

FROM ROCKSTAR POLITICIAN TO CELEBRITY INFLUENCER: FORMER FINNISH PRIME MINISTER SANNA MARIN IN REPRESENTATIONAL AND PRESENTATIONAL MEDIA

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ABSTRACT

Sanna Marin, Finland's former prime minister and leader of the Social Democratic Party, has gained extensive media coverage in recent years due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Finnish NATO membership, as well as becoming something of a social media influencer and style icon. This article examines Marin's rise to fame from top politician to celebrity influencer, drawing on previous theorizations of persona studies, relating to the celebrity politician and the relationship between politicians and media, both representational (traditional) and presentational (social). Finnish and international reporting are comparatively studied, as some difference can be detected in how Marin is portrayed and how her time in office and political legacy are defined. Marin's social media presence, particularly on Instagram, is addressed from a perspective of celebrity status and authenticity, relating to her online persona. Findings indicate that Marin constructs her public persona with the help of the representational and presentational spaces she occupies, including those that cause controversy and debate. Journalists, too, are able to raise their public profiles when interviewing or writing about high-profile politician celebrities such as Sanna Marin.

KEY WORDS

Sanna Marin, Politician, Media, Celebrity, Influencer, Persona

INTRODUCTION

The celebrity politician is a well-known figure today, represented by people such as Arnold Schwarzenegger, Governor of California 2003-2011, or former American presidents Ronald Reagan and Donald Trump, the latter of whom was re-elected in November 2024. They have all appeared in various films and TV shows, making their names long before being elected for their respective offices. A rarer occurrence is the politician celebrity, someone who has had a significant political career and then become a celebrity outside politics. This article examines the celebrity status of such a politician celebrity, namely former Finnish prime minister Sanna Marin, who signed for the American talent management company Range Media Partners in

2023, after having left Finnish parliament behind and began work at the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change the same year. She has been praised internationally for her leadership and seen as a role model for women, particularly in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic as well as Finland's accession to NATO. In 2024, her Instagram account had more than a million followers, underlining her impact as influencer as well. Marin's position calls for an examination of her political legacy and celebrity status, due to her transformation from top politician to politician celebrity influencer, regarding both the public persona she creates via various outlets such as social media and interviews, as well as the conflicting views of her legacy in international and Finnish media.

Sanna Marin, born in 1985, was Prime Minister of Finland from December 2019 to June 2023 (Eduskunta Riksdagen, no date), representing the Social Democratic Party. She stepped down after the 2023 parliamentary elections, won by the National Coalition Party. She served as Minister of Transport and Communications for six months before becoming prime minister. During her time in office, Covid-19 became a global pandemic, Russia began its war of aggression on Ukraine, and inflation increased significantly, causing economic instability globally. These turbulent events raised Marin's profile significantly, making her internationally known. Risto Niemikari and Tapio Raunio (2023, p. 285) observe that from the very beginning of the pandemic, "the focus was on Marin", acknowledging her increasingly elevated profile, and state that she seemed to postpone "difficult decisions concerning state finances" (Niemikari & Raunio, 2023, p. 287), which can be related to the considerable state debt amassed. In April 2023, Finland joined NATO after being in the accession process for nearly a year. Tuomas Forsberg notes that the decision to join was "public opinion-driven" (Forsberg 2024, p. 2). In September 2023, Marin handed in her resignation as MP and began work at the Tony Blair Institute. Her path from politician to influencer began while she was prime minister, cementing her social media presence on Instagram in particular, which is increasingly used to further communication between citizens and politicians, and in Marin's case also displays a "high degree of personalisation" (García-Beaudoux et al. 2023, p. 132).

For contemporary celebrities, social media provides new "presentational" (Marshall 2010, p. 38; Marshall, Moore & Barbour 2015, p. 291) spaces in which they have more agency in terms of the personas, a "strategic form of communication" (Marshall & Barbour 2015, p. 2), they wish to perform and create. The relationship between what is termed representational media (Marshall & Henderson 2016, p. 7), so-called traditional media, and the presentational one as constituted via Marin's persona-making on Instagram is at the centre of this study. Marin's transition from top politician to politician celebrity, and eventually celebrity influencer, indicates a novel trajectory no longer reliant on political achievements, building her persona with the help of representational and presentational spaces. This is reinforced in the numerous international media articles that celebrate her leadership and accomplishments, and Finnish articles that remain more critical of her achievements so far. This study examines how Marin is represented in the media, and what kind of politician celebrity persona she is attempting to construct herself. The material included has been published in a number of languages (English, Finnish, Swedish, and Norwegian), and translations have been provided by the author of this article.

POLITICIAN AS CELEBRITY

The politician celebrity is not a new term, having been introduced previously by David Marsh, Paul t'Hart, and Karen Tindall (2010, p. 325), who define it as "established politicians who enter

the sphere of celebrity” and then attempt by various means to bring forth their political message “through evolving media, such as radio, television and the internet”. Social media has developed significantly since the publication of their article and become increasingly influential. John Street, Sanna Inthorn, and Martin Scott (2013) observe that celebrities may have considerable political influence in terms of various advocacy projects (a contemporary example here would be Kim Kardashian’s work for prison reform in the United States, examined in more detail by Jensen 2021), but that their statements and publicly expressed opinions may also have political power (Street, et al. 2013, p. 91). Sanna Marin represents a reversed trajectory, becoming internationally known during her time in office and reinforcing her celebrity status after having stepped down from national politics. Social media can be controlled, at least in terms of its content, by the person using it, whereas traditional media cannot (Jensen 2021, p. 271). Politicians are to some extent at the mercy of the media but can also use it to their benefit to gain visibility and further their agendas.

In his article from 2004, John Street identifies two kinds of celebrity politicians. The first group consists partly of people who are so called “traditional” politicians, elected by voters to represent their interests, “who engages with the world of popular culture in order to enhance or advance their pre-established political functions and goals” (p. 431). Marin can be argued to belong to this group, which is defined by Street as drawing on traditional celebrity to further their agenda, such as posing for photos with celebrities within the entertainment industry, or appearing on talk shows (Street 2004, p. 437-438). However, Marin’s position is intricate as she left office and parliament, pursuing a different career. The question then emerges as to whether a different kind of categorization is needed, and whether Marin might represent a new form of celebrity, balancing between the politician, celebrity, and influencer in novel ways.

As P. David Marshall (2014, p. 157-158) argues, “[c]elebrity culture is linked to individualisation. It is also linked to personalisation and working out the dimensions of the personal in political and cultural concerns”. The high-profile politician becomes a personification of such individualisation, performing a balancing act between the political, private, and public. This can be connected with scandals and “more intense revelatory news” (Marshall 2014, p. 157), such as a video that leaked in 2022, in which Marin is seen dancing at a private party. It caused commotion in Finland and abroad and became the focus of many interviews and journalistic texts on Marin. The individualization of Marin also relates to other ways in which she is portrayed in the media, notably in terms of the often used “rockstar” comparison, adopted for example by Sharyn Alfonsi (2023) and Kayla Webley Adler (2024) in their media articles. Previous study of Marin’s public appearances and fashion choices sees the rockstar comparison as having “the connotation of being highly admired” (Meriläinen, Ortbals & Strachan 2024, p. 190), but much more than just admiration is arguably at stake. In a Finnish context, Matti Mörntinen (2023) argues that the border between entertainment and politics is getting increasingly thin and uses Marin as an example of a contemporary politician celebrity, calling her “Marin the megastar” in English in his column, which is otherwise written in Finnish. Mörntinen states that such a transformation is much rarer than the reversed process where celebrities become politicians.

The rockstar comparison is not new, and Street (2019, p. 9) observes such wording in relation to Donald Trump and Emmanuel Macron, noting that “[t]he candidate is framed as a star, the campaign as a sell-out tour and the election as the Madison Square Garden finale”, or, in relation to Marin, “a Eurovision competition” (Alfonsi 2023). Street further contends that such comparisons may refer to “how voters are responding to celebrity politics” (2019, p.9). Thus, using a term such as “rockstar” to describe Marin is an indication of her exceptional celebrity status, both nationally and abroad. It emphasizes the individualization mentioned by Marshall

of the politician celebrity, and it also indicates that there is an entertainment value, a commodification (Marshall 2014, p. 206), attached to the persona in question, even becoming a “commodified self” (Marshall, Moore, & Barbour 2020, p. 3).

Marin’s rise to fame has been analysed in depth in Finnish contexts. Johanna Vuorelma (2023), political sciences scholar, argues in her column for *Yle*, the Finnish broadcasting company, that Marin’s career has brought back old interpretations that focus on left-leaning politicians, who may be seen as losing their political ideologies when they get a taste of power. This is often referred to as “champagne socialism”, a term evoked for example by Professor Ilkka Ruostetsaari in an interview for *Ilta-Sanomat* (Puljujärvi 2023). According to Vuorelma, politicians often try to avoid such labelling but argues that Marin has not done so. Vuorelma acknowledges the opposite interpretation of Marin’s position, that she is seen as leaving misogynist politics behind, and calls for new stories that emphasize the responsibility and passion of politicians (Vuorelma 2023). Can political (rock)stardom coexist alongside responsibility and passion? In an earlier interview for *British Vogue*, conducted in May 2020, Marin asserts that she ultimately wants to ensure that “everyone can have a good life, no matter what their backgrounds are”, stating that “I’ve never paid much attention to myself” (Kale 2023). The statements indicate that Marin wishes to emphasize that she is working for the greater good and not for personal gain.

In another text, Arttu Seppänen (2024) writes that Marin’s transition away from national politics caused confusion, as she has been seen as having abandoned traditional social democratic values with her newfound celebrity status. The comment implies that the politician persona and celebrity persona cannot coexist. The commodification of the politician celebrity is here emphasized, and Seppänen predicts that the future may bring more similar trajectories to that of Marin’s. He assesses Marin’s celebrity status as having become possible thanks to Instagram Stories, which gives users the possibility to upload photos and videos that disappear within 24 hours. This feature is referred to as “ephemeral”, meaning that the content is “temporary” and “short-lived” (Jørgensen, Voorveld, and van Noort 2023, p. 187). Marin’s presence on Instagram warrants further study due to her large number of followers and the presentational spaces it provides for the creation of her celebrity persona.

CREATING AUTHENTICITY ON SOCIAL MEDIA

The social media site chosen for further discussion in this section is Instagram, mainly due to Marin’s use of it, but also because of the platform being “heavily involved in persona work” (Barbour, Lee & Moore 2017, p. 1). Giovanni Daniele Starita and Tommaso Trillò (2022) examine celebrity practices among politicians who use social media to reach out to potential voters, and they introduce the term “influencer-politician”, focusing on Italian politician Matteo Salvini’s social media practices. They state that the celebrity politician is “a well-known person who has a clear political narrative, is fluent in modern pop-culture repertoires, can draw a crowd”, and that they are persuasive in terms of their opinions and values (p. 332-333). The list can be applied to Marin as well and is a central part of her popularity not just as politician but also as influencer.

Marin used social media for product advertisement even as prime minister. Emily Hund (2023, p. 6) investigates the influencer industry and argues that it all started with bloggers who commodified “realness”. Starita and Trillò (2022, p. 334) note that being a successful influencer is dependent on how “authentic” the audience considers the celebrity in question. Hund (2023, p. 8) calls influencers and their importance “a paradigm shift in the way we think about each

other and ourselves". The influencer is seen as blurring boundaries between private persona and product. In terms of the emerging politician celebrity influencer such as Marin, the political dimension further complicates this, particularly since she cannot be seen as a "microcelebrity" as described by Marshall, Moore and Barbour (2020: 91) in terms of "niche"-related fame and followers, who may not be received favourably when becoming known outside their micropublics. Marin's success as influencer builds on her earlier fame as prime minister, and she transcends any simple categories of microcelebrity. She does engage in more typical influencer behaviour too, as exemplified by her product placement on social media, relating notably to a leather backpack she posted about in 2021, produced by a Finnish company, but apparently bought and paid for by Marin herself (Lehtonen 2021). Lehtonen writes that after the publication of his text on the backpack, *Iltalehti* found out that the sister of one of the owners of the company that makes the backpack is Marin's acquaintance from school. Private and public personas, the product, and the politician intertwine in the case of the backpack.

Another example of Marin's commercial influence concerns a dress she wore at Helsinki Pride in 2022, which was sold by a clothing store for women in Helsinki. The store manager states that the dress became immensely popular after Marin appeared in it, but that it tends to sell out every summer (Hakulinen 2022). Thus, Marin may or may not have affected sales. The endorsement deals of influencers can have a significant impact on the sales of various commodities (see for example Hess et al. 2021; Carrillat & Ilicic 2019), making it a considerable business. Marin's backpack and dress are not presented as endorsement deals, but they did receive considerable visibility on her Instagram account. Her earlier status as politician, transitioning towards celebrity influencer, may have had an impact on the sales of commodities.

Celebrity politicians also have their pasts to contend with, referring to those who were famous before turning to politics. Marsh, t'Hart and Tindall (2010, p. 324) argue that if there is a great gap between former and current lives of such politicians, including "espoused political values and policy preferences", there is more of a risk of being seen as less credible based on how the person in question has been represented in media before. The question is whether this applies the other way around as well, that a politician turned celebrity is scrutinized based on previous media coverage. In Marin's case, this can be seen as working largely to her advantage, at least in international contexts, as exemplified by Adler, who explains that she originally thought that it was "a tragedy that this history-making politician was best known for the sexism-laced scandals she's weathered over how she dressed and socialized". Adler then observes how Marin handled the negative headlines, continuing with her life, "uncensored and unashamed" (Adler 2024). Using the term "uncensored" is noteworthy, as it indicates authenticity. This is further reinforced by the phrase about Marin being "exactly who she is" (Adler 2024).

Further, Street (2004, p. 447) states that, essentially, "all politicians are celebrity politicians, only some are more convincing, more 'authentic' performers than others". This is an important observation, as all people in the public eye perform identities, narratives, and ideologies they wish to endorse and emphasize. On her Instagram page, Marin is introduced as "Former Prime Minister of Finland", with a variety of posts and photos. Marin has also used Twitter, now X. Her public status has caused some contention as well, as she posted an appeal on then Twitter in July 2023 asking the media to stop writing about her private life (Karvinen 2023). The tweet indicates a wish on Marin's part to control the public narrative, utilizing social media to keep up her celebrity status, while also attempting to control reporting in representational media. In an earlier tweet in June 2022, Marin asserts that she and her then husband have not given their consent regarding photos taken of their daughter, and that children have a right to privacy even if their parents have public roles (Leppänen & Pekonen

2022). The tweet related to an incident concerning former president Sauli Niinistö's son, whose picture was published without the parents' consent.

Twitter/X has been used to control public narratives in similar ways before by politicians and other similar actors (Ekman & Widholm 2015), and Marin can be seen as having engaged in such activity with her tweet above. Mattias Ekman and Andreas Widholm argue that politicians who make such statements "become media producers themselves who, in turn, use journalism as a source and vehicle for promoting their own agenda" (Ekman & Widholm 2015, p. 82). Marin's comment is less about promoting her agenda and more about attempting to control the narrative constructed about her, and to keep certain parts of her life private, while posting about her life for example on Instagram. The five dimensions of an online persona are here relevant, originally examined by Christopher Moore, Kim Barbour, and Katja Lee (2017), who observe that the dimensions relate to "the public, the mediated, the performative, the collective, and intentional value" (Moore et al. 2017, p. 2). The public refers to the "polished, scheduled, and controlled version" of the celebrity at various events (p. 3), connected with mediatization in terms of how the self is produced via different channels and eventually commodified. Marin's efforts to control her public image relate to both dimensions, and to the performed self (Marshall 2010, p. 39).

The use of social media among politicians has been studied previously by, among others, Christian Pieter Hoffmann, Anne Suphan, and Miriam Meckel (2016, p. 249), who make the following observations: "Politicians seek to disseminate promotional content to select groups of social media users". They distinguish for example between those who use social media for "self-promotion" and those who use it in order to entertain particular audiences (Hoffman et al. 2016), also referred to as "micropublics" (Marshall 2014, p. 163) and relating to the collective dimension outlined above. Bethany Usher (2021, p. 2838) defines micropublics as "audiences who gather around the social media profiles of public figures", and Moore, Barbour and Lee (2017, p. 6) add that the concept also encompasses "personal images, memes, likes, and dislikes". Marin's Instagram account offers images of, among many others, her appearance at the Finnish Emma Gala in 2024 (an award ceremony within the music industry), a trip to an Austrian ski resort in February 2024, as well as the traditional Independence Day celebration hosted by the Finnish president in December 2023. In several images, Marin poses with known Finnish politicians such as Jutta Urpilainen, European Commissioner and former minister, and Alexander Stubb who was elected president in February 2024, including a meeting with Moldovan President Maia Sandu in December 2023. Images also show Marin at various speaking engagements and events she has attended, elevating her professional persona (Marshall et al. 2020, p. 185) as it attaches to the personas of other high-profile politicians. Some images constitute more personal profile photos, or more typically celebrity-like images of her at Paris Fashion Week 2023. The posts are relevant from a perspective of the fifth dimension of online personas, relating to value and "prestige" (Moore et al. 2017, p. 7). The performance of self in the images implies a "public private self" (Moore et al. 2017, p. 44, Marshall 2010, p. 44), eventually far more public than private, also, paradoxically, exemplified in Marin's tweets asking for privacy.

Individualization and personalization are central parts of celebrity construction (Marshall 2014), also relating to "the critical interplay between the private and the public" (Marshall 2014, p. 158). Xénia Farkas and Márton Bene (2021) examine politicians' uses of images on social media and distinguish between two different modes: individualization, which focuses on "political work", and privatization "of personalization" which is geared towards the politician's "personality and personal background" (p. 120). They find in their study that individualization is more present on Facebook and personalization on Instagram, with for

example more formal office wear in images on Facebook whereas Instagram shows the politicians in more casual clothing. They conclude that Instagram shows a mix of both, the political work as well as the more personal sphere. The images briefly addressed on Marin's account seem to confirm Farkas and Bene's findings, as they are often taken in professional settings, emphasizing Marin's career and political connections. The images from Fashion Week can be said to perform a different kind of celebrity identity, one more attached to a world of so-called traditional celebrity, "film stars, pop stars, TV personalities" as defined by David C. Giles (2018, p. 205). Marin's celebrity image is therefore mixed, drawing on her status as former prime minister while currently working for a renowned and influential organization, and blending with traditional celebrity. Both aspects of her status are constructed on Instagram.

NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL MEDIA COVERAGE

Much of the reporting on Sanna Marin in international contexts focuses on her time as prime minister and the challenges Finland faced in terms of the pandemic, the war on Ukraine, applying for NATO membership and eventually becoming full member of the alliance. From a more personal perspective, the dance video that leaked of her in 2022 caused much debate and spread instantly worldwide. The discussion here will largely focus on reporting and interviews with Marin that deal with these issues, as they are prominent themes in so many articles, columns, and other pieces. Marshall (2014, p. 156) notes that "[n]ewspapers [...] play in the world of celebrity news". Although social media has become increasingly important since, this is still the case, and newspapers, including tabloids, have not lost their role as observers, commentators, and political actors. Columnists, too, may occupy several roles as online personas, as noted by Usher (2021), creating content "in relation to audience reception of it" (p. 2837). The critical views offered by Finnish journalists and columnists indicate that they write for an audience increasingly less enthused with Marin's politics. Naturally, journalists and columnists in other national contexts may also have "authority and authenticity" (Usher 2021, p. 2844) to perform as they write positively of Marin and her political career. Both parties, Finnish and international journalists, have their audiences to appeal to and this may partly explain the different approaches to Marin's politics. Journalists, therefore, have a stake in the celebrity status of politicians, helping them acquire fame while raising their own profiles in the process. Journalistic reporting can be a double-edged sword as some stories that are published, according to journalist ethics and guidelines, "may not be in line with a politician's views of what might best serve him or her" (Usher 2021, p. 2844.). The relationship between traditional media and politicians is therefore one of uneasy coexistence, and this is also visible in the case of Marin.

Finland's NATO process gained much attention in 2022 and 2023 both nationally and worldwide, with Juha-Pekka Tiainen (2023) drawing on Marin's statement in the 2019 parliamentary elections campaign, which emphasized military neutrality. The title of Tiainen's piece is *Did Sanna Marin truly settle NATO membership? (Ratkaisiko Sanna Marin todella Nato-jäsenyyden?)*. In another piece for *Helsingin Sanomat*, Finland's leading daily newspaper, Teemu Muhonen (2022) interviewed Sanna Marin when Finland was days away from handing in the application. Marin claims to have known immediately when the attack on Ukraine began that Finland, and Sweden too most likely, would soon apply for NATO membership, and asserts that her own position with regard to NATO changed during her time in office. She admits that she thought for a long time that neutral status was best for Finland (Muhonen 2022). Forsberg (2024, p. 11) emphasizes that right before the war began in early 2022, the "political elite" had not yet changed their opinion on membership, and that afterwards, there were politicians who

“somewhat implausibly” stated that they had indeed shifted their opinions much earlier, also referring here to Muhonen (2022). *EVA*, the Finnish Business and Policy Forum, reports that in the autumn 2021, only 26% of the population supported membership, but that the start of the war rapidly changed public opinion (EVA, 2022).

Internationally, reporting is somewhat different in this regard. In an interview for *CBS News*, Alfonsi (2023) asks when Marin knew that Finland needs to join, to which Marin responds that she “knew it right away. I was leaning – in favour – of NATO even before – but the country wasn’t ready”. Marin’s statement indicates that she had supported membership for a long time but that public opinion was against it. This to some extent contradicts Forsberg’s and Finnish journalists’ observations above. Jacqueline Howard (2023) writes for *ABC*, the Australian Broadcasting Company, that Marin’s “legacy” changes things for Finland for the foreseeable future, likely referring to NATO membership, which she attributes to Marin and former president Sauli Niinistö. The word legacy indicates leaving something behind that will have a lasting effect. Finnish NATO membership is, indisputably, a central part of both Marin’s and Niinistö’s political legacies.

The rockstar comparison is revisited in relation to NATO, as *NRK*, the Norwegian broadcasting company, interviewed Marin in December 2023, and Joakim Reigstad (2023) refers to her as “Finland’s new superstar” (“Finlands nye superstjerne”) and as “a comet in the Finnish political sky” (“[e]n komet på den finske politiske himmelen”), emphasizing Marin’s relatively quick rise to international fame. Reigstad notes that Marin expressed before parliamentary elections in both 2015 and 2019 that she opposed Finnish NATO membership, offering a somewhat different perspective from the previous pieces cited. There are several media narratives about Marin and her role for the NATO process. A more contentious opinion is provided by Zoe Williams (2023) for *The Guardian*, who analyses the election results in 2023 and argues that many pivotal moments during Marin’s term were ignored, listing how her government handled Covid and NATO accession. Similar sentiments appear in *Aftonbladet*, a Swedish daily tabloid newspaper, in an editorial written by Jonna Sima (2023). The page states that the editorial of *Aftonbladet* is “independently social democratic” (“oberoende socialdemokratisk”). Sima asserts that “the world’s coolest prime minister” lost her post in the elections, and that Marin gets to carry the blame for Finland’s worsening economy. Sima calls it “a simplified explanatory model” (“en förenklad förklaringsmodell”), indicating that Marin became the scapegoat for problems she did not cause. Sima, too, makes a rather negative prediction of Finland post-Marin and of the ways in which what she deems as Marin’s legacy will be part of the country’s futures.

What Williams refers to in her column, however, when stating that much of Marin’s achievements went unnoticed, is the dance video and its aftermath. Williams asserts that the National Coalition Party won the elections in Finland in 2023 because of “misogynist backlash against Marin the party girl”, implying that Finnish voters were so appalled by the video that they decided not to vote for Marin’s party. Three responses to Williams’s column were published by *The Guardian*, in which Williams is critiqued for her comments. Paul Fairchild writes that he was “saddened to read Zoe Williams’ misrepresentations” (Fairchild 2023) of the elections, and that there was no talk about party girls in reference to Marin during the campaign. Instead, he suggests that increasing government debt was the actual reason why the Democrats did not win, and Anna Homén expresses similar views, observing that the three candidates with the highest number of votes in the elections were women (Homén 2023). Eventually, Robin Bailey states that some of Marin’s foreign policy statements acted against her (Bailey 2023).

The narrative emphasized by Williams, that there was a misogynist response to Marin due to the video, is repeated in other international columns and articles. It is also somewhat supported by Marin herself, as exemplified in the interview for *NRK*: “I looked too young. I looked too sexy in the videos” (“Jeg så for ung ut. Jeg så for sexy ut i de videone”) (Reigstad 2023). The comment is repeated in an interview for *Elle* in January 2024, as Marin asserts that there is a “moral gaze” on everything she does. According to her, the real problem was not the fact that she was dancing, but that “I looked too sexy [...] I was too young” (Adler 2024). The same is stated in Alfonsi’s (2023) interview, that the video attracted attention due to how Marin looked and danced. While sexism and misogyny continue to be serious issues in politics, also for Marin and other female ministers in her government (see for example Mansell et al. 2022; Lovenduski 2014; Sakki & Martikainen 2022), other narratives are also emphasized.

In Finnish media, the approach to the video is once more somewhat different. Ulla Appelsin, writing for *Ilta-Sanomat*, a Finnish daily tabloid newspaper, addresses in her column interviews in which Sanna Marin has spoken of the dance video. Appelsin (2024) observes that the video, in fact, increased Marin’s international popularity and asks for reflection on the ways in which looks and appearance impact success. It is worth noting that a leaked video can also become a star maker (Englund 2023, p. 373). Appelsin critiques Marin’s message in international media in relation to the video, as it suggests that Finland is a misogynist society, while the dance video debate actually related to a broader discussion of Marin’s social life and conduct as prime minister according to Appelsin. The public, as one of the five dimensions of online personas, is here relevant, as it refers to the “polished, scheduled, and controlled version” (Moore et al. 2017, p. 3) of the performed self, including the managing of scandals. An emphasis on misogyny reflects on Marin’s position as a relatively young female leader in a world of masculine politics. After the dance video leaked, Marin gave an emotional speech at the market square in Lahti, stating that she, too, needs to experience “joy, light, and fun” (“iloa, valoa ja hauskuutta”) (*Helsingin Sanomat* 2022). Here, Marin appeals to the audience to recognize her as the ordinary person she is outside office. The politician celebrity as it combines with the celebrity influencer, the rockstar politician, draws on a symbiotic relationship with journalists benefiting from their work on high-profile people, and uses negative publicity to their advantage. Marin is presented in media articles about the video as ordinary and extraordinary, depending on the message conveyed.

Thinking further about the rockstar image also indicates that Marin has fans and not just followers, with Gary Dickson (2012, p. 764) observing that Ronald Reagan had fans as a film star who then transformed into followers when he became president. For Marin, the trajectory has potentially been the opposite. Dickson also asserts that fans desire “entertainment” instead of “seriousness of purpose” (Dickson 2012, p. 765) that would be expected of political leaders. The dance video controversy, as well as the image of Marin wearing a blazer without any shirt underneath that appeared in 2020 in the Finnish women’s magazine *Trendi*, indicate that Marin’s public persona drew on rockstar tendencies while still in office. The photo caused debate as to what is appropriate dress for a prime minister, with Amy Woodyatt (2020) writing for *CNN* that the criticism revolved around timing, as the photoshoot took place in the midst of the pandemic. In support of Marin after the backlash, women posted pictures on social media of themselves wearing just a blazer. The contestation implies that Marin’s balancing between entertainment and seriousness as addressed by Dickson is a significant part of her legacy as prime minister, building on the rockstar image. Gender and media studies expert Anu Koivunen states in an interview for *YLE* that images such as Marin’s are part of politics, and that great awareness is likely involved, also relating to the controversy it caused (Vedenpää 2020; Meriläinen, Ortbals & Strachan 2024, p. 188). The dance video and photo controversies indicate that Marin’s many micropublics include those that are critical of her appearances and conduct,

and that at least some of the contested media content may be created with the intent to cause debate.

A final aspect of Marin's presence in media addressed in this section concerns a book she is allegedly writing, provisionally titled *Our Turn: Fearless Leadership for a New Generation* (Ånäs 2023). The book will supposedly be partly autobiographical according to reports, forming part of the mediatized dimension of Marin's online persona (Moore et al. 2017, p. 3). While it is impossible to predict its content based on a preliminary title, the phenomenon of celebrity memoir is gaining ground. Memoirs by Prince Harry, Viola Davis, Matthew Perry and Pamela Anderson among many others topped the charts in 2023 (Garvey 2023). Katja Lee (2020, p. 87) ponders the future of celebrity memoir in the current digital era, predicting that memoir will become more popular among new categories of celebrities, renewing the genre in the process. Marin's book, based on the preliminary title alone, may well be categorized as some form of advice or how-to for millennials, potentially participating in genre renewal predicted by Lee.

Two books about Sanna Marin, written by Finnish journalists Salla Vuorikoski and Lauri Nurmi, were published in October 2024. This article was already in the copy-editing stage at that point (the first version was written in early 2024). It is noteworthy that Vuorikoski's book was nominated for the Finlandia Prize (Finland's most prestigious literary award) in Nonfiction (Puukka 2024), while Nurmi's book is to be investigated by the Council for Mass Media in Finland. Upon publication of Nurmi's book, Marin stated that she had not given consent to the use of conversations she had had with Nurmi, and the inclusion of potentially confidential material is the focus of the investigation (Korhonen 2024). Both books are unauthorized in the sense that Marin did not participate in the making of them.

While any detailed textual analysis is not possible here, a few relevant observations emerge. Vuorikoski bases her book on interviews with politicians, officials, and journalists among others, and confirms that international media interest in Marin grew when she became prime minister (2024, p. 154; ebook edition used), and that Finnish coverage was increasingly negative from 2021 onwards (2024, p. 252). She refers to Marin as a "world star" ("maailmantähti"), rockstar, and superstar (2024, p. 255; 297; 326; 356; 381), further reinforcing views of Marin as a global celebrity. Nurmi, too, notes that Marin's relationship with the media changed significantly when comparing her approach in 2020 to those in 2022 and 2023 (2024, p. 182; ebook edition used). Marin's presentational persona-making is also addressed by both writers, as Vuorikoski asserts that Marin no longer gives interviews to Finnish journalists (2024, p. 401), and has instead turned to Instagram (2024, p. 376). Nurmi ends his book with an acknowledgements section where he mentions Marin's blog from 2008-2020, which is no longer publicly available online, as one of the sources for his book. According to Nurmi, the blog "authentically" ("autenttisesti") depicts Marin's thinking (2024, p. 239). Arguably, without having access to the blog, it can be seen as part of Marin's earlier presentational persona-making. Vuorikoski's book ends with the statement that no other politician has had a trajectory similar to that of Marin (2024, p. 415), which strengthens the argument made in this article that Marin represents a new kind of politician celebrity.

Other book projects have also been planned and some already withdrawn (Mäntylä 2024), with one of the writers of a cancelled project, Tuomas Niskakangas, stating in his blog that it came to an early end partly because Marin did not want to participate in the project herself, and partly because the book would have needed to be "heroic" ("sankarillinen") for international markets. Niskakangas writes that it was difficult to combine Finnish views of Marin with the "blind admiration" she enjoys elsewhere (Niskakangas 2024). The comment indicates two separate public personas, one belonging to the international rockstar politician

celebrity category, and the other to something far less glamorous in a national context, a former prime minister whose decisions and legacies are scrutinized for decades afterwards by journalists and researchers alike.

Whatever book Marin will produce, it is likely to attract attention upon publication. Ariana Baio interviews Claire Parker and Ashley Hamilton, whose podcast *Celebrity Memoir Book Club* focuses on celebrity memoirs, with Hamilton stating that “a book is the new direct-to-consumer Instagram caption” (Baio 2023). Baio makes the following noteworthy observation: “Unlike a social media post that only stays relevant for a few hours, a book is forever. It’s a permanent way for the most gossiped-about people to reclaim attention and control the narrative”. The comment indicates that the era of books is by no means over despite the power and prevalence of social media. Parker confirms this and notes that writing a book and creating a bestseller is still prestigious (Baio 2023). Such prestige is different from social media and influencing, thinking of the representational and presentational spaces of traditional and social media (Marshall & Henderson 2016, p. 7). While a book will not elicit immediate responses from readers as on social media, and the intended audience, the micropublic, for a book may also be partly different, it provides Marin’s legacy with a permanence that social media cannot. Writing a book can even be seen as a logical next step in Marin’s career and in her transition from politician to politician celebrity to politician celebrity influencer, cementing her fame in more lasting ways.

POLITICIAN CELEBRITY INFLUENCER

Sanna Marin’s path to fame contains both traditional and expected elements as well as somewhat unusual trajectories as outlined in this article. Her becoming prime minister at a young age and at a pivotal moment in Finnish, and global, history, have impacted the way she is seen and portrayed in media reports around the world. Becoming a “rockstar” of politics, a media sensation and sought-after speaker, and being depicted as such in columns and pieces reporting on her period as prime minister, emphasizes the celebrity dimension surrounding her time in office as well as what comes after. While lauded internationally for her involvement in Finnish NATO membership and being seen as a feminist beacon, particularly after the leaked dance video, Finnish media remains more critical of her time in office and of her decision to leave party politics and parliament behind despite receiving a considerable number of votes. The politician celebrity is therefore perceived differently depending on who is doing the scrutinizing and where they are located, indicating that Marin’s public persona in Finnish media contexts is still connected with her career as politician, and more with the celebrity dimension in international ones. The status and online personas of those doing the reporting is also relevant, as their writing on Marin, be it positive or negative, is bound to draw attention. The symbiotic relationship between representational media and the politician celebrity is emphasized, and reporting about Marin enables journalists to elevate their own profiles.

The boundary between the politician and the influencer was blurred in the case of Marin before she resigned from parliament, as exemplified in the products she posted about on social media. They present a different kind of endorsement deal, based partly on personal relationships. The private persona and the politician intertwine here, becoming part of the influencer. In more recent Instagram posts, Marin emphasizes her celebrity status, posting pictures of herself with top politicians and attending events that few ordinary citizens have access to. The account can therefore be seen as emphasizing both her politician persona as well as celebrity status, including the influencer in terms of product placement. The book that she is potentially in the process of writing further reinforces the celebrity status, as memoirs have

become the chosen medium of so many superstars who want to share their stories on their terms.

Sanna Marin's celebrity status transcends earlier definitions of the celebrity politician, or the politician celebrity, as she is no longer using her celebrity status or social media account to gain voters and ensure her re-election, but has moved on to other tasks and engagements, building a career within a world-renowned organization, working with other high-profile politicians. Her entertainment value and the commodification of her persona emerge in relation to the political work she does, the celebrity status she has created, as well as her social media presence. The narrative surrounding her may change many times yet, but as this study shows, Marin is paving the way for a new kind of politician celebrity whose legacy is no longer solely reliant on previous political pursuits, but which draws on the persona they construct in traditional and social media alike, on the representational and presentational spaces they inhabit, including those that become contentious.

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