

Chapter 17

Political media effects in a Nordic perspective

Audun Beyer, Erik Knudsen, Kim Andersen,
& Adam Shehata

Abstract

In this chapter, we focus on one of the most central issues within the scholarly literature on political communication: political media effects. We centre our discussion on the role played by the Nordic context for political media effects and focus on media effects on political learning and knowledge gaps; agenda-setting, priming, and framing effects; and media effects on voting and other political behaviours. Because much of the research and theories that have shaped the political communication literature on media effects emanate from the US, we discuss how differences between the American and the Nordic contexts may influence how well the theories of political media effects emanating from an American perspective fit the Nordic countries. We pay particular attention to studies related to the different theories that have been conducted in the Nordic context.

Keywords: political media effects, agenda-setting, framing, political learning, effects on political behaviour

Introduction

In the scholarly field of media and communication research, the study of media effects is one of the most central (Nabi & Oliver, 2009). Studies of media effects span various research fields, such as health communication and science communication, but are particularly prominent in the field of political communication. Within this field, the study of media effects has moved from being labelled “one of the most notable embarrassments of modern social science” (Bartels, 1993: 267) to having “a major impact in political science and communications scholarship” (Iyengar, 2010: 190). As such, it is by now clear that the media play an important role in shaping people’s political beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours.

In this chapter, we focus on media effects on political learning and knowledge gaps; agenda-setting, priming, and framing effects; and finally, media effects on

voting and other political behaviours. These are some of the most prominent theories and areas of interest within media effects research (Neuman & Guggenheim, 2011), and they are especially well suited for the purpose of this chapter, namely to illustrate the role played by the Nordic context for political media effects. Much of the research and theories that have shaped the study of these central media effects within political communication emanate from the US. We will therefore ask and discuss how traits highlighting the differences between the American and the Nordic contexts (e.g., the status of public service broadcasting) may influence how well the theories of political media effects emanating from an American perspective fit the Nordic countries. This is, of course, not to say that important research has not been done outside the US or the Nordic countries. However, to limit the scope of the chapter, we refrain from including other contexts – such as Germany or the Netherlands, for example – where a lot of research on political media effects has also been done.

We will argue that for theories relating to the human psychology, as, for example, framing, priming, and agenda-setting, there are few reasons to expect differences between different contexts, such as the US and the Nordic countries. However, when it comes to more contextual-dependent theoretical perspectives – such as the knowledge gap hypothesis or how different media types may or may not foster feelings of cynicism and apathy – there is reason to believe that there can be differences between the Nordic and the American contexts. Such differences may be due to the nature of the media systems with, for example, smaller distinctions between quality and tabloid newspapers and strong public service broadcasters.

We start by discussing the context of political media effects in the Nordic countries. We then proceed with discussions concerning political learning and knowledge gaps; agenda-setting, priming, and framing; and finally, effects on voting and other political behaviour. Lastly, we summarise our discussions and provide some concluding remarks concerning the state of media effects research in the Nordic region. Throughout the chapter, we pay particular attention to studies related to the different theories that have been conducted in the Nordic context. We limit ourselves to political media effects on public opinion generally, and individuals more specifically, but it is, of course, also possible to study effects of political communication on the macro level, such as on political culture and institutions (see Potter, 2012). For instance, the macro level theory of mediatisation is one of the most studied in the Nordic context but will not be included in our discussions.

Political media effects in the Nordic countries

Even though the media effects considered in this chapter are typically studied from a micro-level perspective, various institutional and contextual factors play

an important role. The idea that macro-level characteristics condition opinion dynamics and media effects at the individual level is widely recognised in the field and one reason behind the growing interest in cross-national political communication research (Aalberg & Curran, 2012; Hallin & Mancini, 2004). More generally though, the importance of macro-level factors in media effects has also been highlighted by the vast media environmental transformations in the last decades. A range of classic political media effects, such as agenda-setting, priming, framing, and learning, are conditioned upon the wider socio-technological contexts that have characterised Western democracies at different points in time (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008; Prior, 2007). A changing media environment (macro-level) influences patterns of individual media consumption and effects (micro-level). As such, macro-level influences vary across both time and space.

Macro-level influences on media effects are well captured by the so-called O-M-A (i.e., opportunities, motivations, and abilities) framework, which is developed specifically to explain the interplay between structural and individual factors (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Luskin, 1990). Accordingly, media system characteristics influence the information opportunities citizens have. Opportunities typically refer to the number and character of different media available to citizens in a given society. With better opportunities to select among various media with diverse content (supply-side), personal motivations and abilities will have a greater influence on what content people are exposed to (demand-side). Cross-national variations in media environmental opportunity structures are therefore highly important for understanding differential media effects across countries.

As such, research on comparative media systems highlights important institutional characteristics that distinguish the Nordic countries. Historically, the Nordic media systems have belonged to the “democratic corporatist model”, characterised – among other things – by strong journalistic professionalism, high newspaper circulation, and strong public service broadcasting institutions (Brüggemann et al., 2014; Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Although media systems are constantly changing, and distinct characteristics between models may gradually disappear, some of these characteristics are highly relevant today.

Compared to the American media system, where most media effects research has been conducted, the Nordic countries therefore provide different opportunity structures for selective media exposure with important implications for a variety of media effects, such as the ones discussed in this chapter. A long tradition of research into selective exposure has shown that people have a tendency to seek out attitude-consistent media content, without necessarily avoiding the other side (Garrett, 2009; Stroud, 2011). The extent to which citizens can engage in selective exposure is, however, dependent on opportunity structures for selective exposure at the country level. The concept of opportunity structures for selective exposure refers to the “availability of different media, media formats,

media genres, and media content, and the ease with which citizens can select media and media content based on their personal preferences” (Skovsgaard et al., 2016: 4; see also Castro-Herrero et al., 2018). While the current American media system provides significant opportunities for citizens to select media based on both a general interest in politics (current affairs vs. entertainment) as well as political *preferences* (partisan media), this is not the case in the Nordic countries.

Even though entertainment options have grown dramatically in the Nordic countries as well, allowing citizens who are not particularly interested in politics to tune out from news and current affairs, partisan media outlets are much less prevalent. As such, the structural opportunities – although gradually expanding in the online environment – for citizens to select media content based on partisan or ideological preferences are generally lower. In the Nordic countries, legacy media and public service broadcasters have transitioned into the online sphere quite successfully, further curbing the development of partisan, online media. This is not to say that that selective exposure to ideologically congruent sources does not occur in the Nordic countries (see, e.g., Knudsen et al., 2018; Knudsen & Johannesson, 2018; Johannesson & Knudsen, 2020), but that it is much less prevalent than in the American media system. The extent to which media systems are fragmented and politically polarised significantly influences how individual-level media effects translate into aggregate-level outcomes. The fact that Nordic media environments are less fragmented politically and traditional news organisations continue to play a significant role, sets the stage for a variety of media effects to play out differently here (Aalberg & Curran, 2012; Dahlgren, 2019; Djerf-Pierre & Shehata, 2017; cf. Knudsen, 2020).

Political learning and knowledge gaps

As most citizens experience politics through the media, the media play a central role for citizens learning about politics and current affairs. Whether people learn from the media will depend on both individual and structural factors, however. According to the “knowledge gap hypothesis” (Tichenor et al., 1970), people with higher socioeconomic status (SES) tend to learn faster and more from the media than people with lower SES. The mass media contributes to creating a knowledge gap because of a range of factors that differ between persons with higher and lower SES. These factors include learning habits, information-processing skills, social networks, communication skills, perceived relevance leading to selective exposure, and, finally, that the media are “geared toward people with high SES with the result that low SES may have difficulty understanding the news” (McCombs et al., 2011: 94). This will eventually create a Matthew Effect where the rich get richer and the poor get poorer in terms of political knowledge.

Just as the O-M-A framework helps explain differences in selective exposure, as we described above, it also helps explain differences in political learning from the media (Prior, 2007). In line with the knowledge gap hypothesis, the framework posits that political learning depends on people's motivations and abilities to process information from the media. In addition, however, the framework also highlights that the influence of these individual factors will be conditioned by the structural opportunities to get information. When people have more opportunities to access different types of information (both political and non-political), their motivation for processing such information becomes more important for their political learning. Such information opportunities vary both across time and cross-nationally.

From a time perspective, Prior (2007) shows how Americans' preferences have become more important for their news use and political learning in today's high-choice media environment compared to the earlier time's low-choice environment where only a few media sources were available. Consequently, the amount of accidental exposure or incidental exposure, where people are exposed to news while using the media for other purposes, has decreased. Similar results are found in the Nordic context. In a study from Sweden, Strömbäck and colleagues (2013) show how the number of both news avoiders and news seekers have increased over time, and how political interest has become a more important predictor for news consumption. Comparative studies by Norwegian researchers indicate that such trends are taking place across most European countries (Aalberg et al., 2013; Blekesaune et al., 2012). However, a recent study of news avoidance in Norway, spanning a 20-year period, only finds a small, incremental increase in total news avoidance of about 0.1 per cent per year (Karlsen et al., 2020). The same study also finds that the decrease in news exposure from traditional news media is largely compensated for when one takes into account news exposure from online and social media.

From a cross-national perspective, the O-M-A framework can be used to explore how differences in opportunity structures for selective exposure affects political learning. In the Nordic countries, public service broadcasting ensures a better opportunity structure for being accidentally exposed to political information in the news media. For example, research from Denmark shows how scheduling the entertainment show *The X Factor* before and after the public service television news leads more people, especially younger people and those with lower news interest, to watch the news (Andersen et al., 2019). As a natural consequence, research from Sweden has shown that especially people with low interest learn about politics from public service news (Shehata et al., 2015). Likewise, the importance of context is underlined by research showing that public service media provide more hard news and that people therefore know more about politics in the Nordic countries compared to the US (Curran et al., 2009; Iyengar et al., 2010).

With the rise of the Internet and social media, researchers have debated whether such media platforms help or hinder incidental exposure to news and political information. On social media, people often stumble upon news – shared by friends, suggested by algorithms, or sponsored by news companies – while doing other things (Bergström & Belfrage, 2018; Fletcher & Nielsen, 2018). However, the people most likely to be accidentally exposed to and engage with news on social media are those who already have an interest in news and politics (Kümpel, 2020). Just as the knowledge gap hypothesis and the O-M-A framework highlight, this is likely to cause a Matthew Effect, where the rich get richer while the poor get poorer. Even if social media benefits the poor, it will likely be to a lesser extent than for the rich.

Related, researchers have also examined whether social media facilitate political knowledge. Research has shown that news use through traditional media like newspapers facilitates political learning to a larger degree than reliance on social media news use. In fact, several recent studies have shown that social media news use may be negatively related to political knowledge. Recently, this has been documented in a Nordic context, where Karlsen and colleagues (2020) show that what they label passive news use in social media is related to less political learning. In other words, the more reliant one is on getting news through social media, the less likely one is to be politically knowledgeable. The absence of political learning effects from using social media has also been documented in three separate panel surveys conducted in Sweden, all showing that traditional news media use is a stronger predictor of political and current affairs knowledge than social media news use (Dimitrova et al., 2014).

In sum, although changes in the media environment have given people more opportunities to turn their backs to the news media, with consequences for the political knowledge, this seems to happen to a larger extent in the US than in the Nordic countries. One main reason for this is the presence of strong public service broadcasters securing better opportunity structures for being exposed to political information. However, these positive learning effects are, in general, challenged by news consumption moving to social media sites.

Agenda-setting and priming effects

Learning factual knowledge concerning, for example, who is in power and how the political spectrum is defined, is one important way in which the media contribute to political communication effects. However, the media are also able to play a role for political communication by focusing attention towards some issues while ignoring others. Three important – and by many scholars considered related – theories in this regard are agenda-setting, priming, and framing.

Agenda-setting's core tenet is that there is a transfer of salience from the media agenda to the public agenda. This means that, on average, issues that receive much attention by the media are also considered as more important by the public. Agenda-setting is one of the most studied perspectives and theories in communication science, and it has been strengthened through literally hundreds of studies, all over the world for the last 50 years. Agenda-setting was first established as a concept by Walter Lippman about 100 years ago and reiterated by Cohen (1963) almost 60 years ago. However, it only received a proper empirical test by the now seminal Chapel Hill study in the US (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). The Chapel Hill study, followed by a range of agenda-setting studies over time and in different contexts, found strong support for the original assumption; the more salient an issue was on the media agenda, the more important that issue was perceived to be by the public.

Public agenda-setting has also been studied in the Nordic countries. For example, it has been studied in Sweden, both during election campaigns (Shehata, 2010; Shehata & Strömbäck, 2013) and over longer time spans (Djerf-Pierre & Shehata, 2017; Shehata & Falasca, 2014). Findings from these studies lend support for the basic hypothesis, but also highlight the significance of individual-level moderators conditioning agenda-setting effects. There is also not much evidence that agenda-setting influence of traditional news media in Sweden has become weaker during the transition from a low- to high-choice media environment (Djerf-Pierre & Shehata, 2017). Regarding intermedia agenda-setting between traditional and online news media and social media, Harder and colleagues (2017) conclude that online media can indeed alter agenda-setting processes by significantly setting the agenda for other media to follow. However, they also show, in line with Djerf-Pierre and Shehata (2017), how slower media, such as printed newspapers, are still highly important.

Perhaps the closest relative to agenda-setting is priming. While priming has been known in the field of psychology for many years, it was first used in a media and communication setting a little over thirty years ago (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). Priming is said to be the case when the media focus attention on an issue (similar to agenda-setting), and that issue then becomes important in individuals' later judgments. Concerning the mechanism behind priming, it "occurs when a given message activates a mental concept, which for a period of time increases the probability" that this mental concept comes to mind again (McLeod et al., 2009: 230). Priming has often been studied with regards to presidential evaluations in an American context. When judging how well a president is doing, people seem to place more weight on the issue on which they had been primed with beforehand than on other issues. This means that a president's overall approval rating is highly contingent on how well they are doing on the most salient issue of the day. For instance, Pan and Kosicki (1997) show that the overall evaluations of the first President Bush were highly dependent

on the media coverage of first the Gulf War, leading to a higher overall rating, and then the economy, leading to a lower overall rating.

Priming has also been studied in the Nordic context. In Denmark, de Vreese (2004) shows how the news media's coverage of the euro referendum primed voters in their evaluation of politicians. Likewise, in Denmark, Kalogeropoulos and colleagues (2017) show how exposure to news about the economy primes people's government evaluation. A Swedish study also documented priming effects of economic issues on government approval during the financial crisis, although these effects were conditioned by voters' attributions of responsibility (Shehata & Falasca, 2014). In Norway, studies conducted as part of the Norwegian National Election Studies have also shown the occurrence of priming effects during an election campaign (Jenssen & Aalberg, 2004).

Although studies suggest that agenda-setting and priming effects persist in the Nordic countries, the gradual fragmentation of media environments certainly challenge these classic mass communication theories. As citizens' opportunities for media choice increase, with personal values and preferences becoming more important for explaining media usage, the idea of a homogenous media agenda influencing all citizens becomes less viable (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008; Chaffee & Metzger, 2001). With a more heterogenous supply of news, selective exposure and reinforcing spirals may better explain the formation of fragmented public agendas (Slater, 2015; Stroud, 2011).

Framing effects

While agenda-setting and priming effects often deal with larger issues, and how the salience of those issues in the media affect judgments concerning issue importance and issues as standards for evaluations, framing is concerned with the nature of the coverage of specific news items. This means that agenda-setting and priming are concerned with *what* the media cover, while framing is concerned with *how* an issue is covered. When choosing, whether deliberately or not, a perspective from which to tell a news story, the journalist frames the story. What it means to frame something has received a lot of scholarly attention over the years, but the most cited definition is the version that Entman provided in his seminal 1993 article. Here, Entman (1993: 52) argues that to frame is to choose some elements of a phenomenon over others in such a way that it promotes "a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation". If a frame can define something, name the causes of the problem, how to evaluate it, and how to fix it, these elements may in turn come to influence how people respond to, think about, and behave towards the problem at hand. For instance, if climate change is mainly framed in terms of the problems it creates for businesses that have to

stop polluting, rather than something that may cause serious weather problems with even more severe economic consequences (McCombs et al., 2011), these are two very different problem definitions that may lead to equally different causal claims and remedies.

In the framing literature, scholars have often distinguished between two main types of frames: issue-specific and generic. Issue-specific frames pertain to a particular issue, and in themselves are not transferable to different issues. For example, a budget deficit can be framed as a political scandal, where the responsible politician is forced to leave office, or can be framed as a consequence of long-term developments focusing on macro-economic factors. Generic frames “transcend thematic limitations and can be identified in relation to different topics, some even over time and in different cultural contexts” (de Vreese, 2005: 5). Examples of generic news frames are human-interest framing, which focuses on individuals and cases, or the framing of politics as a game or a dispute over an issue. The game framing of politics focuses on the horse-race element of election campaigns, it employs language of winning and losing, and deals with election polls to a large degree (see Beyer, 2012; Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; de Vreese, 2005). Such frames also construe politicians as strategic actors in a battle for power. Effects of such frames are increased cynicism and apathy among the electorate and lower levels of political efficacy (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997).

Framing effects have also been found in the Nordic context. In Denmark, de Vreese and Semetko (2002) show how exposure to news that relies on strategy framing leads to an increase in political cynicism. The effects of the strategic game frame on cynicism and trust towards both political actors and the media themselves have also been documented in election campaign studies in Sweden (Hopmann et al., 2015; Shehata, 2014). Likewise, in Norway, Beyer (2012) shows that people who rely on a commercial broadcaster rather than a publicly funded broadcaster – and thereby are exposed more to strategic framing – show higher levels of both cynicism and apathy towards politics. Studies have also been conducted on the use of human-interest framing. In Denmark and Norway, studies have shown how including a case in news stories affects both people’s political opinions (Hopmann et al., 2017; Knudsen, 2016) and their intention to participate politically (Andersen et al., 2017).

In sum, agenda-setting, priming, and framing effects, similar to those originally identified in the US, have been identified in the Nordic countries. If such effects should differ across some contexts, it should therefore be a result of differences in media content – for example, the extent to which a topic is framed in a specific manner – rather than differences in how people react to such content.

Voting, turnout, and other behavioural effects

Concerning political behaviours, voting is clearly the most central activity that has been explored in research on political communication effects. Voter turnout is perhaps the most-studied variable in relation to the election process, and also the variable that all scholars (and others) view as normatively beneficiary, *per se*. Research has shown that different forms of mediated political communication can have both positive and negative effects on turnout. For instance, negative advertising and campaigning is often shown to increase turnout, but can, however, also alienate voters by creating cynicism and apathy that leads to demobilising in parts of the electorate (for a discussion, see McLeod et al., 2009). Generally, attention to and use of traditional forms of news media, such as newspapers, seem to be positively related to turnout, but the direction of causation between news use, political discussion, and turnout at the ballots remains unclear (Norris, 2000; McCombs et al., 2011).

Studies have also examined the effects of the publication of public opinion polls on both turnout and changes in party choice. Some studies propose a bandwagon effect (Miller, 2000), where parties that are leading the race gain additional momentum because some voters seem to prefer being on the winning side. Other studies propose an underdog effect (Fleitas, 1971), where the opposite happens, as parties that are behind on the polls may mobilise voters that otherwise would not have decided to turn up on election day to secure that a party is represented in parliament. The concern for these types of effects has caused several countries to have restrictions on the publication of opinion polls in different lengths of time prior to an election, and the World Association for Public Opinion Research conducts regular studies of countries that maintain different forms of such restrictions.

In their book on how the media affect civic life, McCombs and colleagues (2011) review scholarship that has extended our understanding of how the news media affect not only voting behaviours, but also other forms of participation. Such behaviours include going to political meetings, signing petitions, contacting public officials, protesting, boycotting, volunteering for organisations, and being a member in civic organisations. Taken together, the evidence suggests that engaging with news media is positively related to most forms of such participation in political and civic life. However, some forms of news media use may also disengage citizens and raise levels of cynicism. In addition, some scholars argue that general television viewing limits and decreases political participation by lowering social capital (see, e.g., Putnam, 2000).

Research from the Nordic context also shows how the media influence political participation. In Denmark, for example, Andersen and colleagues (2016) show how use of hard news in general is positively related to political participation by increasing knowledge and efficacy, while the use of soft news is

negatively related. In another study, however, Andersen (2019) shows how soft news have the ability to mobilise people with a low political interest. Also in Denmark, Ohme (2019) shows how exposure to political information on social media can foster campaign participation. In Sweden, Dimitrova and colleagues (2014) likewise show how social media use has a positive effect on political participation. In Norway, Beyer and colleagues (2014) report two experiments that show the potential for media saliency to change vote intention, in line with issue ownership literature and expectations.

With respect to behavioural effects, the changing media environment may similarly lead to polarisation between groups of citizens. As citizens can seek out whatever content they prefer – following generally their interests as well as political values – political inequalities and gaps might increase. Personalised communication flows stemming from a combination of self-selection and algorithms are typically assumed to reinforce differences in political participation and polarise attitudes between groups (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008; Prior, 2007). So far, however, the empirical evidence for such polarisation remains inconclusive.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we outlined some of the most central theories for political media effects, focusing on media effects on political learning and knowledge gaps; agenda-setting, priming, and framing effects; and finally, media effects on voting and other political behaviours. Throughout the chapter, we highlighted studies from the Nordic countries that are relevant to the theories discussed, and we argued why political media effects in the Nordic context are similar to or different from other contexts. The study of political media effects has been strongly dominated by US-based scholars who tend to draw on empirical data from the American political and media context. This may represent a bias in the study of political media effects, as the American system, both politically and with regards to the media, differs in important respects from many European countries, and particularly the Nordic countries (see Esping-Andersen, 1990; Hallin & Mancini, 2004). At the same time, the research on political media effects in the Nordic countries has been limited compared to US-based research, albeit with several noteworthy contributions as highlighted in this chapter. This means that there is a limited pool of studies to draw on if we wish to explore possible differences in political media effects between the Nordic countries and other contexts, such as the US.

Theoretically, however, one can assume both substantial similarities and differences between the Nordic countries and other contexts, such as the US. Regarding the former, we believe that for theories and mechanisms that are clearly rooted in human psychology, such as framing, priming, and agenda-setting,

there is little reason to expect large differences across contexts. For instance, when individuals participate in controlled experiments examining framing effects across countries, people tend to react similarly to stimuli (e.g., Aarøe & Petersen, 2014). Thus, if there are real-world differences across contexts in, for example, framing effects, it is likely to be a consequence of differences in media coverage, rather than individuals in the Nordic countries reacting differently to stimulus compared to individuals from other contexts. This is of course not to say that the media in different societies are creating similar pictures in people's heads, but merely that people from different contexts respond similarly, for example, when exposed to the same frame.

This interpretation is, of course, a simplification of a more complex reality. However, it serves the purpose of highlighting that it is important to take contextual factors into account when studying such media effects. Contextual factors are particularly important regarding more context-dependent theories, such as selective exposure and the knowledge gap hypothesis, or when looking at effects of real-world media coverage. The importance of different political media effects may very well differ across different contexts that, for example, have different opportunity structures for news consumption (Esser et al., 2012). Thus, we argue that a key factor in explaining why political media effects, such as differences in political learning from the media, play out differently in the Nordic context compared to the American context, is differences in the opportunity structures for exposure to political information in these contexts. In other words, the underlying individual mechanisms in political media effects are likely to be similar in the Nordic context compared to other contexts, but the context in which these effects unfold differs.

Scholars of media effects in the Nordic countries are increasingly providing valuable knowledge on how some media effects are similar to, and other media effects are different from, the effects identified in other contexts. Both types of evidence are important, as both point to the potential limits or universality of communication theories. As with the study of individual differences and similarities in media effects (Oliver & Krakowiak, 2009), contextual similarities and differences can enrich our understanding of when, how, and for whom political media effects apply. Importantly, one of the core developments of media effects research, since the field's earliest work, is the understanding that media effects are not "one-size-fits-all" (Oliver & Krakowiak, 2009). Rather, researchers are likely to find heterogeneous differences in media effects. Because media effects can play out differently across contexts due to differences in opportunity structures, evidence on media effects from the Nordic context have contributed with bringing the field closer to a general understanding of when, how, and for whom different types of media influence individuals politically. For that reason, it is important that Nordic political communication scholars not only continue to, but also increase their effort to, engage with the international

literature on political media effects to explore and explain how different types of such effects play out in the Nordic countries. Only by testing theories, and further developing them with data from the Nordic context, can the field start to move away from a possible theoretical bias and blind spots that arise from focusing on one, or just a few, contexts.

As exposure to information online is increasingly determined by interactions between humans and algorithms, the task of reliably measuring media effects is increasingly hard to accomplish (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008). Algorithms increasingly determine the selection of items shown to each user on social media and the order and presentation of news on online news sites. This means that individuals are now more likely than ever before to receive different “treatments” in terms of which news and news framing they receive (Helberger, 2019). If individuals receive different “treatments”, then media effects are also likely to be increasingly individualised. Thus, the challenge for future media effects research is not only to study and understand differences across time and countries, but also across platforms and personalised online news sites and social media news feeds. Only by rising to this challenge and developing new methods and theoretical concepts that can help explain and account for individualised and personalised information can the field continue to reliably estimate different forms of media effects in the future.

References

- Aalberg, T., Blekesaune, A., & Elvestad, E. (2013). Media choice and informed democracy: Toward increasing news consumption gaps in europe? *International Journal of Press/Politics*, 18(3), 281–303. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161213485990>
- Aalberg, T., & Curran, J. (Eds.). (2012). *How media inform democracy: A comparative approach*. New York: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203803448>
- Aarøe, L., & Petersen, M. B. (2014). Crowding out culture: Scandinavians and Americans agree on social welfare in the face of deservingness cues. *The Journal of Politics*, 76(3), 684–697. <https://www.doi.org/10.1017/S002238161400019X>
- Andersen, K. (2019). An entrance for the uninterested: Who watches soft news and how does it affect their political participation? *Mass Communication and Society*, 22(4), 487–507. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2019.1585544>
- Andersen, K., Bjarnøe, C., Albæk, E., & de Vreese, C. H. (2016). How news type matters: Indirect effects of media use on political participation through knowledge and efficacy. *Journal of Media Psychology*, 28(3), 111–122. <https://doi.org/10.1027/1864-1105/a000201>
- Andersen, K., Skovsgaard, M., Albæk, E., & de Vreese, C. H. (2017). The engaging effect of exemplars: How an emotional reaction to (dis)similar people in the news media affects political participation. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 22(4), 490–509. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161217723152>
- Andersen, K., Skovsgaard, M., & Pedersen, R. T. (2019). The X Factor of opportunity structures: How grab and wrap effects of entertainment create inadvertent news audience in a high-choice media environment. *European Journal of Communication*, 34(5), 535–551. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323119874623>
- Bartels, L. M. (1993). Messages received: The political impact of media exposure. *The American Political Science Review*, 87(2), 267–285. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2939040>

- Bennett, W. L., & Iyengar, S. (2008). A new era of minimal effects? The changing foundations of political communication. *Journal of Communication*, 58(4), 707–731. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2008.00410.x>
- Bergström, A., & Belfrage, M. J. (2018). News in social media: Incidental consumption and the role of opinion leaders. *Digital Journalism*, 6(5), 583–598. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2018.1423625>
- Beyer, A. (2012). *Valgets nyhetsrammer: Produksjon, innhold, opinion* [Election news frames: Production, content, opinion] [Doctoral Dissertation, University of Oslo, Norway].
- Beyer, A., Knutsen, C. H., & Rasch, B. E. (2014). Election campaigns, issue focus and voting intentions: Survey experiments of Norwegian voters. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 37(4), 406–427. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9477.12029>
- Blekesaune, A., Elvestad, E., & Aalberg, T. (2012). Tuning out the world of news and current affairs: An empirical study of Europe's disconnected citizens. *European Sociological Review*, 28(1), 110–126. <https://doi.org/10.1093/esr/jcq051>
- Brüggemann, M., Engesser, S., Büchel, F., Humprecht, E., & Castro, L. (2014). Hallin and Mancini revisited: Four empirical types of Western media systems. *Journal of Communication*, 64(6), 1037–1065. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcom.12127>
- Cappella, J. N., & Jamieson, K. H. (1997). *Spiral of cynicism: The press and the public good*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Castro-Herrero, L., Nir, L., & Skovsgaard, M. (2018). Bridging gaps in cross-cutting media exposure: The role of public service broadcasting. *Political Communication*, 35(4), 542–565. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2018.1476424>
- Chaffee, S., & Metzger, M. (2001). The end of mass communication? *Mass Communication and Society*, 4(4), 365–379. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327825MCS0404_3
- Cohen, B. C. (1963). *Press and foreign policy*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Curran, J., Iyengar, S., Lund, A. B., & Salovaara-Moring, I. (2009). Media system, public knowledge and democracy: A comparative study. *European Journal of Communication*, 24(1), 5–26. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323108098943>
- Delli Carpini, M., & Keeter, S. (1996). *What Americans know about politics and why it matters*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press. www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1cc2kv1
- de Vreese, C. H. (2004). Primed by the Euro: The impact of a referendum campaign on public opinion and evaluations of government and political leaders. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 27(1), 45–64. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0080-6757.2004.099_1.x
- de Vreese, C. H. (2005). The spiral of cynicism reconsidered. *European Journal of Communication*, 20(3), 283–301. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323105055259>
- de Vreese, C. H., & Semetko, H. A. (2002). Cynical and engaged: Strategic campaign coverage, public opinion, and mobilization in a referendum. *Communication Research*, 29(6), 615–641. <https://doi.org/10.1177/009365002237829>
- Dahlgren, P. M. (2019). Selective exposure to public service news over thirty years: The role of ideological leaning, party support, and political interest. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 24(3), 293–314. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161219836223>
- Dimitrova, D. V., Shehata, A., Strömbäck, J., & Nord, L. W. (2014). The effects of digital media on political knowledge and participation in election campaigns: Evidence from panel data. *Communication Research*, 41(1), 95–118. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650211426004>
- Djerf-Pierre, M., & Shehata, A. (2017). Still an agenda setter: Traditional news media and public opinion during the transition from low to high choice media environments. *Journal of Communication*, 67(5), 733–757. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcom.12327>
- Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, 43(4), 51–58.
- Esping-Andersen, G. (1990). *The three worlds of welfare capitalism*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Esser, F., de Vreese, C. H., Strömbäck, J., van Aelst, P., Aalberg, T., Staney, J., . . . Reinemann, C. (2012). Political information opportunities in Europe: A longitudinal and comparative study of thirteen television systems. *International Journal of Press/Politics*, 17(3), 247–274.

- Fleitas, D. W. (1971). Bandwagon and underdog effects in minimal-information elections. *The American Political Science Review*, 65(2), 434–438. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1954459>
- Fletcher, R., & Nielsen, R. K. (2018). Are people incidentally exposed to news on social media? A comparative analysis. *New Media & Society*, 20(7), 2450–2468. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444817724170>
- Garrett, R. K. (2009). Politically motivated reinforcement seeking: Reframing the selective exposure debate. *Journal of Communication*, 59(4), 676–699. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2009.01452.x>
- Hallin, D. C., & Mancini, P. (2004). *Comparing media systems: Three models of media and politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511790867>
- Harder, R. A., Sevenans, J., & Van Aelst, P. (2017). Intermedia agenda setting in the social media age: How traditional players dominate the news agenda in election times. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 22(3), 275–293. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161217704969>
- Helberger, N. (2019). On the democratic role of news recommenders. *Digital Journalism*, 7(8), 993–1012.
- Hopmann, D. N., Shehata, A., & Strömbäck, J. (2015). Contagious media effects: How media use and exposure to game-framed news influence media trust. *Mass Communication and Society*, 18(6), 776–798. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2015.1022190>
- Hopmann, D. N., Skovsgaard, M., & Elmelund-Præstekær, C. (2017). What have I done to deserve this? The role of deservingness in effects of ordinary citizens as cases in the news. *European Journal of Communication*, 32(4), 333–347. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323117710900>
- Iyengar, S. (2010). Framing research: The next steps. In B. F. Schaffner, & P. J. Sellers (Eds.), *Winning with words: The origins and impact of political framing* (pp. 185–191). New York: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203883112>
- Iyengar, S., Curran, J., Lund, A. B., Salovaara-Moring, I., Hahn, K. S., & Coen, S. (2010). Cross-national versus individual-level differences in political information: A media systems perspective. *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion & Parties*, 20(3), 291–309. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17457289.2010.490707>
- Iyengar, S., & Kinder, D. R. (1987). *News that matters: Television and American opinion*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Jenssen, A. T., & Aalberg, T. (2004). På valgkampens slagmark: En eksperimentell studie av medieeffekter [On the election campaign battlefield: An experimental study of media effects]. In B. O. Aardal, A. Krogstad, & H. M. Narud (Eds.), *I valgkampens hete [In the heat of the election campaign]* (pp. 327–353). Oslo: Scandinavian University Press.
- Johannesson, M. P., & Knudsen, E. (2020). Disentangling the influence of recommender attributes and news story attributes: A conjoint experiment on exposure and sharing decisions on social networking sites. *Digital Journalism*, 1–21. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2020.1805780>
- Kalogeropoulos, A., Albæk, E., de Vreese, C. H., & van Dalen, A. (2017). News priming and the changing economy: How economic news influences government evaluations. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 29(2), 269–290. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ijpor/edv048>
- Karlsen, R., Beyer, A., & Steen-Johnsen, K. (2020). Do high-choice media environments facilitate news avoidance? A longitudinal study, 1997–2016. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 64(4), forthcoming.
- Karlsen, R., Beyer, A., Steen-Johnsen, K. (2020, May). *Opportunity structures, news-finds-me beliefs, and general political knowledge: Conditions for learning about politics on social media* [Conference presentation]. 70th ICA Conference, Gold Coast, Australia.
- Knudsen, E. (2016). *Journalistikkens fremstillingsmakt: Nyhetsrammer, meningsdanning og medialisering [The power of journalistic framing: News frames, public opinion and mediatization]* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Bergen, Norway]. <http://bora.uib.no/handle/1956/12225>
- Knudsen, E. (2020). Affective polarization in multiparty systems? Comparing affective polarization toward voters and parties in Norway and the United States. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 1–11. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9477.12186>
- Knudsen, E., Iversen, M. H., & Vatnøy, E. (2018). Mistillit til den andre siden: Ideologisk selektiv eksponering og tillit til røde og blå medier [Distrust in the other side: Ideological selectivity

- in news use and trust in Norwegian “red” and “blue” news media]. *Norsk Medietidsskrift*, 25(2), 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.18261/issn.0805-9535-2018-02-04>
- Knudsen, E., & Johannesson, M. P. (2018). Beyond the limits of survey experiments: How conjoint designs advance causal inference in political communication research. *Political Communication*, 36(2), 259–271. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2018.1493009>
- Kümpel, A. S. (2020). The Matthew Effect in social media news use: Assessing inequalities in news exposure and news engagement on social network sites (SNS). *Journalism*, 21(8), 1083–1098. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884920915374>
- Luskin, R. C. (1990). Explaining political sophistication. *Political Behavior*, 12(4), 331–361.
- McCombs, M., Holbert, R. L., Kioussis, S., & Wanta, W. (2011). *The news and public opinion: Media effects on civic life*. Malden, Massachusetts: Polity.
- McCombs, M., & Shaw, D. L. (1972). The agenda-setting function of mass media. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 36(2), 176–187. <https://doi.org/10.1086/267990>
- McLeod, D. M., Kosicki, G. M., & McLeod, J. M. (2009). Political communication effects. In J. Bryant, & M. B. Oliver (Eds.), *Media effects: Advances in theory and research* (3rd ed.) (pp. 228–251). New York: Routledge.
- Miller, W. L. (2000). Bandwagon effects. In Rose, R. (Ed.) *International encyclopedia of elections* (pp. 21–23). Washington, DC: CQ Press.
- Nabi, R. L., & Oliver, M. B. (2009). Introduction. In R. L. Nabi, & M. B. Oliver (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of media processes and effects* (pp. 1–5). Los Angeles: Sage.
- Neuman, R. W., & Guggenheim, L. (2011). The evolution of media effects theory: A six-stage model of cumulative research. *Communication Theory*, 21(2), 169–196. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2011.01381.x>
- Norris, P. (2000). *A virtuous circle: Political communications in postindustrial societies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ohme, J. (2019). When digital natives enter the electorate: Political social media use among first-time voters and its effects on campaign participation. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, 16(2), 119–136. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19331681.2019.1613279>
- Oliver, M. B., & Krakowiak, K. M. (2009). Individual differences in media effects. In J. Bryant, & M. B. Oliver (Eds.), *Media effects: Advances in theory and research* (3rd ed.) (pp. 517–532). New York: Routledge.
- Pan, Z., & Kosicki, G. M. (1997). Priming and media impact on the evaluations of the president’s performance. *Communication Research*, 24(1), 3–30. <https://doi.org/10.1177/009365097024001001>
- Potter, W. J. (2012). *Media effects*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Prior, M. (2007). *Post-broadcast democracy: How media choice increases inequality in political involvement and polarizes elections*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Shehata, A. (2010). Unemployment on the agenda: A panel study of agenda-setting effects during the 2006 Swedish national election campaign. *Journal of Communication*, 60(1), 182–203. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2009.01475.x>
- Shehata, A. (2014). Game frames, issue frames, and mobilization: Disentangling the effects of frame exposure and motivated news attention on political cynicism and engagement. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 26(2), 157–177. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ijpor/edt034>
- Shehata, A., & Falasca, K. (2014). Priming effects during the financial crisis: Accessibility and applicability mechanisms behind government approval. *European Political Science Review*, 6(4), 597–620. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773913000258>
- Shehata, A., Hopmann, D. N., Nord, L., & Höijer, J. (2015). Television channel content profiles and differential knowledge growth: A test of the inadvertent learning hypothesis using panel data. *Political Communication*, 32(3), 377–395. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2014.955223>
- Shehata, A., & Strömbäck, J. (2013). Not (yet) a new era of minimal effects: A study of agenda setting at the aggregate and individual levels. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 18(2), 234–255. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161212473831>

- Skovsgaard, M., Shehata, A., & Strömbäck, J. (2016). Opportunity structures for selective exposure: Investigating selective exposure and learning in Swedish election campaigns using panel survey data. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 21(4), 527–546. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161216658157>
- Slater, M. D. (2015). Reinforcing spirals model: Conceptualizing the relationship between media content exposure and the development and maintenance of attitudes. *Media Psychology*, 18(3), 370–395. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15213269.2014.897236>
- Strömbäck, J., Djerf-Pierre, M., & Shehata, A. (2013). The dynamics of political interest and news media consumption: A longitudinal perspective. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 25(4), 414–435. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ijpor/eds018>
- Stroud, N. J. (2011). *Niche news: The politics of news choice*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Tichenor, P. J., Donohue, G. A., & Olien, C. N. (1970). Mass media flow and differential growth of knowledge. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 34(2), 159–170. <https://doi.org/10.1086/267786>

