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INTERNATIONAL MEDIA REPRESENTATION OF FINNISH PRIME MINISTER SANNA MARIN

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ABSTRACT

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The aim of my research was to conduct a systematic analysis of how Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin is represented in international media. Although still the minority, there are remarkable female leaders in world leadership. The focus on media representations is justified by the fact that the media greatly influences the public's opinion and perception. The way female leaders are represented in media is crucial as it may affect women's political careers, but many studies also claim that the media is biased, and sexist when depicting female leaders. Female leaders are often evaluated by their fashion, personal life, behaviors instead of abilities as a politician. There has been news coverage and worldwide attention given to Finland's current female-dominated cabinet, including enthusiastic international reactions in social media. Although there is a study dealing with Finnish media's response to PM Marin, there is not yet research about the international media's response, leaving space for this research.

In the domain of leadership, men and women are given different standards and expectations. Previous studies have shown that the stereotypes of a good leader are often masculine rather than feminine. While men are praised as competent leaders when being active, dominant, ambitious, women are presumed to be collaborative, friendly, and emotionally sensitive. Women who act like men are criticized for not being like a woman. On the other hand, those who possess feminine features are seen as incompetent as a leader. This creates a gap that hinders female leaders to be evaluated as a good leader. Moreover, my thesis presumes that international news coverage of Marin is not only related to the coverage of female leaders, but also mixed with Finland's country image. The Prime Minister is the political representative of Finland, and it is predictable that Finland's image as an egalitarian country for example would have connections to how Marin is represented. Previous studies related to country image and public diplomacy offer guidance to interpreting data from this perspective. Finland's country branding strategy brochure composed by Finland Promotion Board introduces the main objectives, key words and themes of Finland's country branding strategy. Keeping these facts in mind, this research studies how Sanna Marin is represented in international and Korean media.

This study used the qualitative research method for the analysis part. Media Studies and Semiotics has been used to examine data with photos and textual data, and the data I used are news articles, column writings, other coverage in English and Korean. I have also gathered scholarly data from Andor, Google scholar, electronic libraries, resource websites.

The theoretical framework of this study involves multiple theories such as social constructivism, representation theories, nation branding theories. Among the theories dealing with representation, this paper will mainly follow the ideas of the constructionist perspectives on representation based on Stuart Hall's representation theory and Hanna Fenichel Pitkin's idea of political representation. Daniel Chandler's interpretation of semiotics and Roland Barthes' essays about the photographic message were used as the main texts for media analysis.

This research consists of 92 articles in total, of which 58 are in English, 34 are in Korean. The analysis shows that Marin has received considerable attention, but the coverage is limited to selected topics, and also highly influenced by media stereotypes being a young, female leader from a Northern European welfare-state. My research found that Marin is represented in international media surrounding certain themes which are young, female leader, marriage and motherhood, performing politician, crisis leader, and leader of Finland. Media reaction written in English and Korean had much in common regarding the content, but differed in its focus of interest of each incidents.

Throughout my thesis, I have aimed to present a systematic research of how this female political leader is represented in media. There is existing prejudice towards their abilities, expectations, not to mention biased depiction in media. My research may contribute to going beyond yearning female leaders, examining how the world treats and views them after they take office. This exploration will hopefully lead to a more impartial representation in the future.

Keywords: Sanna Marin, Finnish politics, women leaders, international media, gender representations, media representations, nation branding

The originality of this thesis has been checked using the Turnitin OriginalityCheck service.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Research aim

The aim of my research is to conduct a systematic analysis of how Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin is represented in international media. Although still the minority, there are remarkable female leaders in world leadership. Past examples include former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, Benazir Bhutto who served as the prime minister of Pakistan, and nowadays there are German chancellor Angela Merkel, Taiwanese Prime Minister Tsai Ing-wen, New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, US vice president Kamala Harris and more. There are also young leaders as Chancellor Sebastian Kurz of Austria, youngest in US congress senator Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. Prime Minister Marin is a case that represents both, being a young, female leader.

The focus of this research is media representations as media greatly influences the public's opinion and perception. One of the main aims of media scholars is analyzing how media institutions create meaning in the society (Fürsich, 2009, p. 246). The way female leaders are represented in media is crucial enough that it may affect political careers, but the media is often biased, and sexist when depicting them. It is nothing new that female leaders are evaluated by their fashion, personal life, behaviors instead of abilities as a politician. The aim behind the coverage of female leaders also varies. For instance, South Korean conservative media display positive coverage of Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin or New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern as an example of global leadership to be looked upon. Nevertheless, their opposition to the idea of promoting LGBT rights and implementing basic income policies is in deep incongruence with the core values promoted by the Finnish and New Zealand government. Suspicions rise over whether they are consuming acclaimed foreign female leaders, expecting them to bring a dilution effect on their hard-core conservative image. Keeping these facts in mind, this paper aims to study how Sanna Marin is represented in international media. The research questions for my thesis are how is Prime Minister Sanna Marin portrayed in international media? What aspects catch the media's attention when dealing with the Finnish Prime Minister? How do media reactions differ and what are the reasons behind that? How are the image of female leaders and Finland's image as a country reflected in Prime Minister Marin's international news coverage?

1.2 Background

Prime Minister Sanna Marin's female-dominated cabinet consisting of Finland's 76th government has received worldwide attention, even labeled as the 'Amazons' (Son, 2020). Starting from the remarkably early women's suffrage, and the current congresswomen, Finland has a history of gender equality in politics. Finland became the first European country to grant woman's suffrage, and the first in the world to grant women standing for parliament. Finland also has a distinct political system known as Consensus democracy (Peltoniemi, 2021, p. 33). Within this system, it is unlikely for any party to win the majority of seats, and co-operation between the main parties is necessary (Peltoniemi, 2021, p. 29). Multiparty governments are generally formed based on consensus, compromise and general agreement. There is also remarkably high trust in politicians and political institutions as well as fellow citizens. The corruption level is very low, marking third in the CPI 2018 after Denmark and New Zealand (Peltoniemi, 2021, p. 33).

There has been an increase in female leaders throughout the world from different political parties and backgrounds. However, in most nations women are still widely excluded from political decision making, participation in politics in general creating a gender imbalance in politics. In some parts of the world, politics is still regarded as 'a man's job. When it comes to leadership, men and women are given different standards and expectations. The stereotypes of a good leader are often those of masculine than feminine (Bauer, 2020, p. 8). While men are praised as a competent leader when being active, dominant, ambitious, women are presumed to be collaborative, friendly, and emotionally sensitive. Women who act like men are criticized for not being like a woman. On the other hand, those who possess feminine features are seen incompetent as a leader. This creates a gap that hinders female leaders to be evaluated as a good leader (Bauer, 2020, p. 16).

Finnish Prime Minister Marin's appearance in this worldly viewpoint may be accepted as a rare case that happens once in a blue moon. There has been news coverage and worldwide attention given to the current female-dominated cabinet, including enthusiastic international reactions in social media. Compared to the attention given to Marin and her female dominant cabinet, the international audience holds a vague understanding of Finnish politics. Marin's coverage is in line with the matters that happened over a century ago as the early woman's suffrage in Finland, and an overall perception of high gender equality and women's rights in Finland; the successful northern European welfare state.

Thus, there should be more academic research which goes beyond the international fuzz, such as on the media coverage of this relatively new leader and its relation to the Finnish country image.

It would be also noteworthy to examine the construction of Finnish country image from the international news coverage of Sanna Marin's government. The Prime Minister is the political representative of Finland, and it is predictable that Finland's image as an egalitarian country for example would have connections to how Marin is represented. Besides promoting tourism, nation branding strategy is recognized to have impact on various sectors such as increasing foreign investments and influencing a country's position in global politics. Meanwhile, it is also a fact that the process of country image highlights certain dominant representations while leaving out others. Thus, in this research, I will attempt to find the connection between female leadership, gender equality, and the image of Finland.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Representation of female leaders

Previous academic literature on female leaders and their representations offers insight that there is bias in international media when depicting female leadership. The prejudice is global, and has strong influence on the public, resulting in female politicians performing self-censorship to appear as capable leaders. The prejudice against female leaders will also affect media coverage of the Finnish Prime Minister, which is the main data of my research. This section reviews literatures dealing with the bias female leaders or politicians face in different political contexts.

Lawless (2004) writes about substantive and symbolic representation of female politicians in her article "Politics of presence? Congresswomen and symbolic representation." The author used the US National Election Study data from 1980 to 1998 to conclude that women in politics serve as symbols. Regardless of their political stances, congresswomen are symbolic figures representing their gender in the political domain, which is one of the benefits only women can bring to Congress. There is more to be studied let alone this prominent fact, such as whether women representing women differ from women unnecessarily representing women.

In her article "Shifting standards: How voters evaluate the qualifications of female and male candidates," Bauer (2020) writes about how female and male candidates' qualifications are differently evaluated by voters. The author details that people perceive as a good female leader, and the expectations they hold. According to the author's experiment, female candidates needed higher qualifications to leap over the hurdle which women are seen as ill-qualified leaders. Due to the stereotype that femininity of women makes them unfitting as a leader, female candidates suffer from lacking qualifications to satisfy the masculine standards of a good leader. Is it questionable whether the survey conducted by the author directly resembles the voter's choice in actual elections, as it neglects other factors that influence choices such as posters, campaigning. The survey also lacked the case of political races between two female candidates.

"The impact of gender stereotyped evaluations on support for women candidates" written by Dolan (2010) resembles Bauer's research but also differed in many ways. She conducted a survey of 1039 American adults, examining how and which gender stereotypes shape the voter's willingness to support women in elections. The respondents

turned out to believe a stereotype that female politicians had warm, compassionate personalities more fit to deal with issues regarding education, family, women, and tended to be liberal and a feminist. Voters had a stereotype that male politicians were strong and intelligent, better in handling crime, defense, foreign policy issues, and were more conservative. As a result, voters who valued ethics were more likely to vote for a female candidate running against a man, while those who concern foreign policy issues showed a tendency to support a male candidate than a woman.

Research by Bell and Sinclair (2016) discusses women leaders, bodies, and sexualities found in popular culture, focusing on the representation of women's leadership. Through their findings they were able to conclude that historically women are viewed as spectacles than leaders. Consequently women's leadership is glamourized and sexualized while women regulate their ambition as leaders.

Kapasi et al. (2016) also examines about how media shapes women's identity as a leader. The authors assert an interesting viewpoint that women are forced to endeavor to create an 'authentic leadership'. Influenced by media representation, female leaders craft an identity that is believed to be the "true self" that match the expectations they receive from followers. This study suggests that media has power over sculpting gender-biased perceptions, discourse, norms of leaders.

Cukier et al. (2016) studies how women are under-represented and miss-represented in Canadian broadcast news. The authors applied the appearances of 2,031 individuals from four major news broadcasters and found that women were under-represented as leader and experts. Women were portrayed less positively, less quoted and only 12 and 22 percent of politics and economic featured women. Women's representation was focused on social, legal, celebrities, arts, media, sports news. This study emphasizes that how women are represented in media is important, as media plays a crucial role in defining leadership and for women securing opportunities across sectors.

Chikaipa's 2019 article "Caring mother or weak politician? A semiotic analysis of editorial cartoon representations of President Joyce Banda in Malawian newspapers" claims that perceptions of female political leaders are highly influenced by the prejudice and stereotypes found in political cartoons. Although this study is about a previous female leader in Malawi, it was exceptionally helpful material to learn about how to interpret visual data. Based on the idea that images and objects are socially constructed without a fixed meaning, Chikaipa used a Constructionist approach to examine the cultural power of the media.

2.2 Nation Branding

My thesis presumes that international news coverage of Sanna Marin is not only related to coverage of female leaders, but also mixed with Finland's country image. Previous studies related to country image and public diplomacy offer guidance to interpreting data from this perspective. Country image and nation branding are concepts often found together in the same research, but the former are thoughts reminded by a country while the later refers to strategies used to promote the image. Adaime (2019) introduces a rare and interesting study by differentiating nation branding with a country's image and reputation. Nation branding is defined as a tactical strategy aimed for specific targets from a marketing perspective, which differs from nation image which is more of an individual's opinion about a country, and nation reputation which is created through communications about the country. The author selects the Arab region and conducts a case study gathering data from 2011 to 2018 to figure out whether gender gap has a negative impact on nation images and reputations. The author finds an interesting fact that successful nation branding strategy does not always bring positive influence on a country's image. According to the study, the gender gap among Arab countries affected the nation image and reputation while it had no significant impact on the nation brand value. In reverse, this demonstrates that even if a country has a good nation branding value, it can have poor image and reputation. The study concludes by advising that governments should act to lower the actual gender gap instead of focusing on strategies aimed to simply improve country reputation.

Jeziarska and Towns' (2018) article evaluating the 'Progressive Sweden' brand is a gateway to grasping the basics of nation branding. The article shows that contrary to Sweden's reputation as a gender equal society, feminism does not appear in the strategic documents. According to the authors, nation branding is fundamentally a nationalist project, strengthening a country's competency in the global market and diplomacy (p. 62). When a country builds its image, it results in enhanced international reputation, eventually earning in economic benefits such as increase in tourists, foreign investments. This is the reason why certain facts are emphasized while others are "masked and silenced" in nation branding (p. 60).

Valaskivi's (2016) article offers a glimpse to the nation branding of Finland and Sweden. Moreover, the author concludes that nation branding is also aimed at domestic audience. The article is based on interviews with professionals in nation branding and the

author's own experience of working as the director of the Finnish Institute in Japan. Although Finland considers changing its country image while Sweden wants its positive image to persist, the author finds that Finland and Sweden nevertheless have similar nation branding strategies as a modern, functional welfare state. The most interesting point of the article was the author's assertion that Nation branding relies on the contradictory idea that although everyone knows that countries strive to promote their nation brand, the solely authentic nation image belongs to their own country. With the aid of media repeatedly broadcasting this created nation image among its own people, the nation brand is promoted out of domestic consensus.

Finland's country branding strategy brochure composed by Finland Promotion Board introduces the main objectives, key words and themes of Finland's country branding strategy. The selective values and identities that represent Finland are "reliable, quirky, problem-solving, equal, inclusive (p. 2)." The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland also lists promoting Finland's country image as one of the responsibilities of the ministry. It seems that Finland is fully aware of how successful country branding results in promoting the country as an appealing place.

The reviewed literature offered understanding of country image, which is the purpose and result of nation branding strategies. Media plays a role in promoting the image not only to international but also domestic audience, reaching a consensus of the image believed to be authentic. Finland's image of an equal, modern welfare state will have a positive effect on its leader, but also have the possibility to act as a prejudice shaping Prime Minister Marin's image.

2.3 Previous research regarding media coverage of Prime Minister Sanna Marin

Kytölahti's (2020) Master's Degree dissertation offers the opportunity to compare Finnish media's response with my research. Her study is an analysis of how Sanna Marin is represented in Finnish news media. Kytölahti pays attention to the timing of media coverage, examining how Marin is represented in Finnish media during her election, and the aftermath. Her findings reveal that Marin is portrayed as "a young politician who needs to prove her ability (p. 43)", while reflecting multiple images of a performing young woman, modern mother, politician, incorrect social democrat. Framing theory and representation theory are used as the basis of the study. Kytölahti also uses feminist theory of public spheres, viewing politics as a public sphere.

3. Theoretical Framework

Because the phenomenon of media representations and their political impact is multifaceted, the theoretical framework of social constructivist or constructionist perspectives on representation, the idea of political representation, semiotics, and nation branding theories have been consulted to answer the research questions and achieve the study aim. To reiterate, the research questions for my thesis are how is Prime Minister Sanna Marin portrayed in international media? What aspects catch the media's attention when dealing with the Finnish Prime Minister? How do media reactions differ and what are the reasons behind that? How are the image of female leaders and Finland's image as a country reflected in Prime Minister Marin's international news coverage?

The reason for selecting multiple theories is because my study deals with media representation of a political figure that represents her electorate as well as a nation, whom at the same time represents youth and her gender. Thus, the process of representation involves convoluted layers of influence from various entities. It is widely accepted that the media does not only tell the truth but has an impact on the representations that we take to be authentic. In contemporary media research, some qualitative researchers focus on understanding how dominant ideological power is encoded in texts in relations with race, class, age, gender and ethnicity (Brennen, 2013). These researchers examine the political, economic, ideological perspectives that shape texts because they believe texts play a part in constructing our knowledge, values, beliefs (Brennen, 2013, p. 202). In cultural studies, even cultural practices or products which are non-written material are analyzed as a text (Fürsich, 2009, p. 240). Along with representation theories and semiotics, nation branding theories also intersect with the case of PM Sanna Marin's international representation, since she is the representative of the Finnish nation. In fact she is in a special position being one of the political leaders that attract more international media attention than any politician, mostly depicted as a symbolic figure.

3.1 Social Constructivism

According to social constructivism, the reality – including our understandings of good political leadership – is a result of social construction. The social constructivist or constructionist research orientation provides the metatheoretical points of departure for this study. According to constructivism, a subject or object would not exist without being

constructed by an act that brought them to the world. Fierke (2006) presents the example of wood and wooden objects to efficiently explain this concept. Although wood is a material substance that exists in nature, particular objects made of wood were created by humans and do not exist in nature (Fierke, 2006, p. 188). These objects that are constructed have a meaning and use within a context. Social constructivists claim that this meaning and use of objects is not a product of pure thought but an outcome made of social values, norms, and assumptions (Fierke, 2006, p. 189). From this stems the constructivist perspective that International Relations are socially constructed. This is because human interaction forms historical, cultural, and political backgrounds of states, alliances, international institutions (Fierke, 2006, p. 189). Another area which social constructivists take interest is the construction of practices of social life and objects. For constructivists, practices that people naturally accept are in fact products of social constructions which should be denaturalized (Jung, 2019, p. 3).

Social constructivism is sometimes compared with rationalism, and a simplified explanation of the difference between the two would be that the former emphasizes the social, while the latter emphasizes the individual. This does not mean that constructivism does not emphasize the individual. Perhaps the most visible difference would be the different view on individual interests and structures. As Fierke suggests, while rationalists pay heed to how structures constrain, constructivists focus on the relationship between agency and structures (Fierke, 2006, p. 191). Constructivists are interested in the identity of the subject that hold such interests, since they assume that identity and interests are both attached to the world of social meaning (Fierke, 2006, p. 191).

In International Relations scholarship, two notable works within social constructivism are Alexander Wendt and Nicholas Onuf's writings. Wendt's 1992 article *Anarchy Is What States Make of It*, contributed to drawing IR audiences to social constructivism and Wendt popularizing the approach (Zehfuss, 2002, p. 11). Wendt's motive of writing the article was to build a bridge between the conflicting ideas of neorealist and neoliberals by developing a constructivist argument. Meanwhile Wendt criticizes social science constructivists for not taking seriously the causal powers of anarchy (Wendt, 1999, p. 395).

The main argument made by Wendt is that anarchy is what states make of it, and thereby is a created social reality. According to Wendt, international politics is not given but made, and it is possible for the existing competitive international system to be reshaped (Zehfuss, 2002, p.12). Wendt asserts the existence of three anarchies with different dominant structures, naming them the Hobbesian, Lockean, and Kantian (Onuf,

2013, p. 2). Wendt also presents his own idea of actors of the world and their identities to contradict the Neorealist idea that self-help inevitable in anarchy. The example Wendt draws on is security under conditions of anarchy, in which actors acquire identities that shape their interests. The concept of identity Wendt describes is a 'relatively stable, role-specific understandings and expectations about self (Zehfuss, 2002, p. 14).' These identities are developed and maintained through interaction with other people, and they have the power to determine the anarchy or security that will prevail (Zehfuss, 2002, p. 14). Thus, under a condition of structural anarchy, there is no reason for a self-help situation to happen when actors seek for their own survival (Zehfuss, 2002, p. 14).

Another prominent explanation of social constructivism is presented by Nicholas Onuf. The most distinct feature of Onuf's assertions would be his particular emphasis in rules, and how they create the possibility of agency. Deeds which construct reality, need meaning to be able to do so, and meaning again depends on rules (Zehfuss, 2002, p. 20). According to Onuf, a 'rule is a statement that tells people what they should do.' Rules are important because they create the possibility of agency, and provide agents with the choice to break or keep the rule (Zehfuss, 2002, p. 20). Since agency is a social condition, not only people but social constructs such as states can also become agents, but all can become agents only through rules (Zehfuss, 2002, p. 20). Actions of these agents often have unintended consequences since they act within an institutional context and cannot choose which collectively change would occur (Zehfuss, 2002, p. 20). Structures are stable patterns that are formed by these unintended consequences (Zehfuss, 2002, p. 20).'

There are also some weaknesses and inconsistencies in the Constructivist approach. For example, Checkel (1998) suggests that constructivism over-emphasizes the role of social structures while undermining agents, make constructivism insufficient as a theory (p. 325). Another aspect that faces criticism is that constructivism holds an inherent weakness labeled as "selection bias." Constructivists are criticized for selectively focusing on human rights, climate change, women's rights, while paying less attention to topics of xenophobic nationalism, racism, homophobia which are also essential phenomenon to understand contemporary society (Jung, 2019, p. 8). Social constructivism's idea that reality is made with certain values and social norm than pure thought is related to the idea that the image of a political figure portrayed in news reports are a construction of the media. My research will link the social constructivist idea with how international media depicts Marin.

3.2 Representation Theories

Social constructivist theories of representation are more relevant for this research which focuses on female political leadership, than IR social constructivism. Despite sharing the ontological points of departure, IR social constructivism focuses on the international system.

3.2.1 Constructionist view on representation and political representation

The theoretical orientation of this research involves constructionist view on representation theories, semiotics, media studies, and nation branding theories. Among the theories dealing with representation, the research mainly follows the ideas of the constructionist perspectives regarding representations. Stuart Hall's book *Representation: cultural representations and signifying practices* (1997) offers an anthology of representation theories particularly emphasizing the constructionist understandings of language and representation. Hall offers a simple definition: "representation is the process by which members of a culture use language to produce meaning (p. 61)." Hall introduces two more selected theories of representation other than the constructionist approach, which are the reflective and the intentional approaches. Since representation is inseparably linked with language, all theories are explained in relation to language. In the reflective approach, language reflects or imitates the fixed meaning already there in the world (Hall, 1997, p. 24). In opposition to this is the intentional approach, which on the basis is the idea that language is a social system which can never be a wholly private game. In this perspective the speaker or the author becomes important, as words mean what the author imposes it to mean based on her unique understanding of the word (Hall, 1997, p. 63). Meanwhile, the constructionist approach has a completely different idea regarding the existence of a true, fixed meaning of words. Things do not mean but are constructed by representational systems such as signs (Hall, 1997, p. 25). This is because the main idea of constructionists is that things do not have any fixed meaning. This enables the constructionist approach of representation to accept a degree of cultural relativism between cultures, as meanings change among different cultures (Hall, 1997, p. 61). Hall introduces two versions of the constructionist approach which are the semiotic approach, and the discursive approach. The semiotic approach was influenced by Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, while the discursive approach was by French philosopher and historian Michel Foucault. While the former concentrated on how signs in language

produce meanings, the latter focused on how discourse produces knowledge (Hall, 1997, p. 62). The constructivist idea of political leadership is given meaning through representational sign systems, and my presumption is that media is the key conveyer making this happen.

Developing the theory of representation, Hall discusses Michel Foucault's book *The Order of Things* (1970), which opens up with the famous painting *Las Meninas* (1656), drawn by the Spanish painter Velázquez. The painting shows the interior of a room, which is assumed to be a room in the Spanish Royal Palace. According to Hall, the painting itself raises significant questions about representation, which Foucault viewed that the painting has no fixed meaning (p. 56). The spectator, the subject, and the painter are all three positions that create representations. The painting is structured in a way that makes it incomplete without the spectator, and the dialogue between the painting and the spectator constructs the meaning (Hall, 1997, p. 60). Foucault writes in his essay that this representation is representation in its pure form, finally freed from the relation that was impeding it (p. 16). Foucault's idea about the importance of focusing on representations has guided and inspired my research about Marin's portrayals in various media with different interests and point of views.

As a part of the research materials for this study are visual, we should also take a look at Hall's explanation of visual images. A photograph of a tree is a visual sign that reflects some of the actual aspects of our visual perceptions about a tree (Hall, 1997, p. 20). Hall's thought on visual signs is that they have to be interpreted despite the close resemblance of the things they refer to (p. 19). Hall asserts that the case of written or spoken language is more difficult, as words show no obvious relationship to the things they refer to. Therefore, the relationship between the sign, the concept and the referred object becomes entirely arbitrary (Hall, 1997, p. 21). This arbitrary nature of sign Hall explains actually derives from Ferdinand de Saussure's understanding of language and sign. According to the first principle of Saussure's theory of language, the signifier and the signified have no natural link (Culler, 1976, p. 19). Saussure calls a form which signifies as the significant or the signifier, and names the idea that is signified as the signifié or signified. The *significant* and the *signifié* are inseparable entities that exist only as components of the sign, and thus a sign can be described as the union of the signifier and signified (Culler, 1976, p. 19). Saussure's view is that the linguistic unit is a form rather than a substance, which can be defined in relation to which distinguishes it from other units. In other words, the sign must be defined according to its relations to other signs, as

there is no necessary core which persists (p. 36). Saussure uses an interesting analogy to further explain his understanding of the relations of signs, which is the chess example. In the chess game, the actual shapes of the king, queen, rock, knight, bishop, pawn are of no importance, as the king may be of any size and shape so long as we are able to distinguish it from the other pieces. Applying this to language, the signifier which we perceive to represent the king (or any object) is actually not defined by any particular noise we use when uttering it (p. 28). What Saussure wants to point out by presenting this example is that whether it is a king or bed or anything else, it is arbitrary by nature.

As we have gone through the main arguments regarding language and representation, now we will discuss its relationship with politics, which again brings the theoretical discussion closer to the focus of this research – media representations of female leaders in politics. In *The Concept of Representation* (1967), Hanna Fenichel Pitkin introduces her idea of political representation which differs from the previous formalistic viewpoints of representation, which she also refers as the authorization view. Mainly asserted by Hobbes scholars, Pitkin's understanding of the authorization representation is its initial endowment of authority that allows the representative to wield the power he pleases (Pitkin, 1967, p. 39). Pitkin criticizes this formalistic perspective, arguing that representing is not acting with authority, and in fact it is not any kind of acting at all. This is because Pitkin views representation as not about doing something but being something, and the representative does not act for others but stands for them, whether by a connection, a resemblance or reflection (p. 61). When seeing a picture of a tree, we say that it is a tree, rather than saying that it represents a tree. However, we are actually calling a patch of color or squiggle of line that is intended to indicate a tree but does not look like a tree (Pitkin, 1967, p. 68). Pitkin defines this as symbolic representation, in which representatives stand for those being similar to them (p. 80). Symbolic representation is the meaning that a representative has for those being represented, and thereby does not imply any action. Another type of representation is the descriptive representation, in which the representative resembles the physical traits, gender, ethnicity, interests and experiences of those being represented. The difference between the two kinds of representation is the contrast between “representing as” and “representing by (Pitkin, 1967, p. 101).” For example, a painter might represent Christ as a tall man, but not as a fish, although he might as well represent Christ by a fish. The former is the activity of descriptive representation; the latter is symbol-making activity. This sort of symbol-making activity can be easily found in conventional symbols such as a mathematician turning a

formerly meaningless mark into a symbol by defining it (Pitkin, 1967, p. 101). A Prime Minister is a political representative, and the symbolic and descriptive representations Pitkin presents have relevance in Marin's case.

3.3 Nation Branding Theories

This research setting is constructed around the idea that besides gender stereotypes, the international media representation of Sanna Marin intersects with the meanings associated with Finland as a nation. Therefore, before discussing the theories of nation branding it is better to first start with a brief history of the idea that nations can become a brand. According to Viktorin et al. (2018), marketing experts linked the idea of branding to places in the 1990s. The most notable theory of nation branding comes from Simon Anholt, who first mentioned the concept in 1998. Alongside with the majority of literature related to this topic, Anholt used the word 'nation brand' to measure a country's reputation (Viktorin et al., 2018, p. 9). Anholt's definition of branding is that it refers to the process of designing the name and identity of a product to build reputation (2007, p. 4). Since this thesis topic is unrelated to branding itself or its usage in the business strategies sector, I will refrain from going deeper in this concept, but will only mention that Anholt distinguishes four different aspects of the brand itself: brand identity, brand image, brand purpose, brand equity (2007).

The principle that enables such a concept as nation branding is the theory of competitive identity. Most countries have a reputation created through which Anholt labels as the 'hexagon of competitive identity.' These six channels are tourism, brands, policy, people, culture, investment (Anholt, 2007, p. 26). Tourism refers not only to national tourism promotion, but also first-hand experience of those visiting the country. A country's export brands are powerful ambassadors of the country's image, and policies also shape country reputation as even domestic policies get reported through international media. The way a country recruits foreign talents (students, companies) and investments through cultural exchanges also builds up reputation (Anholt, 2007, p. 25).

Meanwhile, this reputation which becomes stereotypes of a country is not a reflection of the current status of a country. This is because national image is like a distant echo of an event that has already passed long ago (Anholt, 2007, p. 27). An image of a place does not change in tandem speed with the real life situation of the place, lagging behind by years or decades. It is notable that Anholt views nation branding as a rather negative concept, perceiving it as a problem rather than a solution. Nation brands are formed by the tendency of

public opinion stereotyping nations, which most countries ought to fight against than promote (Anholt, 2010, p. 3). Some other scholars share this negative perception, viewing nation branding as a struggle over fundamental questions of what the nation is in local, governmental, organizational levels (Viktorin et al., 2018, p. 10).

Along with other Nordic countries, Finland has joined the process of country image building from decades ago. Clerc and Katja (2018) studied a descriptive analysis of Finland's efforts to build its nation image from 1988 to 2011. The authors view the establishment of the *Kantine*—a Committee for International Communication—in 1988 as the starting point of these governmental-level efforts (p. 775). Valaskivi's article (2016) about Finland, Sweden, Japan's nation-image building offers a list of some themes that the author has identified as attributes of Finland. The main goal for Finland was emphasizing its role as a 'problem-solver', especially in education and environmental sectors, while also touching other themes as equality, fluency, security, friendliness, casualness, internationality, design, culture and language skills (p. 97). A part of my research task is to see whether similar themes to those presented in Valaskivi's suggestions are also found in the international media coverage of Marin's premiership.

4. Research Method

4.1 Data Collection

In this chapter I will introduce the main research method, data collection plan and standards for data selection which form the basis of the analysis section. The main method of my research was searching for any international news articles, news opinion columns, interviews that dealt with PM Sanna Marin as a politician and a person. By "international media" I specifically mean media reports written in the English and which are, presumably, consumed in various parts of the world. Additionally, I have consulted media items in the Korean language for possible nuance and contrast. In other words the materials I have collected are not limited to media of the United States or the UK, but the language it was published in mattered. To gather research data, I have used the search engine *Google* (www.google.com) to search for articles written in English, and *Naver* (www.naver.com) and *Daum* (www.daum.net) for Korean articles. All the articles I have used include the keyword "Sanna Marin" in the text. I have collected 92 articles in total, of which 58 are in English, 34 are in Korean. The articles were published by renowned news networks, newspapers, magazines, or online news agencies. I did not include blog postings, and postings from unofficial, suspicious websites. After collecting the data, I divided it into several categories. The general pattern of international media was featuring Marin whenever there was an eye-catching event or incident either prompted by her, or involving her. Others simply mentioned Marin when reporting about national issues in Finland or international news in neighboring countries. The main topic of reports was about her election as Prime Minister. High attention was given to the announcement of her female-dominant cabinet, and featured interviews with Marin were easily found, reflecting the international media's high interest.

4.2 Media Analysis

In order to interpret data collected from the media, I used Semiotics – a study of meaning making through signs. Brennen's book *Qualitative research methods for media studies* (2013) defines a sign as something that can be basically anything that represents or stands for something else such as drawings, photographs, paintings, words, acts, sounds, objects and gestures lives (p. 196). Semiotics is the study of these signs that exist in real life (Brennen, 2013, p. 196). Chandler's book *Semiotics: The basics* (2007) also

deals with the basis of semiotics used to interpret photos, signs, symbols. According to his definition, anything that stands for something other than itself can be a sign (p. 13). Like other scholars, Chandler points out the arbitrariness of the sign in the Saussurean model, asserting that it supports the idea that language constructs reality than reflecting it (p. 25). Following this thought, representations can never be neutral and transparent, as they are not identical copies of what they represent (Chandler, 2007, p. 81). Chandler goes on even saying that in fact semiotics enables us to take representation apart from the reality and consider whose realities they represent (p. 82). This is because every representation in any medium must involve a perspective, which creates a gap between the represented and its representation (Chandler, 2007, p. 78). Chandler introduces three codes when interpreting media: the social, textual, and interpretive codes. According to Chandler's categorizing, the social code consists of verbal language, bodily codes such as facial expression, gestures, commodity codes as fashion, and behavioral codes as protocols (p. 149). The second is the textual code, which scientific codes as mathematics, aesthetic codes as painting, music, stylistic codes as narration, mass media codes as photographic, newspaper belong to this category (Chandler, 2007, p. 150). Third is the interpretive code, which includes perceptual codes (visual perception) and ideological codes (individualism, racism, populism) (Chandler, 2007, p. 150). Interpreters interpret these various codes in the media using social and textual knowledge, and the relationship between the world and the medium (Chandler, 2007, p. p. 150). Moreover, in some cases even the absence of something may take on the qualities of a sign (Solomonick, 2015, p.43).

Then how should we face the media when interpreting them as a text? One thing we can learn from previous literature is that we cannot treat them as unmediated or transparent. This is because Semiotics influenced by Saussure already demonstrated that it is an illusion that the medium is transparent (Chandler, 2007, p. 213). To take a deeper look into this matter, there are two writings of Roland Barthes that offer his understandings of how we should interpret media such as image and photography. The *Photographic Message* (1977) contains Barthes' thoughts that a photograph signifies something different to what is shown, and nothing that can tell the photograph is neutral. Yet Barthes also warns that photographs wear an objective mask than any other medium (p. 21). In case of newspaper articles, the texts attached to the photos are only parasitic of the image since in most cases they simply amplify the connotations already given in the photograph. Seldom does the text next to the image produce an entirely new signified (Barthes, 1977, p. 27). Barthes continues writing his commentary on photographs in *Rhetoric of the Image* (1977),

saying that all images are polysemous which leaves the reader to choose some and ignore others (p. 39). The readers never get to encounter a pure state of the image, whereas the photograph contains the myth of naturalness. Barthes writes “the scene is there, captured mechanically, not humanly (the mechanical is here a guarantee of objectivity) (p. 44).”

Peter Hamilton offers a modern understanding of photography, which is not far apart from that of Barthes. In his analysis of French post-war humanist photography, Hamilton claims that photographs seem close to real experience than words since they deal with the images of people in life while writing is made of words. This documentary objectivity is a privilege the photographic image has over written words (Hamilton, 1997, p. 87). Despite that most people nowadays believe that the camera lies, the camera-produced image’s apparent objectivity provides a representational legitimacy that can fix the meaning of a given text (Hamilton, 1997, p. 87).

4.3 Research Ethics

My primary research method is qualitative research method, thus this study does not involve experiments or human participants. Since I have collected and analyzed publicly available data of a public figure, we could leave out the problem of confidentiality, but when using photo data I paid heed not to use other people than PM Marin.

Semiotics was used to examine data with photos and textual data, and the data I used are news articles, column writings, other coverage in English and Korean. I also gathered scholarly data mainly forming the theoretical framework from Andor, Google scholar, electronic libraries, and resource websites.

I have kept in mind to follow the academic guidelines, including citations of the materials (new coverage, articles, photographs, social media reactions) during my research. Also, I have used credible, verifiable sources and data that all have open access to the public.

5. Analysis

While thoroughly going through the articles and analyzing them with the help of semiotics, I found that most articles were concentrated in the themes of Marin as 1) a young and female leader, 2) her marriage and motherhood, 3) a performing politician, 4) crisis leader, and 5) being the leader of Finland. Another interesting point to be found was that a lot of data mentioned or were related to her social media postings, implying the media's interest in her personal life.

5.1 Young, female leader

“Why is there no 'Sanna Marin'?” As seen in this phrase, Marin is depicted in international media as representing a certain generation and gender. The theme of young female leader emerges from the verbal and visual signs that relate to Sanna Marin's age as well as her gender as a woman. Among age-related signs are, for example, ‘35-year-old Marine’, ‘the rising star’, ‘young people’ and gender-related signs are ‘a symbol of progression and hope’, ‘feminist victory’, comparison with other female leaders.

5.1.1 Youngest Prime Minister, Female dominant cabinet

The first category of media reaction is viewing Sanna Marin as a young, female politician which is the most widely-broadcasted theme. In my data, there are numerous articles and reactions related to her election, age and gender reflecting how world media was certainly astonished and interested in this topic. I have classified 32 articles in this category. The constructivist view of the world that the reality is a result of social construction may explain why international media was interested in Marin's age and gender. According to Narain (2017), feminist constructivists in particular study how gender concepts influence global politics, and are also shaped by global politics (p. 423). Patriarchy, a social construction and also dominant social structure of the world, and social relations and equations of power between genders is reflected in it (Narain, 2017, p. 428).

Being both the youngest Prime Minister in the world and also a female leader seems to have flamed interest of world audience. According to Kytölähti (2020), Finnish media not only reported Marin's young age but also wrote about the quick speed of her career progression (p. 31). On the other hand, it seems that international media was not as interested in her career span but was absorbed in her success story as a young, female leader. Although there were articles that explained explicitly about her previous role in the

government and political experience, it was hard to find news articles that were surprised by the speed of her progression. Meanwhile, Kytölahti views that the Finnish media reporting about Marin's speed of progression is actually based on a bias that doubts her on-going success as leader of the country. Kytölahti writes that this "incredulous" tone actually implies that media is underestimating Marin, which follows the pattern female politicians have previously been dwindled by the media (Kytölahti, 2020, pp. 31-2).

The most amount of media attention was given the day Sanna Marin was elected as Prime Minister, which is 9 December 2019. The typical phrase used to represent the event was "Finland's Sanna Marin set to become the world's youngest prime minister at 34." Articles written by *CNBC* (Meredith, S., 2019, December 9), *CNN* (Britton, B. & Ehlinger, M., 2019, December 9), *Aljazeera* (2019, December 9) all used this title. It is noteworthy that *ABC News* additionally highlighted Marin's gender and parentage writing that "The world's youngest prime minister is a woman" and that "Finland's new leader is a new mom" (Kindelan, 2019, December 9). This article also mentioned Marin's political experience, reporting that she was a lawmaker and recently the Minister of Transport and Communications of Finland, also serving as deputy chairwoman of the Social Democratic Party. Mentioning the Prime Minister of New Zealand and Austria's Sebastian Kurz together is a trend found in international media. The late Pakistan Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto is also brought about, although not as often.

Moving back to semiotics, we see here that rhetorical forms as language are involved in shaping reality (Chandler, 2007, p.123). The tone and words media used to deliver Marin's election reflects their idea of the event, let alone the topics and ideas media brings up in relation to her election. For example, in a blog post published on the website of the *Council on Foreign Relations* (Lei, Y. & Turkington, R., 2019, December 13) Marin's election news was classified among other matters related to women. "Finland Elects Woman-Led Coalition Government" was reported in a series along with "Saudi Arabia ends gender-segregated entrances for restaurants", and "rape and murder cases reignite protest in India." The short article delivers Marin's election as follows:

"This week, Finland's newest Prime Minister took office, leading a coalition government in which all five party leaders are *women*. At 34, Sanna Marin is the world's youngest head of state, and three of her other coalition leaders are also younger than 35. Twelve of the nineteen new Finnish cabinet members are *women*, meaning Finland's government has the second-highest percentage of female ministers in the world, after

Spain. Prime Minister Marin represents the Social Democrat Party, and previously served as Transportation Minister after being elected to parliament in 2015. (Lei & Turkington, 2019, December 13. italizations mine)”

The fact that Marin will lead a coalition government with five party leaders whom all are women, seems to accentuate the attention given to her election. The following articles mentioned the female dominant cabinet with equal amount of weight given to Marin’s young age.

ABC News titled its article “Finland’s new 34-year-old prime minister to be youngest in the world, backed by all-female leaders” (2019, December 10), evaluating that Marin was “breaking records and stereotypes for women and young people in politics.” *AP News* found it noteworthy that Marin, and the other coalition leaders were women in their “30s.” *AP news* is rare international media that reported Marin’s rise to the top level of Finnish politics “was rapid.” In the article “Finland gets world’s youngest prime minister, a woman age 34” (Tanner, J., 2019, December 11), *AP news* quoted Marin telling reporters in Helsinki that “As I’ve said, I represent the younger generation.” After quoting that she will not be shaken by reports of her age, it added an interesting comment about Marin’s personality: “After the vote in favor of her appointment, Marin reacted with a faint smile.” There are many articles like this one that describes arbitrary portions of her personality, which seems rather irrelevant to her election news. The article of *The Independent* is one example, quoting a Finnish MP Tytti Tuppurainen’s tweet saying “She’s eminently good” (Tidman, Z. 2019, December 9.) *Reuters* introduced Marin’s favorite music band, writing that she was a long-time fan of “Rage Against The Machine”, an alternative metal band (Kauranen, A. & Virki, T. 2019, December 9). The article mentioning this information seems as if the writer trying to find glimpse of Marin’s dreams of welfare from her music preference.

BBC News, which labeled Marin as a “feminist”, described Marin as an honest, hardworking politician. It quoted Marin saying “I don’t prepare what I say to them, they’ll ask me anything and I’ll answer honestly” (Mohan, M & Eldin, Y. 2020, November 24). It wrote that Marin was the first politician to arrive on site, and was the last politician to leave. Describing her diligent personality gave an impression that Marin was fit to be PM, although she is a young, female leader with lower expectations.

One of the most interesting reports of Marin’s personality was in another report by *BBC News*. Titled “Sanna Marin: The rising star who leads Finland’s 5.5 million” (Greenall,

R. 2019, December 10), this article was the only one that reported Marin's political ambition, and that her election is not a sudden event. The article quoted Kristiina Tolkki, a political journalist from Finland's national broadcaster *YLE*, who commented that for her Marin's rise to the top was something that would happen. Tolkki said "I met her at a ladies' sauna night some years ago and asked her if she was going to be leader. She just looked at me as if to say - are you even asking me this?" Introducing Marin's ambition to rise further while not criticizing it sounded new, considering the stereotypes of female leaders often seen in media.

Many other articles were interested in Marin's personal background and childhood, highlighting that she was raised in a "rainbow family" financially far from being wealthy. Overall, several media expressed elevation by the fact that a young woman was elected as Prime Minister, and a sense of yearning for this to happen in other countries as well. *The World Economic Forum* was straightforward to write, "what are other countries doing?" (Basana, G. 2019, December 9).

Articles that were concerned about Marin's future as PM were rare to find, although it does not mean that there were none. One example is *Aljazeera's* Opinion column titled "Before Sanna Marin came Benazir Bhutto: Is having a female leader definitive proof that a country has reached gender equality?" (Liuhto, M. 2019, December 26). In this column, Liuhto questions the expectations given to Marin, mentioning Benazir Bhutto's tragic fate and scarce contributions to raising women's rights. Her main concern is that the presence of a woman leader is no definitive proof that a country reached gender equality. Marin's rise to power may be far from "feminist victory" since while Finland is known for gender equality, there are also high rates of rape and domestic violence in the country. Politically, *Finns Party* which does not favor gender equalities is most popular in Finland, and the people who elected Marin was her own party members than ordinary citizens. The writer shows concern that Marin will face fierce opposition during her tenure, and that all of this negativity is concealed by the celebratory media coverage of her election. The writer nevertheless acknowledges the symbolical importance of Marin's election, while still asserting the main point, "having a woman lead a country does not automatically mean that women are faring well there."

The photograph *Aljazeera* used in this article has space for interpretation. In the creation of reality, images and metaphors are the key players, as they are the first available object for interpretation, and are contextualized to create layers of interpretation (Freistein & Gadinger, 2020, p. 225). Images used for news articles have their own

characteristics, which Roland Barthes explains in detail in “The Photographic Message” (1977). In this essay Barthes writes that the structure of the photograph is in communication with the structure of the text or title, caption and these two structures are co-operative but necessarily remain separate (p. 16). While the message in a text is made of words, in the photograph it is made of lines, surfaces, shades (p. 16). The photo in *Aljazeera’s* article is a deliberate choice to amplify the message of the article.



Pakistanis elected 35-year-old Benazir Bhutto as their prime minister more than 30 years before 34-year-old Sanna Marin's ascent to power in Finland [Reuters]

Figure 1. Is having a female leader definitive proof that a country has reached gender equality? Picture of Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin and former Prime Minister of Pakistan, Benazir Bhutto. Image: Aljazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2019/12/26/before-sanna-marin-came-benazir-bhutto>

Analyzing the image with the help of semiotics we learn that *Aljazeera* placed a two shot photograph of Marin and Bhutto confronting each other in its article. Since the signifier seems to be identical with its signified in photography, the photograph appears to be a natural sign (Chandler, 2007, p.138). Chandler’s definition of denotation is the definitional, literal, obvious, common-sense meaning of a sign, while connotation is context-dependent, referring to the socio-cultural, personal associations of the sign (pp. 137-138). In this photo, the denotative message is two female leaders looking at each other over some distance. When we recognize them as Marin and Bhutto, we can find that the two women are used as signs that represent female leadership. As much as they are different in race, age, timeline, background, country, as a person, being female leaders makes them almost alike as the similar shade of the photo background which is even bigger than their faces. Marin’s lively smiling face and the late Bhutto’s solemn expression makes a striking

contrast, while the dark background creates a dim atmosphere. Considering the article's doubt towards female leadership, the photo acts as a strong visual metaphor reflecting the article's negative predictions of PM Marin's future. Is having a female leader definitive proof that a country has reached gender equality? The connotative message of the photo seems to suggest that it is not.

In addition, *BBC News* also gives a rather dim prediction of Marin's future. In the article written on the day of her election, the writer mentioned the two previous female prime ministers who were short-lived.

Politico's opinion section is also watchful of evaluating Marin's election as equivalent as Finland being a feminist utopia. It writes "Finland has come a long way. But being on the path to progress is not the same as being a utopia. It would be dangerous to claim victory too soon" (Abdulkarim, M. 2019, December 12).

Interesting enough, Sanna Marin's own reaction to the media fuzz about her age and gender could be found in some news articles. In *CNBC's* article, Marin seems astonished by international attention saying that "Actually I didn't focus on the media attention so much." The article was titled "Finland's Sanna Marin hopes women leaders will be the 'new normal'" (McKeever, V. 2020, January 23), implying that Marin may not be all pleased about the attention's focus on her age and gender. Although she acknowledged that the global community talking about her election has meaning, she also joked that her government does not "meet in female locker rooms and have locker room talk."

The Washington Post also introduces Marin's own opinion revealing that she less focused on the symbolism of her election. It quoted Marin saying "I have never thought about my age or gender; I think of the reasons I got into politics and those things for which we have won the trust of the electorate" (Noack, R. 2019, December 9).



Figure 2. *Time* magazine's *The Next 100* most influential people rising leader Sanna Marin, *The BBC 100 women list 2020* featuring Marin. Image: *TIME*. <https://time.com/collection/time100-next-2021/5937699/sanna-marin/> *BBC*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-55042935>

Celebrating Marin being selected as one of *TIME*'s "The Next 100 most influential people", *TIME* released an article titled "Finland's Sanna Marin, the World's Youngest Female Head of Government, Wants Equality, Not Celebrity" (Abend, L. 2020). Sanna Marin's right face with firm, uplifted gaze in the cover photo gives an impression that she will not look back and march towards the future. This photo which was taken at Kesäranta, the official residence of the Finnish Prime Minister, has a behind story. The article explained that the photographer had attempted to capture Marin with a certain pose: knees turned slightly to the side, hands joined in her lap. However, Marin who has been in office for "just 11 days" faced the camera with legs slightly apart, and rested her hands firmly on her thighs saying, "This is how you would do it if I were a man." Marin's attitude matches her reaction to media attention being concentrated to her age and gender. The article described it as, "Yet once again, in her quiet, firm way, she rejects the label." Marin said "Greta Thunberg is not a role model because she's a young girl. It's because she's a voice for climate. She's talking about issues, and that's what inspires people."

The interview with *Vogue* shows Marin's detailed opinion about her gender. Marin said "In every position I've ever been in, my gender has always been the starting point – that I am a young woman," with some exasperation (Kale, S. 2020, October 16). The interview wrote how Marin feels about her being a symbol of progression and hope, and it

seems that for Marin it is another burden. Marin called “It’s a trap!” expressing her concern that if she fails as PM people will try to find the cause from her gender.

Although there are myriads of articles focusing on her gender, only a few reported about how she felt about this phenomenon. What we can find from this is that the opinion of an active female leader is often silenced, instead of being highlighted.

Like other international media, Marin’s election news was widely reported among Korean media. Korean media was not only alarmed by Marin’s age and gender, but also viewed her election as an opportunity to look back on Korean politics. By contrast to the international media, the election also acted as a chance to introduce Finland, a country rarely mentioned in Korean news sections. By contrast to the international media, the country image aspect is quite prominent in Korean materials. The articles compare Korea, the nation which gender equality in politics is still in the initial status with Finland, where gender equality has been well-established for decades.

In the article “The youngest prime minister in the world takes office in Finland...Women ministers in 12 ministries” (2019, December 11, author’s translation), *Newsis* reported that there is high anticipation for Prime Minister Marin, and in Finland 47% of the parliament is composed of women. It also wrote that Marin’s active use of social media also attracted attention.

The JoongAng showed interest in the Finnish coalition government led by five women leaders. In the article “A 34-year-old female prime minister was born...Five women leading the Finnish government” (Kim, J., 2019, December 9), it was reported that even outside the political arena, gender equality systems and culture are well established in Finland. This article is an example of the country image representation intersecting with the representation of Sanna Marin. The article had a photo of Marin and four women leaders with their political parties and age shown in the background. The article commented that Marin “rose to prominence” in Finnish politics at the age of 27 when she worked as a member of the Tampere City Council. The article “What if she’s the youngest female prime minister? A thirty-four life that caught both work and love” (Jeong, E., 2020, August 5, *The JoongAng*, author’s translation), covered Marin’s rise to Prime Minister as a success story. It wrote that contrary to her splendid political history, she lived a “shattered life” under an alcohol-addicted father and divorced parents. It pointed out Finland's political culture that shows no resistance to young female leaders as an important background of her election. It also wrote that during her time as chairman of the city council, Marin gained public

recognition by not avoiding difficult questions in TV debates and adhering to principled answers.

The following series of articles focus on the lesson Korea can learn from Marin's election. They end up with a similar conclusion that Korean politics should sincerely promote the participation of youth. What the articles have in common is bringing the question of country image into the game of representations by suggesting a comparison between Finland and Korea. *Pressian's* "There is a politics that valued more than 'votes' from young people" starts with a question most Korean media would like to ask when first hearing Marin's election: "What if Sanna Marin lived in Korea?" The article concludes that the answer is negative. This article even offered a unique recreation of Marin's childhood in her point of view:

In March 2000, a girl sat in front of a TV watching the election of Tarja Halonen as the first female president in Finnish history. It was a historical moment for Finland as well as an unforgettable moment for the girl. This is because she now confirmed with her own eyes that women, regardless of gender, can rise to the top. The girl's name was Sanna Marin. (Cho, H., 2021, December 13, author's translation)

Then why isn't something like Finland happening in Korea? The article found answer from the old average age of lawmakers and low proportion of women in the National Assembly. The article explained that the fundamental reason for this is the system that prevents people from participating in politics as well as having any interest in politics, delaying socioeconomic democratization in Korean society.

SisaOn's "Why is there no 'Sanna Marin' in Korea?" (Cho, S., 2019, December 12, author's translation) raises the same question. The articles found cause from high unemployment rate of young people and society's atmosphere that makes it difficult for young people to enter political parties. The article quoted Sanna Marin's "I never thought about age or gender" and ends with the question "Can a future irrespective of age and gender be possible for Korea?"

34세 여성총리 탄생...핀란드 정부 이끄는 5인의 여성

중앙일보 | 입력 2019.12.09 18:11 업데이트 2019.12.09 18:27

김지혜 기자 [구독](#)



핀란드 연립정부를 이끌고 있는 5명의 당 지도자들. (트위터 캡처)



Figure 3. “Korean media coverage of PM Marin focusing on the female-dominant cabinet and comparison with other young European leaders” Image: The JoongAng, DongA Ilbo. <https://www.joongang.co.kr/article/23841329>, <https://www.joongang.co.kr/article/23652536>, <https://www.donga.com/news/article/all/20210604/107277771/1>

Donga Ilbo which used Marin’s shirtless *Trendi* photo in the front tried to find reason why there are many young leaders in Western developed countries. In its article “Young leaders, why they exist in Europe and not in Korea” (Kim, Y., 2021, June 5, author’s translation), it explained about the long-established system for nurturing young politicians in European countries, and emergence of new tasks such as polarization, immigration, and climate change that cannot be solved with the old political grammar. In the photo the first denotative message we grasp is the multiple faces of women and men. If we take a closer look, we can find that they are all European leaders in their thirty-forties. An even proximate look enables readers to find French President Emmanuel Macron bigger than the other six leaders in the upper background, and PM Marin even bigger in the forefront. The connotative message of this photo is that there are these many young leaders in Europe, which include already well-known politicians like Macron and now even a newly elected female leader who happens to be among the youngest of the group. The photo signifies that the advent of a young leader like Marin is not all bizarre but has been trend

over the past years in Europe. Here not only Finland, but Europe is represented as the region of abundant young leadership, and Marin's election is seen in accordance with this.

Alike international media, the theme of youth also emerges in Korean media through signifiers that explicitly cite Sanna Marin's young age. *DailyTruth's* "Finland's female prime minister in her 30s and Korean prime minister in his 70s" (Ryu, J. 2019, December 20, author's translation) criticized how indifferent Korean politics has been to fostering and discovering young politicians. None of the candidates elected in the 16th to 20th general election were in their 20s. The solution proposed by this article is opening the gates wider for those who are not yet ready to participate in politics. Another example of how country image and representations of Marin intersect is *Hangeorye's* article about Finland's youth politics which has been receiving the most attention lately and introduced the 'Vaalikone' system operated by Finnish public broadcaster *YLE*. This is a unique system that can check the level of agreement between voters and candidates regarding various policies (Shin, S. 2020, March 29, author's translation). The article was also interested that Prime Minister Sanna Marin expressed confidence that she already had more than 10 years of political experience, and provided a hyperlink to 'Vaalikone.'

Ohmynews also highlighted that Sanna Marin already joined the Social Democrats in her early twenties and started her political career at the university and local level (Seo, H. 2020, March 10, author's translation). It reported that this is not an exceptional path in Finland as the representatives of other young political parties involved in the government all have similar histories. The article explained that party membership is allowed from the age of 15 in Finland, and there exists a full-scale (region-by-region) proportional representation election system in the Parliament and local government elections, enabling a wide spectrum of multi-party systems and consensus democracy.

DongA Ilbo linked Prime Minister Ardern of New Zealand and Marin in "Maori-LGBT Minister Important to 40-year-old Ardern, 35-year-old Marine appoints a 16-year-old girl as Prime Minister" (Kim, Y. 2021, November 30, author's translation). It wrote that Ardern selected five Maori origin and three sexual minority ministers among the 20 ministers, while Marin made a surprising move appointing a 16-year-old girl Aina-Maria Murto as daily Prime Minister ahead of International Girls Day.

MoneyToday compared a young environmental lawyer nominated from the Democratic Party of Korea as MP candidate, to the Finnish Prime Minister in "Lee So-young, an environmental lawyer who dreams of becoming Korea's Sanna Marin, being the

same age born in 1985 year of the cow” (You, H., 2020, March 6, author’s translation). When asked about her political role model, she said, "I don't want to find it in Korea," and picked young European politicians without hesitation.

5.1.2 Sexism

Feminist social constructionists view gender as a social construct that varies over time and place while maintaining unequal power relations and a hierarchy of masculine over feminine characteristics (True & Hewitt, 2018, p. 93). Despite that *ABC News* evaluated that Marin was “breaking records and stereotypes for women and young people in politics” (10.12.2019), global news articles that dealt with Marin followed the typical bias found in coverage of female leaders. Media was not only interested in Marin’s age and gender, but the attention was spread to her fashion style and social media postings. In the language of semiotics, the connotations of this way of representing female leaders are sexist. This tendency is not very apart from news coverage of former British PM Theresa May’s outfit and leopard shoes, and commonly found reports of other female leaders. From Margaret Thatcher’s pearl necklace and lavish hairstyle to Angela Merkel’s shortly cut hair styling and two-piece outfit, the media is often intensely interested in female politician’s fashion. Although news articles reported the backlash against some people on social media who commented on Marin's appearance, media itself was not free from receiving the same criticism.

One particular incident that shows how media reports sexism debates on female leaders is how Marin’s photograph in the *Trendi* magazine was reported. In this photo, Marin posed with a blazer with wearing nothing underneath. Immense attention was given to Marin’s topless photograph, and numerous women protested against the criticism by sharing their shirtless photos in social media.

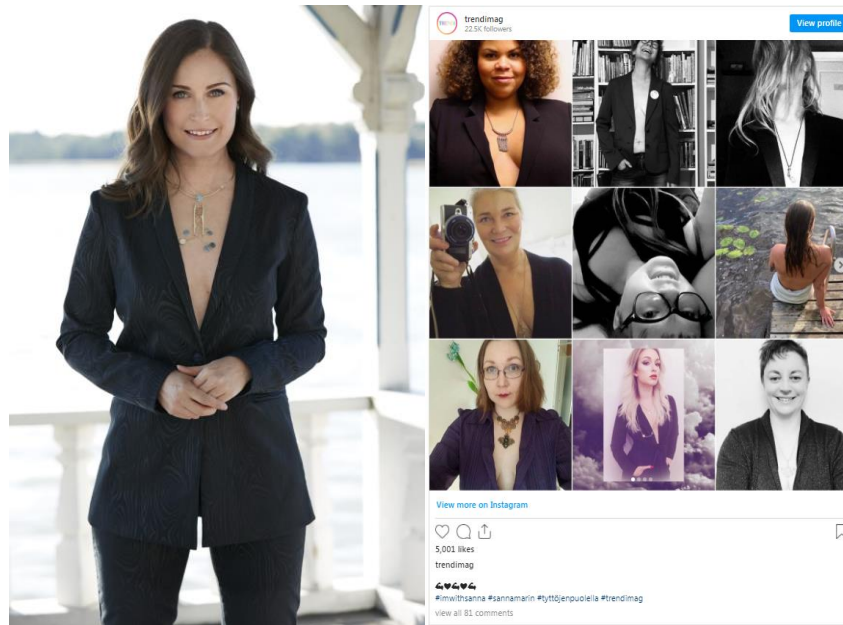


Figure 4. Photo of PM Sanna Marin’s braless style posted with her interview with Finnish magazine *Trendi* sparked debate with immense support in social media. Image: CNN. <https://edition.cnn.com/style/article/sanna-marin-finland-pm-trendi-photoshoot-intl-scli/index.html>

In the photo, the denotative message is that Marin is wearing a black outfit that could be said formal, with a fancy necklace, smiling, a lake and woods in the background. However, the people who criticized this photo saw the Prime Minister shirtless underneath the jacket. For them it was shocking to see the Prime Minister taking an official photo in this fashion. Meanwhile, multiple photos of women posting themselves wearing a black blazer without a shirt seems no more than individual postings of daily fashion lives. However, when we find the similarities between those postings and Marin’s outfit, we can read the connotative message that Marin’s fashion style in the *Trendi* photo is ordinary. The international media, by contrast, represented the incident in way which had sexist connotations.

CNN News wrote that Marin’s photo was seen as a “waste of the Prime Minister's time” when the government was battling the coronavirus pandemic (Woodyatt, A. 2020, October 17). *Dailymail* capitalized the word TOPLESS in the article title, and referred supporters of Marin as “Ms. Marin's outraged fans” (Green, J. 2020, October 15), while other media as *the Independent* called them “supporters” of the Prime Minister (Young, S. 2020, October 16). *Dailymail* further explained Marin’s frequent use of social media describing her as a politician for the millennial 'Instagram generation.' The general tone of the articles could be seen supportive of Marin, but the rising problem is the vocabulary

used and extreme interest given to this topic, which legitimizes classifying the representations as sexist in terms of their connotation. Introducing the opposing people's comments and negative campaigning of this incident multiple times while leaving out Marin's voice is problematic. It is ironic that whatever the tone of media was, eventually Marin's photo and criticism were widely reported overseas while the support given by women was not fully delivered. Marin's photo is not equivalent to some tabloid topics surrounding foreign politicians, yet international media reported it in such manner.

Another incident that sparked interest was Marin and other coalition leaders confessing the amount of hate they had been receiving as female leaders. *Reuters* reported that "Finland's PM says young female government has been target of hate speech" (Lehto, E. & Kauranen, A., 2022, January, 20), writing that Marin will not tolerate such behavior though she is concerned about the hurtful nature of social media. It quotes Marin saying "Globally the image of a leader is still very masculine..., and there are few decision-makers from a younger generation," also adding that she wanted to change this.

Sussex Bylines wrote that the harsh hate comments towards Marin and her cabinet is too extreme even though there is the pandemic and growing dissatisfaction with the current government (Kanjilal, M. 2021, March 6). Based on this backlash, the article advises to take "a closer look" before labeling Finland as the feminist utopia.

Perhaps *Politico* offers the dimmest explanation of the online harassment, commenting that the attacks resulted in some female politicians becoming afraid to speak out (Cater, L. 2021, March 17). It added that although Finland's female-led government brought hopes about an equal future, the misogynistic abuse in the internet shows that at least hope failed online.

Finland's women-led government targeted by online harassment

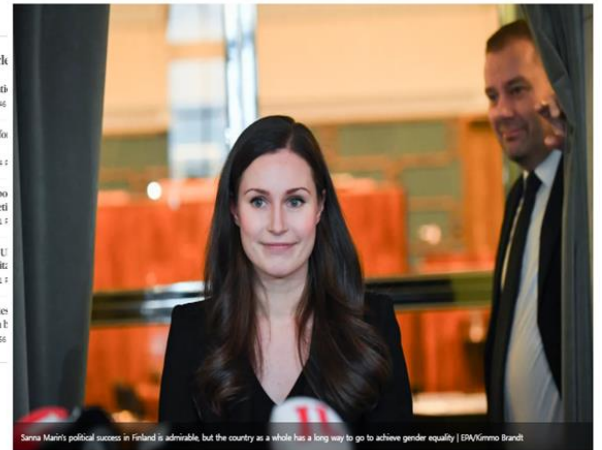
The online attacks have left some female politicians afraid to speak out.



Finland Prime Minister Sanna Marin | Jonathan Hadstrand/AP via Getty Images

Finland is no feminist utopia

Despite pioneering female politicians like Sanna Marin, Finnish society is far from gender-balanced.



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Sanna Marin's political success in Finland is admirable, but the country as a whole has a long way to go to achieve gender equality | EPA/Gimmo Brandt

Figure 5. Face of PM Marin portrayed at the center of women, feminist issues. Image: Politico. <https://www.politico.eu/article/sanna-marin-finland-online-harassment-women-government-targeted/> <https://www.politico.eu/article/finland-is-no-feminist-utopia/>

In the photo used for *Politico's* article, the headline contradicts the image to produce an entirely new signified. In *The Photographic Message* (1977), Barthes explains that since the headline or article of a photo remains separate from the image, they have an obvious effect of connotation (p. 26). Here, the headline's "Finland is no feminist utopia" and PM Main's happy face in the photo completely contradict one another. Moreover, when explaining about metaphors in *Semiotics: The basics* (2007), Daniel Chandler explains that although the signifier of the ironic sign seems to signify one thing, it is evident from another signifier that it actually signifies something very different (p. 134). The photo used for this article creates irony by aggravating the contradictory situation in Finland which the country's female leader is receiving hate messages.

Considering the huge interest in Marin's election, age and gender, Korean media's next coverage was rather unexpected. Marriage and picture in a fashion magazine were delivered to Koreans audience instead of the new Finnish Prime Minister's policies. *Segye Ilbo* wrote that despite the controversy, the Prime Minister's "unconventional" and "bold" outfit gained support from the majority of women and also some men (Choi, S., 2020, October 16, author's translation).

Meanwhile *Women News* reported in its article "Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin: Young female minister is a target of hate" (You, Y., 2022, January 21, author's translation) that Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin and young female ministers have been the target

of hatred because of their “sex and appearance”. It explained that Marin who has 540,000 Instagram followers have been also attacked for appearing in the world's largest fashion magazines and frequent meetings with pop singers and celebrities.

5.2 Marriage and motherhood

International media is certainly interested in Marin’s personal life. This is not that uncommon taking into account other leaders actively using social media, but what stands out about the coverage of Marin is the concentration on her motherhood and family.

In her analysis of Finnish media response, Kytölahti offers a comparison between Sanna Marin and her predecessor Antti Rinne. She noticed that no news headlines announced what kind of a father Rinne was while he also posted pictures on social media including his family (pp. 32-3).

The situation seems no different in what is in this referred to as international media. Among her social media postings, those related to Marin’s marriage and motherhood such as breastfeeding, received most attention. Even though the photo simply showed a mother breastfeeding her baby, the fact that the woman is a Prime Minister seems to have made it all different for the media.

Dailymail mentioned the breastfeeding photo in the title "A politician for the Instagram generation: World's youngest prime minister Sanna Marin, 34, of Finland shares VERY candid breastfeeding snaps and glamorous nights out on social media." (Richardson, H. 2019, December 9). Among the numerous social media posts, this article was interested in her pregnancy journey, sharing selfies of her pregnancy bump, breastfeeding shot and holiday trip photos. Although Marin posted numerous photos of press conferences, national ceremonies, world news coverage and the awards she received, these topics are included in articles unrelated to her social media activities.

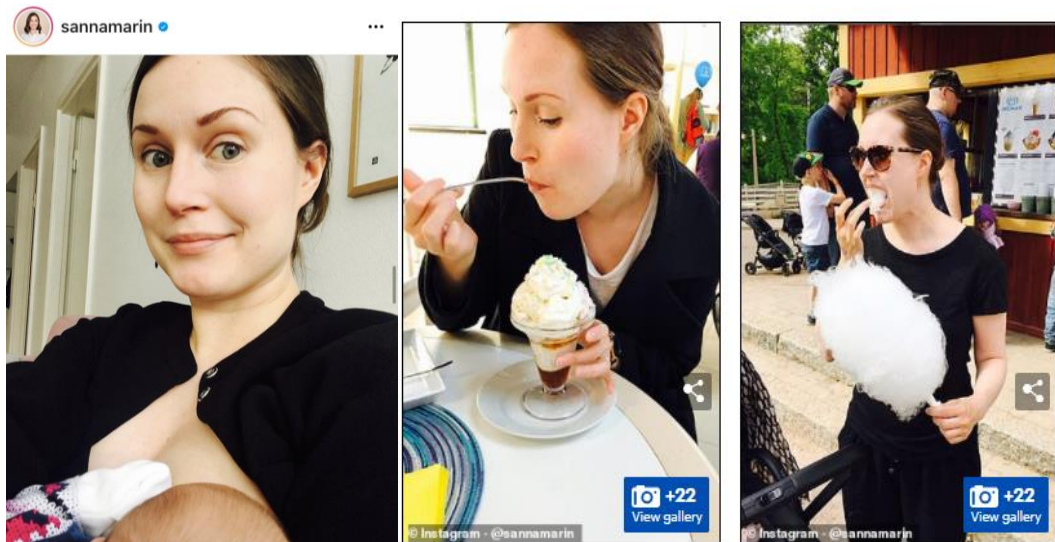


Figure 6. Instagram posts of Marin breastfeeding and eating sweets. Image: Dailymail. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-7771821/A-politician-Instagram-generation-Meet-worlds-youngest-prime-minister-Sanna-Marin-34.html>

The Prime Minister's marriage also caught global attention. Although most reports were informative of the event, media was particularly interested that the couple already had a child. *CBS News* reported that the Finnish prime minister married her longtime partner, offering detailed information of the groom including his name, occupation and that they have been together for 16 years while already having a 2-year-old daughter together (Linton, C. 2020, August 2).

The Independent's article title was "Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin partner of 16 years: Couple have a two-and-a-half-year-old daughter together" (Barr, S. 2020, August 3), also emphasizing presence of the child. The article was also interested in Marin's outfit, writing "the bride wore a satin gown by Finnish fashion label Anniruth," while only saying that the groom was dressed in a black tux.

Meanwhile, there is another viewpoint regarding the media attention given to Marin's social media postings. *Euronews* quoted Tampere University professor Johanna Kantola, who views that Marin is controlling the story of motherhood by herself: "A lot of women politicians in Finland are using Instagram in very specific ways to share about their pregnancy or having small children and leading a political career, so it's also a question of controlling this story yourself" (Chadwick, J. 2020, December 10). In this case, international media is focusing on what Marin actually wants to receive spotlight, and she has control over what catches media attention. Constructionists point out the existence of gender-biased labor structures which divide work into public productive male labor and

private reproductive female care work. These binary social constructs view masculine characteristics such as power, rationality, autonomy to possess more value than feminine characteristics of weakness, emotionality, dependency (True & Hewitt, 2018, p. 93). Marin's Instagram posts showing her life and labor as a mother could be her expression that this often degraded and neglected role is as important as being a political leader.

Korean media was also quick to report Marin's marriage news. *Chosun Ilbo* wrote that her wedding photo on Instagram had already received 80,000 'Likes' in two hours (Son, J., 2020, August 4, author's translation). This article asserted that Finland is called 'the country of Amazones', meaning that it is ruled by women. It explained that Prime Minister Marin made headlines shortly after appointing 12 female ministers, and the female-dominant situation is similar in the Social Democratic Party, and the Parliament.

Maeil Economics was interested in Marin's small wedding in the article "Stopped Corona and caught love...34-year-old Finnish prime minister holds 'small wedding'" (Jin, Y., 2020, August 3, author's translation). It emphasized that the event was a 'small wedding' with only 40 guests including family and friends in attendance. Small wedding is a trend in Korea and is considered meaningful opposing to lavish traditional weddings with hundreds of attendants. The hidden implication behind calling Marin's wedding a small wedding is criticizing Korean high class weddings showing that even the leader of a country can have a modest wedding. Interestingly, the article also introduced that among the Nordic countries, the Danish Prime Minister held a wedding recently.

5.3 Performing politician

Prime Minister Marin is known to often share her opinion about topics such as environmental issues, human rights, education. Considering the amount of articles focusing on Marin's election and female-dominant cabinet, Marin is relatively less often introduced as a politician and MP of the Social Democratic Party. Nevertheless, although not as heated as reports related to Marin's age and social media, international media showed interest in several specific policies. The topics covered by international media narrowed down to gender, climate changes, and basic income policies.

Bloomberg was interested in post-pandemic gender policies in Finland. The article mentioned "Marin, mother to three-year-old daughter Emma" said many of the solutions are structural, and women should be actors in policy making than subjects" (Pohjanpalo, K. & Laikola, L. 2021, August 26). Marin was also quoted saying, "Equality is no silo, no

single sector, but equality is something that happens when it is taken into account in all walks of life and policy” reflecting the importance of integrity in her leadership.

The World Economic Forum’s introduction page for Marin was titled “It just doesn't happen by itself”: Sanna Marin calls for gender equality laws” (Goldsmith, B. 2020, January 30), depicting Marin as an active and determined leader. Marin underscored that equality would not happen by itself, urging governments and companies to do more to ensure women are treated impartially. This implies that the PM herself has enthusiasm in promoting gender equality, and thinks of it as a priority. *World Economic Forum* featured PM Marin’s own interview about climate policies in its series of articles written by Young Global Leaders (2021, May 18). In this interview Marin wrote “Finland’s climate targets are among the most ambitious in the world. My country aims to be a leader among advanced economies,” proving that she has a high and clear goal regarding this issue.

Euronews took a deeper look into Finland’s transgender policies and racism issues. The article acknowledged the Marin government’s progressive gender policies to a certain extent, but it also criticized that progress is lacking in certain areas (Chadwick, J. 2020, December 10). *Forbes* was suspicious of Marin’s goal of building a socially, economically and ecologically sustainable Finland, calling it “ambivalent” (Basaria, N. 2020, December 12). Since it is not easy to judge how Marin’s government is handling its first year, it warns that the “young Prime Minister” will have to prove the effectiveness of her cabinet.

The Sun called Marin “a left-winger within her party and a strong defender of Finland's generous welfare state”, introducing Marin’s gender policies and struggle to solve homelessness (Adu, A. 2019, December 9). It wrote Marin is “prioritizing equality” and to close the gender pay gap, will adopt a new parental system that enables more men to use parental leaves.

Along with efforts to promote gender equality, Marin’s policies to tackle climate change also received attention. *The Nomad Today* quoted Marin saying “Climate change is the greatest threat to humankind” (Lipchis, E. 2020, February 4). It introduced Marin government’s objective was turning Finland into the world’s first carbon neutral welfare society by 2035, stressing how interested the PM is in this issue.

Finland’s basic income policy or experiment had been a highly debatable topic globally. Many doubt the effectiveness of this policy to increase employment, while it has proven to improve people's mental well-being. *Dailymail* wrote that the basic income policy is unsustainable due to the limited effect in improving employment levels (Stickings, T.

2020, May 6). It wrote that although the health minister said the experiment would be useful for future reforms, PM Marin does not plan to introduce such an income. Meanwhile *BloombergQuint* also reported the ineffectiveness of the policy and that Marin will not introduce it further (Pohjanpalo, K. 2020, May 6). It added that the coalition government wants instead to look into a negative income tax, which allows low income earners receiving a payment while stop paying taxes to the government.

Korean articles showed high interest in Finland's basic income experiment and welfare policies, reflecting the heated debate over applying these policies in Korea. Written by a Korean adjunct professor of Tampere University, *Pressian* offered an overall analysis and prospect of Finnish politics. Through Sanna Marin's speeches, the writer discovered that the Nordic social democracy and welfare state model, which are recently described to be out of date, still shows off its lasting vitality (Seo, H., 2020, August 31, author's translation). The writer was positive about the high level of gender equality, women's political participation, and the fact that human rights of the socially disadvantaged and minorities are being guaranteed at a high level. This seems to have relevance with Finland's country image as an egalitarian society with high gender-equality achievements.

Another article published by *Pressian* was interested in the philosophy of Finland's 34-year-old female PM's government, especially about the basic income experiment. The writer found no meaning in the slight increase of happiness, although evaluating that the experiment proved that Finland is the world's best country for innovation and experimentation (Kang, C., 2021, March 22, author's translation). The article quoted Marin saying, "I was born into a poor family. Without a strong welfare state and Finnish education system, I would not have been able to succeed and move forward" commenting that this is a very valuable lesson. It seems that in this article, the image of Finland as a welfare state is relevant in the representations of Marin.

Contrary to bleak interpretations regarding the basic income experiment, *Hangeorye 21's* "Lessons from the Finnish Basic Income Experiment" (Seo, H., 2020, May 22, author's translation) found hope in it. It explained that while many international media reported that Finland's basic income experiment had failed, it is still noteworthy that the employment rate of basic income recipients did not decrease. The writer wrote that Marin government's program includes a new basic income experiment plan and budget, although it is unclear whether the project will actually be pursued.

Hangeorye's "Why Finland wants to reform its health and welfare delivery system" (Shin, Y., 2021, March 16, author's translation) is a rare article that question's Finland's

welfare policy regarding the healthcare system. It reported that Marin's cabinet is preparing a new health and welfare service reform plan, but it is too early to predict whether it will succeed. The reason for Marin's reform plans is Finland's shortage of manpower, low accessibility, and long waiting times in the medical service. The article concludes that this shows that the Finnish welfare state is not always efficient or successful, for it is also a place where people live.

5.4 Crisis Leader

5.4.1 Reacting to the pandemic

Media reaction to Marin dealing with the pandemic is highly influenced by the fact that Finland did well as a nation. During the first wave there were mainly praises about the Finnish Government's reaction in comparison with the Sweden government which went for herd immunity policies. Most articles published during this time spoke highly of Marin's leadership. As Marin took office right before the pandemic, it was the first hurdle for the international audience to evaluate her as a leader.

While listing reasons of nominating Marin as one of 2021 TIME 100 NEXT, the magazine praised her performance far exceeded what had been expected from her age: "Globally, Sanna Marin has been celebrated for becoming Prime Minister so young. However, she is not a political novice, and during the pandemic, she has proved that good leadership does not depend on age. Times of crisis show us what people are made of" (Solberg, E. 2021, February 17). The magazine also predicted a bright future for Marin commenting: "She's an important part of a strong team of women political leaders in the Nordic-Baltic region."

Similarly, when explaining the reason behind nominating Marin as one of BBC 100 Women 2020, *BBC* pointed out Marin's reaction to the pandemic as one of the factors that proved her to be worth the pick. The articles quoted Marin saying, "We as women leaders can show that it is possible to fight the virus and at the same time tackle climate change, invest in education and make socially just reforms in society" (2020, November 23).

Another *BBC News* article compared Marin with other female leaders in Taiwan, Germany and New Zealand, commenting that she was praised and placed in the same category with the others (Mohan, M & Eldin, Y. 2020, November 24). Interesting enough, it is clear that Marin does not think her leadership should be gender-based. Marin said that some countries with men leaders have also done well. Her opinion of Finland's successful reaction is the result of listening to scientists and making bold decisions in uncertainty.

Although titled “‘RAINBOW CHILD’ Who is Sanna Marin? The world’s youngest Prime Minister” (Adu, A. 2019, December 9), *The Sun’s* article also praises Marin’s handling of the coronavirus crisis reporting that roughly 5.5 million people live in the country, but there are under 1,400 Covid-19 fatalities, one of the lowest per capita death rates in the world.

Arkans News shows the most noteworthy comments of Marin, naming her with outstanding phrases such as “a graceful warrior, an innovator who breaks stereotypes and taboos, a strong-minded egalitarian, a rebel against sexism, a role model who continues her fight with a low voice and without being rude” (Cengiz, D). The article highly praised Marin’s “calm and determined attitude” and evaluated that she acted as a role model during the pandemic.

Some articles picked communication skills as one of the factors Marin and other female leader’s actions shined during the spread of the virus. *Euronews* paid heed to the fact that countries led by female leaders prevented more infections and deaths, and Marin’s leadership shows a connection with these other women (Chadwick, J. 2020, December 10). The article introduced a study conducted by the University of Reading, and that woman leaders’ communication style was selected as one of the reasons of the success. *Forbes* also mentioned Marin’s “very clear communication skill” and reliance on outside expertise as the key to success (Basaria, N. 2020, December 12).

So far it is evident that during the first wave of the coronavirus, a majority of articles favored Marin government’s reaction to the pandemic. However, sudden turn of events transformed the international media’s tone of reporting and evaluation of Marin’s leadership.

Fox News reported the incident as “Finland’s 36-year-old prime minister apologizes for clubbing after COVID-19 close contact Sanna Marin was reportedly out at a Helsinki nightclub around 3 a.m.” (Best, P. 2021, December 8). The article introduced other cases which Nordic leaders have also violated COVID-19 rules including the Norwegian Prime Minister and a senior Swedish official. Comparing this title with the *Reuters* about the same incident titled “Finland’s PM apologises for not isolating after night club photo surfaces” (Leht, E. 2021, December 9) shows that *Fox News* continued to highlight Marin’s young age even in this incident. Meanwhile, *Reuters* quoted Marin’s apology to this incident saying, “I did wrong. I should have considered the situation more carefully.” It also reported that previously Marin wrote on Facebook that her state secretary had said “ministers would not be quarantined because they all have been vaccinated twice,”

explaining why she continued socializing. The tone of this article was relatively neutral, not accusing Marin's Facebook posting as dull excuses. The article also wrote Marin's point of view letting her explain about the incident, but it did not introduce the exact pandemic rules or whether the PM had broken them.

Politico's title regarding this incident was "Saturday night fever! Finnish PM Sanna Marin under fire over nightclub trip" (Duxbury, C. 2021, December 7). In spite of the provocative title, unlike most other articles it explained in detail that Marin's act was not going against Finnish rules: "Under Finland's current rules, doubly vaccinated citizens like Marin don't have to isolate if a contact tests positive, meaning the prime minister was formally allowed to socialize." The process of Marin's apology was presented in detail as well, along with her negative PCR test result. It is interesting that *Politico* found Marin's inability to react to media opinion as the main reason behind the fierce criticism towards her. The article interviewed a professor at Finland's Åbo Akademi expressing his opinion about the incident, and concluded that "Analysts said Marin's ability, or lack thereof, to sense and react to public and media opinion is likely to remain in sharp focus." *Politico* went further also bringing up another incident which Marin was reported to have spent €845 monthly on catering at the official residence. The article showed highly negative coverage of Marin's acts, writing that those are examples which Marin's judgment has been questioned.

Korean media followed the pattern of international media, first delivering news that Finland was doing an outstanding job fighting covid. *SisaIn* published an article examining how UK, US, China, Germany, Japan, Singapore, France, Sweden, Finland are fighting the pandemic. The article wrote that the key word for Finland was "light and darkness (valot ja varjot)" (Byeon, J., 2022, January 14, author's translation). The keywords were extracted from Marin's New Year's address, calling the beginning of vaccination, the resumption of daily life, solidarity with each other as examples of "light", while calling the long-term cost of health care paralysis, economic slowdowns, gaps in care and learning as examples of "darkness." It ended that Marin was not optimistic about 2022, and she will do her best to ensure that there are more bright days than dark days.

Hangeorye praised Marin's leadership explicitly writing that "34-year-old Prime Minister Sanna Marin and female ministers stopped 'Finland's coronavirus'" (Seo, H., 2020, July 19, author's translation). It called the Finnish government's response to COVID-19 "excellent" and quoted a recent opinion poll conducted by the Finnish media also showing a positive evaluation. According to the poll, only supporters of the far-right populist *Finn's*

Party gave a critical evaluation, suggesting that the gap between the *Finn's Party* and other parties is widening amid the pandemic.

Marin's club visit incident prompted a sudden change of tone in Korean media. *Money S* wrote that the reaction of the local people to Prime Minister Marin is cold, and according to a recent poll commissioned by Finnish broadcaster *MTV3*, two-thirds of the respondents considered Marine's going out a 'serious mistake' (Kim, T., 2021, December 8, author's translation).

새벽4시 클럽서 댄스...전날 확진자 접촉한 최연소 여총리였다

중앙일보 | 입력 2021.12.09 13:31 업데이트 2021.12.09 14:28

김은빈 기자 [구독](#)



신나 마린 핀란드 총리. 로이터=연합뉴스

Figure 7. Korean report of PM Sanna Marin partying during the spread of covid. Image: *The JoongAng*. <https://www.joongang.co.kr/article/25030749#home>

The JoongAng used a provocative title, “Dancing at the club at 4 in the morning...She was the youngest female prime minister who had contact with the confirmed patient the day before” (Kim, E., 2021, December 9, author's translation). It reported that Prime Minister Marin stayed in a nightclub and danced until 4 o'clock the next day, and that criticism immediately arose. What is also notable of this article is the title and photo creating a visual metaphor of 'transference.' Chandler explains transference, which is a type of metaphor, through the example of a Chanel No. 5 advertisement starring French actress Catherine Deneuve (2007, p. 128). Transference is a substitution of one signified with another signified, creating a new sign. The aim of the Chanel advertisement is the viewer

transferring the qualities signified by the actress to the perfume, creating a new metaphorical sign which makes the perfume itself meaning beauty and elegance (Chandler, 2007, p. 128). Chandler's theory can be applied to the photo in the article. The title "Clubbing at 4AM" and Marin's calm expression, subtle movements of hair in the article are totally irrelevant. Yet, in this context, it creates an image of hypocrisy and allusion that behind Marin's elegance lies a devastating truth. Clubbing until morning seems to acquire a connotation of irresponsibility, which is in contrast to the ideas of good leadership. To sum up, the photo acts as an allusion that Marin's handling of the pandemic is careless.

5.4.2 Crisis in Ukraine

Besides the handling of the pandemic, an interesting site for analyzing Marin's international media representation is the Russian invasion of Ukraine in the context of which Marin was also mentioned to show the Finnish government's stance on this crisis. The articles included in my data dealt with Prime Minister Marin expressing her reaction and diplomatic viewpoints as the representative of the Finnish government. The main topic was whether Finland will join NATO (the North Atlantic Treaty Organization) membership, and how the government plans to act against Russian threat. Although most articles described Marin's coherent stance that Finland will make its own independent choice about the matter, the articles written before and after the invasion differed in its tone.

Under the gender structure in society, social activities as war is regarded masculine while peace and caring regarded feminine (True & Hewitt, 2018, p. 93). Women may defy these gendered constructions by taking on typically 'male' activities or roles, breaking gender stereotypes (True & Hewitt, 2018, p. 94). International media's portrayal of Marin going against Russian threat is a combination of masculine, feminine stereotypes.

Some of Marin's quotes used in articles enable readers to picture a stern, rational, practical leader that makes level-headed decisions even in crisis. For example, *Reuters* wrote that Marin said it is very unlikely that Finland would apply for NATO membership during her tenure. The article introduces Marin's quotes, "Nobody can influence us, not the United States, not Russia, not anyone else" (2022, January 20). The article includes a recent poll by Finland's largest daily news *Helsingin Sanomat*, which then showed that 28% of respondents wanted Finland to join NATO while 42% was against and the rest were unsure. Another article written ahead of the invasion, before US and Russian talks gave an impression that Marin was a strong leader. It was titled "PM Marin: Finland 'will not be

blackmailed by Russia” (Vanttinen, P. 10.01.2022, EURACTIV.com, italizations mine) and highlighted her determination and firm stance against foreign influence. The article also quoted Marin saying, “Finland decides on its own foreign and security policy. There are no two ways about this.” These passages which show Marin’s unshakable mind when it comes to ensuring Finland’s independent decisions despite Russian threat, send a connotation of a determined leader.

On the other hand, articles written after the invasion reported that Marin along with President Sauli Niinistö strongly condemned Russia's attack on Ukraine. These articles, through the play of signifiers and signifieds, mostly gave the impression that although PM Marin is trying to appear firm against war, her policy will still remain diplomatic.

The majority of articles reported that despite the threat from Russia, this will not lead Finland to join NATO membership. However, some articles reflected change in attitude, implying that Finland might actually join NATO in midst of Russian threats. *The Jerusalem Post* writes Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin said that the debate within Finland concerning NATO membership "will change" following the start of a war in Ukraine (Spungin, T. 2022, February 25). *The EurAsian Times* also suggested that Finland might join NATO labeling the title, “Amid Russian Military Ops In Ukraine, Finland PM Says Country Ready To Join NATO If It Comes To National Security” (Sputnik,T. 2022, February 24). This article quoted another speech of Marin: “Finland is ready to apply for NATO membership if the issue of national security becomes acute.”

Last Updated: 14th February, 2022 17:09 IST

Finland's Prime Minister Sanna Marin Backs Sanctions Against Russia Amid Row With Ukraine

Amid the chaotic announcements from western countries, Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin came in support of Kyiv and vowed to provide financial aid to Ukraine.

Written By [Ajeet Kumar](#)



Figure 8. “Photo of Russian President Putin and Marin” Image: Republic World. <https://www.republicworld.com/world-news/russia-ukraine-crisis/finlands-prime-minister-sanna-marin-backs-sanctions-against-russia-amid-row-with-ukraine-articleshow.html>

The Indian *Republic World's* article included a picture of Russian President Vladimir Putin and Marin. The blurring of the edge of the photos creates an illusion that the two leaders are present in the same spot. The two are placed confronting each other, which conveys a connotation that the two leaders have opposing viewpoints. While the Russian leader wears an emotionless expression, the Finnish Prime Minister in white clothes and background clearly has something to say, or warn. The article's title was “Finland's Prime Minister Sanna Marin backs sanctions against Russia amid row with Ukraine” (Kumar, A. 2022, February 14). The article praised Marin's reactions comparing it to other western countries that showed “chaotic” reactions. Nevertheless, this article was also dubious of Finland joining NATO, writing that Marin “dismissed” and “denied” joining NATO. In spite of that, in the end it is also written that Marin admitted the possibility of Finland applying for NATO membership during her term in office, prompting confusion. This article gives an impression that unlike Marin's firm attitude, Finland's Russian policies actually remain opaque. An interesting point is that in the context of the Russian invasion, Marin becomes a security political actor and signs that would relate to her gender seem to disappear. The

media's main focus was on evaluating whether Marin's attitude and diplomatic strategy towards Russian threats is suitable for defending her nation's security.

The Hill also gives a similar impression of Marin. It describes her as a strong leader, but also remained dubious whether she would actually make a decision that matches her attitude. The article explained that for months Finland has been pondering on whether to apply for NATO membership and Marin said actual application would require broad support (Lonas, L., 2022, February 24).

National Post showed interest in a different topic, writing "Finland is ready to receive refugees from Ukraine, says PM" (Reuters. 2022, February 24). According to the article, Marin strongly condemned Russia's military action against Ukraine and said Finland is ready to receive refugees from Ukraine.

Prime Minister Marin's appearance in Korean media regarding the Russian invasion has been limited, but was linked to topics broader than joining NATO membership. Korean media was most interested in Finland's status as a neutral state – which in reality is not a neutral state but militarily non-aligned – and how Marin is coping with the precarious situation. *ChosunBiz* wrote about Finland sending weapons and ammunition to Ukraine in its article "Sweden, Finland break 'military neutral' principle and provide weapons to Ukraine" (Kwon, Y., 2022, March 1, author's translation). It wrote that both Finland and Sweden maintain a neutral stance and are not members of NATO. It added that while Prime Minister Marin has drawn the line that there are no plans to join NATO in the near future, local media reported that the incident is spreading favorable public opinion about joining NATO.

Newsis wrote an interesting article about "Finnishization" in its article "'Finnish style' Ukrainian solution proposed by Macron... 'It's taboo in Finland'" (Kang, Y., 2022, February 10, author's translation). It started by reporting that Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin of the progressive party said it was extremely unlikely that Finland would apply for NATO membership while she is in office. The article reported the opinion of political analysts seeing this as a deliberate move to prevent opposition parties from attacking her on NATO issues. It added that French President Emmanuel Macron recently proposed a controversial plan of making Ukraine a "Finnish-style neutral state" to Russian President Vladimir Putin. The term "Finnishization" is derived from the word "Finnlandisierung", which was named in Germany in the 1960s. However, the article added interviews with several

Finns, reporting that Finnish people do not recommend this kind of neutralization, and it only reminds them of the tragedy of the past.

Segye Ilbo tried to link Marin's social media reaction "Young Finnish lions are so amazing!" celebrating Finnish national ice hockey team winning first gold medal in the Beijing Winter Olympics with the crisis in Ukraine. It wrote that Finland defeating its 'enemy' Russia gives Ukraine the confidence that "we can do it too", which is trembling with the threat of Russian invasion (Kim, T., 2022, February 21, author's translation).

Three weeks later, another article from the same press started with an impressive quote: "On the day to commemorate the end of the Winter War, our Finnish people's hearts are with Ukraine" (Kim, T., 2022, March 14, author's translation). The writer first explained as if this was a direct quote from PM Marin's tweet, but it was an arbitrary abbreviation of Marin's 14 March 2022 tweet, which retweeted Finnish Defense Force's postings of the Winter War. The full text was, "On the day of the remembrance of the end of the Winter War, our thoughts are in the Finns who sacrificed their lives for the sake of the homeland. We are very grateful to them. Today, Ukraine is fighting to preserve its independence. The sacrifices are hard. Our thoughts are the same with them (author's translation)." The full text was introduced later in the article, along with the history of the Winter War. In midst of this is a sudden photo of Marin, taken on 11.03.2022 in Paris after the EU summit.



▲ 산나 마린 핀란드 총리가 11일(현지시간) 프랑스 파리 인근 베르사유 궁전에서 열린 유럽연합(EU) 정상회의에 참석한 뒤 취재진의 물음에 대답하는 모습. 마린 총리 SNS 캡처

Figure 9. "Photo of Marin answering to the press in Paris to participate in the EU summit" Image: Segye Ilbo <http://www.segye.com/newsView/20220314505959?OutUrl=naver>.

The photo captures Marin's sad expression wearing black clothes in front of a palace. Although the photo has no direct relation to Marin's tweet, placing it in an article about the Winter War and Russian invasion has a connotative meaning that Marin is having an emotional moment deeply empathizing with the people in Ukraine.

Meanwhile *Yonhap News* (2022, March 31) reported that although Russia invaded Ukraine to hinder Ukraine from joining NATO, this hostile act has ironically drawn Sweden and Finland closer to NATO membership. Unlike Norway which is not a member of EU but joined NATO, Finland and Sweden had not been NATO members, but the percentage of people supportive of joining NATO in both countries have surged within a month. Prime Minister Marin said that the deteriorating security environment after Russia's invasion of Ukraine is changing citizens' and politicians' perceptions of NATO membership, and predicted that the debate will intensify.

Seoul Newspaper also reported the sudden change in recent polls regarding Finland joining NATO (Lee, J., 2022, March 15). According to the article, Finnish public broadcaster *YLE* announced that 62% of respondents answered "yes", 16% answered "no" and 21% answered "don't know." Compared to the survey conducted a month ago, those who favor NATO membership rose 9 percent. This is the first time that Finland's majority said they were in favor of joining NATO in a poll. The article reported that neither the Prime Minister nor President Sauli Niinistö has yet expressed their support, and Finland's major politicians have not expressed strong opinion of breaking the traditional military neutrality and joining NATO.

The following article published a month after shows that Finland joining NATO is imminent. *DongA Ilbo's* "Two female Prime Ministers of Northern Europe: One shot on the way home from work" (2022, April 14, author's translation) reported that the leaders of Sweden and Finland met to discuss about whether to join NATO. It reported that at the NATO meeting to be held in Madrid, Spain in June, it is predicted that the 'NATO membership application' will be submitted. Sweden and Finland have been adhering to a policy of military non-alignment, but with the Russian invasion of Ukraine, public opinion to join NATO is rising in both countries. The article reported that Finland even has a border with Russia of 1340 km long.



Figure 10. “Photo of Marin and Swedish Prime Minister” Image: DongA Ilbo <https://news.v.daum.net/v/20220414155759162>

The photo used for this article is an interesting choice that needs interpretation. The article simply described the scene as, “Two women are going for a walk. Swedish Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson on the left and Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin on the right.” This is the linguistic message of the image, but there is more connotative meaning. In *Rhetoric of the Image* (1977), Barthes writes that the photograph offers us three messages: a linguistic message, a coded iconic message, and a non-coded iconic message (p. 36). The literal image is denoted while the symbolic image is connoted, meaning that the denoted image naturalizes the symbolic message (p. 37). In the photo *DongA Ilbo* used, two women dressed fashionably are taking a walk in the light. In the denoted message, what remains in the photograph is a kind of natural being-there of objects (Barthes, 1977, p. 37). However, the symbolic message hidden under the denoted message is that the two women taking a walk in the forest are two female leaders of their countries. In fact most serious talks of war, military defense, decisions that will shake the region are their conversation topics. Combined with the article’s headline “one shot on the way home from work”, the symbolic message of the photo is that the two women are confronting atrocity with peace.

Meanwhile, *The JoongAng* published an article that showed particular interest in Marin, titled “World’s youngest 37-year-old female prime minister, this time leads the historical NATO membership” (Chu, I. 2022, April 16, author’s translation). This article not only reported Finland’s diplomatic decisions surrounding NATO membership, but also

introduced specifically about PM Marin as a person and politician. It first wrote that although in February when Russia began its invasion of Ukraine, Marin drew the line that Finland had no plans to join NATO in the near future, after 50 days her reply completely changed saying “There is no reason to delay the decision. It will be done very quickly.” The writer of the article commented that “This historic moment is led by a female Prime Minister in her 30s.” Followed by this comment the article introduced Marin in a selective manner, mainly pinpointing several incidents that would shock or interest Korean readers. The article called PM Marin an “issue maker” holding the record for the world's youngest female government head. It also introduced the *Trendi* photograph incident calling it a “no-bra pictorial”, and Marin’s rainbow family background, marriage with a 15-year-relationship and birth of a daughter. It commented Marin’s rise to Prime Minister as “since entering Parliament in 2015, she has established her political position at a ‘frightening pace’.” The article introduced an incident rarely found among Korean articles about Marin, which was Estonian Minister Mart Helme calling her a “sales girl.” The article added that Marin took back this ridicule by saying, “I am very proud of Finland. Here, a child from a poor family can study to achieve her purpose in life, and a cashier can become a Prime Minister.”

5.5 Leader of “Finland”

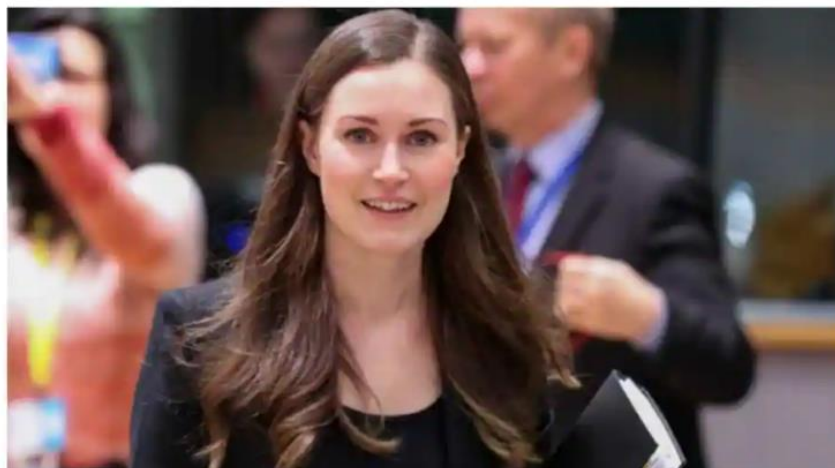
My thesis presumes that international news coverage of Sanna Marin is not only related to coverage of female leaders, but also mixed with Finland’s country image. Finland’s image as a country will have effect on the image of its leader, whether positive or not. According to Anholt (2010), a government taking its term in office can hardly produce any significant impact on their nation’s international reputation (Anholt, 2010, p. 129). Consequently, even if a new administration starts, it is influenced by the previous stereotypes that shaped the country image. When a country has a clear, simple, well-defined national stereotype, the media will feature the country more regularly, eventually spreading the cliché (Anholt, 2010, p. 142). This is why Finland also has an image that is hardly forgotten, mostly that of an egalitarian society where everyone is happy. Approximately 160 countries in the world that do not suffer from headline-grabbing flaws or catastrophic troubles do not receive regular media attention (Anholt, 2010, p. 141). Finland is among these ‘boring countries’ that lack novel news to tackle their country stereotypes.

Nevertheless, we can find that international media coverage is highly influenced by the idea that Finland is the world’s happiest country. It seems that since Marin’s election as Prime Minister, international media had frequently asked her questions related to this

topic. Most of them depicted Finland as a dream country seeking for advice, reproducing the stereotype even further. In *Rhetoric of the Image* (1977), Barthes introduces the term 'Italianicity' to analyze a French advertisement of pasta brand *Panzani*. In this advertisement, the signifier is the bringing together of the tomato, the pepper and yellow, green, red hues, while the signified is something Barthes calls 'Italianicity'. Italianicity is not Italy, but it is the condensed essence of everything that could be Italian, which is actually a French knowledge based on a familiarity with certain tourist stereotypes (p. 34). In the *Panzani* advertisement, the Mediterranean vegetables, the color, the composition, all creates meaning (p. 50). Perhaps applying this example to Finland's case would help better understand international media relating Marin and 'Finnishness'. As 'Italianicity' had nothing to do with the Italians perceiving their country or the actually Italy, 'Finnishness' is also a stereotype that is believed among other countries. As the leader of Finland, Marin was connected with Finland's nation image in international media portrayals. The following articles show how Marin is summoned to this topic and her comments being framed inside the country image.

Will make sure Finland stays the happiest nation, and grows: PM

WION Web Team
Helsinki, Finland • Published: Dec 05, 2021, 06:39 PM(IST)



Finland PM Sanna Marin, who has received two doses of COVID-19 shots, initially defended her actions Photograph: (AFP) FOLLOW US

Figure 11. Photo of Marin smiling. Image: WION News. <https://www.wionews.com/world/will-make-sure-finland-stays-the-happiest-nation-and-grows-pm-434336>

WION News reported Marin's interview with another press, commenting that Finland is the world's happiest country, and many people believed that this was made possible

because of Sanna Marin (WION Web Team. 2021, December 5). The article found grounds for their comment from Marin's dedicated mind in achieving equality. "Once the youngest prime minister of the country", Marin assured that the future leaders of Finland will also endeavor and make the country continue its journey towards equality.

Reuters used the title "Advice from the world's happiest country - give all your kids the best possible education and care for each other and the environment, especially at this time of global crisis caused by the coronavirus epidemic." (Virki, T. 2020, March 20). International media linked Marin's policies with Finland's image as the happiest country in the world, as if the latter is the direct result of the former.

The Guardian introduced Marin's welfare policies including education, parental leave, ending homelessness (Topping, A. 2021, December 5). However, they were introduced under the title "Finland is the world's happiest nation – and I want to keep it that way, says Prime Minister."

Another influence that reflects the country stereotype is the presence of numerous articles that presume that women's rights are extremely high in Finland. In these articles Marin's gender is highlighted, usually followed by Finland's accomplishment in women's rights such giving women full political rights in 1906. *The Sydney Morning Herald* introduced an article written by an Australian mother living in Helsinki giving an impression that motherhood is easy in Finland. Titled "Why it's totally normal (in Finland) to be a young mum and PM" (Battersby, A. 2020, January 23), the article refers to Marin's Instagram posts of her life as a mother and comments on it. According to the writer, Sanna Marin is not a superhuman but simply "lucky" to be living in Finland where the society and government share the burden of many responsibilities that Australian mothers are left alone with. Finnish mothers have the freedom to choose how to spend their time, the article says, as choosing to govern the country.

An article published by *European student think tank* is a rare piece that questions Finland being nominated as the world's happiest nation (Tammila, K. 2022, February 21). The writer finds the nomination surprising, mentioning the country's high suicide rates, depression rates, and also a considerably high rate of alcoholism. Nevertheless, the writer finds answer from women. The writer concludes that Finland's history of early women's suffrage and outstanding performance of women in prominent roles including Marin, are contributors of winning the title.

Meanwhile, there was an interesting incident in terms of Finland being the happiest country. The famous trillionaire Elon Musk's joke on Twitter mocking Marin's party

attendance during the pandemic had been shared nearly 18,000 times and liked by over 244,000 Twitter users. Elon Musk later replied to another user on Twitter, adding that Marin "seems cool." Marin responded to this herself, writing on Twitter that "Finland is cool too" referring to the country's accomplishments and pervasive knowledge of being the happiest country. Although not an antonym, linking "cool" and "happy" would not be a traditional metaphor. It seems Marin paved way for finding something new out of the old.

Before looking into Korean articles, it is better to introduce a particular incident which PM Marin or Finland became well-known in Korea. Right ahead of Korea's National Assembly Election in April 2020, there were news reports that Finland has sent covid-testing samples to Korea via Finnair. It would be justifiable to say international attention and praises given to the South Korean government's initial reaction to the pandemic, influenced the ruling Democratic Party's historic victory winning 3/5 seats (180 among 300) in the National Assembly. Finland's covid testing delivery news was accepted as one of the examples proving that the Korean government's policies were right. For instance, *KBS Gwangju* reported a video news about this incident titled "*Diagnosing covid, why Europe can't? Then go to Korea!*" (2020, April 1). It started with phrases "The country of Santa Claus, Xylitol, design and...the happiest country in the world, a far country in the Baltic sea hard to find similarities with Korea; but happy country Finland also could not dodge covid (author's translation)." Although the incident had no direct relation to Marin, the video news used PM Sanna Marin's solemn face in the cover photo with the phrase "Send them to Korea! Fast, fast" written beside. This is the reason why many Koreans still think that the Prime Minister had ordered sending the testing samples herself. *KBS News* published an article explaining more in detail about why a Finnish private hospital ordered covid-19 testing to Korea. It wrote that the private hospital Mehiläinen, decided to send the samples directly to Korea, quoting the hospital's reaction, "Korea is a suitable place to request a test, especially since the current situation is well controlled through a large number of tests." (Jeong, Y., 2020, April 1, author's translation). The article explained that a total of 18,000 samples will be sent to Korea over the next two weeks, and the first chartered plane carrying 1,500 samples will depart from Vantaa Airport. The fact that the hospital had initially sent fake samples to measure the testing center's ability built an impression that even in times of adversity, Finland is strict when it comes to protecting the wellbeing of citizens.

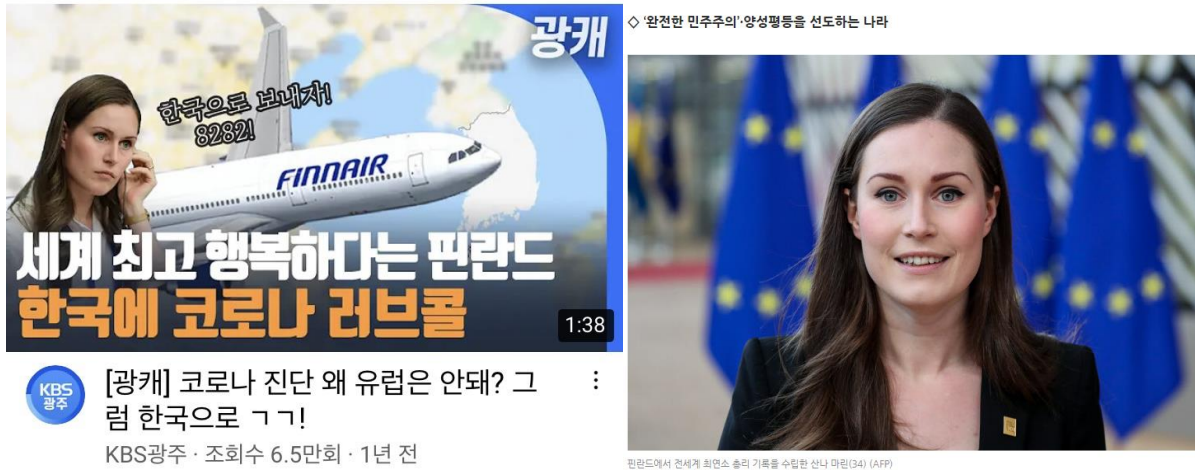


Figure 12. Korean media coverage of Finland sending covid samples to Korea for covid testing and Finland's 'Full democracy'. Image: BridgeEconomics, Youtube.
[http://www.viva100.com/main/view.php?key=20200419010006646,](http://www.viva100.com/main/view.php?key=20200419010006646)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GRqXQbq69zg>

BridgeEconomics published an article titled “The secret charm of Finland that you will fall in love with” (Kim, S., 2020, April 20, author’s translation) using a photo of smiling Sanna Marin. While the denotative meaning of the photo is Marin smiling, when reading the phrases placed above and below the photo we can read another message. Above the photo is the phrase “Full democracy, the country at the forefront of gender equality” and under the photo is written “Sanna Marin, 34, holds the record for world's youngest prime minister in Finland.” When explaining about metaphors, Chandler wrote that a shot of an airplane followed by a shot of a bird flying metaphorically imply that the airplane is the bird (2007, p. 127). This photo under its title is an allusion that Marin and Finland’s positive image as a praise-worthy welfare state are the same. The article continues with this allusion saying that Marin’s life shows a summary of this country. It explains that Marin’s rise to Prime Minister from a “difficult family situation” is proof of Finland’s welfare system, and she was able to experience firsthand the importance of social welfare and equality in Finland.

Naeil Newspaper’s “The happiest country's Prime Minister's 'free breakfast gate” (Kim, T., 2021, June 24, author’s translation) reports Prime Minister Marin’s scandal regarding ordering free breakfast for a month at her official residence. The article wrote that this incident damaged the pride of Finnish people, who are living in the happiest country in the world for four consecutive years and a society that is rich, transparent,

healthy and living together. It added that Finnish media criticized Marin, saying that "the prime minister did not use public funds to separate public and private expenses."

As we have seen, Korean news coverage of Marin seems unbreakable from the idea that Finland is the happiest country in the world. However, the best way to uncover stereotypes is listening to Finnish people themselves about happiness. *Hangeorye's* interview with Finnish Ambassador Eero Suominen offered insight of what happiness means to Finns and how different it is from its Korean concept. The Ambassador's answer to "Can it be said that Finland is truly the happiest country?" was "In Finland, we use the expression 'satisfied with life' rather than 'happy'." According to the Ambassador, the Finnish concept of happiness was different from exhilarating emotions of joy and happiness.

"For Finns, a concept far more important than happiness is serenity. A comfortable and predictable life without rush is important to Finns. For example, in a recent interview, Prime Minister Sanna Marin's spouse described the Prime Minister as a "very calm person". That is the highest compliment in Finland. From the point of view of the people, it means that a calm leader is a good leader that can be trusted. For Finns, serenity and satisfaction are more important than happiness." (Kim, S., 2020, June 12, author's translation).

It is unlikely that Korean media is writing articles about Finland based on this knowledge. This means that linking Finland and happiness as a pair will continue to influence news reports about Marin.

6. Conclusion

In this section, I will summarize the meaning of the analysis part while also going through the research questions proposed in the introduction. Returning to the starting point, the aim of my research was to conduct a systematic analysis of how Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin is represented in international and Korean media. Despite the growing numbers of female leaders, they are still the minority. Media representation of female leadership is a powerful tool to shape public opinion about women leaders, but the reports are often biased. Media reports about female politicians often reflect gender stereotypes while some reports show more interest in other areas such as style and personal life than their ability as a leader. Keeping these facts in mind, this paper studied how Sanna Marin is represented in international media.

The analysis part of this study shows that Marin's representation was shaped by denotative and connotative messages in various articles and photos. Unlike the denotative message, which is the evident meaning of a photo, the connotative message is a reflection of the context surrounding what is directly visible in the photo. Media reports often used photos of Marin taken in a variety of situations and postures to amplify the media's stance on the reported incidents. In those photos Marin was captured posing alone, with other leaders, wearing certain outfit, smiling, frowning, staring ahead, etc. In each article, the media built a context for the photos, sometimes deliberately using them in irrelevant contexts to shape Marin's image. Whether a new rising star among young female leaders, victim of online attacks, a mother, wife, sympathetic, strong, leader of the happiest country in the world, the media's evaluation of leader Sanna Marin was delivered throughout the world.

Then how is Prime Minister Sanna Marin portrayed in international media? The results of my analysis showed that some parts were as anticipated, but there were also some surprises. Among her various roles, this research found that Marin's representation in international media was concentrated in certain themes. The seven themes which formed the analysis were constructed by the signifiers and denotations found in news articles. The themes I categorized and the signifiers that constitute them are summarized in the following chart.

Themes	Signifiers/Denotations
Youngest Prime Minister, Female dominant cabinet	'35-year-old Marine', the rising star, a symbol of progression and hope, feminist victory, comparison with other female leaders
Sexism	Shirtless <i>Trendi</i> photo, TOPLESS, Ms. Marin's 'outraged fans'
Marriage and motherhood	Breastfeeding photo, marriage with 16-year-relationship, mother of a daughter, small wedding
Performing politician	mother to three-year-old daughter Emma, a left-winger within her party and a strong defender of Finland's generous welfare state, prioritizing equality
Reacting to the pandemic	a graceful warrior, an innovator who breaks stereotypes and taboos, a strong-minded egalitarian, a rebel against sexism, a role model who continues her fight with a low voice and without being rude, good leadership does not depend on age, very clear communication skill, "Clubbing at 4AM"
Crisis in Ukraine	a determined leader, a stern, rational, practical leader, an empathetic leader, issue maker
Leader of "Finland"	Smiling face, the happiest country's Prime Minister's 'free breakfast gate'

Figure 13. Themes and the signifiers that constitute them in the analysis

As expected, international media was most interested in Marin as a young, female leader. Her personal life including marriage and motherhood, accompanying her social media actives also caught attention. Despite several featured interviews, Marin's vision as a performing politician and her leadership received less spotlight and she was mentioned whenever there were eye-catching incidents in Finland or Northern European region. Two most notable events which Marin's leadership received attention were reacting to the pandemic and dealing with the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Overall, it could be said that

Marin has received more attention than typical leaders, but the representation was limited to certain categories which media found interest.

Then what aspects caught international media's attention when dealing with the Finnish Prime Minister? Interest shown in the coverage of Marin's age and gender was alarming, but the spotlight was not free from the typical bias about female leaders. Media was with all ears when reporting about issues such as Marin's fashion, personal life, social media postings, sexist backlash, clubbing during the pandemic. The reason media showed unusually high interest in these topics is open to receive criticism. Similarly, international media's reports were not entirely free from gender stereotypes. Research by Heilman (2001) shows that according to gender stereotypes, men are seen as aggressive, forceful, independent, and decisive, while women as kind, helpful, sympathetic, and concerned about others (p. 658). Marin's personality portrayed in news coverage was mostly calm and thoughtful whereas one interview with Marin's previous acquaintance revealed her political ambition started from early years, creating dissonance. This showed that despite the attention received, Marin's personality still remains in the clouds, meaning that the image shaped by media has somewhat failed to capture the truth.

Next, how do international media reactions differ and what are the reasons behind that? The analysis section showed that materials written in English focused on Marin's presence as a young, female politician itself, while those in Korean corresponded in tone and content but the focus of interest was slightly different. News reports in English also showed high alert to Marin's personal remarks, social media reactions, new 'stories' created due to Marin's age and gender. Korean media was particularly interested in the system behind Marin's success story, and the lessons that could be learned. The characteristics and difference of media written in both languages are listed in the following table.

English	Korean
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Astonishment and excitement about age, gender -Mostly high expectations as a leader, praise, envy, small concerns -Feminist victory vs. Sexist backlash -Marin's own POV introduced but undermined -Featured interviews with Marin, revealing slight glimpse of her personality -High interest in SNS postings -Marin's coping with environmental issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Similar in tone and content with other international media -Marin's success story -Interested in the system that allowed Marin's rise -High interest in the lessons Marin's presence offer to Korean politics -Frequent reference to other Nordic countries -Comparing with Korean domestic issues -Marin's foreign relations policies

Figure 14. International media representations of PM Sanna Marin based on my analysis

There are also limitations to this study. One limitation I perceive is related to the research method. My main method was using the search engine to access numerous new articles dealing with Marin. There were myriads of data mentioning Marin, and in order to make those suitable for systematic research, I categorized and allocated them according to my selection of topics. Although multiple news articles focused on similar incidents, there were limits using the qualitative research method to go through all that can be seen. Considering the amount of data available, it would be interesting if future researchers use other quantitative research methods and research programs that can widen the scope of information and data to draw a novel conclusion. Moreover, nowadays news articles are not the only types of media available. Other media representations such as social media reactions, video clips, as well as data produced in other languages than English and Korean are also future options to study. Another point I would like to add as a limitation of my research is that what is referred to as "international" in this study is quite random, and the news genres or presumed readership is not taken into consideration in the analysis.

In the analysis part, I was not all positive about the international media representation of Sanna Marin. This research reminded me that it is hard to expect media being impartial

when depicting female leaders. Nevertheless, there is also the bright side. Kytölähti who researched Finnish media representation of Marin says media's focus on Marin's age and gender is not all negative. The attention also tells the world that a young woman can lead a country without needing to compromise her other roles (Kytölähti, 2020, p.45). Having received enormous attention as a young and female politician, Sanna Marin has certainly been introduced throughout the world. Perhaps it is not farfetched to read this as a signal that the world is hoping to see more 'Marins'.

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