opinions are formed. M5S also emphasises, however, that these public opinions and collectively affecting decisions need to be based on educated citizens and quality information. Thus, the party has also implemented an e-learning functionality to Rousseau where the subscribed followers can take courses about, for instance, budgeting of the European Union (e.g. 1.125). This kind of argumentation constructs and supports the idea that citizens need to educate themselves in order to make e-participation functional and that, therefore, there is a responsibility shift in decision-making from the elected representatives to ordinary citizens (1.6):

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[19] As explained by Yli-Huumo et al. (2016) "Blockchain is a distributed database solution that maintains a continuously growing list of data records that are confirmed by the nodes participating in it. The data is recorded in a public ledger, including information of every transaction ever completed. Blockchain is a decentralized solution which does not require any third party organization in the middle. -- In addition, the nodes in Blockchain are all anonymous, which makes it more secure for other nodes to confirm the transactions."

Without a public opinion that becomes informed and educated through public debates there is no bond between the leader and the public. Hence, we need information, quality information [...].

We need organisations and people that work on the information and we need the ability to ask ourselves the right questions. Asking the right questions and developing a critical spirit creates our information, creates our identity. Creating our identity allows us to stay in the community and to fully enjoy the right to quality information and, consequently, to influence the leaders and on their actions as the people.

Accordingly, LN supports the ideal that decisions should be based on quality information and educated opinions. As a more detailed example of LN's participatory planning and decision-making, the process of reforming the Finnish healthcare and social welfare system acts as an apt case. For now, the process of renewing the healthcare system has taken years in the parliament, it has not been consulted by a broader public and has still not come to a conclusion (interview 2019). To propose an alternative path, LN took a different approach to the issue by moving the discussion from the chambers of the parliament to its website and consulted its followers about the issue, instead of continuing the discussion about the proposal solely in the parliament (2.44). LN received several responses and finally formulated its own proposal about the reform. Through this move, LN aimed to prove that active citizen-initiated political participation can provide new viewpoints and solutions to unsolved complex political issues, as explained by the informant in the interview (2019):

One of the first, let's say, pilot models of our decision-making trial in practice was the sote [i.e. the process of reform of the national healthcare and social welfare system] already during the previous parliamentary term when we tested it. [...] First, we asked in our Internet-parliament what you [the subscribed followers] think about this sote-model proposed by the government and do you want that we [LN] support it or should we start to do our own sote-model. Approximately 4000 people answered and, if I remember correctly, about 90 percent of them said that we should do our own model.

After that we started to gather people together. There were doctors from the private and public sectors, management of central hospitals, professors of constitutional law, lawyers, [and] nurses, with whom we then did a certain kind of frame for our sote-model. And then, when we got there, when we brought the first version of it to the Internet-parliament, it surprised me too that we got hundreds – to the email of LN and even to my personal email – really hundreds of professional comments. There were comments from doctors, nurses,

experts in the field of healthcare who said what they thought of it. So, this to me tells pretty
well that people are at least interested in participating.

This is one example of many where 'the people' are given the power to participate and also to decide about the issue in question. In both LN and M5S's texts, active participation is hoped and expected from all groups of society to ensure that everyone is heard. Implementing this type of thinking, however, may also imply that questions regarding responsibility may shift from the decision-makers to the citizens: when tools such as the Internet-parliament or the Rousseau-platform are introduced and referenda are conducted there, decisions can then be justified by stating that "the people have chosen". This is in itself an efficient way to shape the followers' views of the discussed phenomena as well as the questions of responsibility and power. In fact, M5S states that Rousseau, as the operational system of the party, is the practical tool to ensure that the citizens make the decisions, while M5S executes them in practice. To take this idea one step further, M5S writes that the 10 years of M5S's existence has "seen the citizens enter in the Institutions to revolutionize the Italian politics" (1.57).

The seven above explicated discursive ways though which M5S and LN seek to convince their followers about the proposed reforms can be summed in three main arguments. First of all, by portraying that political power has been centralised, the parties construct a sense that the system should be changed in a way that the power is be distributed more widely and that in this distribution the people have a central participatory role in decision-making. Second, M5S and LN emphasise that the "old" system needs to be "updated" to match the current digitalised world and that a functioning form of participatory politics is possible thanks to the Internet and other new technologies, such as Blockchain. By referring to digitalisation and novel technologies, the parties affirm the importance of, for instance, the 'development' of the society. Finally, both parties assert that even though decisions have to be made collectively, people need to educate themselves and base their opinions on quality information. These arguments play a crucial role in the ways in which the parties frame the surrounding world, and, therefore, affect how the future is perceived.

5.2. Legitimation through internal and external identifications

In addition to the seven above presented discursive arguments through which M5S and LN construct a division between the "old" and the "new" forms of politics, it has been found that the parties utilise also specific identifications to affirm their position and aim to convince their

followers about the required changes in politics. The identifications are not necessarily consciously chosen or emphasised, but they still hold an important role when attempting to influence people's perceptions about the who or what is the appropriate actor or decision in a given situation. The identifications found in M5S and LN's blog texts can be divided into 1) internal and 2) external ones. The same analytical division can be applied to understand the actors or characteristics from which the parties wish to detach from. In the following paragraphs, these identifications are presented in more detail by discussing first the internal and then the external identifications.

The internal identifications refer here to the categorisations that the parties make about themselves and their followers to maintain internal governance and discipline, such as when inner rules are emphasised M5S has several internal rules, such as the one limiting a representative's political mandates to a maximum of two. Moreover, M5S asserts that a representative cannot have multiple positions in several institutions at the same time, and that every representative needs to refund a portion of their paycheck back to the community. If these rules are not followed, their breakers are publicly held accountable for their actions and can even be publicly expulsed from the party. To enforce the rules, M5S has also established a specific functionality on Rousseau that permits to report suspicious actions inside the party, as seen from the following quotation (1.63):

> *MoVimento 5 Stelle attains that the respect for its rules is one of its founding pillars, to protect its members and keep the bar straight on its values.*
>
> *The renewed College of Arbitrators has therefore intensified its action and activated numerous disciplinary proceedings, following the reports of the members.*
>
> *Rousseau, through the "notifications" function, allows all its members to ask that the rules are respected and enforced.*

LN has also its own set rules that it wishes to be followed. For instance, when LN was looking for candidates for the Finnish general election, it established specific regulations that the candidates should comply with. To state an example, LN required that all of its candidates must have a clean criminal record. Still, soon it was noticed that not everyone had followed this rule. Differing from M5S, however, the candidates of LN were not held publicly accountable for violating the rules. Instead, LN stated generally that these persons could not be part of LN's parliamentary group even if they were elected (2.50):

Liike Nyt's candidates have signed a written commitment not to have a criminal record. This has been an explicit condition for the parliamentary election candidacy. It has now become clear that some of the candidates have provided incorrect information.

This is very unfortunate. It should be noted already at this stage that candidates with serious crimes on their records will not be included in the Liike Nyt's parliamentary group.

These types of distinctions regarding who can be a legitimate follower or candidate of the party can have strong symbolism in strengthening the identity of the party and the identifications associated with its followers. In fact, M5S explicitly stated that their actions affirming the internal rules of the party were a sign of resilience and strength. As the internal rules and discipline are utilised to justify selected actions or decisions, such as expulsions, they must be approved by the followers as well. To ensure the approval, the rules and internal identifications often reflect the values and norms that are generally supported in the society, such as social justice.

The external identifications signify the categories that the parties construct in relation to external actors, either with the intention to comply with it or to stand against it. One of the most evident external identifications endorsed by the parties is the connection to 'the people' – either 'the Italians' or 'the Finns'. As observed in several occasions, both parties root for a citizen-led revolution, highlighting that they are movements formed by the citizens for the citizens, not for politicians. In the case of M5S, this identification is seen in practice by asserting, for example, that the party was established outside of the traditional political system. Moreover, M5S emphasises that the party operates entirely with donations from the people, instead of receiving money from lobbyists, private companies or other actors with potentially biased interests. M5S has also proposed a law that would demand all political parties to register the donations over 500 euros that they acquire. Again, these efforts construct the picture of M5S being 'the good example'.

Another external identification that M5S and LN attribute to entails the sense of being a unique actor on a national level. Both movements emphasise that they are the sole entities in their respective countries that provide a real opportunity to the people to participate directly in political decision-making. The parties wish to be acknowledged as *the* actors that promote participatory decision-making in their states, as seen from the following quotation from M5S (1.28):

We are once again proud of this new milestone reached by Rousseau and by MoVimento 5 Stelle which is confirmed as the only Italian political reality that offers members the concrete opportunity to participate directly in the choice of candidates for election appointments. Anyone who meets the required conditions has had the opportunity to apply, completely cost-free and autonomously, without having to pass through a small group of people as happens elsewhere. This is a unique modality in Italy and probably not only in Italy, which must make us proud, together with the fact that only we in the Movement can affirm, without fear of being contradicted, that all our candidates are uncensored.

By constructing an identity of unique actor in Italy, pioneering collective decision-making and citizen-initiated political participation, M5S detaches itself from the hegemonic power centre and traditional parties. This, again, is intended as a powerful argument to convince M5S's followers about the party's necessity as well as its position as legitimate leader.

LN also emphasises that it is the first party in Finland to implement e-participation. In addition, it also identifies itself with external international movements and parties to sustain the challenges it poses to traditional governance. For example, when arguing that reforms are needed, LN refers to European movements that have challenged the traditional representative organisation of politics (2.45):

New political movements challenging old power are emerging across Europe. When the phenomenon has been tried to be explained, the analysis has often concentrated in searching for common factors [between the movements]. They often have features of nationalism, direct democracy, and anti-elite sentiments. Therefore, the movements have been seen as threats and a rather cohesive movement of "populists". At the same time, however, it is forgotten that each movement has its own special characteristics […].

That is exactly why the new European movements appeal to voters so widely. Also Liike Nyt is trying to find answers specifically to how the politics should be done. We want to change the processes in which decisions are prepared in parties, municipalities and the parliament. That is why we are also interested in Italy: MoVimento 5 Stelle is based on an evolving online platform that not only allows voting, but also creating political content and educating people.

In addition to the idea that decisions need to be discussed and made collectively, LN gives substantial authority to 'scientific knowledge' and 'experts' and opposes decision-making that is based on pure emotions or feelings. Due to the intensifying processes of the scientization and rationalisation in most societies, the demand of knowledge has been growing, the novel sites of

knowledge production have been increasing, and science has been gaining more and more authority (Zapp 2017). Therefore, science has also become an increasingly frequently utilised basis for authoritative argumentation when justifying or legitimising decisions. In other words, actors desire that their way of acting is connected to science and rationality that, in the current societies, are universally appreciated and valued characteristics. In fact, in addition to the identifications to scientific information, LN leans often on "rational thinking" when legitimising and justifying its claims or decisions and it wishes to be identified as a rational "party of reason", as expressed in the interview (2019):

> *Liike is this kind of 'rational party of reason' that thinks and looks at everything that is going on from above. And then proposes solutions based on these high-level observations and then also asks from people about them. We stay, in that sense, grounded and reasoned. So, we kind of want to strengthen and make sure that decision-making is done with reason. Really.*

These arguments culminate to the claim that the party wishes to be detached from the category of populism and populists, as seen from the quotation below (2.45). Such arguments support the idea that populism is a negative categorisation that can possibly depoliticise the changes demanded by the new movements. Moreover, they highlight the idea that the platform parties are seen as a serious option for traditional representative politics.

> *One reason for the rise of the [alternative] movements is the uncertain times brought about by economic and climate challenges. However, it is clear that it is also about the centralisation of power caused by the outdated systems. When institutions, organisations and parties have a stable position, networks amongst them always emerge – which also increases the risk of corruption. These structures are currently being challenged from so many directions that it should be self-evident that this is not just about populism serving unfulfilled promises.*

In summary, M5S and LN attribute both internal and external identifications to themselves. Internally, especially M5S enforces selected rules that express, for instance, who is a suitable representative of the party. The internal identifications are utilised to maintain discipline. When examining the external identifications, both parties repeatedly refer to 'the people', as in the Italians or the Finns, as well as their role as unique actors in their respective countries. Moreover, both parties, and especially LN, hold that decision-making needs to be backed with scientific information and that citizens need to educate themselves in order to guarantee the

functionality of e-participation. Here, the parties take distance from categorisations such as populism and feeling-based decision-making. All in all, recognising these identifications helps to understand how M5S and LN conduct epistemic work to legitimise and justify their actions and existence.

5.3. Anti-ideological thinking and digital fundamental rights as value base

The discursive ways that M5S and LN use to construct depictions of the surrounding society and the identifications present in the parties' communication are both based on and imbedded in the parties' values. Following the theory of epistemic governance, values are here understood as the in-depth perceptions about what actors think are good and desirable in a society. Moreover, the values often reflect general societal morals because they are thought to resonate with the larger audience. Therefore, identifying the values to which M5S and LN refer to can unveil yet another aspect to the rationale of change that the parties pursue.

In the texts, the values asserted by M5S and LN are often paired with statements on what qualities and actions that the parties do not validate. Many identified values are similar to the ones generally emphasised by traditional parties as well, such as social justice and inclusivity. In addition, however, there are also value based concepts and ideas that are not as common in traditional political rhetoric, such as, digital identity, digital fundamental rights, and anti-ideological philosophy.

In general, both M5S and LN express negative moral judgements when criticising the traditional, representative way of organising political governance. One issue that M5S finds particularly problematic is that people turn to politics for making a career in it. Instead of working for the common good, politicians are portrayed as wealthy beneficiaries of the system while citizens are left secondary in the hierarchy. To address this issue, M5S states that it has started to make cuts to the costs of politics (1.66):

> *The MoVimento 5 Stelle has since the beginning fought and will always fight against the privileges and the costs of politics: we have worked for containing the costs and for continuing to save money thanks to the commitment of the members of the Movement's Bureau.*
>
> *In only two years we have refunded 185 million euros [from our politicians' salaries]. […] We have decided to render the Chamber of Deputies a virtuous and transparent place: the good example towards the citizens could not start from anywhere else than the Institutions.*

It is what we did with the life annuities of politicians: thanks to this cut, another 45,6 million euros per year will be saved, only from the costs of the Chamber.

This is one of the first serious and concrete responses, and we will not stop here. We are in need of ethics in the institutions and of a tightened fight against the costs of politics for the good of the citizens and of our Nation. Full speed ahead!

Through these assumptions regarding the issues of the current political model, M5S appeals to the readers' sense of social justice in regard to the injustice of the existing economical imbalance of politics. In Italy, financial issues have generally had a central role in political discussions as, for instance, corruption and economic inequality have been persistent problems in the Italian society. Hence, this depiction of the current situation is not only powerful because it addresses the current system's cardinal problems and aims to diminish its legitimacy, it also creates room for new ways of organising politics and emphasises M5S's role as 'the exemplary party' making the changes first-hand.

Following M5S's practice of 'acting as good example', LN also protests against career politicians, and politicians that harvest double positions in political institutions, such as the national and municipal governments, as they allow impervious and biased decisions to be made instead of working for the common good. Even though Finland is generally seen as a country with a relatively efficient political system and low levels of corruption, LN states that the political power is centralised, and decisions are made ideologically simply to please the own party's followers and assure their votes in the next elections (2.23):

The political system is broken because of double roles. [...] Members of Parliament make decisions in the parliament and simultaneously for example in the municipal council. 83 percent of MPs have this kind of double role in Finland.

We want that in addition to the voice of the parliamentary group, also the one of the citizens is strongly heard, so not only from the candidates and the parties. That is why we use balloting as a guiding principle of decision-making throughout the parliamentary term. In our Internet-parliament the subscribed followers can give their vote to those themes that they feel are important to themselves.

Still continuing in a similar vein to M5S, LN states that their policymaking should not be guided by strong ideological values that would benefit only part of the society. The party also asserts that ideological opinions should be moved to the side in a more general sense, referring to traditional parties. According to LN, this ideological competition can be generalised to the

macro level of political organisation that is currently portrayed as a strategic game where the most important thing for politicians is to win other political parties and emphasise their ideological differences – instead of making decisions that would serve the general public in the best way possible (2.23):

> *The political debate is portrayed even in quality media as a strategical game where the relevant thing is that the own tribe wins. [...] Almost all parties have good ideas. And lousy ones. For me it is irrelevant if a good idea comes from the right, the left or from the middle.*

In fact, to challenge the ideological restrictions that M5S and LN portray as being part of traditional political organisation, both parties promote an "anti-ideological" approach to political decision-making: instead of assessing ideas based on the ideological silos formed by traditional political parties, M5S and LN emphasise that any good idea is valuable regardless of who invents or proposes it. In practice, this has meant, for example, that LN has been able to switch their opinion from "never wanting to become a traditional party and staying as an unofficial movement forever" to registering the movement as a party only some months later. Meanwhile, M5S has been able to switch government alliance from being first in coalition with the right-wing party *Lega* and then, after a government crisis initiated by Lega in the summer 2019, forming a coalition with the social democratic party *Partito Democratico*. This switch was legitimised by discussing it on M5S's blog and voting about it on Rousseau (1.147):

> *After 14 months, however, Lega has decided to betray this [government] contract for sheer convenience and electoral voracity, causing the government led by president Conte to fall and throwing the country into a crisis that is chaotic and dangerous in the times and the ways in which it was provoked. Lega has failed to maintain a kept commitment, bringing Italy into a very difficult situation.*

> *MoVimento 5 Stelle is post ideological, bases the political action on themes and not on people or armchairs. We are willing to commit – alongside President Conte – to keep our promises and protect the interests of citizens, provided that the interlocutors with whom it is necessary to dialogue to carry out a program for the Country keep faith with the commitments made above all before the Italians, even before MoVimento 5 Stelle.*

By taking these types of actions and supporting 'anti-ideological decision-making', the parties challenge the left-right axis that has customarily been applied to make sense of traditional politics and, consequently, can construct a more fragmented view of the political landscape. It comes as no surprise, then, that also social scientists have found it difficult to make sense of

M5S on the traditional left-right-division (Caruso 2017, 586). The concepts of ideology and anti-ideology are utilised to suggest that there is an 'objective' reality that does not contain conflicting interests and is not blurred or obscured by ideologies, and that in this objective reality decisions can be made rationally to serve everyone's needs. This notion is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.2.

What comes across as notably different between M5S and LN's argumentation compared to traditional parties' discourses, especially in the case of M5S, is the amount of references to digital rights and digital identity. To M5S digital citizenship and digital identity are the concepts that would answer the needs of current and future times – if, at least, developed quickly to match the pace of other digital developments. For now, however, the party notes that these have not been developed equally with digital technologies which has broadened the gap between the regulation of offline and online living which, in turn, risks increasing the level of inequality in the society as well as the 'digital divide' (see Chapter 2.3.). Therefore, M5S urges for adding the Internet connection as part of any essential necessity (1.24):

> *Using [the Internet] means having it available and knowing what to do with it. It is not enough that a cable with the 100-megabit connection arrives, you must have the will and the ability to use this technology. To render this possible, connectivity must be recognized as a right, a universal right. Connectivity should be like water, like gas, like light.*
>
> *[...]*
>
> *This is a very interesting phenomenon because, in my opinion, it generates, on the one hand, an enormous territorial equity and, on the other hand, it allows the growth of a new businesses. Operators can be born without having to make investments. Investments made by the public eliminate an important barrier of entry by increasing competition.*

Thus, to M5S, the rise of digital citizenship and of digital fundamental rights would be central elements in the digital development of the society. The party emphasises that the Internet extends humanity, so people's rights, identities and citizenship need to be recognised juridically also online. In addition, M5S highlights the value of security in the development of e-participation by discussing the possibilities presented by, for example, the Blockchain technology. The party also emphasises the value of education that, to them, would ensure that people are more prepared for the changes the digitalisation of fundamental rights and citizenship may cause. The emphasis on digitalising people's rights, identity and citizenship

supports M5S's aspirations convince their supporters about the necessity to transform traditional politics into something more interactive and online based (1.18):

> *We are therefore in a moment of transition, between an old paradigm and new tools that require us to find a new model to define our way of being and acting in the community, in which old and new rights can find a coherent and functional place and where new definitions and old concepts do not appear in contrast but rather work in synergy to open up new spaces for positive progress for our society, also from an economic and political point of view. This is especially true for fundamental rights related to citizenship, such as participation, information and interaction, which are irreplaceable to allow all of us, on a global level, to participate consciously and actively in society without distinction of economic, social level, cultural or faith of any nature.*

All in all, the observations presented in this sub-chapter regarding the values of M5S and LN add yet another layer to understanding the parties' argumentation of change because they shed light on how the parties attempt to justify and legitimise themselves and their actions in relation to the values and norms imposed by the society. Most of all, this chapter contributes to understanding the part of M5S and LN's epistemic work that concerns the ways in which political participation *should* be organised. Both parties sustain that they need to be the 'good examples' in leading reforms in political organisation. Additionally, they support 'anti-ideological' thinking that does not contaminate the decision-making processes with ideologically loaded interests. Finally, particularly M5S endorses that all citizens need to be entitled to digital identities, digital citizenship and digital fundamental rights because they are portrayed as the cornerstones of the 'developed' society of the future.

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Studying political participation in the digital era – and especially the digitalisation of the political sphere – is a complex task because the essential nature of digitalisation is predominantly bound to (technological) innovations and is, therefore, in constant change. The aim of this thesis was to make sense of how digitalisation influences citizen-initiated political participation and, more specifically, how new online-based platform parties are able to gain legitimacy in relation to traditional governance – despite of the hesitant approaches towards online politics. The phenomenon was examined by studying the ways in which two platform parties, *MoVimento 5 Stelle* (M5S) and *Liike Nyt* (LN), conduct epistemic governance on their blogs between March and September 2019.

In this final chapter, the outcomes of the thesis are discussed, and the findings are concluded in three sub-chapters. The first sub-chapter answers the research question by illustrating the influence of digitalisation in citizen-initiated political participation. It is necessary to note that the concept of digital political participation has been shortened as e-participation throughout this thesis. Thereafter, the theoretical implications are proposed. Finally, in the third sub-chapter, limitations of the study are presented and avenues for future research suggested.

6.1. Influence of digitalisation in citizen-initiated political participation

The analytical focus of this thesis was on identifying the discursive elements that the studied platform parties, M5S and LN, make use of when trying to convince their followers about the necessity of the parties' own existence and the reforms regarding the (re-)organisation of politics. Therefore, the research question was, *how do MoVimento 5 Stelle and Liike Nyt legitimise themselves in relation to forms of classical-modernist governance and seek to shape the course of social change towards digital political participation?* By answering this question, it was possible to draw a more defined picture of the parties' discursive ways to pursue social change and, thus, provide insights into the complex phenomenon of political participation in the digital era. The research question is answered through the principal concepts of this thesis: digital political participation (shortened as e-participation), legitimation, and social change.

According to the studied platform parties, political participation needs to be upgraded to match the digital development of current times. Both M5S and LN argue that the traditional, representative way of organising politics has crucial problems and flaws, also identified by

Hajer (2009, 29–30) as the 'triple deficit' of classical-modernist governance regarding 1) the implementation of policies, 2) the politicians' lack of knowledge needed for policymaking, and 3) the governing institutions' shortage of legitimacy. M5S and LN portray the problems of traditional governance as evidence indicating that the system needs reforms and 'updates' to current, digital times.

While M5S was found to focus its criticism on the particular problems imbedded in traditional politics, such as corruption, LN was found to concentrate its criticism on a general developmental disconnection where the traditional political system has remained in the past and the technologically advanced world has progressed to "modernity" through digital developments. Instead of presenting the traditional and digital forms of governance as individual philosophical systems that are implemented based on a choice between tradition and digitalisation, LN portrays them as an evolutionary continuum where the first has become outdated, and the latter, in turn, is seen as the developed version of political organisation that would answer the needs of current as well as future times.

This choice of representation reflects the imagery of modernisation[20] that depicts that people tend to see the world, their lives and their personal needs in constant 'development' which, in turn, require novel and 'developed' solutions. Therefore, actors who wish to influence others have found to utilise this development-based argumentation by framing their ideas with concepts of progress and development while describing the opposite practices as 'outdated' (Alasuutari 2016). By doing so, actors seeking social change trust that this conceptualisation resonates with their audiences. Indeed, LN can be seen to utilise, either intentionally or unwittingly, the imagery of modernisation as a resource of epistemic work by portraying that the organisation of politics and political participation need to be 'developed for the better'.

Based on the findings of this study, M5S and LN legitimise the digital transformation of political participation by constructing perceptions of ideal political governance, identifications, as well as norms and values. The perceptions of ideal political governance lean on the idea of collective decision-making that is facilitated by the Internet and other digitalised tools. To answer to these ideals, M5S and LN have established their own online platforms, Rousseau and the Internet-parliament, which the parties present as ways for citizens to participate directly in policymaking. Hence, these tools are perceived to enable the distribution of political power, the

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[20] A detailed explication of the imagery of modernisation can be found in Chapter 4.2.

inclusion of citizens' interests directly in political agendas, and the creation of a future where collective participation and citizen-initiated political participation have become the norm.

In addition to the ideals of political governance, the parties utilise also identifications to legitimise themselves and their agendas in the eyes of their audiences. The parties assimilate themselves with specific internal identifications to strengthen a sense of discipline and collective identity within the party, and external identifications to enhance their image as 'unique' actors in the national context. Moreover, both parties refer to universal identifications, such as science, by stating that decisions should be made based on researched information and that citizens should educate themselves in order to make e-participation functional. At the same time, the parties take distance from unwanted categories. For example, LN intends to maintain separation from the category of populism by explicitly leaning on "rational thinking" when legitimising and justifying its claims or decisions and has also called itself a "rational party of reason". This indicates that the category is seen as detrimental to the image and legitimacy of the party.

On the grounds of the findings related to identifications, it seems that the platform parties' quests to achieve legitimation is connected to taking a stand on other actors' authority. M5S and LN challenge the authority of traditional politics by stating that decisions are made in too small groups and that politicians should not have several mandates in different institutions. Even the parties' core principle of e-participation challenges traditional politics' authority: the parties argue that more people with new perspectives need to be included in decision-making processes because traditional representative politics have allowed decisions to be made in too small groups which has caused political power to be centralised.

Finally, the results indicate that the analysed platform parties promote e-participation with distinctive values and an 'anti-ideological' approach to decision-making. The anti-ideological approach is described in more detail in the following Chapter 6.2. Many of the values asserted by M5S and LN are ones that are commonly emphasised by traditional parties as well, such as inclusivity and social justice. In addition, however, M5S and LN highlight values and ideals that are not as common in traditional political rhetoric. Most of these contain the aspect of the Internet or online-communication at their core.

Especially M5S asserts that the Internet extends humanity and, therefore, things valued offline need to be recognised also online. For example, M5S highlights that citizenship, identity and fundamental human rights must be juridically cemented in online forms as well. To address the

issue of (data) security, M5S discusses the possibilities to utilise the Blockchain technology. Additionally, the party states that equality is improved by adopting Internet-based political tools, such as the Rousseau-platform, and by making sure that citizens educate themselves so that they are more prepared for the changes the digitalisation of fundamental rights and citizenship may cause. Proclaiming the importance of a 'digital identity', 'digital citizenship', and 'digital fundamental rights' connects the intensifying process of digitalisation of the society to the wider process of social change.

6.2. Theoretical implications

This study was based on the conceptual approach of epistemic governance (Chapter 4.2.). The analysis was particularly founded on the objects of epistemic work, while the interpretation of the results included elements from the viewpoints of imageries and authority as well. The framework proved to be a fitting choice for this study because it provided concrete analytical tools for making sense of how the two examined platform parties, M5S and LN, legitimise themselves and justify their actions in the arena of political participation – especially in two very differing cultural contexts. More specifically, the framework allowed to determine how the platform parties challenge traditional governance and propose alternative ways for governance.

By analysing the two platform parties through the core concepts of this thesis of e-participation, legitimation, and social change, this study aspires to contribute to the emerging tradition of digital political participation research. The concepts of network governance and platform party proved to be useful tools in the analysis and in the conceptualisation of the phenomenon. The discursive argument regarding M5S and LN's 'anti-ideological' approach to decision-making, however, requires further examination that includes complementary concepts from the constructivist tradition of ideology theorisation.

In their texts, M5S and LN argue that the political decision-making is often blurred by ideological interests in the outdated forms of governance. The parties state that, currently, 'good ideas' cannot be implemented as efficiently as would be possible because they get stuck in traditional parties' silos that are, in turn, delimited by political ideologies. Instead of these ideological silos, M5S and LN insist that any 'good idea' should be realised, regardless of who proposes it, and an anti-ideological approach should be adopted in politics to ensure that a

'clear' vision of the reality is achieved. Accordingly, this argument also consists the idea that 'the people' do not have conflicting or ideologically loaded viewpoints or interests.

The constructivist tradition of ideology theory, however, finds this kind of juxtaposition between 'ideology' and 'reality' in many ways problematic, even impossible (Pietilä 1991a; Pietilä 1991b). The impossibility of the distinction between ideology and reality comes down to the paradoxical demand that, if a specific ideologically loaded opinion or interest is found, there must be something that counters it – something purely "non-ideological". Therefore, characteristics should be determined that would distinguish an 'ideological' idea from a 'non-ideological' one. Moreover, an actor should be found who would be in such an objective position that they would be able to determine the difference between ideology and reality. (Pietilä 1991a; Pietilä 1991b.)

As social constructionists explain (e.g. Berger & Luckmann 1994), people cannot step outside of their social realities to vacuums and make purely objective assessments or decisions there. Instead, people are always in interaction with others and influence the ways in which the world is understood and defined through their decision and interests. Moreover, as Althusser (1984, 127–130) indicates, ideologies are typically so normalised and part of people's everyday lives that they will never be explicitly identified as "ideologies". In fact, denying that a decision is ideologically loaded is one of ideologies' main characteristics (ibid.). Therefore, it could be argued that the juxtaposition between ideology and non-ideology is not sensible or that also M5S and LN's decision-making is somehow ideologically influenced.

In fact, regardless of M5S and LN's claims in favour of non-ideological decision-making, the parties do emphasise certain principles and internal rules that can act as value-basis when making decisions. The principles that both M5S and LN lean on in general, contain, for example, notes on the restoration of social justice, transparency and anti-corruption, reliability and responsibility of politics, as well as equality and inclusion. The parties also refer to the need of a functional economy and efficient decision-making systems, and the importance of saving public money instead of spending it relentlessly. Moreover, M5S considers that regulation and governance of the society is a necessity but, at the same time, hierarchy between citizens and the state needs to be lowered, while LN emphasises the importance of more equal distribution of decision-making power.

Additionally, M5S and LN assert that "the people" are the ones who can and should assess whether an idea is good enough to be executed. This is done by organising referenda on the

parties' online platforms, Rousseau and the Internet-parliament. As argued at the end of Chapter 5.1., however, implementing online voting platforms is not only a practical decision that has merely practical results through which realisable ideas can be identified. Utilising online platforms for voting can also have symbolic consequences implying that the responsibility to choose what is best for the community is now shifted to the people.

These implications of the anti-ideological approach to decision-making highlight the complexity of the influence of digitalisation to current politics. In the light of the findings of this study, it is clear that we are not only talking about individual technologies that become implemented in politics but, instead, a more cohesive, discursive and cultural change of political participation. While traditional classical-modernist politics are challenged by forms of network governance and platform parties, the processes of norm-setting and regulation of Internet-facilitated citizen-participation and political communication have just started to take shape. Hence, more attention needs to be given to the influence of digitalisation in the transformation of citizen-initiated political participation.

6.3. Limitations of the study and suggestions for future research

This thesis has explored the ongoing digital transformation of political participation by analysing blog texts from M5S and LN as well as an interview from the latter. An evident limitation of the study is that only one interview was conducted. However, its role was complementary to the dataset of LN and it already showed that conducting interviews can reveal highly interesting information on the subject. Another limitation of the study is that the data focuses exclusively on M5S from Italy and LN from Finland. Therefore, the empirical findings cannot be directly generalised internationally. Yet, the findings of this study do indicate a pattern of the parties' epistemic governance that might be of use for future studies mapping further how new ways of political organisation enhance their salience in the eyes of citizens. To draw any conclusive cultural accounts of e-participation, further studies need to be conducted. Moreover, also non-European viewpoints would provide extremely valuable insights into the phenomenon as well as the theoretical approach of epistemic governance.

As classical-modernist governance is challenged by emerging alternative forms of political participation and the political landscape seems to become increasingly fragment with notions of direct and hybrid e-governance, it becomes both topical and necessary to question whether the traditional left-right division of political movements is still a descriptive categorisation.

Thus, research should also be made assessing whether the traditional leftist-centrist-rightist political division is still valid for analysing the political field. Through further studies, a new conceptualisation of politics could be developed that would encompass all forms of political participation, from traditional parties to alternative movements.

To provide needed conceptual clarity to e-participation research, it would be essential to further examine and then determine the implications of e-participation usage. A central question is, whether the platform parties have attracted people who have previously been passive in politics or if they are people who have previously already been active in politics. The comments posted to the blog texts could also provide valuable information about, for instance, the public's sentiments about platform parties. In addition, research mapping possible risks in implementing e-participation and online governance – such as censure, biased information framing, and tokenism – could shed light on the future of the digital public sphere. Finally, all of the viewpoints mentioned above would benefit from a longitudinal study, aimed to depict potential changes and emerging trends in the influence of digitalisation in citizen-initiated political participation.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Articles used as data for MoVimento 5 Stelle

Tag: Digital Citizenship/Cittadinanza digitale

1.1	6.3.2019	Il diritto alla partecipazione democratica digitale - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.2	13.3.2019	La democrazia diretta e i suoi vantaggi - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.3	20.3.2019	ll processo telematico - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.4	27.3.2019	Il nuovo uomo digitale - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.5	3.4.2019	I diritti strumentali alla cittadinanza digitale - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.6	10.4.2019	La regolamentazione dell'informazione digitale - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.7	17.4.2019	L'identità digitale - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.8	24.4.2019	Il principio dell'inalterabilità dei dati - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.9	8.5.2019	Diritto ad avere una relazione online con lo Stato - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.10	15.5.2019	L'amministrazione delle città intelligenti - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.11	22.5.2019	Il diritto di tutela del nostro tempo - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.12	29.5.2019	Il diritto a una riscossione fiscale equa - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.13	5.6.2019	Un diritto di accesso neutrale ed equo per tutti - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.14	12.6.2019	Diritti nativi e diritti preesistenti - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.15	19.6.2019	Diritto alla partecipazione alle politiche di bilancio - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.16	26.6.2019	Il diritto al fascicolo sanitario digitale - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.17	3.7.2019	Il diritto di accesso online ai servizi dello Stato - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.18	4.7.2019	Cittadinanza digitale, un diritto fondamentale per l'uomo - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.19	10.7.2019	Il diritto all'innovazione - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.20	17.7.2019	Il diritto alla salute nell'era digitale - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.21	24.7.2019	Qual è la definizione di cittadinanza digitale? - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.22	31.7.2019	Cittadinanza digitale e bilancio partecipativo - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.23	7.8.2019	Sistema Pubblico d'Identità Digitale - SPID - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.24	21.8.2019	Diritto di accesso alla banda ultralarga - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.25	11.9.2019	Cittadinanza digitale, il ruolo dei nuovi media - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.26	18.9.2019	I diritti digitali - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.27	25.9.2019	Il diritto di accesso dei cittadini e degli innovatori - Il Blog delle Stelle

Tag: Direct Democracy/Democrazia Diretta

1.28	29.3.2019	Europarlamentarie 2019/ i risultati del primo turno - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.29	24.6.2019	Domani la votazione per scegliere i due nuovi Probiviri - Il Blog delle Stelle

Tag: 5 Star Italy/Italia 5 Stelle

1.30	10.7.2019	Dieci anni in MoVimento! Il 12 e 13 ottobre, a Napoli, Italia 5 Stelle. #MoVimen10 - Il Blog delle
1.31	14.7.2019	Un Bilancio di Italia 5 Stelle 2018/ sicura, accessibile a tutti e plastic free! - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.32	17.7.2019	Continuiamo a fare la differenza! Ci vediamo il 12 e 13 ottobre a Napoli per Italia 5 Stelle - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.33	18.7.2019	Dieci anni in MoVimento! Italia 5 Stelle alla Mostra d'Oltremare, a Napoli, il 12 e 13 ottobre - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.34	19.7.2019	Italia 5 Stelle a Napoli progettiamo il futuro dei prossimi 20 anni - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.35	23.7.2019	Sostieni Italia5Stelle/ disegniamo insieme il futuro - Il Blog delle Stelle

Tag: The Five Star Movement/MoVimento 5 Stelle

Tag: Rousseau

1.94	6.3.2019	Recupero, riuso, riciclo/ a marzo con Rousseau fai centro con l'Economia Circolare - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.95	7.3.2019	Al Villaggio Rousseau di Milano per conoscere Sharing - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.96	7.3.2019	Il programma del Villaggio Rousseau di Milano. Prenota il tuo posto! - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.97	7.3.2019	Il voto su blockchain per Rousseau è realtà. Venite a testarlo al Villaggio di Milano - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.98	9.3.2019	Innovazione e partecipazione/ al via la due giorni del Villaggio Rousseau a Milano - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.99	10.3.2019	Villaggio Rousseau a Milano - Il programma di oggi - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.100	12.3.2019	I numeri da record del Villaggio Rousseau di Milano in una sola parola/ grazie! - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.101	18.3.2019	#RousseauCityLab/ a Genova per parlare di innovazione nella lotta a mafie e corruzione - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.102	19.3.2019	#AcquaPubblica in tutti i Comuni d'Italia - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.103	26.3.2019	Europarlamentarie 2019/ ecco i profili dei candidati - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.104	26.3.2019	Rousseau City Lab/ questo weekend a Genova per parlare del futuro della giustizia - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.105	26.3.2019	Rousseau, scopri le attività di marzo su Lex Parlamento - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.106	28.3.2019	Domani si vota per le Parlamentarie Europee - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.107	29.3.2019	Europarlamentarie 2019 aperte dalle 10 alle 22/ si vota! - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.108	2.4.2019	Com'è cambiato il sistema di voto su Rousseau (e perché è più sicuro) - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.109	3.4.2019	Europarlamentarie, domani il voto del secondo turno - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.110	4.4.2019	Antonello Soro, l'ex capogruppo del Pd oggi garante della privacy che multa Rousseau - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.111	4.4.2019	Secondo turno Europarlamentarie 2019/ si vota dalle 10 alle 22 - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.112	4.4.2019	Europarlamentarie 2019/ i risultati del secondo turno - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.113	5.4.2019	Il sito sul Salario Minimo è online. Porta questa battaglia nel tuo comune con Rousseau - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.114	14.4.2019	Domani terzo turno delle europarlamentarie del MoVimento 5 Stelle - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.115	14.4.2019	Europrogramma del Movimento 5 Stelle/ Erasmus per tutti, più fondi per gli studenti - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.116	15.4.2019	Diritto d'autore, accordo storico fra Siae e Soundreef. Riviviamo il confronto del Rousseau City Lab - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.117	15.4.2019	Europarlamentarie, oggi il terzo turno/ si vota fino alle 19 - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.118	15.4.2019	Terzo turno Europarlamentarie 2019/ i risultati - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.119	29.4.2019	Vota l'Europrogramma del MoVimento 5 Stelle per cambiare l'Europa - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.120	29.4.2019	Europrogramma/ ecco i risultati delle votazioni su Rousseau - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.121	30.4.2019	La città del futuro/ Rousseau City Lab a Pescara l'11 e 12 maggio - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.122	20.5.2019	Domani si vota sulle restituzioni - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.123	21.5.2019	A chi destinare le restituzioni? Puoi votare fino alle 19 - Il Blog delle Stelle

1.124	21.5.2019	Restituzioni, ecco dove andranno - I risultati delle votazioni - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.125	25.5.2019	E-learning/ ecco il corso online sul bilancio europeo - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.126	29.5.2019	Domani si vota per confermare la fiducia a Luigi Di Maio - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.127	30.5.2019	Oggi si vota per confermare la fiducia a Luigi Di Maio - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.128	30.5.2019	Risultati della votazione record online/ Luigi Di Maio confermato con l'80% dei voti - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.129	6.6.2019	Bilancio Rousseau 2018/ quello che i giornali non scrivono - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.130	10.6.2019	30 giorni di Rousseau/ cosa abbiamo fatto a maggio - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.131	12.6.2019	Futuro del lavoro, il 22 giugno a Catania per il CityLab di Rousseau - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.132	12.6.2019	Nasce il portale dei talenti - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.133	20.6.2019	Rousseau City Lab/ questo weekend a Catania per parlare del futuro del lavoro - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.134	25.6.2019	RISULTATI/ Vota per scegliere i due nuovi Probiviri - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.135	1.7.2019	Promuovi #ProteggiAnimali con Rousseau. Condividi l'amore e il rispetto per i nostri amici più fedeli - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.136	8.7.2019	#ProteggiAnimali anche d'estate, condividi una foto con gli amici a 4 zampe - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.137	15.7.2019	#ProteggiAnimali - Nella nostra legge tutte le tutele e nelle vostre foto tutto l'amore e il rispetto che meritano - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.138	16.7.2019	Un disegno di legge per l'estensione della durata dell'abilitazione scientifica - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.139	25.7.2019	Oggi e domani si vota la nuova organizzazione del MoVimento 5 Stelle - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.140	26.7.2019	Nuova organizzazione del MoVimento 5 Stelle - I risultati delle votazioni - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.141	6.8.2019	Rousseau lancia la scuola di Open Comuni. Supporto operativo per chi lotta sui territori! - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.142	19.8.2019	La democrazia diretta in una parola - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.143	29.8.2019	Nel MoVimento 5 Stelle decidono gli iscritti - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.144	30.8.2019	Rousseau conta - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.145	31.8.2019	La verità sul voto su Rousseau. Le 10 fake news a cui non credere - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.146	1.9.2019	Martedi votazione su Rousseau sul nuovo governo - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.147	3.9.2019	Oggi su Rousseau la votazione sul nuovo Governo - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.148	3.9.2019	Rousseau/ votazione sul nuovo Governo - I RISULTATI - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.149	4.9.2019	Regionarie Umbria/ aperte le candidature! - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.150	8.9.2019	14 settembre 2019/ parte la Scuola di Open Comuni. Iscriviti subito! - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.151	11.9.2019	Rousseau promosso a pieni voti dagli iscritti! Il 95% è soddisfatto della nuova Area Voto - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.152	13.9.2019	Domani parte la scuola di "Open Comuni" per portavoce comunali e futuri candidati! - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.153	15.9.2019	Scuola "Open Comuni", testimonianza di una partecipante/ "ECCEZIONALE!" - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.154	18.9.2019	Domani votazione per le Regionarie dell'Umbria - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.155	19.9.2019	Domani votazione per il "Patto Civico per l'Umbria" - Il Blog delle Stelle

1.156	19.9.2019	Nasce "Rousseau Open Engineering", call per sviluppatori - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.157	19.9.2019	Votazione per le Regionarie dell'Umbria - I RISULTATI - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.158	20.9.2019	Votazione per il "Patto Civico per l'Umbria" - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.159	20.9.2019	Votazione per il "Patto Civico per l'Umbria" - I RISULTATI - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.160	29.9.2019	Combattiamo la plastica monouso con Sharing di Rousseau - Il Blog delle Stelle
1.161	29.9.2019	Noi guardiamo al futuro/ la cittadinanza digitale - Il Blog delle Stelle

Appendix 2. Articles used as data for Liike Nyt

Tag: Blogs/Blogit

2.1	22.3.2019	Annele Wiman #489/ Hyvän tekeminen toisille eheyttää vahvasti myös meitä aikuisia	Liike
2.2	22.3.2019	Juhani Lundén #245/ Tuulenhalkaisijana Tampereella	Liike
2.3	29.3.2019	Annika Ingraeus #472/ Ehkäisy ja sen pettäminen	Liike
2.4	29.3.2019	Jan Österlund #490/ Rakenteellisen korruption jäljillä	Liike
2.5	29.3.2019	Kenneth Morelius #480/ Poliittinen päätöksenteko on rikki	Liike
2.6	29.3.2019	Mikko Björklund #467/ Miksi nuoret eivät äänestä?	Liike
2.7	29.3.2019	Nora Stenvall #487/ Vastakkainasettelu on huono strategia päästä vaadittuihin tavoitteisiin päästöjen osalta	Liike
2.8	29.3.2019	Teija Makkonen #273/ Vaalilupaukset manipuloivat inhimillisiä tunteitamme	Liike
2.9	29.3.2019	Ville-Matti Kuusela #146/ Osallistu ihmeessä, sanoi poliitikko nuorelle. Me kerromme mihin ja miten.	Liike
2.10	2.4.2019	Mirita Saxberg #270/ Ilmasto muuttuu, mutta mitä tekevät poliitikot?	Liike
2.11	3.4.2019	Kyösti Tuominen #190/ Lapsilisien ostovoima on palautettava	Liike
2.12	8.4.2019	Jan Österlund #490/ Ympäristöministeriö päätti perjantaina 5.4.2019 palauttaa Malmin lentokentän suojelun taka
2.13	12.4.2019	Mikko Björklund #467/ Ilmastonmuutos – pienillä askelilla kohti isompaa muutosta	Liike
2.14	12.4.2019	Mirita Saxberg #270/ Joka neljäs yksinyrittäjä on köyhä, koska eläkevakuutusjärjestelmä ei toimi	Liike
2.15	12.4.2019	Mirita Saxberg #270/ Järkevää politiikkaa tehdään asiat edellä, mutta eniten väliä on ihmisellä	Liike
2.16	12.4.2019	Teija Makkonen #273/ Naiset armeijaan vai kansalaispalvelukseen?	Liike
2.17	13.4.2019	Mikko Björklund #467/ Yritystukijärjestelmä on pakko uudistaa. Tuetaan PK-yrityksiä?	Liike
2.18	13.4.2019	Mirita Saxberg #270/ "Mä en syntynyt kultalusikka suussa"	Liike
2.19	13.4.2019	Mirita Saxberg #270/ Perhepolitiikka ei saa syrjiä kahden kodin lapsia ja eronneita vanhempia	Liike
2.20	13.4.2019	Teija Makkonen #273/ Mitä ulko- ja turvallisuuspolitiikan asioita Suomen pitäisi painottaa seuraavina vuosina?	Liike

Tag: People/Henkilöt

2.21	18.4.2019	Alex Nieminen
2.22	18.4.2019	Helene Auramo
2.23	19.4.2019	Tuomas Enbuske
2.24	20.4.2019	Hjallis Harkimo
2.25	20.4.2019	Karoliina Kähönen
2.26	20.4.2019	Mikael Junger
2.27	20.4.2019	Sarian Antila

Tag: Climate Change/Ilmastonmuutos

2.28	8.3.2019	Ilmastonmuutos ja ympäristö	Liike
2.29	18.5.2019	Ilmastonmuutos – Näin vastasitte	Liike

Tag: The national healthcare and social welfare system/Sote

2.30	5.6.2019	Sote – aloittelijan tietopaketti | Liike
2.31	5.6.2019	Terveydenhuollon ammattilainen/ Sekava sote stressaa terveysalan ihmisiä | Liike
2.32	8.6.2019	Satoja miljoonia malliin, jota ei ehkä tule | Liike
2.33	11.6.2019	Ministeri Saarikko vastaa rohkeasti Liike Nytin kiperiin sote-kysymyksiin | Liike
2.34	12.6.2019	Liike Nyt kysyi, nostaako sote verojamme. Näin ministeri Saarikko vastaa! | Liike
2.35	12.6.2019	Palkkaharmonisaatio ja kolmen miljardin kustannusten hillintä/ Ministeri Saarikko vastaa | Liike
2.36	13.6.2019	Miten valinnanvapausesitys vaikuttaa kustannusten hillinnän tavoitteeseen? Ministeri Saarikko vastaa | Liike
2.37	13.6.2019	Suomen Psykologiliitto/ Tulevista sote-keskuksista puuttuu mielenterveysosaaminen | Liike

Tag: General/Yleiset

2.38	4.3.2019	Räjäytetään systeemi ja polkaistaan kevät käyntiin Liike Nytin vaalistartissa! | Liike
2.39	6.3.2019	Liikkeen ehdokkaat keräsivät kahdessa kuukaudessa yli 11 000 nimeä | Liike
2.40	6.3.2019	Nettiparlamentti päättää Liike Nytin tiekartan sisällön | Liike
2.41	6.3.2019	Väitöskirjaa poliittisesta päätöksenteosta tekevä Karoliina Kähönen haluaa muuttaa politiikkaa saadakseen nuoret mukaan | Liike
2.42	12.3.2019	Ilmoittaudu Mikä mättää päätöksenteossa? -seminaariin! | Liike
2.43	18.3.2019	Liike Nytin vaalitapahtumakiertue käynnistyi Fuengirolasta | Liike
2.44	20.3.2019	Liike Nyt tuo vihdoin vuoropuhelun tarjolle myös ulkosuomalaisille | Liike
2.45	21.3.2019	Uusilla poliittisilla liikkeillä on omat erityisluonteensa – nyt luodaan uusia eurooppalaisia liittoumia | Liike
2.46	28.3.2019	Joukkoistamalla parempia päätöksiä | Liike
2.47	30.3.2019	Tätä vallankumousta ei voi estää | Liike
2.48	1.4.2019	Ennakkoäänestys alkaa 3.4.! | Liike
2.49	3.4.2019	Tervetuloa Liike Nytin vaalivalvojaisiin! | Liike
2.50	4.4.2019	Liike Nyt edellyttää ehdokkailtaan puhdasta rikosrekisteriä | Liike
2.51	7.4.2019	Hjallis Harkimo/ Onko oikein, että ongelmat ovat edessämme, mutta kukaan ei tee mitään? | Liike
2.52	9.4.2019	Sohvaperunat kohtaavat vaalitentin! | Liike
2.53	11.4.2019	Liike Nytillä on ennätyksellinen suosio somessa – videoita katsottu 1,3 miljoonaa kertaa | Liike
2.54	16.4.2019	Liike Nyt sai eduskuntavaaleissa lähes 70 000 ääntä! | Liike
2.55	6.5.2019	Liike Nyt avaa keskustelun puolueesta | Liike
2.56	10.5.2019	Kiertuepäivät ovat varmistuneet | Liike
2.57	6.4.2019	Osallistava ja osaava Suomi – mitä mieltä olet hallitusohjelmasta? | Liike
2.58	11.6.2019	Liike Nyt -eduskuntaryhmän puhe hallitusohjelmasta 11.6.2019 | Liike
2.59	20.6.2019	Liike Nyt lähtee perustamaan puoluetta | Liike
2.60	20.6.2019	Tiedote/ Liike Nyt lähtee perustamaan puoluetta | Liike
2.61	24.6.2019	Äänestä! Pitääkö Isis-leirin suomalaisia auttaa? | Liike
2.62	28.6.2019	Tiedote/ Resurssit Al-Holin leirin parantamiseen | Liike
2.63	1.7.2019	Nettiparlamentti keskustelee puolueesta | Liike
2.64	16.7.2019	Liike Nyt SuomiAreenalla! | Liike
2.65	19.7.2019	Tiedote/ "Harry Harkimo/ Onnistuminen vaatii kaikkien osallistumista" | Liike

Appendix 3. Questions asked in the interview from the informant of Liike Nyt

The interview was conducted as an unstructured in-depth interview. Therefore, the questions listed here are extractions from the conversation. Some of the questions have been re-formulated into more concise forms or accompanied with notes in brackets for readability reasons. The questions are in order of occurrence.

1. Could you tell briefly about yourself and what is your background in politics.
2. What do you feel were the initiating forces (*muutosvoimat*) that affected the birth of the party and then later its developments?
3. Could you specify what they [structural changes needed to be made in politics, according to the informant] are on a concrete level?
4. [The informant talks about the party's objectives] Do you feel that you are approaching your objectives? Are people more interested [in politics]?
5. Did you simply spot this example [of digital political participation] from Italy and then got in contact with them or how did your dialogue got started?
6. Have you gotten [from M5S] any concrete views regarding the platform, whether it works or not?
7. Could we go a little back to 2017 when you said you started to think about establishing the party… At what point did the Internet-parliament (*nettiparlamentti*) come into the picture and what else has there been here in the middle?
8. Did anything surprising occur [from the market analysis the party made according to the informant]?
9. Could you specify how the Internet-parliament works in practice?
10. In addition to voting about whether to become an official party or not, have you organised other referenda lately?
11. What kind of things were brought up [from the referenda on the Internet-parliament]?
12. Do you have any idea about the people who have joined already [the Internet-parliament]? Is there a specific type of citizen that you aim to reach?
13. What is your perception about the traditional political field and what do you see as to what added value LN brings?
14. When you think about the international field of political decision-making and that many decisions are discussed more and more on a global level, how does LN relate to the global forums in your opinion?
15. What do you see could be the factors affecting [political participation] in the future?
16. [Informant mentions politics and science] how do you feel they go together?
17. Does LN somehow provide background information to the issues voted in the Internet-parliament?
18. How is the background information provided? Have you had any input from, e.g. Casaleggio or others? Have you done any benchmarking?
19. Have I understood correctly that LN does not want to go as far as M5S with its functionalities on the platform?
20. What kind of challenges has LN encountered? And what do you feel could be the challenges in the future?
21. Where do you see your [LN's] activity in, let's say, ten years from now?
22. What is in your opinion LN's final goal? Is it, as you said, bringing politics to the masses and spread its mode of conduct to all parties? So that LN becomes, in a way, unnecessary?
23. Have there been some key persons or actors that have made it possible for LN to advance its objectives?
24. How do you [LN] feel about the international decision-making arena?
25. [Informant talks about global challenges] How do you feel that LN can answer to these and provides solutions?
26. [Informant talks about the political agenda and agenda setting power] Who has the power to determine the agenda in your opinion?

27. It seems to me that LN and M5S have, in some sense, similar proposals for solutions to, in the end, very different agendas. Have I understood correctly?
28. [Informant talks about new movements being established around Europe] Does it somehow add to your motivation?
29. Do you think that LN has reached, so to speak, "fresh blood" when it comes to its followers?
30. What is, in your view, LN's core interaction medium? Is it the social media you brought up earlier or the Internet-parliament?
31. How has LN reacted to critical discussions about, for example, influencing people's opinions online and algorithms?
32. [The informant mentions that LN does not want direct democracy but a hybrid version where power is diffused to several actors] So, you wish that power is spread to several actors, not only to citizens either?
33. So, does somebody's opinion weigh more than somebody else's?
34. And is it due to the [level of] expertise [of the person in question] you mentioned?
35. [Informant tells that LN has conducted their own research on political participation] Has your research been in the form of questionnaires?
36. I have the impression that you seek to engage people into politics but also change how they perceive the political field and participation in general. Is this in any way a right interpretation?
37. Do you have anything else in your mind you would like to add?