

# Political Scandal Tests Trust in Politicians

## *The Case of the Finnish Minister Who Resigned Because of His Text Messages*

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### **Abstract**

Political scandals have been observed to be increasingly common everywhere. In April 2008, the Finnish Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Ilkka Kanerva, was compelled to resign because of the sensation arising from the enormous number of suggestive text messages that he had sent to a young female erotic dancer. During the scandal, the media followed this episode intensively. The present article considers what kinds of qualities for political leadership the media called for during this scandal and how these qualities were justified. The paper is based partly on quantitative but mostly on qualitative content analyses of the four most read newspapers in Finland. The results show five categories, the qualities being professional competence, personal characteristics and behaviour, trustworthiness, maintenance of relations and communication skills. The results show that the requirements imposed by the media are high, but that evaluation of professional competence is still crucial. Further, the occurrence of a scandal seems to trigger discussions on trust in politicians.

**Keywords:** politicians, individualization, journalism, newspapers, scandal, trust

### **Introduction**

Over recent decades, political scandals have become increasingly common throughout the world. The central elements of political scandals are typically sex, money and power. Nowadays, these scandals could not exist without the media, and it would be impossible to fully understand them without considering the media. On the other hand, scandals have become an increasingly important part of political publicity. In the scandals, the focus is on individual politicians whose qualities are usually a subject of considerable speculation. In scandals, trust in politicians is rigorously tested. Thompson (2000) has said that “scandals are struggles over symbolic power in which reputation and trust are at stake”.

The present article focuses on evaluations and descriptions of politicians during scandals. It describes them through a case study by analysing the press content during a sex scandal in a political field in Finland. In April 2008, the Finnish Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Ilkka Kanerva, was compelled to resign because of the sensation arising

from the enormous number of suggestive text messages he had sent to a young female erotic dancer. During the scandal, the media followed this episode intensively and much of the reporting focused on politicians as individuals, and their qualities were evaluated at greater length and more robustly than usual. This rich discussion of the qualities of politicians also makes this scandal interesting for research purposes.

Scandals seem to be a permanent feature of modern politics. It is shown that political scandals have gradually become a more regular feature in news media coverage in Nordic countries; however, Nordic scandals concerning sexual behaviour are still rare, not least compared with the UK and the US (Allern et al. 2012).

The scandals often focus on certain individuals. Thus they can also be seen as a sign of the personalization of politics, because they are more connected to individuals than they are to ideologies and parties (Juntunen & Väliverronen 2009). Personalization is a concept that describes the process in which the political weight of the individual actor in politics increases over time. It is a widely accepted process (McAllister, 2007), although lately it has encountered some criticism (Karvonen, 2009; Adam & Maier, 2010). The possibility of evidence for the historical development of this phenomenon has been discussed. Karvonen (2009) analysed earlier studies of personalization. He observed that the development of personalization is clearly not uniform from country to country. However, he also found that there are many indications that the individual has become more prominent in electoral and executive politics in several countries. In Karvonen's (2009) analysis, Finland was a positive case, which means that there were more indications of personalization in Finland than in some other countries. The importance of the roles of prime minister, party leader and individual candidate has grown in Finland.

Media reporting is one important area where personalization of politics can be observed. In their review, Adam and Maier (2010) concluded that media coverage is the only area of politics where the empirical state of research supports the statement that politics has become more personalized. Generally, it is accepted that the role of the media is increasingly important for political parties and party leaders and for many different reasons. For example, Negrine (2008) analysed this development in the UK. His main argument is that parties have always tried to adapt to the current challenges of society and to new technologies. Because of this adaptation process, the parties have become more professional, more centralized and more strategic. From this it has followed that parties are also more leader-directed, and that the politicians have to be more professional. According to Negrine (2008), the parties are not only run professionally, but politicians themselves treat politics as a profession. If politicians are seen more as professionals in politics, we can assume that they are also expected to behave and work more professionally, which would mean increased competency requirements.

Interestingly, Van Aelst, Sheaffer and Stanyer (2011) have defined the concept of personalization in more detail. They distinguish two forms of personalization: individualization and privatization. Individualization concerns a focus on individual politician as central actors in the political arena, and privatization implies a shift in media focus from the politician as an occupier of a public role to the politician as a private individual, as a person distinct from his/her public role. They continue by dividing individualization into the general visibility of politicians and the concentrated visibility of politicians, the latter involving the focus on a limited number of political leaders. They postulate that

privatization can be divided into the attention on personal life and the attention on more personal characteristics. In the present study, privatization is an especially interesting concept, because the scandal concerned the personal life of the politician.

In their case study in Israel, Rahat and Sheafer (2007) found no significant evidence of a trend towards privatization. However, Langer (2007) has observed that in the UK there was a trend towards reporting more about political leaders' private qualities and personal lives. In addition, Reinemann and Wilke (2007) have observed that, in the German press in the 2000s, there were more evaluative statements about politicians, especially about the performance qualities of candidates. In Finland, too, several scholars have looked at privatization and shown that it does occur in Finnish politics (Isotalus, 2001; Liimatainen & Isotalus, 1998; Niemi, 2009), although there is a lack of systematic research on this. Further, Kivioja (2008) demonstrated that, in the Finnish tabloids, political journalism has had to devote more space to infotainment in political journalism, which can be seen in how the papers report, for example, on politicians' divorces.

Privatization can be seen in political scandals because, nowadays, they are often related to the personal lives of individual politicians (e.g., Juntunen & Välvirronen, 2009; Tumber & Waisbord, 2004). This is especially the case in sex scandals. The case of Kanerva has the typical features of the sexual-political scandal defined by Thompson (2000: 120-121). It involves the public disclosure of aspects of private life that transgress the norms and codes of sexual propriety. This case was in the focus of media attention for over two months, diverting attention from many other topics. In addition, the scandal also involved an individual in an extremely powerful position in politics and had radical consequences within this field. Tumber (2004: 1125) notes that some scandals become scandals only when they are taken up by the tabloid press and then reproduced by the broadsheets – just as in this case.

Scandals are interesting from the perspective of the qualities of political leadership, because they are typically based on some sort of violation of norms (Thompson, 2000). The norms (e.g., of good/bad politicians) are not public; they are not, for example, taught or written down. When the norms are violated in a scandal, they are noticed, and they show up in public. Therefore, a scandal constitutes a good opportunity to consider the norms (i.e., good and bad qualities and behaviour). The norms for politicians' qualities are normally implied; however, we may assume that during a scandal they become more apparent in the media. The studies also show that news coverage of scandals is characterized by being heavily oriented towards personal norm violation and responsibility (e.g., Allern & Pollack, 2012).

It is also important to remember that there are numerous cultural differences in media scandals; personalization and privatization have developed differently, and scandals differ across countries (Esser & Hartung 2004, Tumber & Waisbord 2004). In Finland, politicians' private lives – and especially their sexual behaviour – were previously taboo; however, during the past ten years, they have been received increasing coverage in the media. The case of Kanerva is seen as a sort of turning point of this development, because it was the first time in the history of Finland that a Finnish minister had to resign because of his private life. Resigning because of a scandal also seems to be rare internationally (Bynander & Hart, 2007), although it seems to be increasingly common, at least in the Nordic countries. In the present article, we concentrate on the qualifications of political leaders and leadership that the scandal gave rise to.

## The Case of Kanerva

Ilkka Kanerva was the Finnish Minister for Foreign Affairs in spring, 2008, when it became public knowledge that he had sent inappropriate text messages to an erotic dancer by the name of Johanna Tukiainen. Eventually, he was obliged to resign his position.

In March 2008, the scandal magazine *Hymy* reported that Ilkka Kanerva had sent approximately 200 text messages to the erotic dancer. The ingredients for a scandal were all there. The afternoon papers (tabloids) took the first step; however, the quality dailies followed only a few days later. Only the reporters from the magazine *Hymy* knew the content of the messages, so the others tried to create news from a variety of perspectives: for example, about the misuse of working time and of the minister's official mobile phone. The possibility of sex addiction was also hinted at.

At first, Kanerva denied sending any messages. A few days later, he admitted sending text messages to Johanna Tukiainen, but denied that the messages had been in any way inappropriate. The next day, Kanerva stated in an interview that the text messages were about work-related issues. He also assured his own political party (The National Coalition Party) that the text messages contained nothing of an inappropriate nature. A few days later, Kanerva publicly apologized at a press conference held in Brussels. The Finnish Prime Minister, Matti Vanhanen, declared that the case was closed. The papers were full of speculation as to whether the minister's apology was constrained or insincere and as to what the messages really contained. There was also a lot of discussion about the immorality of the behaviour and about Kanerva's political credibility. In addition, it emerged that Kanerva had many advocates who claimed that the whole case was harmless and innocent and part of the minister's private life.

At the end of March, an afternoon paper, *Ilta-Sanomat*, published one of the text messages ("Do you want to do it at some exciting place?"). Kanerva claimed that the message was an answer to a question addressed to him earlier. The chairman of the National Coalition Party, Jyrki Katainen, made an announcement that Kanerva had his unqualified support. The next day, Johanna Tukiainen claimed that Kanerva was lying about the previously published text message being an answer to a question. Unexpectedly, Kanerva did not attend a conference held in Tallinn, Estonia. The reason given in the news was that he was suffering from exhaustion. The next day, Kanerva denied being exhausted and stated that he would not resign from the government.

On the first of April, the magazine *Hymy* published 24 text messages sent to Tukiainen by Kanerva. Jyrki Katainen announced that Kanerva could not continue as Minister for Foreign Affairs. The dismissal of Kanerva was widely reported in the world's media. A few examples of Kanerva's text messages to Johanna Tukiainen follow:

Sounds almost like a fantasy. Have you kept your garden in good trim? (Sent 20.2.08, 01.12 a.m.)

How about touching you in a nightclub with my fingers? (Sent 20.2.08, 01.50 a.m.)

I can't speak for anyone but myself. What would feel good? (Sent 20.2.08, 01.06 a.m.)

Sometimes I like to watch when a partner is getting excited and showing what it's all about. Would you dare to do it? (Sent 20.2.08, 01.21 a.m.)

The Finnish journalist and author of a book on Finnish political scandals, Risto Uimonen (2009), wrote that Kanerva had been made the victim of an extraordinary inflammatory and extensive media sensation. Niemi (2009) interviewed Finnish journalists and tried to find out why the Kanerva case had caused such a big sensation. The journalists gave four main reasons. The first reason was Kanerva's position as Minister for Foreign Affairs. The second reason was that Kanerva had to pay for his old mistakes; he had also previously caused minor sensations concerning suggestive text messages that he had sent to young females, and he had promised that he would not do so any longer. The third reason was his own actions. The journalists thought that he did not set things straight actively enough or apologise early enough for what he had done. The fourth reason was media competition, meaning that the journalists had thought that they had to report on the case because all the other media were doing so. Laine (2010) considers that Kanerva disregarded the public in at least two ways. First, he underestimated the current media climate. Second, he deliberately ignored public expectations, according to which his enjoyment of confidence from voters annuls his license to partake in any and every behaviour.

### **Purpose and Method of the Study**

The Kanerva case provoked a rich media discussion about political leadership. Most of the discussion concerned Kanerva's characteristics and his behaviour; however, the qualities of certain other politicians as well as the qualities of politicians in general were also brought into the discussion.

First, we try to describe how much attention the Kanerva case attracted in the media in order to show the significance of the case in the Finnish political discussion. Second, and the main aim of the paper, we describe what qualities of political leadership the media described during this scandal. We talk about qualifications that suddenly become explicit due to the violation of norms, which presupposes that descriptions, such as how one should or should not behave or what kind of person one should or should not be, are often more or less evaluative. They can therefore also be seen as some sort of requirements for political leaders. Thereafter, the third aim is to analyse how these qualities were justified in the media, which provides a perspective from which to evaluate the legitimacy of the qualities mentioned.

The empirical data were collected by analysing media texts. The media data were collected from two quality Finnish dailies (*Helsingin Sanomat*, *Aamulehti*) and two afternoon papers (*Iltalehti* and *Ilta-Sanomat*) for the whole of 2008. These newspapers are the four most read papers in Finland. All articles in 2008 about Finnish political leaders were included. In practice, this meant articles about party leaders, ministers, presidents, party secretaries, the speaker of parliament, or political leadership in general. The data amounted to a total of 11,654 articles.

In the present paper, we focus on articles from March and April, 2008, but we use data for the whole year for the purpose of making comparisons. The scandal reached its peak during March and April, and from these two months alone there are 2,310 articles in the data.

The data were analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively. To find out how much media attention the case attracted, the material was analysed quantitatively. Every article

was read carefully to see which political leaders were mentioned and in what context. One mention of a political leader means that his or her name or well-known position was mentioned in a newspaper article. In one article, the name was counted only once. The mentions were counted according to political leaders' names per month and per paper. The purpose of counting was to evaluate the impact of the scandal on the rate of mentions.

Most of the analyses are qualitative. The purpose of qualitative analysis is to identify qualities described to elicit the media's requirements for politicians. All material was analysed using data-based qualitative content analysis in order to identify relevant phenomena and key themes and patterns in the data. In the data, most of the descriptions analysed – i.e. qualities of political leadership – are directly related to Minister Kanerva, however, there are also descriptions of other central politicians in relation to the scandal. Because of the amount of data, we needed to systematically research, organize and simplify the material. This was done using NVIVO software. The content was coded to create categories from the data. The basic rules of data-based qualitative content analysis were followed (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Gunter, 2000). This means that the content was coded by creating categories from the data. The essential questions during the coding were the following: what is said about political leadership, how is it described and what is it connected to, which of the political leaders it is about and who is the writer in the newspapers (a journalist, a private individual, a politician). The unit of analysis ranged from a couple of words to entire paragraphs due to the topic of the article. The content was coded first into main categories like "personal characteristics and behaviour" and then into subcategories like "behaviour criticized" and "behaviour praised". The coders consulted each other on what should be assigned to the main categories and also used the keywords in the classification. After the qualitative content analysis, the quantity of references in main categories and their percentage value were determined. The number of coded references was 1,789, of which 1,660 concerned qualities and 129 justifications of these qualities.

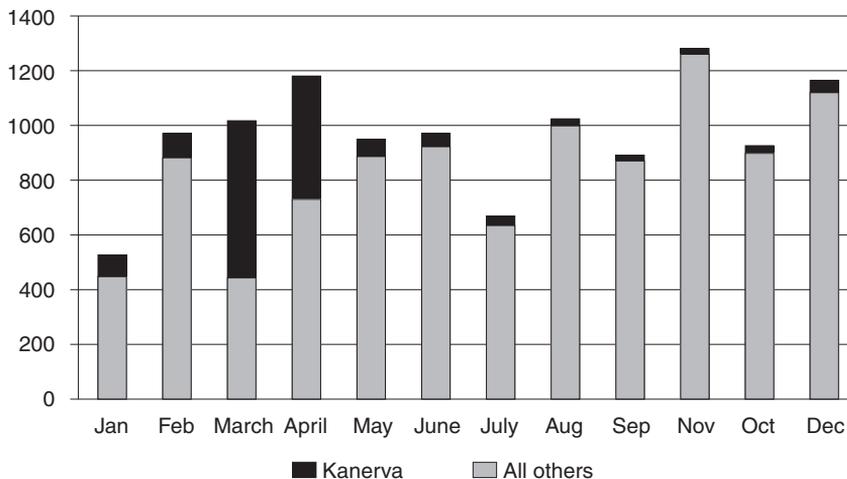
The intercoder reliability was tested. Three trained and experienced coders coded a total of 12.5 % of the data independently. First, the principles of coding and content of categories were explained to the coders. Afterwards, they carried out the classification independently with the help of the matrix, which included the keywords for the categories. The results showed 91.1-99.8 % agreement between coders.

## **Results**

The Kanerva case seemed to be the biggest news about political leaders in 2008 in Finland. In the quantitative analysis, the number of articles on the text messages was high, and the resignation of Minister Kanerva was the main subject matter in our analysis. Even the most interesting revelations about the Prime Minister's legal action taken against his former lady friend, a scandal about well-known politicians' campaign funding, the municipal elections and the tragic news of a school shooting were eclipsed during the year in the papers' reporting on political leaders. There were 1,022 articles in which the name of Kanerva was mentioned during the two-month period of the scandal. They accounted for 44% of all articles about political leaders in March and April 2008. The two quality papers had altogether 466 and the two tabloids 556 articles about this

scandal, and thus did not greatly differ in number of articles, although, in the tabloids, the issue was a subject of slightly more speculation. Comparison of the number of articles in which Mr Kanerva was mentioned month by month revealed that the scandal attracted a great deal of media attention. In January, there were 82 articles and in February 83 articles in which Kanerva was mentioned, but in March 570 and even in April, after his resignation, 452 articles were published. The numbers of articles on Minister Kanerva are presented in Figure 1.

**Figure 1.** Numbers of Articles about Minister Kanerva Compared to Numbers of Articles about all Other Political Leaders in four Finnish Newspapers in 2008



While the scandal snowballed, there were many big issues to be decided in parliament. Therefore, many thought that the scandal had been overemphasized in the media. There was also negative feedback from other politicians about the amount of attention the text messages received, as in Excerpt 1.

**Excerpt 1**

When the scandal of Kanerva’s text messages was boiling hot, the next year’s budget frames were under consideration, and this involved about 35 million euro and that was small news, Mustajärvi (MP) is wondering. (Aamulehti 16.4.2008)

In every case, the Kanerva affair took up a large amount of column space in the Finnish newspapers. In this respect, the case does indeed meet the criteria for a scandal.

According to the qualitative analysis of our media data, five main categories of qualifications were articulated by the media concerning political leaders. These were professional competence, personal characteristics and behaviour, trustworthiness, communication skills, and maintenance of relations. Nine per cent of all references did not fit into these five main categories. The main categories are summarized in Table 1.

The first category, professional competence, was considered widely in these articles, accounting for 26% of the references. There was hardly any criticism of work-related issues or of Ilkka Kanerva’s professional competence in foreign affairs or politics in general. Quite the contrary, he was praised for doing his job well. Kanerva fulfilled

**Table 1.** *Main Categories, Their Percentages, Number of References and Keywords of Categories*

Category	Percentage of References	Frequency of References	Keywords
Professional Competence	26	433	Professional qualifications, political merits, work-related requirements, experience in politics, position in politics
Personal Characteristics and Behaviour	25	414	Personality traits, personal style and behaviour, conduct, manners
Trustworthiness	18	295	Credibility as a political leader, honesty, lying, respect, maintaining or losing a good reputation
Maintenance of Relations	18	292	Relationship qualities with voters, parties and other co-operation partners
Communication Skills	14	226	Public speaking skills, social skills, media skills, crisis communication skills
Total	100	1660	

the crucial criteria for being active and very experienced. It was also expressed that a minister should obey the laws and demonstrate consideration in his or her actions. In the discussion of the qualities of a Minister for Foreign Affairs, it was mentioned repeatedly that it is a good thing if a minister is also cosmopolitan and competent in the substance of politics as well as competent in domestic as well as international affairs. According to the media, as illustrated in Excerpt 2, it would appear to be most important for a politician to do his job well.

### Excerpt 2

Mr Sasi, MP, however, points out that Kanerva has performed his duties impeccably. – ‘The most important thing is Kanerva’s work. He has done very well a Minister for Foreign Affairs.’ (11 March, 2008, *Ilta-Sanomat*)

For a political leader, some personal features and traits are more desirable than others. These descriptions constitute the second category: personal characteristics and behaviour. This category accounted for 25% of these references. According to the data, a sociable personality manifests itself in good social skills; in addition, excellent manners and good behaviour are required. The politician should also learn from his earlier mistakes and be capable of apologising and even time this correctly.

Considering the persona and behaviour of Mr Kanerva, there were numerous personal attributes that were criticized. One was his very poor judgment. The papers reported both in articles by reporters and in interviews with other politicians, as well as in letters to the editor, that a Minister for Foreign Affairs should be more shrewd in assessing with whom, what, and when he would communicate by text messages and what the consequences may be. Thus, there seems to be a norm or an expectation that a political leader must have a very good ability to interpret situational cues and evaluate and judge how to cope.

Trustworthiness is also an important quality revealed by the sensation of the text messages. It accounted for 18% of the references. It was repeatedly mentioned in the data that the text messages themselves were quite harmless; the worst thing was lying about them. The entire credibility of the Minister for Foreign Affairs was impugned because at first he lied, denying that he had sent the messages, then he lied about the nature of the messages, before finally admitting everything and apologising.

Judging by this case, the media are very stringent. A political leader must be blameless, honourable, fair and sincere. He or she must be honest and always truthful. A political leader must keep his/her promises and be totally respectable. This is illustrated in Excerpt 3.

### **Excerpt 3**

– Lying is always a very incriminating thing for a politician. If he/she lies about little things, what stops him/her lying about the big ones? Lying indicates moral dishonesty, although the things lied about were little... (14 March, 2008, *Aamulehti*)

Kanerva's text message sending is forgivable, but the lying is not. (1 April, 2008, *Aamulehti*)

Kanerva had previously given Katainen his word – just between friends – that there would be no new text message scandals. When the new incident occurred, it was obvious that it was above all Katainen who felt let down. (14 April, 2008, *Aamulehti*)

This case clearly revealed that a political leader must be trusted by other politicians, the government, his own political party, the president and, of course, by the general public. However, trustworthiness in this category is seen as a characteristic of a politician, although it is based on the impressions of others. Instead, the next category is based on the evaluations and descriptions of relations between a politician and others.

The fourth category is maintenance of relations. This category includes explicit references to relations with someone or some groups. This describes the importance of good relations in the political field. Different types of relations and networks made up 18% of the references. There were at least three kinds of meaningful relations: relations with voters, relations with one's own party and networking with fellow politicians and, of course, media relations. In this case, the relationship with voters appeared in two ways. There was much media criticism of Kanerva from voters during the scandal; however, Minister Kanerva also had a great deal of popular support in his hometown of Turku. When he was in the eye of the scandal, he proudly displayed to the reporters the letters and e-mails he had received from his faithful supporters.

In addition, the importance of support from one's own party emerged during the scandal. When the media attacked Mr Kanerva, he received support from the elite politicians of his own party. The relationship, however, was ambivalent. When compelled to resign, Kanerva accused the leader of the National Coalition Party, Jyrki Katainen, of being a turncoat because he had withdrawn his support and trust. Thus, to weather a scandal, a minister's relations with the president and the other members of the government of Finland must also be in good condition.

According to our data, political leaders must have good media relations skills. The data show a clear tension in the relationship between politicians and the media. The case

was seen in the media as a sign of a growing media tendency to focus on the personal characteristics and private lives of political leaders. There was a great deal of discussion in the papers as to where the limits of privacy go and what the media may and must report. There was also discussion about how things were in “the old good days” and how they are now and whether this development was good or bad. The press also extensively contemplated its own actions and considered the purposes of the coverage. The conclusion in most of the articles was that things have changed irreversibly and that the media can no longer ignore politicians’ private issues. Excerpt 5 illustrates the tension between media freedom and politicians’ right to privacy.

#### **Excerpt 5**

‘It was the media that kept this issue in the focus of public attention, as this is the duty of the media. But the media did not send the text messages; that was the Minister for Foreign Affairs himself’, Reetta Meriläinen, editor-in-chief of *Helsingin Sanomat* points out. It matters how the Minister for Foreign Affairs is behaving and acting, including in situations outside his official position. (2 April, 2008, *Helsingin Sanomat*)

The fifth category is communication skills (14% of the references). For example, how one speaks (e.g., how one communicates feelings and politeness in all social interactions) is important. Showing feelings was interpreted positively in the papers. For example, Kanerva was criticized in the media for his dismissive attitude towards ordinary people. His behaviour was interpreted as contemptuous because he showed no signs of remorse and made no apologies. On the other hand, the party leader, Jyrki Katainen, was often commented on positively because he was close to tears when he announced to the media that he had been compelled to ask Mr Kanerva to resign and how difficult it was personally for him, although some journalists also criticized this as being too emotional.

Another dimension of communication skills is media skills – for example, how to cooperate with reporters and manage crises. Minister Kanerva was severely criticized because of his very poor performance in crisis communication. The newspapers even brought in academics and other experts to comment on how Mr Kanerva and his assistants should communicate in a crisis. Excerpt 4 also highlights the criticism Kanerva suffered for not taking full responsibility for his behaviour.

#### **Excerpt 4**

At first the accusations were denied, and then the revelations were belittled and laughed about. When nothing else worked, the truth was admitted and apologies were remorsefully made. At every turn, the media were blamed as if they were the ones who invented the scandal. (15 March, 2008, *Iltalehti*)

The present study is also concerned with how the requirements articulated in the media were justified. The most common way to justify the evaluations was to see Kanerva’s behaviour as indecent, because a 60-year-old minister should not behave in such a way. The credibility of politics was also mentioned repeatedly in the media data. Because the Finnish political system was seen to have recently suffered many terrible blows and its reputation was already low, the case was seen as making a bad thing worse. Therefore, the case was mentioned as a threat to the credibility of the whole political system.

The key element of the threat also revolved around reputation and image. There were articles about how the immoral behaviour of the minister was detrimental to the reputation and image of the party, the government and Finland in general. There was writing about how other nations would laugh at the Finns because of this scandal. It was also announced that Finland's national security was imperilled by an unsuspecting political leader ready to fall into intimate discussions with anyone at all. The use of working time and a cell phone owned by the Ministry was seen as reason for the negative evaluation. This behaviour was seen as a waste of the taxpayers' money. There were also suspicions that Kanerva broke the law, because, according to Finnish law, ministers must behave properly in their work.

The term *political credibility* occurred repeatedly in the media data. It was used by professional reporters, columnists, experts and politicians and members of the public interviewed in street polls. It was also used increasingly towards the end of the scandal. The most common meaning associated with political credibility was decency and dignity. This meaning also attracted a great deal of attention because of President Tarja Halonen, as Excerpt 6 illustrates.

### **Excerpt 6**

According to President Tarja Halonen, times and habits have changed. The politicians are assumed to behave more or less well and in a decent way. The reason for this is the increased demands of the public. The president raised this issue on the agenda yesterday in Bucharest at the summit conference of NATO. Originally, Halonen was supposed to travel to the conference with Ilkka Kanerva. In this new situation Halonen considered both good and bad aspects. – The positive aspect in this matter is, how to say, clean behaviour...new dimensions have arisen. Although people are the same as before, they should adapt to a new role. This has now been seen in many cases. (4 April, 2008, *Iltalehti*)

## **Discussion**

The Kanerva case attracted a great deal of attention in the Finnish media, and it can be said that it diverted attention from many other political topics, which is a typical feature of scandals. The case matched Thompson's (2000) description of the features of a sexual-political scandal surprisingly consistently. Although scandals may be different in different countries (Esser & Hartung, 2004), this case shows that sexual-political scandals have reached the shores of Finland. This analysis also confirms Thompson's (2000) observation that norms emerge in a scandal. During the scandal, the Finnish media evaluated the politicians concerned at length, thereby revealing the general qualities of political leadership.

There may be numerous reasons for the amount of media coverage devoted to this ostensibly trivial case. At least the earlier incidents had some influence on this, because it was not the first time that Mr. Kanerva had caused minor media sensations by sending suggestive text messages to ladies, as had other leading politicians, e.g. earlier the Prime Minister of Finland, Mr. Matti Vanhanen, had been subject to negative publicity because of his private life. The historical context and current media climate therefore seemed to be just right for this kind of sex scandal, because the Finnish media had not previously

been so open in their reporting on the private lives of politicians. Of course, the active role of the erotic dancer is also crucial, because this is seen as the first “kiss-and-tell” case in Finland, and the dancer took advantage of the case to become a media celebrity.

There were five categories of these qualities: professional competence, personal characteristics and behaviour, trustworthiness, communication competence, and maintenance of relations. The first notable feature of the criteria for political leaders is that the criteria mentioned in the newspapers are remarkably similar. This means that the papers reiterate the same adjectives and the same descriptions and that the journalists have obviously read their colleagues’ reports. The second observation is that the qualities of a good political leader are extremely demanding. Thus, the media require a great deal of their political leaders, and the leaders should behave like exemplary citizens. The norms of political leaders seem to be different from those of other citizens; they represent the norms of the elite.

Although the results reveal many kinds of requirements, they also strongly emphasize the professional competence of the minister, although in this case good professional competence was not enough for the minister to retain his position. The results thus follow Adams and Maier’s (2010) view that non-political qualities concerning media reporting on politicians have not outstripped political qualities. Although the case of Kanerva can be seen as a real mark of privatization in Finland, and the Finnish media also considered it in this way, this does not necessarily mean that the qualities for evaluating politicians have changed dramatically as a result of the scandal. Therefore, these results indicate that perhaps the influence of privatization on democracy is not as powerful as has been expected.

On the other hand, the results question Van Aelst et al.’s (2011) subcategories of privatization. The studied scandal is closely related to the personal life of the politician; however, his personal and professional characteristics are considered widely in the same context. According to these results, it would be very problematic to define which characteristics are politically relevant and which are not. In particular, the descriptions concerning trustworthiness would be difficult to divide into these subcategories. Although Van Aelst et al. (2011) mention that it is possible to code this kind of characteristic to both categories, it is reasonable to ask whether their subcategories of privatization are functional in practice.

In this case, the norms transgressed mainly concerned trust and confidence, honesty and decency. These were the key norms in this case. In earlier studies, too, it has been observed that the fundamental values (e.g. reputation, integrity and honour) are the things that really matter in scandals, even cross-culturally (Liao, 2010; Thompson, 2000). The trustworthiness of politicians seemed also to be a more crucial category during the scandal than it normally is for political leaders (see Isotalus & Almonkari 2011). It is striking how often it is mentioned in the papers that a minister must be truthful and keep his promises. These are also core qualities for evaluating politicians in other countries (e.g., Langer, 2007). Esser and Hartung (2004) mention that the worst thing is when a politician is caught lying during a scandal. In addition, the Finnish media were very strict concerning lying. Stressing these qualities may be something more typical of Finnish culture than of most other cultures. It has been noted in studies of Finnish culture that honesty and doing what has been promised are important for Finns and are highly appreciated in Finnish culture in general (e.g., Isotalus, 2009). Supposedly, there

are cultural differences concerning how strictly lying is condoned in politics. In any event, the case emphasizes the standpoint that the function of scandal is social control (Esser & Hartung, 2004).

Maintaining relations is also a central category in the data. In this case, trust was an especially crucial element in these relations. As long as Kanerva enjoyed the trust of other politicians, he was able to continue as a minister, but when he lost that trust he had to resign. There was also a great deal of speculation regarding the trust of citizens in the newspapers; however, it was not as concrete a phenomenon as the trust of other politicians. Juntunen and Väliverronen (2009) contend that media revelations about politicians' private lives have damaged relations between journalists and politicians. The present results also indicated that there is intense tension between media and politicians, especially concerning media freedom and the rights of politicians to privacy. The case studied here seems to mark a sort of turning point in the privatization of politics in Finland. The Finnish media have previously been reticent about dealing with the private lives of politicians, but nowadays they focus more and more on the personal characteristics and personal lives of individual politicians, simultaneously violating the traditional norms. During the scandal, the press often itself mentioned how the media maintained silence, for example, about the mistresses of political leaders.

An analysis of the justifications of these qualities revealed justifications based on values of political credibility, national security and the reputation of Finland. Political credibility was really the issue in this case; however, it is reasonable to doubt these other media justifications. Can such a case really damage the reputation of the nation or imperil the political system as claimed in some stories? These justifications actually show how the media can easily dramatize the courses of events.

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