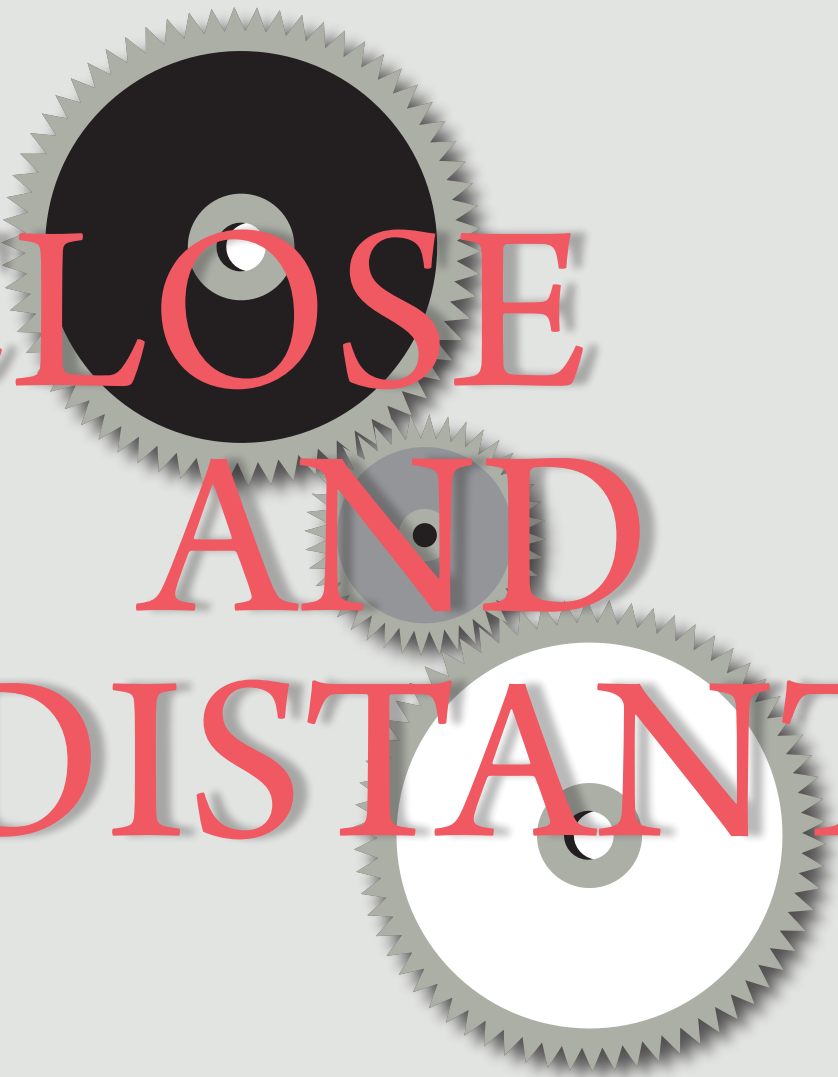




CLOSE AND DISTANT

Political Executive–Media Relations in Four Countries

Karl Magnus Johansson & Gunnar Nygren (eds.)

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Preface and acknowledgments

Every book has its origins. The origins of this book go back to an initiative in 2012 by one of us, Karl Magnus Johansson, who ultimately became the lead coordinator of the project, to conduct a cross-disciplinary and cross-national research project. Gunnar Nygren then led another project that proved to be a crucial starting point for this project and book. Gunnar's project brought together two participants – Elena Degtereva (Johansson since 2013), Södertörn, and Bogusława Dobek-Ostrowska, Wrocław – who were drawn into early talks about the project. Gunnar's project resulted in the collection edited by Nygren & Dobek-Ostrowska, *Journalism in Change: Journalistic Culture in Poland, Russia and Sweden* (Peter Lang, 2015). The new project proposal then expanded to also include Professors Auksė Balčytienė, Kaunas, Tom Moring, Helsinki and Tapio Raunio, Tampere. The project is funded by the Foundation for Baltic and East European Studies (Östersjöstiftelsen). We gratefully acknowledge this funding, as well as the support from the Publications Committee at Södertörn University.

Once research funding was secured, we proceeded to recruit a project PhD candidate, Milda Mallin, née Celiešiūtė, followed by two project assistants, Risto Niemikari, Tampere and Jacek Nożewski, Wrocław, who have since become PhD candidates at their home universities. All three have made significant contributions to the project, and we are following their ongoing work with great interest.

This project began on 1 July 2014. The team met for the first time in early September 2014 to hold the first of what would altogether be seven project workshops. Five were held at Södertörn University, Stockholm, the sixth in Ljubljana in June 2017, the day before the CEECOM conference where, in a panel, we presented versions of the chapters on the national case studies, and the seventh in Prague in May 2018, two days before the International Communication Association (ICA) conference panel, where we presented versions of the cross-national thematic chapters. In Prague, Professor Svetlana Bodrunova, Saint Petersburg State University, and Professor Arjen van Dalen, University of Southern Denmark, served as our discussants at the workshop; Svetlana was also a discussant at our ICA panel. We were fortunate to have them as

discussants and to get to know them. We thank them for their constructive comments and suggestions.

Likewise, we wish to thank two other scholars, Aeron Davis and Zvi Reich, whom we invited on two different occasions to present their research and comment on ours.

In addition to fellow project participants, seminar participants and other colleagues also read and commented on earlier versions of the chapters. Milda wishes to thank Lars Nord, Mid Sweden University, and Risto wishes to thank the political science research seminar at the University of Tampere. We, for our part, presented drafts at the research seminars of journalism and political science, respectively, at Södertörn University. Particular thanks to our discussants Jenny Madestam, Johan Eriksson and Peter Strandbrink.

For their time and help in editing the manuscript, we are grateful to our Nordicom editors, Johannes Bjerling, Karin Zelano and Josefine Bové. We also wish to thank Maxim Johansson for developing our project website, www.polexmedia.com, which provides information about the project and its participants, publications, and events.

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We are particularly grateful to our project colleagues, the contributors to this book. Their commitment throughout this project has been outstanding.

Finally, we thank each other, for a rewarding cooperation and for finalising this volume together as editors.

Södertörn University August 2018

Karl Magnus Johansson

Gunnar Nygren

Chapter 1

The interplay of media and the political executive

Introduction and framework

Gunnar Nygren & Karl Magnus Johansson

On Friday 25 August 2017, the leader of the conservative party in Sweden, Anna Kinberg Batra, called a press conference. She was under pressure and declared that she would be leaving her post due to increased internal criticism. The press conference ended four days of intense coverage from all leading media on the decreasing popular support for the party. The internal wave of criticism had grown stronger every day, and journalists reported the story as a power struggle between different groups within the party.

Was the media the organiser behind the resignation? The coverage showed that the media and the political sphere are intertwined in a mutual dependency: Media provided an arena for the internal party struggle, but it also amplified the internal criticism. In media logic, the demands for a new leader became a good story, and the opposition in the party used this logic to oust a party leader democratically elected just eight months earlier (Eriksson, 2017).

What kind of relationships lie behind political journalism?

This resignation is just one example of the mediatisation of politics. There are many similar examples in other countries that illustrate how media logic and political logic are intertwined in daily politics (e.g., Esser & Strömbäck, 2014). In political journalism, the key actors are the politicians and their press secretaries on one side and the journalists on the other (e.g., Davis, 2010; Kuhn & Kleis Nielsen, 2014). In this book, we explore the question of how close or distant the political executive power and the media are to or from one another, and how we can understand their relationship. The title of this volume – *Close and distant. Political executive–media relations in four countries* – reflects the concern in research and elsewhere about the relationship between journalists and the political elite. Throughout this volume, we discuss questions about closeness and distance, the power balance between actors

– its exchanges and negotiations. Hence, this book is concerned with the ongoing relationships and mutual dependency between politics and the media, between journalists and their sources.

The relationship between the political elite and journalists is about power – who is able to get attention and influence the public image of politics and political actors. It is about conflicting interests as well as mutual interests, when both sides are dependent on one another.

The political elite needs media attention in a complex society with an abundance of information and a deficit of attention. Media can give the political elite access to the public sphere and the attention of citizens and actors; but there is also the question of how this attention is framed – how politicians and politics are portrayed.

Journalists need the political system for news and information, and a political reporter's network of sources is their most important asset. Journalists are supposed to be independent of political power and follow professional ideology, and their close relationships with their sources imply a kind of dependency and professional dilemma.

This power-based relationship is ultimately about the control of information and access to the public's attention. In this complicated relationship, there is no good or evil – both groups have legitimate interests in their struggle to influence the image of politics in society. However, there are also invisible limits on how far each side can go to influence the public, and by what methods. There are conflicting interests as well as mutual interests in the relationship – and the balance of power shifts depending on the situation.

A three-year project covering four countries and journalist-source interaction

The book is the result of a three-year research project that brought together researchers from four countries to analyse the relationship between the political executive power and the media. We analyse and compare the relationships identified in Finland, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden during the years 2015-2016. The examined countries are very different politically as well as in size and social structure. The media systems also differ in their legacy relationships between politics and media, and the key goals of this project have been to find similarities in all these differences, patterns in the interaction between the groups and, above all, national differences.

While there is broad consensus that journalists and their sources interact with each other in a variety of ways and that this interaction is worth studying, there is much less consensus on “who is leading the tango”, the journalists or the sources.¹ This book makes two contributions to this debate. First, the determinants of the relationships between journalists and staff/sources in the Finnish, Lithuanian, Polish and Swedish executive governments are examined. This analysis builds mainly on extensive inter-

views with journalists and staff regarding media-related matters in governments and is supplemented by documentary evidence (see more below).

Second, the book advances a specific argument about how the strategic exchange of access and information between political sources and journalists brings them together while still maintaining a certain distance. Accordingly, we argue, they are both close and distant. There is interactivity and reciprocity – a mutual exchange, but also distance. In one way, journalists and politicians are forever locked in a daily power struggle. From another perspective, they are in a kind of working relationship with one another. Here, we seek to illuminate these connections and the ties that bind, but one thing is certain: politicians and journalists need each other.

While we often think of the relationship between the government and the press as hostile, in this book we show another side of the partnership by emphasising the ways in which news organisations and government officials benefit from this relationship despite the tensions. This book also approaches the partnership from both sides: politics and media. As Cook (2005: 12) notes, whereas many studies of journalism reveal the power of sources in suggesting and shaping if not determining the news, “the literature is asymmetrical, with many more journalist’s-eye views of the process than perspectives from the politicians’ side”.

Four sets of questions

The purpose of this book is to study the relationship between journalists and political sources in the selected countries. The key question is whether these relationships are mutually reinforcing and symbiotic or more fundamentally adversarial. By making comparisons between different media systems, we try to define common trends and patterns in the four countries. This will contribute to the discussion about what is related to a national context and what features are parts of a common political communication culture in Europe.

The first set of questions, which is central to the book, revolves around the character of the relationships themselves. What is the nature of the relationships? How do the political sources and journalists enter such relationships; how is contact initiated? Who leads? Who follows? (Or, more cynically: who uses whom and who gains the most?) Further, what kinds of methods are used to influence the other party in this relationship, and how is this power relationship negotiated in daily practice? Does the use of social media in communications change the relationship, and if yes, in what direction? These questions are addressed and expanded on in this volume.

A second set of questions concerns the daily professional work, i.e. normal practices and routines, of chief executives’ media advisors.² What are they actually doing? Why, in what ways and with what consequences are these practices and routines prevailing? This book looks at these and other questions concerning practical arrangements, practices and institutions or organisations in executive power systems.

Exploring such questions might tell us more about contemporary governing practices in the multimedia age through or with the media, the nature of executive power and politics, and life at the top.

A third set of questions targets journalists and contemporary political journalism specifically in a comparative perspective as well. What is the degree of political parallelism between journalism and politics? Are detachment and neutrality strong ideals, and how is this visible in daily work? How dependent are journalists on sources, and how can they develop their relationships with sources and still safeguard their autonomy? What conditions in their daily work set the limits for what political journalism can achieve: journalistic expertise, resources and the need for news 24/7?

A fourth and final set of questions focuses on the implications for modern democracy and its institutions, including the government as well as the media. What are the consequences for democracy of such evolving and prevailing mutual dependencies? In particular, we are interested in the consequences with regard to transparency, accountability, legitimacy, and the overall power relations and democratic processes more broadly.

Mediatisation or bubble effects?

This book offers insight into the practices of politics and journalism – the actual conduct of staff in these professions, what people actually do in everyday situations and what they must face when confronting real-world challenges. This includes the management of government communications (Sanders & Canel, 2013). Therefore, the book goes into structures as well as practices within the governing and journalistic processes.

The book also relates to the discussion of the role of media in modern politics. In the world of ideal models, media is regarded as “the fourth estate”. In the normative theories of division of power in liberal democracy, media independently scrutinises power and creates a public sphere for deliberative public debate (Dahl, 1989; Christians et al., 2009). In this model, the division between the media and the political system is clear.

However, ideal models are seldom reflected in real societies. The real world is never this clear, but much more complicated with many power-based relationships, both visible and invisible. Over the past 20-30 years, different kinds of criticism in both research and public debate have been directed at the relationship between media and power. These criticisms come from different perspectives and often contain many contradictions:

The “mediatisation critique” – that the political system adapts to media logic and that the media therefore appropriates power in the political processes. Commercialisation of media and various changes in the political system lead to mediatised politics, under which the political system loses its autonomy and becomes dependent on media

(e.g., Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999). This is basically undemocratic, because journalists and the media are not held responsible by voters (Petersson, 1996).

The “bubble critique” – that media and politics are part of the same bubble, that they are tied together with relationships socialising them into the same system and the same values (Kuhn & Kleis Nielsen, 2014). This kind of critique has often been used by populist parties claiming that mainstream media is politically correct and part of the political system (de Vreese, Esser & Hopmann, 2017). With populist parties and movements growing in many countries, this critique has in recent years become increasingly common.

These contradictory criticisms are a sign of the growing uncertainty regarding the role of the media in relation to politics. The uncertainty is a result of rapid changes in both the media system and the political system over the last 20-30 years (Kuhn & Kleis Nielsen, 2014).

In the political system, the role of the political parties has changed. Stable support is waning and those who stick with their parties are experiencing a more volatile political landscape. Without the old class- and interest-based party organisations, parties have had to develop communication strategies to reach voters. The growth of communication departments, PR consultants and “spin doctors” is evident in many countries; the professionalisation of political communication is a general trend (Ström-bäck & Kioussis, 2011). At the same time, new populist parties are growing out of the discontent with the old system. The new parties are often weakly organised; instead of relying on strong internal organisation, these parties tend to rely on close relations with media (de Vreese et al., 2017).

Also, the media system is changing. Audiences are fragmented from the abundance of TV channels, websites and social media networks. The consequence of this fragmentation is referred to as “bubble effects”, where audiences get their opinions confirmed by their media flow and more seldom meet other perspectives and opinions (Pariser, 2011). In addition to this, media is increasingly driven on a commercial basis, and commercial values are becoming more important in both news selection and framing. The speed in news reporting is increasing, and editorial resources for quality journalism have been downsized. As a result, fewer reporters have to produce more to fill all channels (Allern & Pollack, 2012; Nygren & Nord, 2017).

Taken together, these changes influence political journalism in many ways. They influence both the political actors and journalists, and the consequence is that the conditions for political journalism have become more difficult to analyse. A key question is how the interaction between journalists and political sources is influenced by these trends – the power balance in the ongoing negotiation on the selection and framing of political news.

A multidisciplinary approach

The starting point for the project is the assumption that the relationships between journalists and different kinds of political sources are simultaneously adversarial and collaborative/symbiotic. Both sides use the relationship for their own purposes, and there is an ongoing negotiation in the relationship based on strength and power. The actual result depends on the situation and what is at stake.

The different roles held by political sources and journalists in liberal democracies form the basis for the analysis. Both groups have legitimate incentives to influence the selection and framing of news. There is basically no antidemocratic tendency in the efforts of either of these groups to influence political journalism:

- The political system, in our case governments with leading politicians and press advisors, need media to get their issues on the agenda and gather support. In modern society, the media provides the most important arena for politics – the place where politics is made visible.
- Journalists have diverging roles as both actors and directors of the public arena for politics. Journalism and politics have always been intertwined (Schudson, 2003). Following liberal ideology, however, journalists are also supposed to be an independent watchdog on power and keep their distance to the political system (Christians et al., 2009).

There is also a limit to how far the political system can go to influence political coverage without being a threat to the autonomy of the media. This limit is hard to define, and, even if it occasionally shifts, it still exists to guarantee the autonomy for media as a “fourth estate” in relation to government and political power. Authoritarian regimes use *hard methods* to control information flows and media image: ownership, legislation, censorship and repression. This is the case in many countries with limited press freedom. In Western democracies, the political system predominantly uses *soft methods* to influence media and control information: “spin doctors” and news management strategies including the production of information subsidies for news media (Davis, 2014).

Is there a limit to the influence that is acceptable in the other direction, i.e. can the media have “too much” influence on political processes? This has been discussed in critical research on the mediatisation of politics (e.g., Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999). According to basic liberal ideology, though, the freedom of the press and other media is part of the constitution and should not be limited, especially with regard to political issues.

At the core of the relation between politicians and journalists is the existence of a shared culture (Pfetsch, 2014). This culture binds journalists and sources together, and is based on shared norms, values and attitudes. While it has a normative basis, it nevertheless differs among national cultures. And here lies the rationale for a comparative approach: patterns that can be found in countries that are different from one

another stand above national versions and adaptations; these patterns are constituting features of the relation itself.

The project is multidisciplinary and based on earlier research and theories in political science, mass communication and journalism.

In political science, the personalisation of politics has gradually become more common (e.g., Karvonen, 2010; Langer, 2011). This development has been reinforced by media coverage, and politicians also use these mechanisms. Part of this is also a reflection of the presidentialisation of politics, where political power is concentrated to the prime minister (e.g., Poguntke & Webb, 2005). The role of media is certainly one driver behind this development, but so is the need for the political centre to control information in more complex processes. In several countries, there is a strengthening – via an increased capacity to coordinate and control policy – of the executive centre, of prime ministers' offices. Arguably, another driving factor is the increasing pressure for centralisation, as governments face the challenge of “speaking with one voice”. This is epitomised by central control of government communication, tight message control and tendencies toward centralisation.

In journalism studies, the relationship between journalists and sources has been an important area of study for a long time (e.g., Sigal, 1986). This is a delicately negotiated relationship. It is based on an exchange of what each part can offer the other – the sources can offer information and news, and journalists can offer space in the public sphere and public visibility. Thus, both sides are interdependent, even though journalists and political sources pursue different professional goals (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995). The negotiation is based on power, and the group of actors that has the upper hand changes from situation to situation (Berkowitz, 2009). While there are different schools of thought in the analysis of which side has the leading role – journalists or sources – it is also possible to view the relationship as a kind of cooperation – a symbiosis where both sides have a mutual interest in keeping a good relationship (Larsson, 1998; Manning, 2001).

Theories on mediatisation of society bind together political science and journalism studies. The term has been defined as a general social process in which the media has become increasingly influential and deeply integrated in different spheres of society (Esser & Strömbäck, 2014). It is a slow and structural change in society – not a question of media effects but of how society in general has adapted to the logics of media. In the field of politics, it is defined as a long-term process where the importance of the media in political processes, institutions, organisations and actors has increased (Esser & Strömbäck, 2014). Research has analysed a broad spectrum of trends in political journalism resulting from the mediatisation of politics and the increasing influence of media logics in public political debate; among these are the increased use of game frames and interpretative news, personification, orientation towards conflicts, dramatisation and scandals (Jönsson & Strömbäck, 2007; Patterson, 1993).

In comparative media studies, the key area is the relationship between media and political power. The influential model of Hallin and Mancini (2004) focuses on this

relationship in two dimensions: the degree of state intervention in media and the degree of political parallelism (if media is used for political purposes and reflects political divides). The degree of professionalism is also very much about the autonomy of journalism in relation to politics. On a systemic level, the degree of professionalism and detachment is also part of the professional political communication culture (Pfetsch, 2014). In these comparative studies, important national differences are visible that can be traced back to history and cultural heritage.

These areas of research and theories form a matrix for our analysis. On top of this, theories on media development are used to analyse the changing conditions for political communication. New media platforms are becoming increasingly important within the political communication system, but the traditional media is still present and adapting to the new situation. Chadwick (2013) calls this a “hybrid media system”, where old and new media coexist. New technology like the Internet and mobile networks create new platforms for both up-and-coming social media and legacy media. Newspapers also use social media platforms for both reporting and distribution of content, TV channels are present both in broadcasting and online, and fragmented online news services and blogs use media content and increasingly often produce their own content. Thus, while technology changes the system, political communication culture is rather sluggish. The result is a hybrid media system where old and new media logics coexist and interact.

Research design and methods in the project

We explore this area of research by applying a twofold strategy. First, we provide in-depth case studies of contemporary political executive-media relationships in each of the examined countries. Second, we place the findings from our individual cases in a comparative perspective, surveying evidence on political executive-media relationships across the four countries participating in the project: Finland, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden.

Most of the research and theories on political communication originate in the U.S. or the U.K. (Blumler, 2015). This is why there has been a tendency in recent decades to “de-westernise” media research (Wasserman & de Beer, 2009). The main argument is that results from the U.S. and the U.K. are not always applicable in other countries without taking history, the level of economic development and national culture into account. By including two central European countries in the analysis, our perspective is broader than the perspective provided by studies examining similar (western European) countries.

The countries examined here are all situated around the Baltic Sea. However, they differ regarding size, economic development, political history and culture. Most notably, there is variation among them regarding the media system and the political system. Sweden and Finland are quite close and have a common history; Poland and

Lithuania share post-communist experiences. As far as media systems or models of the media-state interaction are concerned, Finland and Sweden belong to the same model – the democratic corporatist model (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Poland, in a post-communist context, belongs instead to a unique East Central European model (see Dobek-Ostrowska & Głowacki, 2008, 2011). Lithuania, finally, shares many of the experiences of Poland, carrying a heritage from the Soviet era and a high degree of what Hallin and Mancini (2004) referred to as “political parallelism” (Balčytienė, 2012).³

It is easy to detect differences between the four countries, but if we also find similarities in the analysis despite all these differences, these similarities will be a very strong indication of general features in political journalism and the relationship between journalists and their sources in the political system. This, together with the need to “de-westernise” political communication studies, is the main argument for including four countries that are so different in the project.

Three steps in the research design

Teams of researchers in the four countries carried out the project during the period 2014-2017. They worked closely during this period, holding regular workshops and developing common methods and questions. This close cooperation made it possible to conduct the comparative analysis in this volume.

The focus of the project was the day-to-day relationships between journalists and political sources. However, the role of the media during crises and scandals has been analysed before (e.g., Allern & Pollack, 2012; Lull & Hinerman, 1997), and the basis for journalism during crises is the relationships that have been established under normal situations.

Another limitation of the project was the focus on politicians in power (ruling political parties and government) and political journalists. However, while the focus has been on journalists’ relations with the party currently in power, many of the sources have the experience of being in opposition and fathoming how to then use political conflicts in their daily work.

The project had three clear steps. In the first step, the authors of individual chapters mapped the landscape of political journalism for the country in question. They identified political actors and journalists, analysed important media and described the structures of political communication.

The second step consisted of interviews with leading political journalists and political press secretaries/press advisors in the governments, in some cases including ministers and press advisors from earlier governments. In each country, 20-25 interviews were conducted, most of which were held in 2015-2016. Each interview took one hour on average and followed the same interview guide, and the interviewees were granted anonymity. The findings from these interviews are presented in each country chapter (Chapters 2-5).

In the third step, the results were analysed and compared with regard to certain themes and topics. The findings from the comparative analyses are presented as thematic chapters (Chapters 6-10).

In the research design, there are some limitations to bear in mind. In the interviews, journalists and political advisors provided information in the manner that they wanted it to be made public. No systematic content analysis was conducted to verify the results from the interviews. Despite this limitation, the project still offers insight into the process behind the published stories in the newspapers and radio/TV news, an insight that would never have been gained through content analysis or surveys. Thus, the project offers a glimpse of parts of a hidden interaction that forms the daily output in news media. We believe this will contribute to the cumulative knowledge of social science despite the limitation.

Adversarial or symbiotic relationship?

The points of departure for the analysis are that there are two major dimensions in the relationship between journalists and political sources: adversarial vs symbiotic and public vs hidden. Taken together in a four-square matrix, these two dimensions cover the different types of interaction between journalists and political sources. This matrix was developed as a hypothesis, and the analysis considers how the empirical findings fit into this matrix (Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1 Dimensions of the interaction between politicians and journalists.

	Visible/public (Overt)	Hidden/not public (Covert)
Symbiotic/no conflict	Press conferences. Public performances, debates and journalists referring to what politicians are saying.	Positive leaks about “good news”, to get the news before competitors.
Adversarial/conflict	Journalists as watchdogs, scrutinising political actors and political acting on the initiative of journalists.	Negative leaks from the political sphere about competitors. “Cover-up” of scandals, trying to hide negative information.

The hypothesis was that most of the interaction between the actors can be placed within these four squares. Much of the previous research on the interaction between journalists and politicians has focused on public interactions, for example the use of press conferences (Eriksson et al., 2013).

Another possibility is that interaction concerning a news story moves between these kinds of interaction depending on the situation and the balance of power between the parts in each stage of the negotiation. For example, a journalist may receive a leak about something that will be presented at a press conference the following day, and

in exchange for this, the source gets more coverage than would otherwise be the case. There is no conflict between journalists and politicians in this story. It starts as a hidden interaction, but later moves into the public sphere. Another example is a watchdog story that starts as a leak from political opponents and moves into the public sphere, where its development is uncontrolled.

This book does not include an evaluation of these four squares; from a normative perspective, none of them contains “better” journalism than any of the others. Instead, they all perform different functions in democracy: information, debate and a watchdog function. The types of interaction differ, however, between the four squares, and the distribution of power in the daily negotiation differs. This also influences the role of journalism in democracy and the balance of power between the political system and media.

An important dimension of the relationship is formality and informality. These two sides exist at the same time, and the border between them on a day-to-day basis is often blurred:

It is clear that we need to pay close attention not only to the routine interaction between journalists and politicians, but also to the informal and formal ties that bind them together in relationships that are adversarial one moment and symbiotic the next, as well as the paths via which some journalists move into politics (as advisers and candidates) and sometimes back to news media. (Kuhn & Kleis Nielsen, 2014: 16)

A key aspect of this project has been collecting truly comparative material. Even before we started to pursue the empirical research, a number of analytical challenges became evident.

First, comparative analysis was going to be difficult due to the wealth of data – many hours of interviews were gathered. The only way to manage this was for the researchers to cooperate closely around clearly defined themes. The result of this work is presented in the cross-national thematic chapters in this book.

Second, our focus on cross-country comparisons implied that we had to sacrifice the longitudinal dimension, or, in other words, that comparisons across space were given priority over comparisons across time. In some interviews, journalists and political sources were able to make comparisons over time. It was also possible to make comparisons using earlier research in some of the cases. In general, however, the results present a picture of the situation in the 2010s.

It should also be borne in mind that the political situation can change very fast. An example with regard to the study at hand is the election of a new Polish government in 2015, and the ensuing conflicts concerning the role and standing of Polish media. Indeed, growing political populism and anti-EU tendencies are currently changing the political scene in many European countries, including the four countries in the study. While it is possible to cover this development in some cases, the main purpose of the study is to find more general patterns in the relationship – patterns that are stable during different kinds of political regimes.

Organisation of the book and core messages

The book is structured into three parts and eleven chapters. In this first chapter, we describe the research problem, the aim and the research design of the study, and we present our selection of national cases and theoretical and methodological approaches. We then preview the chapters of the book in the context of the analytical dimensions and the research problems that they address.

The first part consists of four empirical chapters that present the case studies of political executive-media relationships in, respectively, Finland, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden. In the analyses, these chapters focus on interactive dynamics in the relationships. Consequently, all chapters have a similar structure that is based on the same matrix. Accordingly, the chapters reflect five dimensions (Figure 1.2).

Figure 1.2 Dimensions in the analysis of interaction.

- Daily work**
 - Routines
 - Access to political sources and media
 - The role of social media in daily work
- Formality and informality in the relationships, given different situations**
 - Visible/public or Hidden/not public
 - Symbiotic/no conflict or Adversarial/conflict
- Professionalisation**
 - The roles of the actors
 - How the system works on both sides
- Relationships between actors**
 - Networks
 - Cultures developed within the system
 - Strategies from both sides
- Changes over time**
 - In the short perspective, 5-10 years
 - In the long perspective, 20-30 years

A concluding discussion in each chapter assesses, in particular, the common questions about closeness and distance, and the exchange and power balance between actors. This assessment is placed in relation to the specific conditions of the country.

In Chapter 2, Risto Niemikari, Tapio Raunio and Tom Moring explore the relationship between the political executive and media in Finland, arguing that this relationship is characteristically a system of interdependence where journalists rely on politicians for information, and politicians, in turn, rely on journalists as a channel for publicity. Drawing on 21 interviews with political and media elites, they demonstrate that the role of political advisors is central, while the civil servant media staff of the prime minister's office seek to maintain a neutral position. Interviewees on both sides describe the high degree of access to political sources as a distinct, almost unique feature of the Finnish system. However, a culture of informal interaction operates alongside this openness, as the management of pre-public information is crucial for both politicians

and journalists. Even though informal interaction remains an integral part of political executive-media relationships, both sides describe a shift towards more professional and ethical conduct. Social media has the potential of providing politicians with a way of bypassing media influence, but it is still far from surpassing the importance of traditional media coverage.

In Chapter 3, Auksė Balčytienė and Milda Malling examine the relationship between the media and politics in Lithuania, arguing that it is an interaction shaped by benefits-oriented reasoning. They argue that for both communicating sides, the logic of “benefits-oriented reasoning” appears to be a key determinant of success in communication. This analysis is based on 20 interviews with political journalists, government spokespersons and press advisors in Lithuania. It shows that each group gains power in different situations along a formality-informality continuum. Beyond contextual particularities, as described in the chapter, the changes in political-media interaction uncover broader tendencies that are also recognised in other sociocultural contexts as well as in conditions and circumstances related to political communication and journalism production.

In Chapter 4, Bogusława Dobek-Ostrowska and Jacek Nozowski explore the political executive-media relationship in Poland, drawing on 23 interviews. This analysis reveals how close ministers and press secretaries are to each other, whereas spokespersons are more marginalised, politically speaking. Another important finding concerns social media, which is widely used for self-presentation in Poland. Both the politicians and the media use such platforms (especially Facebook and Twitter) for communication and immediate connection. While the dramatic political change in Poland has brought about many changes to the media world, journalists do not notice any limitations on their access to sources. This relationship is dependent on the networks of sources that individual journalists establish over time, and these sources are not limited exclusively to politicians. Moreover, journalists try to access political sources in another way, and as a result political changes have only changed their routines. This chapter observes a process of politicisation of communication staff, which also includes the spokespersons. It also claims that the prime minister plays the main role in the communication process of the government, followed by political advisors. Civil servants come last.

In Chapter 5, Karl Magnus Johansson, Milda Malling and Gunnar Nygren explore the political executive-media relationship in Sweden and suggest that it is “a professionally symbiotic relationship”. This chapter focuses in particular on professional day-to-day relationships and habits. The analysis is mainly based on 21 interviews with journalists and government press secretaries, supplemented by documentary evidence. The analysis establishes the routinisation at work, as well as the professionalisation. The exchanges appear close, but both parties recognise the professional roles at the heart of the relationship. Media development also influences the relationship between journalists and their sources in government; downsizing in the newsrooms, increased production 24/7 for all platforms and increased competition for unique news make journalists more dependent on available sources. At the same time, professionalisa-

tion of government communication makes news management more efficient and has centralising effects on executive systems. These trends serve to change the balance between journalists and their political sources in favour of the sources.

Taken together, the contributions to the study of the political executive-media relationships in the four countries yield three core messages. First, these relationships have been subject to *increasingly intense interaction* over time, following increased demands from media and technological changes. In brief, there are more channels of communication, and both sides use social media and various platforms to communicate. This pattern is also reflected in practically instant reporting, as revealed through social media and news media online.

Second, parallel to this rise in intensity, we have witnessed a *broadening of the interaction locations* used to communicate. Although the traditional locations remain resilient, they have been complemented by increasingly prominent interaction locations, reflected in everyday and institutional practices.

Third, important variation in the patterns of political executive-media relationships is established and may be *explained by centralisation vs decentralisation in governments*. Over time, trends are consistent with the idea of growing politicisation in the wake of rising media scrutiny. The growth of resources in government communication and downsizing of newsrooms in leading media outlets change the power balance between journalists and their sources, especially in times of increasing speed in the news cycle.

The second part of the book consists of five chapters on different themes with a cross-national perspective based on the four national cases.

In Chapter 6, Karl Magnus Johansson and Tapio Raunio explore government communication from a comparative perspective. They set out the research on government communication and then proceed to explore and compare the contexts in which it occurs. They hypothesise that there is a trend of centralisation in government communication – a move upwards in the political executive towards central coordination and control. They test this hypothesis empirically through an inventory of elite interview evidence and a four-country comparison including two case studies – Finland and Sweden – as well as two case illustrations: Lithuania and Poland. Based on the extensive interviews in the case studies, they describe how government communication is structured. They find that the cases of Finland and Sweden offer support for the centralisation hypothesis, while those of Lithuania and Poland point to the limitations of the centralisation hypothesis. Hence, they conclude that the extent to which government communication is centralised varies and that the variation is patterned. The findings suggest that previous research, which is heavily focused on “Western” states, underestimates cross-national variation in government communication.

In Chapter 7, Elena Johansson examines the use of social media among journalists and political sources in the countries. According to Chadwick (2013), technological development, through the emergence of media channels and so on, has transformed media systems toward hybridisation. In the modern hybrid media systems, older and newer media forms interact, interweave and compete with each other. This chapter

looks at strategies of government communication in social media (Facebook and Twitter). The analysis demonstrates that, for ministers, Facebook serves as something of a top-down channel to bypass editorial media, while Twitter provides some informational exchange with professional elites, including media elites. Thus, government communication in social media combines features of traditional and new media practices and follows a “hybrid” logic. Ministers’ communication, whether via press secretaries or not, suggests a centralised management system as far as social media is concerned.

In Chapter 8, Milda Malling analyses formality and informality in the relationship between political sources and journalists in Lithuania and Sweden. How do the exchange, trust and power balance between journalists and their political sources differ depending on the form of interaction (formal vs informal)? The findings indicate that formal situations and agenda-based news are advantageous for the professional sources. Informal sources gain power over formal sources during political conflicts and non-agenda news, while the top political leaders and their press advisors are most often isolated from this interaction. The result calls for the reconsideration of existing theories on interdependency and shows that the type of interaction influences the content of exchange and power between journalists and their sources.

In Chapter 9, Gunnar Nygren and Risto Niemikari discuss theories on mediatisation of politics in relation to the findings in the project. They challenge the understanding of mediatisation as replacing political logics with media logics. The empirical results from the four countries confirm the ongoing mediatisation, but this does not mean a transfer of power from the political system to media. On the contrary – professionalised government communication learns how to play the game with media according to the rules of media logics. By transforming the political system and integrating media logic into political processes, the political instrumentalisation of media is becoming stronger. The shifting power balance between downsized and commercialised media outlets and professionalised government communication gives the notion of mediatisation of politics a different meaning to the usual interpretation.

In Chapter 10, Aukšė Balčytienė and Tom Moring look at the results from the perspective of political communication cultures. They offer a historical perspective: how contextual circumstances (histories and traditions, values and ideals as well as other cultural legacies) are shaping the trajectories of transformations in each of the four countries. Furthermore, they discuss these specific “moments of truth” in each of the four countries studied, and how these moments might be characterised. Are these infused by local political and economic or global reasons? Is there anything specific that can be learned from these changes? In other words, what in the political-media interaction in all four countries is historical and cultural (and thus context-specific) and what is universal and reciprocal, and thus transferable also to other contexts?

Combined, the contributions covering cross-national themes yield several messages and important insights into the interplay of media and the political executive. If there is one core message it is this: the communication process is one of reciprocity,

of exchange, where the centrally involved actors somehow find themselves not just interacting but in a kind of working relationship.

The book concludes with a chapter by Karl Magnus Johansson and Gunnar Nygren that offers perspectives from political science and journalism studies. The chapter discusses the findings and implications for political studies as well as from a normative perspective: whenever there are actual or possible evolving symbiotic relationships with journalists and news sources, including political power holders, what are the consequences for democracy? The relationship qualifies the expectation of a “symbiotic” relationship as well as of a clear trend of “mediatisation” and of growing centralisation of government communication across time and cases. The chapter also discusses the results from a normative perspective of journalism as an autonomous institution in a democratic society. In relation to the different media systems studied in the project, this normative perspective gives different results. The final question is how much space there is for journalism as a “fourth estate” in the networked and commercialised media system that is developing in all of the studied countries. Is political instrumentalisation of media coming through “the back door”?

Notes

1. Key, classical, works are Blumler & Gurevitch, 1981; Ericson, Baranek & Chan, 1989; Gans, 1980; Gieber & Johnson, 1961; Sigal, 1986. See also, for example, Allern, 1997; Brants et al., 2010; Cook, 2005; Davis, 2009; Koch-Baumgarten & Voltmer, 2010; Larsson, 2002; Manning, 2001; Reich, 2009; Strömbäck & Nord, 2006; 2010.
2. In this book, we use the terms “chief executive”, “head of government”, “prime minister” and “premier” interchangeably. We also use the terms “press secretary”, “media/press advisor” and “political advisor” interchangeably to describe political appointees serving in this function. Likewise, we use the terms “professional communicator”, “press officer” and “information officer” interchangeably – they are “non-political”, that is, not politically appointed or non-partisan, civil servants.
3. In the words of Hallin and Mancini, political parallelism refers to “the degree and nature of the links between the media and political parties or, more broadly, the extent to which the media system reflects the major political divisions in society” (Hallin & Mancini, 2004: 21).

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PART ONE

Chapter 2

Finland

Informal interdependence and occasional clashes

Risto Niemikari, Tapio Raunio & Tom Moring

Abstract

Drawing on 21 interviews with political and media elites, this chapter argues that political executive-media relationships in Finland are characterised by a system of interdependence between politicians and journalists. Political advisors play a central role, while the civil servant media staff seek to maintain a neutral position. One distinct feature of the Finnish system is a high degree of access to political sources. Alongside this openness, there is a culture of informal interaction, as the management of pre-public information is crucial for politicians, journalists and civil servants. Relationships between journalists and political sources are generally good, with both sides describing a shift towards more professional and ethical conduct. Occasional antagonisms do arise nonetheless, with essentially each prime minister having phases of poor media relations at some point. While social media allows politicians to bypass the media, it is still far from surpassing the importance of traditional media coverage.

Keywords: Finland, government, media, communication, prime minister, journalism

Introduction

An independent report published on 15 May 2017 and written by Olli Mäenpää, a professor of administrative law from the University of Helsinki, heavily criticised the editorial staff of Yleisradio (Yle for short), the Finnish public service broadcasting company, for caving in to pressure from the prime minister (PM) after a negative story. The story, published in December 2016, had uncovered links between the relatives of prime minister Juha Sipilä (the Centre Party) and the state-supported mining firm, Terrafame. The relatives were owners in Katera Steel, which had landed a major contract from Terrafame, for which the PM had just approved a large tranche of additional funding. Sipilä, who was later exonerated of charges by the parliamentary ombudsman, responded by sending multiple long and angry emails to the journalists linked with the story.

Following Sipilä's complaints, senior Yle management prohibited further coverage of the story, and eventually the two journalists who had written the story resigned.

This resulted in a strong backlash, not just among journalists but also in society at large, with Yle and the editor-in-chief of Yle's division for news and current affairs, Atte Jääskeläinen, being accused of giving "special treatment" to the PM and the government. The report by Mäenpää came to a similar conclusion and emphasised that Yle must uphold its impartiality and remember the role of the media as a "watchdog" of political leaders (Yle, 2017a). After five consecutive years at the top, Reporters Without Borders cited Sipilä's behaviour as a reason why Finland was overtaken by Norway and Sweden in the World Press Freedom Index (Yle, 2017b).

Top-level politicians have tried to influence media before; this is not new in Finland.¹ However, this time the issue became particularly heated as the events occurred at a time when the financing of Yle was under consideration. Because of the heated public debate, the board of Yle, Yle's CEO and Jääskeläinen himself reached the conclusion that the prerequisites for Jääskeläinen's successful functioning in the office were no longer being met – and in May 2017, Jääskeläinen resigned (Yle, 2017c). Yle also promised to invest more resources into investigative journalism and develop measures for assessing its independence from outside influence (Yle, 2017d).

"Sipilägate", as the scandal was called, had in fact been preceded by another awkward moment in leader-media relationships. In September 2015, Yle allowed PM Sipilä to address the nation on the country's difficult economic situation in a pre-recorded speech that was broadcast after the evening news. This was the first such televised address by a Finnish PM since 1993, when Esko Aho spoke to the nation amid a deep recession, and as a consequence, the impartiality of both Yle and Jääskeläinen was questioned.

It is important to set these incidents against the proper backdrop. Relationships between journalists and politicians in Finland are for the most part friendly and constructive. In Finland, politicians, including the PM and ministers, are easily available for interviews, nowhere more so than in the café and corridors of Eduskunta, the unicameral national legislature building. This reflects the overall Finnish political culture, which is often described as pragmatic and consensual, with party-political cooperation across the political spectrum and the involvement of stakeholders such as trade unions and other interest groups.

However, recent constitutional reforms have radically changed the Finnish political regime, with the PM and the government emerging from the shadow of the president (Karvonen, 2014; Karvonen, Paloheimo & Raunio, 2016). Thus, the rare but recurring clashes between leading politicians and the media can be seen as exceptional outbreaks of two tectonic plates trying to find their roles in a changing environment.²

This chapter analyses leader-media relationships in Finland, focusing specifically on ties and connections between the prime minister's office (PMO) and journalists. Our primary source is interviews that were carried out between January and May 2016. We interviewed political journalists from all major media (n=12), civil servants of the PMO (who either work primarily on communications matters or supervise such efforts as senior-level civil servants, n=5) and political advisors who have worked for recent prime ministers (n=4). In addition to these 21 in-depth

interviews, we rely on governmental documents about communication structures and strategies. Our main argument is that links between journalists and the PMO are institutionalised and function largely without problems, but journalists must strike a balance between closeness and impartiality. Inside the PMO, the role of party political advisors is highlighted. As regards the PMO, we observe a strong trend of increasingly centralised government communication; over time, the importance of this office has clearly increased.

The media and the political system of Finland

The relationships between the political sphere, the administrative sphere and the media would not be comprehensible without consideration of some of the characteristics of the Finnish political system and its history (Jussila, Hentilä & Nevakivi, 1999; Vartola, 2004) (Table 2.1). Finland, due to its common history with Sweden until 1807, has often been included in the Nordic or even Scandinavian group of countries. Research describes a “Scandinavian party system” or a “Nordic model” (Arter, 2016; Berglund & Lindström, 1978; Petersson, 1994). In this group, however, Finland has been a rather odd case (Moring, 2008). While the Swedish legal system of the late eighteenth century survived the Russian rule between 1809 and 1917, it did so without the structural and political changes that were implemented in the other Nordic states during this period.

Table 2.1 The media system and the political system in Finland

Characteristics	Finland
Political system	Unitary state with semi-presidentialism
Electoral system	Proportional representation (multimember constituencies)
Party system	Fragmented (eight parties in parliament)
Turnout (national elections)	Around 70 per cent
Government	Coalition (Centre Party, National Coalition, Blue Reform)
Media system	Dual public-private broadcasting system, private newspaper business
Public service broadcasting share of time in viewing	High (45 per cent) with two strong domestic commercial competitors (MTV, all channels, 24 per cent; Nelonen, all channels, 17 per cent)*
Newspaper reading (subscriptions per 1000 inhabitants)	High (320), in a diverse market with many local newspapers**

* Yle Annual Reports of 2016-2017.

** Nordicom, Newspapers circulation per thousand inhabitants 2000–2016, <http://www.nordicom.gu.se/en/statistics-facts/media-statistics>.

The Finnish party system is rooted in the five-party model that long characterised the Nordic countries, although with some important modifications. In Finland, the relatively moderate Conservative Party on the right (the National Coalition) has never been as big as in Sweden or Norway, and the small, Liberal Party has shrunk and disappeared. In contrast, the party with agrarian roots (the Centre) has succeeded in maintaining a strength clearly exceeding that of similar parties in other Nordic countries, whereas the Social Democratic Party has never become as dominant as in Sweden. As a matter of fact, in the Eduskunta, the centre-right parties have held the majority of seats since the early 1970s, often by a rather comfortable margin. Thus, the prospect of a government consisting of only left-wing parties has not been realistic for several decades and all cabinets formed after the 2003 elections have been led by centre-right parties.

In Finland, the Green League first entered the parliament in the 1980s, and having served several times in the government, it is one of the most successful green parties in Europe. Various populist movements have surfaced under different names; one of the more recent of these parties, the Finns Party, had a major breakthrough in the 2011 Eduskunta elections, where they became the third-biggest party. Although often compared to the biggest populist party in Sweden, the Sweden Democrats, which is distinctly far-right and has, until now, been isolated from political power, the history of Finnish populism is quite different.³ Due to the pattern of three to four large parties, Finland has often had government coalitions that have not followed the type of bloc politics that has long been prevalent in Sweden.

Until the reform of the constitution in 2000, the Finnish president had considerable powers and influence on government formation. Thus, Finland was not among those countries where election results reliably predicted government coalitions (Luebbert, 1986). The semi-presidential system (Nousiainen, 2001) also resulted in significant powers for the administrative elites, who maintained autonomy vis-à-vis the political elites. As noted by Stenius and Turunen (1995), Finland was isolated from the liberal changes that altered Sweden's political life after the death of Gustav III (1746-1792). These features shall be kept in mind when interpreting the interviews presented in this chapter.

With regard to the media system, Finland, like the other Nordic countries, can be placed within the "Democratic-Corporatist Model" (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Thus, in Finland there is a relatively influential press based on mass circulation, political parallelism in combination with journalistic professionalism, and the coexistence of liberal traditions of media freedom and strong state intervention in the media sector (the latter through the existence of public service broadcasting).

However, the Finnish media system does not fit this model perfectly. For example, press-party parallelism faded relatively early as subsidies to the party press were minute and later totally abandoned. (A distinguishing feature that emerged instead was a strong regional anchorage of the press.) The particular features of the country's political history also reflect how press and media freedoms are enacted. In the latter

part of the twentieth century, Finnish media exercised a temperate policy in relation to Finland's eastern neighbour, a behaviour that spilled over to respectfulness towards the political elite, particularly the president. According to Moring (2008: 58), at times this has led to "something of a free card with respect to critical surveillance of the political elite". The historical background is personified in particular by two dominant presidents after the Second World War, J.K. Paasikivi and U.K. Kekkonen. Although stretching far back in history, these cultural features have influenced the politics-media relationship in Finnish political life more generally.

More current research of nine European countries (Lengauer et al., 2014; Pfetsch et al., 2014) places Finnish political communication culture in a Scandinavian context, although not fully comfortably. Among the identified features is the notion (among politicians) that politics has become increasingly mediatised (cf. Kunelius & Reunanen, 2012; Isotalus & Almonkari, 2014), and scores high on journalistic autonomy. However, and interestingly in light of the findings in this chapter, tensions between politicians and journalists are more pronounced in Finland than in its Scandinavian neighbours, particularly regarding the belief by politicians that the media has a decisive influence on their careers. This finding may be partly explained by the political tensions around party financing that occurred shortly before the interviews were conducted (see note 6). On the other hand, in Finland, political media staff consistently took a midway position between journalists and politicians when interviewed on issues that were dividing the two, a division that was particularly pronounced in terms of the motives of each respective group. Where politicians score high on claims of biased reporting, increasingly negative reporting and "entertainmentalisation", journalists score much lower, and the political media staff fall in between. This indicates that political media staff have a certain understanding of the professional goals of journalists, most likely because they also often have a background in media.

Recent developments in the media sector have been harsh for commercial media, particularly since the economic recession starting in 2008. Commercial media has had to handle falling revenues from advertising and increased competition from digital media and search engines. Moreover, a growing share of young people has resorted to social media. The Reuters Digital News Report 2016 gives the following picture of the development in 26 countries, where Finland is included:

Across our 26 countries, we see a common picture of job losses, cost-cutting, and missed targets as falling print revenues combine with the brutal economics of digital (*sic*) in a perfect storm. Almost everywhere, we see the further adoption of online platforms and devices for news – largely as a supplement to broadcast but often at the expense of print. (Reuters Institute, 2016)

Newspapers have thus merged, and political journalism has been stripped of resources as several newspapers today share one reporting unit in the capital. Newspapers (as will be exemplified below) have also resorted to agendas that are more popular. To some extent, the heated debate around Yle can be understood from

this perspective. Together with the biggest newspapers (Helsingin Sanomat and Aamulehti), Yle has taken a leading role in digital news reporting. This has caused tensions regarding how far the publicly financed company should be allowed to expand into the digital sphere.

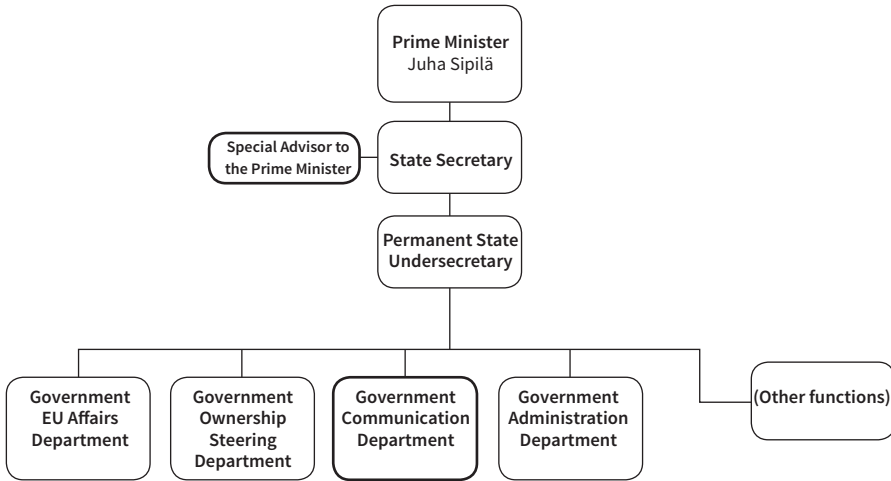
As part of this development, through blogs and social media, particularly Twitter, politicians have found new ways to spread political messages and information. Journalists are now frequently reporting the blog posts or tweets of politicians, a phenomenon that emerged long before the tweet storms of the current U.S. president. Thus, in matters where they wish to keep the publicity in their own hands, politicians have occasionally chosen to post their comments on blogs instead of giving interviews.

Organising government communication

As a result of the constitutional changes enacted since the late 1980s, the Finnish government has emerged from the shadow of the president as the main executive. The PM is the political leader of the country, and how the government and the prime minister handle their communications is therefore more important than under the old constitution. In Finland, there is a distinction between political communication and civil servant communication. The former refers to the immediate political staff of the PM and ministers (i.e. the political assistants and political advisors that are often referred to as “special advisors”; see Figure 2.1) whereas the latter refers to the civil servant communications staff of the PMO, called the “government communications department” (GCD), and other ministries’ communications departments.

Interestingly, all civil servants in charge of government communication (currently the head of GCD) have previously worked as journalists. Whereas political advisors come and go with each minister/government, the civil servants are bureaucrats who often spend their entire professional careers in the same ministry. While the number of party-political ministerial assistants has increased considerably, it is still rare for a minister to have an assistant that only deals with press matters. Instead, the assistants have a broad range of duties, including advising. In this chapter, these actors are referred to as “political advisors”.

Understanding the distinction outlined above is crucial for evaluating the data we have collected. There is no such thing as a single body of “staff for media-related matters”. Instead, there is a division between two staffs that exist simultaneously. These two groups have very different roles, responsibilities and powers, as our chapter will show. Figure 2.1 shows the PMO’s official organisational chart and highlights the distinction between political and civil servant media staff.

Figure 2.1 The official organisation chart of the PMO in Finland

Comments: Adapted from the official chart (prime minister's office, 2016a), which is dated 15 March 2016, reflecting the situation during the time our interviews were conducted. Along with the PM, the official organisation chart also mentions two other ministers as affiliated with the PMO. We have omitted these for the sake of clarity.

Daily work: “Rubbing elbows” in the Eduskunta café

When talking about daily routines, a typical answer from each of the three interviewed groups was along the lines of “there is no such thing as a regular day”. The political journalists typically begin their day with a visit to the newsroom before moving to the “field”; they spend a great deal of time in the parliament building. The GCD deals with a lot of the practical work, including updating the web pages and social media channels of the government, publishing press releases and arranging press conferences. It is responsible for the official communications of the government, routinely communicating new decisions, an area they call “communications on decisions”, and publishing current affairs communications (i.e. “news”). Senior-level civil servants have a great variety of duties and deal less with daily front-line communications.

The political advisors did not describe their daily work in much detail. They accompany and assist their ministers in most activities. As few ministers have a separate assistant just for media-related matters, their closest political advisor usually functions as press assistant. However, political advisors usually do not give statements to the media; instead, their function is to handle interview requests and relay the minister’s preliminary comments. A good depiction of the political advisors’ role is that they are “always a few metres away from the minister”.

A Finnish phenomenon is the Parliament café, which I know does not occur elsewhere. It is quite unbelievable, but journalists and ministers sit there and, you know,

have a good time sipping coffee with each other. And there is not a big gap between them, either. The gap is surprisingly small. (Finnish journalist 7)

Above is one journalist's description of a very central aspect of the Finnish system: the sense of low hierarchy between politicians and journalists. Respondents from all three groups talked about a culture of "rubbing elbows", which refers to the practices and culture in the Eduskunta, where journalists are allowed to move very freely and discuss things with anyone they come across in the hallways, including ministers, MPs and other top politicians (cf. Vesa et al., 2015). For the political side, this translates into a need for awareness: "You have to react to situations as they arise, because when the PM is in the parliament building, it is not possible to avoid commenting on current events," one of our interviewees said (Finnish political advisor 4). Generally, all three groups felt that the relations between journalists and political sources are characterised by good access.

There is also a wide range of governmental communication channels for journalists to follow. However, the journalists emphasised that limiting oneself to following these would leave them in a reactive position: "The GCD's communications are more about providing information about what has already been decided [...]. You would not have many stories if you relied solely on them" (Finnish journalist 3). This points towards the topic of informality, which will be discussed later. Another channel of communication mentioned by respondents in all three groups was the so-called "background briefings", where a select group of journalists is invited to discuss current matters in informal settings. This will also be elaborated further later in the chapter.

When asked about the frequency of their contacts with the PM, all journalists claimed to have been in contact with him or his staff very recently. The journalists and political advisors are in contact with each other daily, and so are the journalists and GCD civil servants who work mainly with communications.

Note that the important gatekeeping role of the political advisors clearly affects the journalists' work, as they invariably say that a minister's closest advisor is the most effective way of getting in touch. Naturally, the heatedness of a given political situation can lead to politicians trying to evade journalists: "There is a tendency that when the going gets tough, the phones are turned off" (Finnish journalist 10). However, in most cases, journalists feel that they can get at least some kind of a comment during the day.

With the exception of events abroad and unexpected domestic scandals, it is mostly the government that sets the political agenda, but the journalists seek to proactively find stories, and informal contacts with sources from within the government can provide them with ideas. While all three groups described social media as a way for the political side to bypass traditional media, only a few of the journalists considered social media to be a source for news as such. Instead, many journalists described it as an indicator of public opinion.

Quite understandably, the civil servants sought to refrain from having a personal presence in social media. In official communications, the government seeks to use

social media for disseminating press releases and other media content, like pictures. Note that there was a clear consensus among our interviewees: all maintained that Twitter is the single most important social media channel in politics-media relationships.

Inevitably informal? Trust-based contacts in the relationships

All three groups were asked if there is informal interaction or contact between journalists and sources on the political side (politicians, their staff or civil servants). By informal contact we mean contact that takes place outside the official sphere of daily work; people you know and can meet in your free time – even friends. The answers from all three groups made it abundantly clear that such informal interaction is very common, even natural.

With only a few exceptions, the journalists said that they have informal contacts and that they think their colleagues have as well. Such contacts are most common with politicians and their advisors. As one journalist put it: “I would say that every political journalist has these contacts; I really do not believe that someone would not have them. You cannot do this job without contacts” (Finnish journalist 11).

The civil servants also said that it is common for politicians, their advisors and civil servants to know some journalists personally, and the political advisors were of the same view. Indeed, they all claimed to have informal contacts among journalists and believed that other political advisors are no different. This is in line with the earlier interview findings of Juntunen (2011), who notes that political journalism is distinct in its use of personal contacts and informal interaction.

In informality, the aspects of inevitability and utility combine. The journalists need them in order to move away from the reactive stance discussed earlier. For the political advisors, the motivation for informality is, of course, to influence which stories unfold and from what point of view. The political advisors spoke carefully about the topic: “It is easier to cooperate and think about a story [...] together with people that you interact with more” (Finnish political advisor 4). Here, their methods range from classical leaks to calling a journalist or going out for a drink to provide their own account of a developing topic. For the civil servants, the motivation for informality was more difficult to analyse as they are more strictly bound by law not to disclose unofficial information. However, civil servants are not immune to this phenomenon. Leaks and unofficial conversations seem to extend to the civil servants as well.⁴ Out of all the interviewees, the journalists were most open about their usage of informality.

Note that all three groups of interviewees agreed that, in a small country like Finland, informal contacts are inevitable. Many commented that they have studied at the same university or happen to live in the same neighbourhood. The journalists and the civil servants, who in many cases may have worked in the same position for

decades, often mentioned that “getting to know” people comes naturally. However, this view can also be an excuse for some to justify their own personal relations, as these relations are a potential ethical challenge, at least for civil servants and journalists.

Formal methods only get you formal information. Informal methods can get you informal information. That is the deal here. And then you enter a sphere where there has to be some kind of trust on how this information will be handled. (Finnish journalist 10)

This brings in considerations for all parties involved, in terms of both ethics and utility. The journalists pondered whether they can maintain their journalistic integrity, while the political advisors, who are not bound to such an extent by ethical considerations, must maintain a balance between the positive and negative outcomes of informal contacts. The civil servants, in turn, had outright legal considerations to make: “[I]f information has been given beforehand based on informal relationships, sure, it can breed all kinds of ... situations” (Finnish civil servant 5). However, the importance of informal interaction was recognised.

Consider the following passage from a 2011 internal “handbook” of the PMO’s communications (Prime minister’s office, 2011 – The document was provided for research use by the GCD), which seeks to establish a balance between ethics and utility:

Equal treatment of media is the policy of the PMO, meaning that interesting news and other important information are available for all media equally. This is done, for instance, with public press releases and press conferences open for all newsrooms. However, the policy of impartiality does not prevent the possibility of offering a single newsroom or a group tips for stories, interviews or a prepared specialist article. Offering a newsroom a point of view on a topic that they are particularly interested in usually catches their attention and advances the PMO’s agenda more efficiently than a public announcement would. Building a personal network of relationships makes it easier for a journalist to contact you in particular, and also enables you to present the PMO’s point of view.

The experienced journalists often described two schools of thought among journalists on the topic of informal interactions with political sources. A more recent philosophy is observing journalism, where, ideally speaking, no informal interaction should be allowed and keeping a distance is considered a virtue.⁵ This is in stark contrast to the older school of “liver cirrhosis” types (a humoristic but common term), where informal interaction with political sources is a professional must for political journalists. The civil servants felt that a moderate amount of informality is a good thing, as knowing people and their ways can make work easier for everyone. Overall, they feel that it is good that people are able to interact with the media in a cooperative fashion – there is no problem, when people “know their limits”. With the political advisors, there seemed to be a tendency to use language that plays down the illegitimate aspects of informality. As one political advisor put it, informality can at best be a “win-win situ-

ation, where both sides benefit [...], especially when the rules of the game are clear for everyone” (Finnish political advisor 3).

Compare this last account with a description by a journalist: “Politics is a kind of game, where different sources and agents leak information in a way that suits them” (Finnish journalist 8). Indeed, our data suggest that the actors involved in the relationships have a game-theoretical understanding of the uses of informal interaction. Many interviewees mentioned the mutual aspect of informal interaction, where the logic of cooperation is based on long-term benefits for both sides. Cashing in on a single situation will lead to the actor in question being unable to benefit from informality later. As one senior civil servant expressed it: “We might make a deal that they do not write about it unless we agree on it. Only once has a journalist fooled me in this. But then again, once they lose your trust, then it is not good” (Finnish civil servant 1). One of the interviewed journalists described it very similarly: “It is founded over time on this kind of understanding of who you can trust, who really knows something. And if someone bullshits you even once, then it is over” (Finnish journalist 12). Interestingly enough, the interview data repeatedly show interviewees describing the possible upsides and downsides of informality with phrases like “back-scratching” and even “symbiosis”.

Our previous section on daily work mentioned that there are many channels that journalists can use to follow the government, ranging from traditional press releases and conferences to the government’s website and Twitter account. However, we found it interesting that interviewees from all three groups mentioned a distinct form of communication that was not mentioned in our interview questions: so-called “background briefings”. These are occasions when a predefined group of journalists is invited to hear information about current topics under informal names such as “morning coffee with the minister”. For example, Vesa (2015: 138) mentions an invitation to journalists from the minister of social affairs and health to attend an “evening party” where there would be a “possibility of talking about the progress of the social security reform and its financing over good food and a sauna”. The guest list often includes journalists with a particular specialist background, media affiliation or seniority status. This is in line with the description of background briefings in the current official “Central Government Communications Guidelines” (Prime minister’s office, 2016b).

These briefings are important, as they seem to fall between the official and unofficial as well as between the formal and informal. Our interviews indicate that they are arranged not only by parties and politicians (both opposition and government), but by the civil servant organisation as well. These background briefings are generally viewed as useful for both journalists and sources. Journalists can gain valuable insight, as these off-the-record situations allow for a more relaxed discussion on topics. This is in contrast to findings by Juntunen (2011), where an interviewed political journalist expressed concern about the journalists’ ability to critically assess the information provided, given the tight schedules and lack of resources that journalists face today. Indeed, the politicians and the civil servants in our data seem to deem these briefings as being useful for “deepening the journalists’ understanding” of things (Finnish civil servant 3).

The risk that a journalist would break the confidentiality exists, but rarely materialises. On the other hand, the journalists are put in a difficult position if something important is brought up in a background briefing but not followed up in an on-the-record context. Our interviewees did not articulate any outright criticism of these briefings, but the problem of drawing the line between those invited and those not invited causes occasional friction. This also pertains to the different ethical schools of thought concerning informal interaction. The utility of background briefings follows the same logic as informal interaction in general; one journalist put it like this:

The fewer people there are present, the better the “efficiency ratio” gets [...]. If you start to have, like, 20 to 30 people, then it is only useful as background information but not as material for news. [...] Those who are not invited – they are the ones who criticise [background briefings]. (Finnish journalist 7)

Note, however, that the current government communications guideline (Prime minister’s office, 2016b) has been updated to account for some of the criticism:

All media representatives must be treated equally when press conferences and briefings are held. If attendance is restricted, the grounds for exclusion must be clear-cut and fair. Public authorities need to ensure that sufficient information on the theme is also available for those who are not invited. Meetings between public authorities and individual media companies and journalists are part of the normal management of stakeholder relations.

Professionalisation: Centralisation and the divide between political staff and civil servants

When speaking of the roles of different actors in leader-media relationships, interviewees from all three groups were quick to point out the distinction between political communication and civil servant communication, as described earlier in this chapter. From a civil servant’s point of view:

Consider that we [in Finland] have political communication and civil servant communication. Even though we [at the GCD] communicate about politics all the time, it should be kept in mind that it is a different thing [...]. We only tell what we have already communicated. We do not comment on the substance or whether something is good or bad and what effects it might have. (Finnish civil servant 4)

Note, however, that the distinction between “political” and “civil servant” communication is not clear-cut. This is why the distinction also attracts some criticism from journalists. A 2016 working group appointed by the PMO to assess communications proposed “a model in which both political and public servant communications would be coordinated by communications directors in the individual ministries insofar as the communications relate to the implementation of the government programme”

(Prime minister's office, 2016c). The journalists viewed the role of political advisors as far more important than the civil servants did. This is explained by the fact that civil servants sometimes perform similar duties to the advisors, and sometimes even have the mandate to comment on things on behalf of the minister.

The top advisor is the main channel through which the PM or a minister can be reached when direct access is not possible: "They work as a buffer [...] so that the PM has some peace to work, to not let every single request go through" (Finnish journalist 5). In contrast, the GCD is considered to have a "ceremonial role"; it handles the PM's communications in official matters and is responsible for practicalities and formalities. Thus, the journalists described the GCD's role as limited, as it can be very useful with practicalities but is hardly ever decisive in a political sense. A senior-level civil servant's account gave further credence and detail to this view:

You could say that there are many coexisting staffs. There is the civil servant organisation which prepares legislation, presents the legislation, and even advises. To some extent, politically. And on the other hand, there are the ministers' political staffs, the advisors, who – even though they are not formally in charge – are actually in charge of the preparations and deal with those matters. In addition to that, they also take care of, you might say, pure party politics. (Finnish civil servant 5)

The political advisors agreed, regarding themselves as political and "intimately closer to the PM" than the civil servants (Finnish political advisor 3). Furthermore, one advisor's account of their role was very telling of the position in terms of power: "We, the political advisors, function as a filter between the PM and the GCD" (Finnish political advisor 2).

Note also that, formally speaking, the political advisors are themselves civil servants as well. This dual role breeds interesting considerations both for the political advisors and for research. While there seems to be a normative consensus that they are free to conduct themselves politically, the law requires them to follow the same codes of conduct as other civil servants. This important topic – described by political advisors as a "touchy subject" – warrants further research.

According to the accounts of both the civil servants and the political advisors, the top ministers (the party leaders) had the last say on communications strategies. A rule of thumb is that the bigger the issue, the more coordination there is. While the GCD may participate in planning and make recommendations, the politicians and their advisors are the ones who decide on the political substance and, to an extent, the timing. Here, political advisors seem to wield a lot of power, as noted in the following account of a civil servant:

Their role is quite significant. It might happen to be that the chief of the GCD is participating in the preparations, and then along comes a 23-year old special advisor who, with a political mandate, has the last word on what it says in the text. (Finnish civil servant 2)

The interviews also revealed signs of centralisation of communications under the PM and his office. First of all, journalists did not regard all ministries as being equally important to follow. Some of the journalists described a hierarchy of importance between the ministries: After the PMO comes the ministry of finance, then maybe foreign affairs or defence, and then all the rest. In the case of other ministries, the journalists also tended to focus on the political advisors to a greater extent. Thus, as a whole, the civil servant communicators of other ministries emerged as the least important actors in the whole communications scheme. Second, the government itself has introduced new doctrines that call for centralisation of communications to the GCD in horizontal matters. This is closely related to new strategic management philosophies used by recent governments (Kekkonen & Raunio, 2011) and ideas that call for further integration of communications to the PMO.

The civil servants gave a very coherent account of the division of labour between the PMO and the ministries. The GCD is responsible for the PM's communications and governmental communications as a whole, while the ministries' communication departments handle their own ministry's or minister's external communications – primarily communications about decisions. The political advisors supported this view. When asked about centralisation, the civil servants seemed a bit divided on the topic. Some agreed that centralisation has occurred, at least through the strategic management doctrines discussed above, while others regarded the system as quite decentralised. The ministries did a lot of communications on their own, and, numerically speaking, employed most of the media staff. We will return to the topic of centralisation in our concluding discussion.

When asked about distinct guidelines or documents that would steer communications efforts, the civil servants automatically referred to the law and the GCD's official guidelines. Apart from codes for crisis situations, these documents are public. Noticeably, the political advisors voiced a different attitude toward such guidelines, seeing them as “documents that emphasise dialogue, openness and all sorts of beautiful things. We try to live by them to some extent, as well” (Finnish political advisor 3). For bigger policy projects, distinct communications plans are established.

On the topic of externalising communications to consultants, the civil servants were somewhat divided. Some downplayed the role of such services, while others pointed out that their role has increased over the years. The political advisors invariably said that political parties use the services of professional PR companies and party-politically affiliated think tanks. However, both the political advisors and the civil servants confirmed that such services are (and ought to be) always paid by political parties, not the government. As for the government, the use of consultants is described as limited to projects regarding big reforms or visualisations of campaigns like the “Finland 100 years” project.

Civil relationships with healthy tension?

Our interviewees were asked to describe how the contact between political sources and journalists evolves: who initiates the contact and on what level does it occur? On the whole, contact is quite frequent and initiated by both sides. However, the respondents from all three groups agreed that most of the contact, quite naturally, is initiated by journalists.

Journalists often seem to have established a somewhat stable network of sources. According to accounts from both the journalists and the political advisors, journalists are eager to identify useful contacts whenever new actors emerge on the scene (e.g., a new minister with new advisors). A journalist's network of contacts usually includes actors not just from the government or the opposition, but also the civil society – NGOs, think tanks, scholars and activists, to name a few. Some of the journalists wanted to point out that there are many ex-politicians (or people close to the parties) in leading positions in NGOs. This indicates that informal interaction between politicians and journalists takes place in NGOs as well.

The civil servants stated that journalists initiate contact, but also hinted at the possibility of being more or less active themselves. Understandably, civil servants avoided taking the role of the instigator, but one of them mentioned that they are able to “do things” once a journalist has made contact.

In contrast to the civil servants, the political advisors openly said that they initiate contact in many cases – often in an attempt to wield influence. Such attempts are often accompanied by an explanation, like the need to “correct a story”. However, some advisors admitted that they initiate contact when it is in their interest to release some piece of information. In terms of the level of the contact, the advisors' answers are very similar to those of the civil servants discussed above. Sometimes the ministers themselves do the contacting, in which case it is often with a supervisor-level journalist.

The interviewees from all three groups were also asked to evaluate the nature and quality of the relationship between political sources and the media. Overall, all sides describe the relationship as good, but they are aware that the state of the relationships is bound to fluctuate over time. Typical answers from all sides described the relationship along the lines of “professional and civil”. The journalists often described their relationship with governmental sources as good and had little to complain about:

I do not think that the war drums are sounding or anything like that. They understand our job and we understand their job [...]. In my opinion, the relationships are simple, with no problems getting access within a reasonable amount of time.
(Finnish journalist 11)

As for the journalists' relationships with the GCD in particular, they seem to be good partially because the GCD's civil servants are not that important as sources. However, some of the more experienced journalists pointed out that using them as informal sources is not totally out of the question. The journalists seem pleased with the GCD's

handling of official communications. This is also verified in studies conducted by the GCD itself, where the great majority of respondents (journalists) expressed approval of how the basic duties of official communications are carried out (the results of these studies were provided for research use by the GCD).

However, due to their more important role, the relationships with political advisors are described in more colourful terms. Both the journalists and the political advisors refer to a mutual mood of “suspicion” between the two groups. The journalists said that relationships with the political advisors vary depending on personalities and active-ness. For many of the journalists, the relationships with the political advisors seemed to be rather close due to frequent contact. Furthermore, some of the journalists even mentioned having had personal phone numbers of PMs at their disposal. However, the journalists emphasised that the relationships with the PM, like those with other political actors, vary between individual office holders.

The civil servants agreed with the notion of good and professional media relationships, voicing values such as trying to serve the media as well as they can. The civil servants in the GCD were aware that they are perceived as somewhat unimportant, and pointed out that this fits their role – their reluctance to comment is an established fact for all actors involved: “It is kind of our duty to be an information plug, up to the point that the law says we must be” (Finnish civil servant 3). On the other hand, “when a matter is made public, we make sure that it goes public as well as possible” (FC4). The senior civil servants described the Finnish media as overall good to work with and even “kind”. They also felt that political journalists usually tend to assess the actual relevance of what they are about to report and do not take to reporting gossip.

The political advisors also invariably described their relationships with journalists as “civil” and agreed that the relationships with the PM and other leading politicians are generally good, referring to them described them as “close” and “active”. At the same time there was a sense of “healthy tension” – the advisors said that they understand the critical nature of the media, and that journalists are right in focusing a lot of attention on the PM. However, some advisors also pointed out that policy criticism by media is often presented as criticism of the prime minister.

As for their relationships with the civil servants, the advisors’ descriptions were limited to a general characterisation of them as “good and professional”. However, in some cases, the civil servants were described as wanting to play a bigger role than the one they actually have. Note that both civil servants and political advisors refrained from commenting on their relationships with each other in much detail. This is particularly interesting given the tensions brought on by the dual role of the political advisors as outright party politicians *de facto* and civil servants *de jure*.

As a whole, positive appraisals of the relationships between actors (journalists, civil servants, politicians and their advisors) dominated. However, the journalists’ descriptions of the relationships between political sources and the media revealed a distinct discourse of mutuality:

[B]oth sides are in contact with each other for beneficial purposes, and both sides are aware of this [...]. [They are] relationships of utility. (Finnish journalist 2)

The media needs politicians and politicians need the media. That is how it goes. But it depends on each individual journalist, how they build that relationship. (Finnish journalist 11)

It is a fairly functional relationship [laughs], because it is kind of symbiotic, in the sense that both sides need each other. (Finnish journalist 7)

This points to the game-theory aspect of the relationships that was discussed earlier. All interviewees were asked to describe the strategies that different actors involved in the game might use. Understandably, the civil servants were very brief in their accounts of various strategies to promote or delay information. Many of them expressed the view that as civil servants, they are not political actors as such, and the best way to promote information is to communicate it effectively and evenly. However, the senior civil servants acknowledged that they sometimes try to offer stories or points of view to the media, as “[y]ou have to know how to use the media as well” (Finnish civil servant 1).

In comparison, the journalists’ and political advisors’ accounts yield more detailed results. The journalists invariably mentioned tips and outright leaks as examples of strategies. More common and benign strategies include complaining about quotes or trying to choose which journalist will conduct an interview. Yet another common strategy is the framing of political issues, illustrated in the following account by a journalist: “When you take the initiative, you have the chance to make it so that a thing is called a ‘coercion law’ instead of a ‘competitiveness package’” (Finnish journalist 2). Background briefings were mentioned as an informal strategy used by politicians: “[The] background briefings that are arranged for journalists ... There they bring up something. They bring it up exactly because they want to set it in motion” (Finnish journalist 5). Only rarely does a leak constitute a full explanation of something that has happened outside of the public eye. Rather, leaks are often designed to only reveal those parts of a story that are most likely to harm a particular political rival. The journalists described how a small leak in many cases can effectively bring down an entire policy package.

On the other hand, the journalists also described many strategies that politicians and their advisors might use in order to delay information or prevent stories from being published. Many journalists said they had experienced attempts by advisors and politicians to demonstrate that there is “no story to tell” when currently working on a story. However, it should be noted that many journalists felt that there were no outright restraining attempts as such, but rather attempts to influence: “There is no way that anyone can prevent a story. Nor have I seen for ages that anyone would seriously even attempt anything like that” (Finnish journalist 7).

Overall, the most frequent strategy towards journalists is silence and avoidance, or at most, ambiguity. Aware of this, most journalists said that if there are “journalistic

grounds” to proceed with a story, they do – regardless of the political motivation of the source. In this regard, many referred to a kind of idea of pluralism over time, resulting from the fact that political actors from across the political spectrum attempt to do the same thing. The journalists also described a number of counter-strategies, the most important one being cross-examination of multiple sources.

Many of the strategies described by the political advisors fit the accounts given by journalists, commonly identifying tip-offs, total passivity and subtle avoidance. However, some strategies were known to only one of the sides. For instance, none of the journalists mentioned the idea of redirecting questions to other ministers or party officials as a politician’s strategy. The political advisors also described thinking of specific “spots” for communicating something pertaining to upcoming events, for example “dramatic environments” in which to speak of a particular topic to maximise media attention. Another strategy was to coin a new concept or a proposal in a seemingly unrelated speech at one of the many events a minister participates in. The political advisors, understandably, did not go into much detail, but agreed that there is a great variety of such strategies and that it is not very difficult for the PM to use them: “[T]he PM is a walking news piece” (Finnish political advisor 3). Precisely because of this fact, the advisors agreed that their general task is to never let journalists catch the minister off guard.

Change over time: Generational change and concerns about traditional media

All interviewees were asked to assess both short-term (5-10 years) and long-term (up to 30 years) changes. For the journalists, the most commonly mentioned change in the short-term perspective was the rising importance of social media. Some of the journalists felt that social media has served to cause a general sense of haste, which in turn can lower journalistic standards. Others felt that social media and other new communication channels have already challenged the position of the media:

Without a doubt it takes away from us, the traditional media, some of the gatekeeper privileges [...] Already as we speak, there are several ways to bypass the traditional media. A lot of routes to go past, and lots of people take those routes. And this will surely grow. (Finnish journalist 7)

However, some journalists pointed out that the impact of social media does not automatically translate into influence on political decision-making. For instance, unlike traditional journalists, blogger activists are not in the position to demand answers to their questions. Some of the more experienced journalists voiced a concern about how a general, malignant style of social media might influence the public debate, and meant that the role of social media in journalism therefore should be assessed critically. However, at best, social media can help to bring new sources to light and

broaden the spectrum of debate. Furthermore, social media has changed the way election campaigns are carried out, with MPs and candidates depending more on their virtual internet “constituencies”. On the topic of social media, the political advisors mostly agreed with the journalists, adding that for them, social media has highlighted the importance of reacting quickly and decisively to situations.

The civil servants identified yet another important short-term change, namely the increasing role of horizontal issues and work in the government. This was largely due to the strategic management philosophies and the introduction of so-called “key projects”, which require more coordination with individual ministries and, in effect, generate more centralisation of communications to the PMO.

In addition to these short-term changes, many interviewees identified similar changes in the longer perspective. Most interviewees in all three groups agreed that the amount of informal interaction has decreased during the past few decades. There are still considerable amounts of it left, but there has been a perceived shift towards “healthier” forms of informality:

They [informal relationships] have grown a bit more distant from what they used to be. They still exist, but before the campaign finance scandal it was stronger.⁶ That might have been one of the things to turn the tide [...] This culture of sitting evenings together has diminished. And the occasions where you see them nowadays, they are more formal. (Finnish journalist 7)

The “drinking days” of the 1970s and 1980s are gone – a notion referring to the somewhat mythical heyday of informality when journalists and politicians would spend long nights out together. Contemporary journalists were perceived as acting more professionally. All three groups shared this perception. It was also equally common that the interviewees had only heard about these relationships as legends told by older colleagues. Similarly, many interviewees described the “trusted reporter” institution of previous times as having vanished for the most part. It remains an open question as to whether such arrangements still exist to some extent, in a different form. Isotalus and Almonkari (2014: 301) report similar findings in their study of party leaders and media in Finland:

The confrontation between the media and politicians is evident, and its development is seen as a new phenomenon. However, the media representatives thought that the confrontation between [media professionals] and politicians is a good thing. It was considered that earlier the relationships between journalists and politicians were too close, with a negative influence on reporting. This development suggests that the relationship between politicians and journalists has become increasingly professional.

However, the most important long-term change described by all three groups is the crisis of traditional media. To some extent, the two phenomena are related to each other, as described in the following account by an experienced journalist:

The relationships might have become a bit more professional [...] To put it briefly: westernised and professionalised. With the difference that in Finland politicians are

still more accessible and interact more with journalists than in many countries [...] And it has its upsides and downsides [...] Yet I would name the media's economy as the biggest threat. In Finland, as in many countries, the media is in such a poor economic state that there is a pressure to commercialise, go light, entertain [...] Surely it must add to the difficulty factor. In an ever more complex and fast-paced world, how do you give people relevant information – information that they are not even interested in? [...] This is a shared problem, how to deal with this. (Finnish journalist 8)

Most of the journalists voiced the same concern about how the big changes in the media field, most notably its dwindling resources, threaten the quality of political journalism. Other factors associated with this are the speed demanded by the internet and social media, and the increasing competition for people's time. The civil servants agreed, pointing out that the advent of so-called "click journalism" seems to have brought along a degree of sensationalism in contemporary political journalism. The political advisors talked extensively about this theme, expressing that journalists no longer seem to have time to be careful in their work. The advisors also pointed out that the fragmentation of media formats makes it more difficult for politicians to estimate what kind of publicity they are going to get, and for what benefit.

Most interestingly, all three groups shared a concern for the future of traditional media. This might be one of the clearest indicators of mutuality, even "symbiosis", in politics-media relationships. The plight of the media as a field is not regarded as a victory by the political side, but rather as a shared problem.

Other interesting developments

In this section, we bring up additional, interesting features that emerged during the interviews. The first one is how the observed changes in the media field influence the traditional interdependency of journalists and the government. Interviewees in *all groups* worried that new types of media actors or other "forces" might pose challenges for the system. Consider these journalists' accounts:

On the other hand, you have all sorts [of fake news websites] which are totally reckless even from the politicians' point of view. So in that sense, politicians, too, need this civil, normal media to counterweigh these rumour sites and fake media outlets. (Finnish journalist 2)

The way I see it [the new actors], our relation to politicians will not be affected. You would think that they would view traditional journalists as more reliable and stable compared to all these phony editing sites. You would think that it would strengthen the relationship rather than anything else. (Finnish journalist 9)

Above, a prospect of increasing cooperation, even closeness, between political sources and the media is visible. Ironically, this might be the very phenomenon that contributed

to the rise of these new media actors in the first place: the idea of traditional media having lost its watchdog role. In this regard, some of the journalists mentioned that the populist Finns Party displays a somewhat non-cooperative behaviour towards the media. Some credited this to a lack of experience, but also to a notion of the populists having an *ideological* dislike of traditional media. The civil servants pointed out that drawing a distinction between “real” media and other actors is certainly a challenge for official communications. Here, the case of Jari Hanska is mentioned as an example. Hanska is a freelancer whom the ministry of finance prohibited from participating in a background briefing (Union of Journalists in Finland, 2016). However, the case can also be seen as an example of the ethical difficulties involved in organising briefings with limited invitations (also discussed above).

The future role of Yle as a state-owned, public broadcasting company is also subject to increasing political interest – including, but not limited to, the crisis referred to in the introductory section of this chapter. This is noteworthy, considering that many interviewees from all three groups mentioned PM Sipilä’s TV speech to the people when asked to identify an interesting case of Finnish leader-media relationships. Respondents from all groups considered the speech “exceptional” and “a very interesting” journalistic decision by Yle. The topic is highly sensitive for both sides and it may well be that the issue would have been brought up even more if the interviews had been carried out after PM Sipilä had approached the reporters in Yle about the Terrafame case. The following analogy by one journalist hinted towards a perceived presidentialisation in the role of the prime minister:

Sure, it was very exceptional. And that is what it looked like [...] We know that Kekkonen [the powerful president of Finland from 1956 to 1981], for example, used television in this way, as a direct contact for a charismatic leader. Presidents have had this opportunity, but not prime ministers. It is a very exceptional speech, indeed. (Finnish journalist 12)

Interviewees from all groups equally mentioned that many key variables in leader-media relationships, particularly access and the nature of the relationships, depended a lot on the persona of the PM, minister or even political advisor in question. Each PM brings her or his own personality to the equation, with some clearly being more comfortable in dealing with the media than others. Essentially all prime ministers have encountered their share of problems with the media (see Uimonen, 2011). Furthermore, judging by the answers of journalists and political advisors, it seems that there is variation between political parties in how they handle media relations. Among the journalists, at least, there seemed to be a perception that the National Coalition Party is exceptionally skilled and active in using the leader-media system to their advantage.⁷

Concluding remarks

The relationships between top-level politicians, political advisors and journalists display some interesting features that fall back on the *longue durée* of Finnish political history. The civil servants still maintain an autonomous position, quite different from more politicised administrations in the other Nordic countries. This creates an ambiguous position for political advisors that have a *de facto* party-political mandate but a *de jure* more objective status to consider when carrying out their – often politically motivated – tasks. The role of political advisors, especially vis-à-vis the civil servants, is clearly a touchy subject deserving of closer examination. Here, one must also remember that there are no “spokespersons” in the Finnish structure: public comments to the media about government decisions are provided by the PM and other ministers, certainly not by the political advisors and only rather infrequently by civil servants.

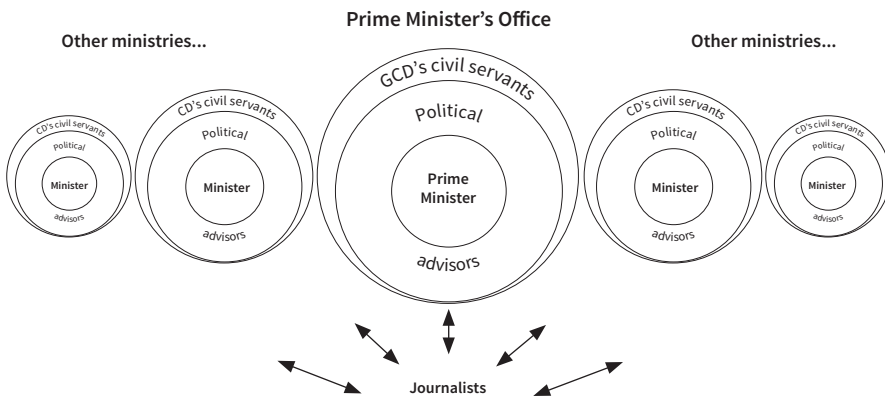
Journalists apparently understand the situation and play the game without blowing the whistle on formal grounds – at least as long as they themselves feel that they can benefit from the set-up. With growing distances and increasingly formal relationships between politicians and journalists, the civil servants, who perform duties between the two groups, may become subject to growing tensions. Such a development may be further fed by a tendency among politicians to use direct appeals through social media. Before, journalists were gatekeepers and had a stronger position in designing how news was delivered. In addition, both politicians and journalists have strongly embraced social media, particularly Twitter, and it may be possible to claim that the old days of drinking together have been replaced with close ties through smartphones.

The increasing importance of political advisors is related to the centralisation of government communication. Civil servants described the centralisation of communications to the PMO as something pertaining to strategical management thinking in recent governments. Centralisation also appears to be driven by an increasing use of horizontal policy packages, and perhaps by ideological heterogeneity; Finnish multi-party cabinets typically bring together parties that have quite different preferences. In 2016, the working group appointed by the PMO to assess the communications of the government and individual ministries essentially called for more centralisation of communications:

Based on its findings, the working group calls for greater coordination between the government and the ministries in how communications activities are carried out [...] The working group recommends the responsibility and mandate that are essential for coordinating communications to be included in the government programme and that these should be defined and updated in greater detail in the government action plan [...] If the recommendation is followed, all the government communications will be integrated with the primary responsibility assumed by the prime minister’s office. (Prime minister’s office, 2016c)

At the same time, the interviewed journalists described a similar trend in their own behaviour as they tend to follow the PMO and certain key ministries more closely than other ministries. This development is summarised in Figure 2.2, which should be compared with the official organisation chart of the PMO (Figure 2.1 above). From the journalists' point of view, the importance of sources, in declining order, was as follows: (1) the PM, (2) his political advisors, who exercise political power in communications over (3) the GCD's civil servants. This scheme repeats itself for each ministry, leaving the civil servant communicators of individual ministries in the least important position.

Figure 2.2 Governmental sources from the journalists' perspective



Amidst all the changes in the media system as well as inside the government, our interviews clearly show that journalism still counts. Old habits die hard, and MPs, ministers and journalists still regularly interact face-to-face, particularly in the premises of the Eduskunta. Both sides appreciate the by and large constructive relationships between politicians and the media. Despite much talk of increasing professionalism and distance in these relationships, our results show that informal interaction and private contacts remain an integral feature of the Finnish system (see also Noppari, 2010). Nonetheless, as news is delivered through various channels – more or less directly from the source – journalists may find their future role to be more similar to that of pundits or interpreters of political affairs. Such tendencies can already be observed – in Finland but perhaps foremost in the tough disputes between the president and legacy media in the United States. This may cause an elitisation of political journalism, where the most prominent political journalists become more like experts providing coverage to a circle of politically interested citizens.

Notes

1. Particularly well-known cases from the past include the critique of prime minister Kalevi Sorsa (Social Democrats) in 1984 against the media for taking an improper role in the democratic process, leading to “infocracy”, and the boycott of President Mauno Koivisto in 1985, exercising pressure on the public broadcasting company to pre-check any reuse of citations, the so-called “citation conflict”.
2. Interestingly, the Finnish political system has also been noted for the small-scale and tight connections among its elites that cover not only the political side but also business interests, trade unions and the media (Ruostetsaari, 2015).
3. The Finns Party split after Jussi Halla-aho was elected new party leader at the party conference in June 2017. Halla-aho, convicted in court for hate speech, and the party leadership look set to take the party economically further to the right whilst engaging in hard-line attacks on immigration and multiculturalism. Immediately following the election of Halla-aho, Timo Soini, who had chaired the Finns Party since 1997, and the more moderate wing of the party left the Finns Party and established a parliamentary group of their own, the Blue Reform. This enabled Soini and his colleagues to remain in government.
4. For legal reasons, civil servants have to be more careful in this regard. This tendency was also noted by Vesa and Kananen (2014) in their interview study on Finnish civil servants, political actors and representatives of NGOs.
5. This shift has been identified as pre- and post-Watergate journalism; see Aula (1991). For a more detailed look at Finnish political journalists’ self-understanding and ethical views, see Välvirronen (2018).
6. Since the 2007 elections, Finland had been governed by a coalition between the Centre Party, the National Coalition, the Green League and the Swedish People’s Party. By midterm, the Finnish political establishment was shaken by party finance scandals. The debate about party funding erupted in May 2008 when Timo Kalli, a senior Centre MP, announced that he had deliberately left out certain donors from the public notification of the financing of his 2007 election campaign as this was legally possible. While Kalli and most of the other MPs later informed the media of their sources of campaign income, such behaviour fuelled doubts and concerns about the trustworthiness of politicians and where parties were getting their money. The scandal was particularly troubling for the leading government party, the Centre, because the party had close links with, and received considerable financial support from, Kehittyvien maakuntien Suomi, an organisation explicitly set up to defend the interests of the rural constituencies and financed by wealthy businessmen with rather questionable reputations. As the Centre and National Coalition MPs were the main (however not the only) beneficiaries of such funds, the government was attacked strongly by the media and the opposition for its hesitant approach in dealing with the scandal. A snowball effect ensued, with the police starting investigations about the links between interest groups and several leading politicians, including PM Matti Vanhanen. While the government stayed in office, there was nonetheless an awkward sense of sleaze permeating the entire domestic political landscape, adding to earlier concerns about trade unions funding left-wing parties.
7. Interviewees in an earlier study by Juntunen (2011) unanimously agreed that the National Coalition is the most efficient party in terms of media relations. In his comprehensive study of Finnish elites, Ruostetsaari (2014) observed that the media elite is notably aligned with the National Coalition.

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Chapter 3

Lithuania

Media-politics interaction shaped by benefits-oriented reasoning

Auksė Balčytienė & Milda Malling

Abstract

This chapter discusses how media and political information sources navigate change and adjust their needs-oriented behaviour to changing conditions. The results presented are based on 20 qualitative interviews with leading political journalists as well as government advisors and spokespersons in Lithuania. Although media and political sources gain power in different situations, both sides function in reciprocal interconnectedness. Formal contacts are quite consistent and professionalised, but they continue to work in the shadow of informal social networks, which create their own power relationships, dynamics and hierarchical structures. Though the findings are contextually fashioned, the views regarding the interaction indicate broader trends of communication professionalisation identified also in other cultures and political conditions.

Keywords: political journalism, government relations, political culture, democratisation, professionalisation, Lithuania

Introduction

By looking at Lithuania, which is one of the smallest countries in the European Union, this chapter aims to shed light on the ways in which politics and media interact in times of uncertainty and reformation on both sides.

There is an extensive literature examining the relationships between media and the political world (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995; Curran & Seaton, 2003; Downey & Stanyer, 2010; Gross, 2002) and the growing impact of media on politics (Esser & Strömbäck, 2014; Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999; Pfetsch, 2014). The number of studies has skyrocketed in recent years, not least within the framework of mediatisation research. However, what is missing in these analyses is an examination of how the relationship between the two sides is formed and exchanges are orchestrated, and how the interaction between the actors involved in political communication and news making is sustained. Such a view, although there are a few notable exceptions (Pfetsch, 2014), has been largely ignored in the recent studies of media domination and influence.

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In this analysis, we argue that such an approach is crucial, and that the interaction between the wants, needs, goals and methods applied by the two groups – namely, political journalists and their informants – is a process that is vital to explore in its own right.

We approach this objective by considering a number of presumptions. Some are based on the results from previous analyses, most of which follow the perspective of institutionalisation and proclaim the notion of a self-governing (i.e. autonomous) logic within each of the two institutions (see, for example, Hjarvard, 2008). As implied in these studies, both sides in the media-politics relationship rely on routines and habits implicit in this particular field and occupation. Other studies, especially those centred on younger European democracies in southern and eastern Europe, suggest that the two systems function in a very close and parallel dependency. Often, these studies discuss the struggles between political elites who engage media in promoting allies or discrediting opponents (Bajomi-Lázár, 2017; Gross, 2002, 2013; Jakubowicz & Sükösd, 2008; Sparks, 2012).

In our study, we follow an integrated approach that combines both lines of thinking and also stresses that societal relationships are culturally shaped. Since the whole region of central and eastern Europe (CEE) appears to be moved by various ongoing transformations, tensions and instabilities (Balčytienė, 2015a, 2015b), the broader context is of exceptional significance for our examination of the Lithuanian case.

All thoughts outlined above may be summed up as a concern about the social logic of the media-political leader interaction, and this concern may be decomposed into a number of research questions: How is communication formed and how is power negotiated between the two groups? Whose logics, i.e. whose needs and role-regulated performance and objectives, drive the interaction and the social dynamics between politics and the media? How close is the relationship between the two sides – in other words, is informality inevitable in this interaction? Finally, what can be learned from the Lithuanian experience?

Central and eastern Europe and the atmosphere of change

Though the Lithuanian case is an interesting illustration in its own right, we will start our analysis by sketching a broader depiction of the factors that shape societal change in the CEE region.

The exceptionality of the CEE post-socialist democracies rests in the fact that the building of democracy went hand in hand with constructing capitalism and democratic media systems. Though liberation was intense and at the same time gradual, not all countries succeeded in making systemic changeovers worthy of the democratic name. To be sustained in a longer perspective, newly reformed democratic institutions require a democratic culture (Bajomi-Lázár, 2008; Gross, 2002; Lašas, 2015), and this, it appears, cannot be imported or just added on top of the previous

culture (Balčytienė, 2015b). Instead, a democratic political culture has to grow and mature steadily from within, i.e. through information flows, focused manoeuvres and attentive interactions among politicians, policymakers, citizens, organised interest groups and the media.

In all CEE countries, democratic models were applied in a fairly short and intense period of liberalisation and reorganisation (Balčytienė, 2015a). Many of the structures were applied in an obscure and hurried manner without gradual and full assimilation (Balčytienė, 2013; Rupnik & Zielonka, 2013). Hence, even at present, they appear to be functioning only partially or in an informal and, indeed, obscure way. Though informality, as such, is not illegal or specifically undemocratic, in the CEE countries it is shaped by neo-liberalist reasoning and market radicalism (Greskovits, 2015), weak institutional structures and the absence of accountable and formalised practice (Ekiert & Ziblatt, 2013), regulatory holes and legal inconsistencies (Krygier, 2015). In addition to this, supporting factors such as a resilient civil society, determined professional associations and high journalistic standards are missing.

All these flaws create additional “windows of opportunity” for private interests and benefits-oriented reasoning, leading to clientelist arrangements between different power holders within politics, media and business. A consequence is the maintenance of the non-transparent and dubious behaviours that are discussed in this chapter on Lithuania.

Lithuania: Politics, media and public life

Lithuania is a consolidated representative democracy that is shaped by both internal and external influences. Among the conditions that today affect the country are the effects of the global economic crisis, negative effects of emigration, the presence of political corruption and the existence of a “grey zones” economy. These factors have a direct impact on institutional structures, within politics as well as within the media.

Lithuania is a semi-presidential republic. In this model, the rules of the game may be applied somewhat flexibly, i.e. with regard to the particular political situation at hand. Hence, attention should be paid to the peculiarities of the Lithuanian political culture and the way it affects institutional performance as well as the state of democracy.¹ In contrast to a pure parliamentary system, the Lithuanian parliament does not exercise exclusive power over the passage of bills and the durability of the government.

The Lithuanian political culture has its own peculiarities. Historically, there is a clear orientation towards family, apolitical individualism and national patriotism (Norkus, 2011). It is also very personalised, which, correspondingly, affects the political character of parties: political life is centred around strong personalities and individuals whose political ambitions are linked with individual interests. The degree to which Lithuanian politics is personality centred may also explain the large number of polarised and divided parties, and decision-making appears to be determined by oppositional clashes, rivalry and confrontation between different elites (Navickas, 2017).

Table 3.1 The political system and the media system in Lithuania

Characteristics	Lithuania
Political system	Unitary state with semi-presidentialism
Electoral system	Mixed electoral system: The unicameral parliament of Lithuania is composed of 141 members (71 deputies are chosen in single-seat constituencies and the remaining 70 MPs are elected on a proportional basis).
Party system (2016–2020)	Highly fragmented (10 political parties in parliament)
Turnout (national elections)	Parliamentary elections: around 50 per cent*
Government (2012–2016)	Coalition (Lithuanian Social Democratic Party, the Labour Party, the Order and Justice Party and the Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania)
Government (2016–2020)	Coalition (Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union and Lithuanian Social Democratic Party)
Public service broadcasting share of time in viewing	Low (10 per cent). The two commercial competitors, TV3 and LNK, have shares of about 15 per cent.**
Daily use of media	77 per cent watch TV on a TV set, 44 per cent listen to the radio, 18 per cent read written press, 61 per cent use the Internet and 47 per cent use social networks every day.***

* This figure is valid with regard to the last parliamentary elections (2016) as well as the last presidential election (2014).

** TNS, 2017.

*** Standard Eurobarometer 88, Autumn 2017.

Despite the fact that the party system in Lithuania was considered to be consolidated already in the mid-1990s (Novagrockienė, 2001), political identification in the country has taken place only in theory, not in reality. As a matter of fact, most of the political parties have emerged as subprojects within the reform movement Sąjūdis, which acted as a political power and mobilised the nation between 1988 and 1992. Hence, the parties were born in a very short period of time and without solid ideological backing or policy coherence, which further caused interpretations of political life as a fierce political battle.

While ideological and populist clashes are a reality in many contemporary democracies, the distinctiveness of the Lithuanian case lies in the character and specificity of political linkages and negotiations. In Lithuania, these are shaped by the political winner “taking all” to meet popular (and quite often also personal) interests and goals. This exceptionality is an outcome not only of certain features of multi-party politics, but also of the setting. In Lithuania, as in other CEE countries, transformations have taken place in an economically weak environment (Balčytienė et al., 2015; Štetka, 2012) and attempts to politically control economic capital (and, vice versa, control politics by capital) are still obvious. This type of thinking shapes the daily practices of elites and contributes to a gradual politicisation and oligarchisation of state and society, evidenced not least by the instrumentalisation and colonisation of media.

The political change in Lithuania has not only brought the growing influence of market-oriented thinking, it has also revealed some enduring flaws in the country’s political life. The conflictive political culture combined with profitable economic

interest and, simultaneously, the dominant spirit of marketisation produced specific conditions in which parties, instead of gradually diversifying according to ideological lines, eventually turned out to be rather similar. Indeed, while it appears to be possible, from both their names and election argumentation, to place them along a traditional left-to-right scale, the actual post-election practices of the parties show that this is incorrect. The situation at hand is one of the reasons why public opinion has lost trust in the party system.

Because of these factors – politicisation combined with oligarchisation and marketisation – Lithuania represents a novel type of party politics. Although political responsiveness once occurred through bottom-up participation (predominantly in the early 1990s), the parties in today's Lithuania are professional campaign organisations that are dependent on money rather than popular support.

In summary, we suggest that multiple factors need to be considered in order to understand the exceptionalities of the relationship between the media and politics in Lithuania. The timing of the transformations is one such factor, with others including the peculiarities of the Lithuanian political culture and the economic conditions.

In the following sections, an analysis of 20 qualitative interviews with leading political news journalists and government spokespersons and press advisors sheds further light on the Lithuanian case.

Political communication and news management: An empirical insight

In a context that is still heavily influenced by many large transformations, interviews with central actors may provide us with a picture that is not solid. With regard to news making in Lithuania, our empirical study shows that it is difficult, if not impossible, to draw a succinct and summary representation of the political-media relationship.

Given the high fragmentation and hybridisation of modern communications (Chadwick, 2013) and the existence of intense political divergence and polarisation (Davis & Dunaway, 2016; Mancini, 2013), journalistic performance will almost certainly become mixed. Hence, methods of news making and access to political information – and journalists' relationships with political news sources – will be highly varied and difficult to dress according to a single model.

Before going deeper into the accounts given by the Lithuanian journalists and their sources, it should be pointed out that our media respondents, generally, belong to the elite of the profession. Since all of them are mid-career professionals, with either journalistic or editorial experience, they all have extensive networks with different sources. In fact, quite a few of our interviewees might be considered brands of political commentary in Lithuania.

Key questions are how the actual interaction between the two groups is sustained and whether there are specific situations where the overall balance of power is shifted.

In essence, whose logic – that of news journalism and the media in general or that of public bureaucracies and political information sources – initiates and directs the interaction? And to what extent are the observed practices maintained and driven by a trend of mediatisation? Is it with regard to the case at hand more appropriate to see them as a result of political influence and politicisation?

From common goals to separation of the roles

Broadly speaking, our respondents tended to discuss two kinds of changes in the overall relationship: changes linked with increased professionalisation and changes associated with larger societal transformations (e.g., “economisation” and “marketisation” of society and culture). Whereas professional values and norms are remarkably enduring (and most likely stem from the national Lithuanian context), the developments related to technology and commercial imperatives are part of a global trend.

During the interviews, both the journalists and the political sources agreed that media and politics were closer to each other at the beginning of the 1990s than they are now. The interviewees frequently referred to historical reasons and described the relationship between journalists and politicians as no longer being characterised as “fighting for the common goals”. Thus, in the eyes of our interviewees, the present situation is different from the situation of the early 1990s, when both sides thought that it was necessary to communicate new values and goals for the independent state. At that time, it was common for both journalists and politicians to participate in informal clubs or private parties. As one political reporter described it:

Right after the independence, the media had to redefine itself. It had to change. The same applies to the politicians. All of them [journalists and politicians] were friends. All of them were “pro-Lithuania” [...] Politicians were visiting the house of my parents, who were also journalists. They were all striving for the same goal. And the media at that time was not critical, around 1990-1991. Later on, it began: politics, scandals, intrigues. (Lithuanian journalist 1)

Another journalist pointed out that the media landscape today, in comparison to the one 20-30 years ago, is much more scattered and complex:

Back then there were fewer media channels and fewer journalists with whom politicians could communicate. There were maybe a dozen people who saw each other all the time, so the relation was easier to build. In my opinion, the behaviour has changed, especially among politicians. The communication used to be simpler, more familiar. Now it is more Western, more European, and the distance grows [...] It is not the same generation that spent days in the same building [the parliament], journalists and politicians together re-establishing independence. (Lithuanian journalist 2)

According to the interviewed journalists, politicians have become more cautious and less confiding, partly because the media is more critical, and it is difficult to predict what would trigger a scandal, and partly because new technologies mean that every step is documented and on the record and can go viral. The journalists see this growing distinction between journalism and politics as a democratic advantage and a prerequisite for a more professionalised relationship:

Some of today's scandals would not have happened several years ago – they would have been “solved” thanks to personal contacts between journalists and politicians. Today, there are too many journalists, and someone would report on it anyway. (Lithuanian journalist 2)

As in some other countries presented in this book, Lithuanian interviewees pointed out that the distance between journalists and politicians has also grown physically. A decade ago, due to the safety concerns and pressures from political communicators, access was restricted to some parts of the parliament building, government buildings and the president's office. Earlier, journalists had been able to walk freely in the building and knock on basically any door – be it the office of the minister or a public servant. Direct access allowed direct interaction.

Nowadays, due to the time pressures in their newsrooms, journalists rely on phone calls and emails rather than time-consuming, face-to-face interaction, on-location reporting and long talks with background sources. One senior Lithuanian journalist said:

Internet news media attracts a large audience in Lithuania. Its appearance contributed to a rapid increase in the pace and demand for “fresh” news. One of the risks is that journalists, pressed to deliver a large number of headlines for the online media over a short period of time, will be more likely to copy-paste the information prepared by the PR departments. (Lithuanian journalist 3)

Generally, journalists prefer to receive written information, not least due to the time constraints and the possibility of reusing it, as stated by one of the press advisors:

I sometimes call and introduce a subject for a particular Internet news portal. “Please send it in written form,” they answer. Even the radio – I call and invite them to some event, but they want to get just a written, ready-to-use press release. (Lithuanian press advisor 7)

Interestingly enough, the interviewed political sources pointed out the lack of “serious” media and in-depth reporting even more often than the journalists did. Increasing requests to produce more news in less time weakens journalism. Press advisors often complain that press releases are published without calling, checking up or getting the details straight. A chief of communication from one of the ministries commented:

Journalists come to the president's press conference without preparing a single question. It is advantageous for the source but only in the short term. In the long term, it is a threat to democracy. (Lithuanian press advisor 1)

The press advisors also noted that news based on sentences made quickly and in passing – “somewhere in the corridor” – influenced the relationships between the media and the politicians. This leads to a tendency to focus on small scandals that tend to die out the day after rather than on larger political issues. As summarised by one high-ranking politician:

Due to the IT development, everything is happening so fast in the world, life and the media. Communication is fast. Messages are short, and the journalists appreciate messages that are short. It is difficult to present issues that are more complex, and for journalists to grasp them. I miss the willingness from the media, and thus the public, to understand larger, systematic issues and to hold the audience’s attention for a longer time. (Lithuanian politician 1)

According to the press advisors, many politicians adhere to and follow these rules and, in an attempt to appear friendly, agree to provide quick comments or participate in infotainment shows. The tendency of politicians to adhere to the infotainment formula was lamented by one political advisor:

If a member of the parliament goes on a silly TV show and answers the weirdest questions, can they still be perceived as an authority? (Lithuanian press advisor 2)

In this sense, the media holds power over the politicians:

Sometimes politicians want to seem important or are lacking attention. They then come up with some trivial idea and pass it on to the journalists, who write about it. And the journalists do not feel responsibility for writing nonsense [...] (Lithuanian press advisor 2)

The above quotes suggest a number of changes between the two groups of actors. Among the most obvious is the objective “distanciation” between them. “Fighting for common goals” belongs to the past, whereas “scrutinising each other” appears to be a trend of the current practice.

As specified by various respondents, the significance of the media, generally, has increased. There are more titles and more channels, and the landscape has become more fragmented and scattered. With the increase of information channels, competition has increased, and the need to produce more in a shorter period of time has become a burden for the media. In fact, commercialism and marketisation appear to be strong tendencies affecting the functioning of *both* fields – politics and media.

Government communication: “It depends on a person”

Professionalised political communication can be understood as purposeful and strategic communication for a political purpose. The Lithuanian government began to establish communication departments at the end of the 1990s, but the structure and responsibili-

ties entrusted to those departments depended on the minister. Currently, all ministries have communication departments, and the ministers have communication advisors.

All but one of the interviewed press advisors in Lithuania started their careers as professional journalists. They were not members of political parties and many of them have worked for several ministers from different political parties. In line with this, the task for Lithuanian press advisors is to communicate and frame messages in a way that fits the particular political party or politician; they themselves do not have to support or stand behind the messages. As told by a senior press advisor, who served several of the highest politicians in the country:

You have to narrow your political views according to where you work. I either work for a politician and follow his agenda – or I quit. (Lithuanian press advisor 2)

The functions allocated to press advisors and communication departments are very person-dependent, meaning that different ministers organise the work of their communication departments differently. According to the interviewees who had worked for several decades in the field, attempts to centralise (or decentralise) the government's communication efforts depend on the preferences of the specific government and its constellation. During the period of our research (2014-2016), the government's communication was decentralised. This meant that each ministry could make its own decisions regarding communication, and coordination with the prime minister's office was not strong. As explained by the prime minister's press advisor:

Everything is decentralised, and the ministries make their own decisions regarding communication. If something very important happens, I would talk to the press department of that particular ministry and we would discuss what they will communicate and what will come from us [the government]. But if they want [to communicate something], they do not ask us. (Lithuanian press advisor 3)

The coordination of government communication can be organised for specific issues, such as, for example, the refugee crisis, where several ministries coordinated their communication on a regular basis in order to provide a common message for the public. However, in general, the lack of coordination is the biggest shortcoming in the government's communication. As stated by one of the press advisors:

I do not miss the supervision from the government, but I think that there is too little coordination. There are topics where communication should be more unanimous and less fragmented. There are issues where several ministries work together, but communicate differently [...] (Lithuanian press advisor 4)

Indeed, much of the government's communication works on an ad hoc basis. There are few written strategies or documents that are actually used when planning government communication, and the ones that exist are treated more as a formality. All press advisors referred to constant change and were doubtful whether more long-term planning would even be possible:

The minister does not have such a thing as a separate communication strategy. We have annual plans, although nobody but us cares about them. Our work is operational. It is a shame, but that is the situation. (Lithuanian press advisor 1)

An important factor when professionalising communication is whether the manager (in this case, the political executive) is willing to hand over the responsibility for communication to the communication specialists, and whether these specialists are included already on the strategic decision-making level. In other words, the question is whether communication professionals are taking part in the strategic planning or if they are trusted only with the “technical” tasks. The interviews with the press advisors illustrate how the politicians in Lithuania, especially in tense situations, do not work hand in hand with their communication staff, but tend to act independently, and their staff are left with a secondary, reactive role:

And at the end of the day, he [the prime minister] would be personally taking care of communication, which was often hard to predict. He would trust only himself, and the result would be that he knows best what the PR should be and what should be said and when. In most of the cases he was right, but on the other hand, because he took on this hard responsibility, everyone in Lithuania started seeing him as a symbol for the difficulties of the financial crisis. (Lithuanian press advisor 5)

Politicians’ temptation to answer media inquiries personally, without consulting the communication department, was brought up even by a public official representing another government:

The prime minister might pick up the phone and answer the journalists’ questions. It would be better if he did not do so. PR is a system. This does not mean dissociating from the media, but following the rules is important. All the questions should reach you via the press advisor, and the press advisor should relieve the executive from some of the questions, problems and workload and handle the criticism. (Lithuanian press advisor 2)

This proves that the press advisors working for the Lithuanian government are still in the process of legitimising their profession in the eyes of both their organisations and the journalists. The interviewed press advisors admitted that most of their tasks consist of answering media inquiries, preparing press releases and organising events. As explained by one press advisor:

I have to admit that the minister manages the biggest part of the information. My main tasks are to know what we are doing, what we have done, what the new initiatives are, events, what we communicate today and why, to coordinate, to find the details for the media, etc. A lot of technical work, like inviting the journalists. (Lithuanian press advisor 4)

The press advisors even mentioned some elements of tactics and advisory roles in everyday work, like prioritising certain media or topics:

I need to screen the media. There is gutter press, which is not advantageous to the minister. In those cases, we suggest that the deputy minister, some advisor or even I answer their inquiries. The most important thing is to discuss how much information we can reveal and what information would be received negatively. Maybe some news should wait or be presented differently. (Lithuanian press advisor 4)

Long-term, strategically oriented work was seldom mentioned. However, some of the press advisors often viewed their broader functions, such as that of influencing and working off the record, as a way for journalists to make sense of certain situations. One of the press chiefs explained:

We really communicate with journalists a lot. I talk to the editors, one of my colleagues to the reporters, another colleague with radio journalists [...] We all have journalists as “friends” on social media. We chat with them and try to explain quickly, or we just talk. (Lithuanian press advisor 6)

Even though journalists think that it is important to maintain a good relationship with press advisors, only a few of the advisors were perceived as useful sources. In many cases, journalists see the press advisors as coordinators and an unnecessary link to the politicians. Many journalists expressed that it is the beginners who call press advisors. If an experienced reporter calls a press advisor, it is for smaller, factual inquiries, for example statistical data.

The above examples suggest that political communication in Lithuania is not fully professionalised, but only semi-professionalised. Overall, there is an obvious absence of structurally coordinated communication between different governmental bodies. Communication departments at different ministries are preoccupied with technical and managerial tasks rather than strategic roles. Personal authority and personality characteristics still play a central role regarding communication.

It would be too soon to conclude that this means that media leads the tango. However, always in a rush and hungry for sensational stories, the media can easily become a tool to mediatise small, internal political fights and thus provide an image of uncoordinated, inconsistent government communication. This, we know, is an effective way to distract attention from more important political coverage.

“I can call the prime minister directly, and he can call me”

The Lithuanian journalists described access to the politicians as very good; only the ministers and other very high politicians are contacted through the press advisor (and even with regard to these, there are some exceptions). Thus, having direct contact with the political leaders is still considered a common practice (but, of course, among journalists with relevant experience and know-how). Some senior journalists even said they would call directly the mobile of the prime minister or “drop by” the prime minister’s office – or that the prime minister would call them. As one of the journalists said:

You know, when I do not have a theme, I invite the prime minister. The higher the position the person occupies, the easier it is to invite them to the news hour. The prime minister is the one who can easily redistribute work and postpone things. My colleagues laugh at me, but I've been doing this for 10 years. If you do not have a theme at 1 pm, call the prime minister. (Lithuanian journalist 5)

In Lithuania, the politicians seem to accept the situation. For example, one of the most popular and highest political executives in Lithuania was described in this way by an interviewed press advisor:

It is [this person's] strength – trying to find time for everybody and be open. [This person] was the same way even before becoming a politician. Therefore, the media loves [this person]. Not only due to expert skills, but also due to human skills – answering the phone and calling the journalists back. [This person] even has the journalists' phone numbers saved. (Lithuanian press advisor 4)

“Journalism by the phone” plays a significant part in the daily routines in the news-rooms. Contacting their sources on the telephone or via email rather than being “on the spot” is normal to most journalists, and the trend is the same in many countries (Davis, 2010). Lithuanian journalists confirm this picture – there are fewer journalists walking in the corridors of parliament and chatting with sources in search of potential news. While the journalists still try to visit parliament a few days a week, attend press conferences or participate in informal meetings with potential sources, they note that these types of contact were more frequent before:

I noticed that it is the editors-in-chief who walk around and drink coffee with the potential sources, and also some of the print journalists. Most likely they get something out of it [...] but we do not have the time. If we meet for a coffee, we need to know that we will have something to write about. We do not have time for this kind of source work. (Lithuanian journalist 1)

On the other hand, some sources are more open when talking on the phone, one of our interviewees noted (Lithuanian journalist 8). Political news quite easily becomes a tool in political battles, and some sources may therefore prefer not to be visible to others. Having these kinds of sources, obviously, requires an already established relationship. Therefore, the journalists emphasised the importance of building a network of “own” informants, i.e. sources who have known the journalist for a long time and with whom the relationship is built on mutual trust and cooperation.

Social media is increasingly used by both journalists and politicians, even though levels of activity and engagement vary from person to person. Few of the interviewed press advisors could name specific strategies or target audiences for the social media profiles of the politicians whom they represented. Those who could do so said that politicians' social media profiles are supposed to show their “more human” and playful side for the vaguely defined audience – from journalists and colleagues to the elec-

torate. According to our interviewees, this kind of communication produces mainly one-way conversations where dialogue is largely absent.

When it comes to the journalists, some of them used their social media profile mainly as observers. This meant that they followed politicians on social media primarily to find opinions and views that are better formulated and more exact than those that can be found in traditional news stories. In this way, the opinions and views that politicians express in social media, especially scandalous statements, become the news in the traditional media, and vice versa.

Other journalists are much more active. Their social media profiles are a part of their personal brand and a platform to steer the public discussion. The news or opinions posted by these journalists often become a part of the broader political and traditional media agenda:

Some journalists who used to be known just as TV or web journalists are today active on social media, and they are more daring. The opinions can be strict, negative and rough, and it seems that the public likes it [...] We react to these opinions. [...] We analyse the situation outside the social network and then we write an official press release. This way, we raise the discussion to a more formal level, but it also becomes more visible. (Lithuanian press advisor 8)

Can informal talks be professionalised?

Relations between journalists and sources may be quite standard, so-called “conventional practices”, where journalists ask for information and receive it. Yet there are cases where political interests try to actively promote some specific issues, and in these cases, the news often comes from the political side. Basically, there are two ways of “feeding” the media with news: either all journalists are approached or a select journalist is contacted. In the latter case, an obvious expectation is that this approach will result in a more advantageous coverage from the source’s perspective.

Just like in some of the other countries discussed in this book, Lithuanian journalists reported that informal contacts are a necessity and an asset in their professional work – in this way, they are not only able to get information faster, they also get more exclusive information. One of the reporters put it like this:

You will know nothing if you do not have friends. [Through friends] you will be the first to know, and you will know more. You get important topics. You can dig deeper or at least are able to avoid saying nonsense, which is otherwise easy to do if you only rely on the official information. (Lithuanian journalist 6)

The range of the informal relationships varied from “professional friendships” to, in some cases, “personal friendships”. There are several reasons as to why journalists found the informal sources to be especially important.

First of all, background talks with lower-ranking public officers help the journalists when they report on different policy areas. Even with long experience within the field, it is not possible to know all the details without actually “being in the system”. As one journalist said:

For example, the energy policy is very complex and sometimes not very interesting for journalists. It requires intellectual investment; hence, there are only a few experts and in the media we see only a facade of the theme. But, of course, all the corruption and evil hide in the details [...] You have to know people who worked or advised there previously, and can pass on some sort of contact who is willing to share that information. If you try going according to the vertical logic and subordination in the system, you will get nothing [...] You have to look for another way. (Lithuanian journalist 5)

Secondly, informal sources are essential for finding exclusive news. In this case, the print media reporters were the ones who were most dependent on exclusive information, not least since they find themselves in a tough competition with the “faster” online news media, news agencies and broadcast journalists. Informal sources were perceived as particularly important when it comes to issues such as hiring/firing, government formation, putting together the lists for the elections, and party leader elections.

However, both sides have an interest in having informal access to the other side. In the eyes of the press advisors, one of the most important advantages with informal sources was linked to opinion formation and the setting of the agenda:

You can control what journalists know regarding the issues. When a situation occurs, they will write what they have known from before. That is why it is important that the message reaches them. (Lithuanian press advisor 1)

Indeed, in order to influence the agenda, the political sources can themselves initiate informal conversations, and since the practice is a part of the “strategic communication toolbox”, it can well be referred to as a form of “formalised informality”.

Another reason for informal meetings is to make sure that journalists interpret situations correctly. One of the press advisors put it this way:

We invite the journalists to off-the-record conversations with [one of the political leaders] when there are processes that cannot be explained in front of the camera [...] We do so in order to avoid incorrect interpretations. (Lithuanian press advisor 6)

The interviewees emphasised that informal contacts require a long-term engagement and a balancing between professional and “friendly” roles. Thus, the cooperation is based on expectations from both sides.

Moreover, attempts to maintain informal access to key sources occasionally result in compromises and ethical dilemmas, not least from the journalists’ perspective:

It happened, and more than once, that I considered the source's wish that I should not write [about a topic]. If you receive information, if you are the first, the only one who received it, you cannot "go on the attack" full-speed. (Lithuanian journalist 6)

In addition to this, in order to protect a source, some of the journalists said they might suggest not quoting the source (even if the source him- or herself had previously agreed to be quoted) (Lithuanian journalist 1). Yet another advantage from the sources' perspective is that journalists may choose not to report in cases where the source says something coarsely or scandalous by mistake (i.e. if a mistake would place the source in a ridiculous, comic situation and the issue itself is not very high on the agenda) (Lithuanian journalist 2). Consequently, the professional role boundaries are more blurred in informal situations than in formal ones.

The following excerpt illustrates how the journalists can be used as informants for the politicians and their advisors:

The close relationship is important, so we may ask the journalists for their opinion. We often ask how they evaluate certain events. To know the insider opinion from the media is both interesting and important. We ask, and they answer. (Lithuanian press advisor 6)

This leads to a situation where some journalists become not only watchdogs, but also actors in the political arena. Some journalists' willingness to show their loyalty to the source even surprises one of the press advisors:

Once a journalist called and mentioned that another media outlet was interested in some specific topic. We had time to prepare for it. And it was true – a few days later I received a phone call from that media outlet! So the journalist did not work on this topic but warned us [...] I agree that journalists try to gain our confidence, but it should not be so. (Lithuanian press advisor 4)

At the same time, both parties tend to maintain a certain "coldness", at least as reported in our interviews. The journalists emphasised that willingness to maintain access to the source should not influence their reporting, and the press advisors expressed that they should always be careful and selective when talking to the media. Consequently, both parties agreed that the provision of inside information should not protect a source from critical treatment in the media. One of the press advisors indicated that first and foremost it is the tone that changes with informal relations:

The minister meets some journalists, they shake hands and have a friendly, everyday catch-up talk, and one can see that they are friends. But in the programme, the tough question will still be asked, but maybe in a nicer tone. (Lithuanian press advisor 1)

To summarise, informal relationships between journalists and their political sources are an important part of Lithuania's political communication culture, and both sides are aware of the advantages and disadvantages of these relationships. Politicians and their press advisors perceive that being able to pass on information informally can

benefit their political goals, and therefore they try to feed the media with attractive, specially tailored news bites for select journalists. This serves two purposes: on the one hand, it helps the political side to set the agenda; on the other hand, it helps to maintain and build the trust that is necessary for future cooperation.

From professional logic to brand logic

In general, the interviewed journalists are driven by professional ideals. They are professionally determined and highly ambitious, as revealed in the following sequence:

Journalist: If I see a systemic problem, I talk to [my sources] as another human, not as a journalist: “Look, this should be changed,” I say [...] I try to make it so that what in my opinion is wrong reaches those who make decisions.

Interviewer: You tend to not only monitor, but also to change?

Journalist: Change and moving on is the best result of my work. If you saw something was wrong and changed it – then you did a good job. (Lithuanian journalist 4)

As demonstrated in this example, the journalist is motivated by the idea of the journalist as an activist. However, such a civic vision is not shared by all professionals; the norms of professional journalism have evolved and are now cherished by all interviewees for this study.

That there are other aims that guide journalistic decision-making becomes apparent in the next quotes. As revealed in the answers of our interviewees, many journalists are preoccupied and consciously thinking about their own professional brand, i.e. their own visibility and popularity:

You are calling the most interesting speaker, the one who talks about the most interesting topic. Your programme should remain the most viewed, most quoted. After all, you will not invite a boring person just because you go out for a beer with him. You’re trying to make the best show of all. (Lithuanian journalist 5)

The journalists disclosed features of their own distinctive reporting style, i.e. personal and authentic features. In other words, each of the interviewed journalists suggested their own unique way of communicating. As indicated by one political journalist:

I never cut off, never edit the taped conversations, even in those times when I come to the site as a reporter. For example, if I have only four minutes, I stop the speaker, I do not hesitate to interrupt. It saves time. Nothing should be abbreviated, ever. That everyone knows. It is also a plus. (Lithuanian journalist 5)

In general, the above examples signal that political-media relationships are focused on polite posturing from both sides. Nevertheless, despite calm politeness, both partners in the relationship want to keep control of their own “territory”, and both actors

therefore remain sceptical toward each other. Politicians are frustrated with overtly commercialised media, whereas journalists claim that politics has turned out to be increasingly less appealing and interesting over time.

These tendencies and observations draw our attention to the impact of networked communications on shifting institutional and personal roles in politics-media interaction. As noted by all respondents, political interaction via social networks has intensified in the past few years. While greater financial investments and more coordinated communication have taken place on the side of politics, political journalists appear to have greater success in their uses of social media for self-representations and the building of celebrified brands.

Conclusions

Even though the above analysis opens only a narrow window to the complex relationships between the media and politics, it nevertheless clarifies certain trends.

While some of the discussed patterns appear to be the product of cultural practices specific to Lithuania, others are likely to result from general developments and transformations in the sphere of political communication.

Having access to politicians of the highest rank appears to be an exceptionality of the country. This is attributed not only to the smallness of the market (and hence interpersonal closeness), but also to the fact that Lithuanian politics is often tied to personal interests. Moreover, since the very history of the country has established a context for the unusual proximity between politicians and journalists – in the early 1990s, politicians and journalists were “fighting for the common goals” – explanations based on history must also be considered.

While the official communication between the two sides is friendly and appears to be honest, it is also rather suspicious – on occasions quite tense and even sceptical. The overall relation between the two groups of actors is sustained and regulated by needs-oriented performance.

Political journalists from the leading news media organisations are generally highly experienced, professionally ambitious and driven to function according to the ideals of classic journalistic professionalism (where the citizens’ right to know is often expressed as serving the public good). However, the chapter has discussed some problems affecting political communication in Lithuania, not least with regard to information management, instrumentalisation and manipulation of the media.

Officially, there is a distance between the two sides of the relationship, but there are situations when the official facade of institutionally established and professionally organised communications is overlooked and even ignored. As shown with our examples, there are occasions when politics adapts to the logic of the news media (mostly through involvement in informal occasions), but informality is often planned and used strategically.

On the whole, it is possible to suggest that we are entering a new phase in the transformation of political communication in Lithuania. As was anticipated in a number of previous analyses of political makeovers in the CEE (Bajomi-Lázár, 2014; Rupnik & Zielonka, 2013; Sükösd, 2014; Voltmer, 2015; Zielonka & Mancini, 2012), the lack of a sound social and ideological basis (resulting in fragile organisational structures) made the political parties in former communist countries particularly reliant on media. It was not so long ago that media appeared to be an indispensable resource for politicians since it was viewed as the only adequate means that could be extensively used by parties to reach their voters and to publicly “validate” the choices made. It is precisely on this basis that a close political and business linkage – and hence colonisation and instrumentalisation of the media – emerged (Bajomi-Lázár, 2014; Štetka, 2012).

Though media and politics continue to remain in close contact, there is a development towards increased “distanciation” between them; both sides are also characterised by increased professionalisation. On the one hand, this is determined by the growing needs and requirements for strategic management of information, hence politicians are more inclined to communicate through press representatives and, especially during election time, to rely on political consultants and marketing specialists. On the other hand, there is a counter-tendency with politicians who are more reluctant to communicate through institutionalised channels. As revealed, political executives highly value and personally invest in the maintenance of close relationships with journalists. Predominantly, these customs contribute to a practice defined here as “authentication of political communication”.

In conclusion, this study, once again, proves that cultural legacies tend to persist regardless of substantial political, economic, organisational or technological changes. As demonstrated here, formal affiliations and relationships between the two groups of actors continue to work in the shadow of informal power centres, hierarchies and personally maintained networks. Though new communication practices are applied, and new technologies are intensively used on both sides of the relationship, it is the local culture that gives the true character and meaning to more general and global trends.

Note

1. Whereas the prime minister is the head of the government, the president has substantial power over constitutional matters.

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Chapter 4

Poland

Independent vs servile relationships

Bogusława Dobek-Ostrowska & Jacek Nożewski

Abstract

The Polish political and media systems changed dramatically after the 2015 parliamentary elections. The Law and Justice Party gained power and started to restructure the conditions for political communication – journalists, press secretaries and politicians. However, despite structural and organisational changes within public service media, journalists keep working and reporting about political events. This chapter presents the relationships between Polish journalists and their political sources – both politicians and press secretaries. The interviews show a mutual dependency between politics and the press, where both sides recognise the need for formal as well as informal relationships. The nature of the relationship varies with the political climate: when the political situation becomes complicated, politicians become less accessible and press secretaries block the information flow. As a result, journalists in Poland prefer direct contact with politicians and/or other complementary sources of information. The respondents further emphasised the need for a professional relationship and adhering to professional norms.

Keywords: Poland, media-executive relationships, information access, professional roles, political communication

Introduction

After the semi-democratic election in 1989, Poland began to develop relationships between political executives and free independent media that were more similar to those in other democratic countries. Nonetheless, Poland has fallen behind in many international rankings, such as the World Press Freedom Index and the Democracy Index, since the parliamentary and presidential elections in 2015. The changes are closely related to the communication policies of the political executive in Poland, the main topic of this study. Providing a point of departure for the chapter, Table 4.1 summarises the political system and the media system in Poland.

Table 4.1 The political and media systems in Poland

Characteristics	Poland
Political system	Parliamentary system of III Republic (the Constitution 1992)
Electoral system	Proportional representation (multimember constituencies)
Party system	Multi-party (eight parties in Parliament since 2015)
Turnout: National parliamentary elections	Low average 1989-2015 46.6 per cent
Presidential election	Low average 1990-2015 57.7 per cent
Government (since 2015)	One-party government (Law and Justice)
Media system	Dual public-private broadcasting system, private newspaper business
Audience share of public service TV, May 2017	Lower position (16 per cent) than the main two commercial competitors (21 and 31 per cent)
Audience share of public service broadcast TV news, May 2017	Lower position (TVP1, TVP2 – 19 and 7 per cent) than the main commercial competitor (TVN – 22.4 per cent)
Newspaper reading, May 2017	Very low – in the case of the print version of five main daily newspapers, which is read by 4.4 per cent of the population; and low – in the case of the online version, which is read by 21.44 per cent

The Polish political and media landscape

Media context

In Poland, a pluralistic media system began to develop in the 1990s. Private and independent print media emerged and the main state media channels were transformed into public broadcasting services. After a decade that saw the rise and fall of commercial enterprises, the media system stabilised and still today maintains the same structure.

Television is the main source of information for Poles, above all for the older generation, which is also the most active group of voters. TV coverage of politics hence plays a leading role in political communication. The print press, i.e. newspapers (print and online versions) and weekly magazines' websites dedicated to politics, are also important. We will therefore concentrate our analysis of leader-media relationships on these two media platforms.

The main public channels, TVP1 and TVP2, attracted 16.7 per cent of viewers in May 2017.¹ The commercial and relatively low-quality channel POLSAT TV attracted 11.4 per cent of the viewers, and the other commercial channel, TVN, attracted about 10 per cent. More than 60 per cent of Poles prefer other channels. The Polish news channels are well-developed media companies and have a loyal audience. All of them

had more viewers in 2017 than in the previous year. TVN 24, owned by the commercial American group Scripps Networks Interactive, is the most popular one. TVN 24 also had the highest change in viewership between 2016 and 2017 (4.66% of viewers in May 2017, 20% more than in May 2016). The public channel TVP Info came second (3.38% of viewers in May 2017), and the commercial channel POLSAT News TV came third (1.18% in May 2017) (*TVP 1 i TVP2 straciły w maju najwięcej widzów*, 2017) (*Teleexpress i "Wiadomości" straciły najwięcej widzów*, 2017).

In Poland, press readership is low, especially among the younger generation. Data from May 2017 show that only 4.4 per cent of Poles aged 15 to 75 read one of the four main newspapers: the tabloid *Fakt* (8.4%), *Gazeta Wyborcza* (6.7%), the tabloid *Super Express* (3.9%) and *Rzeczpospolita* (1.8%) (*Duży spadek czytelnictwa*, 2017). To a large extent, the internet and social media have replaced the print press. However, online versions of newspapers still manage to attract readers: about 6 million users visited www.wyborcza.pl for an average of 12.23 minutes in March 2017, which constituted 21.44 per cent of the research population (*Serwisy gazet*, 2017).

Having described the characteristics of the Polish media landscape, the next section turns to the political context.

Political context

The conservative Law and Justice Party won the parliamentary election in 2015, and gained a majority (51%) in the Sejm, the lower house of the Polish parliament. In addition to the one-party government, the parliament hosts seven opposition parties and four unaffiliated members. Table 4.2 provides an overview of the parliamentary situation following the 2015 elections.

Table 4.2 Structure of the Polish parliament after the parliamentary election in 2015

Political position	Party	No. of seats	Percentage of seats
RULING PARTY	Law and Justice	234	51
	Civil Platform	136	30
OPPOSITION	Kukiz`15	33	7
	.Modern	27	6
	Agriculture Party (PSL)	16	3
		14	3
	Other:		
	Union of European Democrats	4	
	Free and Solidary	3	
REPUBLICANS		3	
	No member of party	4	
TOTAL		460	100

In a rather short period of time, the politics of Law and Justice provoked strong protest and negative reactions from the opposition, leading to increasing politicisation and political antagonism in the media. The content of the two main public service channels, TVP1 and TVP2, and one of the information channels, TVP Info, has become increasingly pro-government. Many professional journalists who have worked in the public service channels for a long time have lost or decided to leave their jobs. Many of the skilled journalists who worked for the public channels before have been engaged by private media companies, who in turn have become increasingly critical of the government and politicians belonging to the Law and Justice Party. As a result, communication between the government and the mass media is not politically neutral. The situation is best described as one of entrenched journalism, where the media takes sides in political conflicts and participates in the political process (Anaszewicz & Dobek-Ostrowska, 2013; Dobek-Ostrowska & Łódzki, 2008; López-Escobar et al., 2008: 185; Michel, 2016). In conclusion, Polish politics and media are characterised by a high level of political polarization.

Somewhat surprisingly, the criticism of the prime minister and the Law and Justice Party has not been reflected in the public opinion. In 2017, 37 per cent of respondents were positive toward the government, 33 per cent were negative, while 26 per cent of the respondents did not have an opinion (*Sondaż: PiS bierze wszystko*, 2017). The same year, 32 per cent of the respondents declared that they would support Law and Justice in the next election, while 27 per cent intended to vote for Civic Platform, 9 per cent for the Kukiz' Party, 8 per cent for Nowoczesna and 6 per cent for the Democratic Left Alliance Party (*Poparcie partii*, 2017). Having outlined the political and media landscape of present-day Poland, the chapter now goes on to describe the government communication structure by the time of the data collection.

Mapping the government communication structure

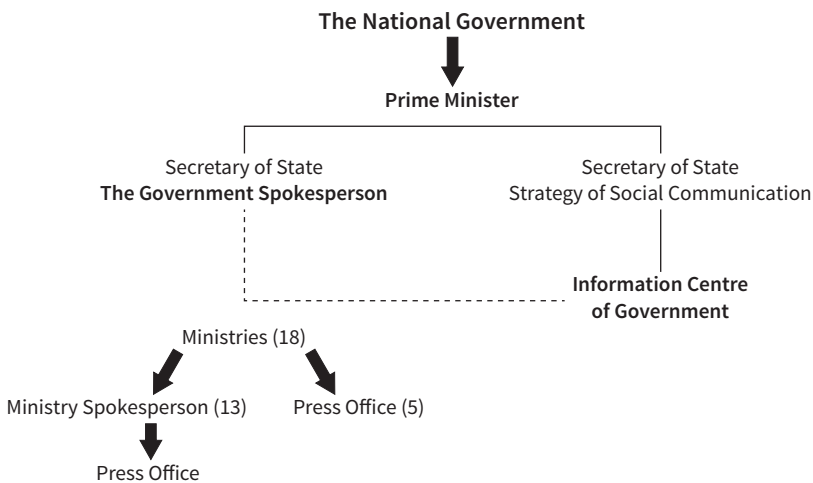
In the government of Beata Szydło, three out of a total of 22 departments in the prime minister's office (PMO)² had a key role in the government communication structure. The first one was the government information centre – responsible for providing information and press services to the prime minister (PM) and the government, and publishing the *Public Information Bulletin*. The second one, the media support department, arranged the domestic visits and meetings of the PM. The duties of both departments included building relationships with the media and influencing the public opinion. The third department with a role in government communication was the strategy and communication department, providing website communication via the website (www.premier.gov.pl) and handling the social media profiles of the PM's chancellery.

The role and position of government spokespersons

Overall, the government of Beata Szydło was composed of 18 ministries (see Figure 4.1). Thirteen had spokespersons and press secretaries, while five departments only had a press secretary. Some of the spokespersons were linked to the ruling party, while others were civil servants. As an indication of the relative size of each group, figures from 2013 establish that 61 per cent of government spokespersons were civil servants while 33 per cent had some kind of connection to the ruling political party. Over 78 per cent reported directly to their minister and 17 per cent reported to the chief of the department at the ministry (Anaszewicz, 2015: 133) (see Figure 4.1).

As for the government information office, figures from 2013 show a total of 330 people working there, with 31 of them (9%) being directly connected with the chancellery of the PM (Anaszewicz, 2015: 169). About 16 per cent of all personnel had a degree in political science, 14 per cent in law, 13 per cent in philology, 6 per cent in management and marketing, and 5 per cent in journalism, military studies or economics (Anaszewicz, 2015: 173). Figure 4.1 shows how the spokespersons fit into the overall structure of the government.

Figure 4.1 Position of government spokespersons in the prime minister's chancellery.



Source: Authors based on Anaszewicz (2015: 133); see also Anaszewicz & Dobek-Ostrowska (2013: 162).

A point that deserves particular emphasis is that the positions of press advisor and press secretary are very distinct in the Polish context. Press advisors are active in particular when the election campaigns begin, when the help of press advisors and spin doctors is heightened. Press secretaries, on the other hand, are responsible for media-politician relations in general. Consequently, the two groups are analysed separately.

Results

Within the project, 23 interviews were conducted with journalists, government spokespersons and politicians. The journalist respondents included eight experienced journalists from national radio, television (public and commercial) and newspapers from both left-wing and right-wing media sectors. As for political respondents, five spokespersons were interviewed, including the spokesperson for the government, as well as ten politicians, including deputies and ministers from the ruling party and the opposition.

In general, the material shows that the relations between politics and media in Poland depend on three interconnected factors: (1) the relationships between politicians, press secretaries and journalists; (2) the individual perceptions of the other actors in political communication; and (3) a recognition of the fact that different actors have different power to influence the information flow. These elements equally shape the connections between media and politics and determine the communication strategies of political and media actors. The data also show that mutual relationships between politicians, press secretaries and journalists consist primarily of formal and informal contacts and are ultimately determined by individual choice and experience.

One important issue is the fact that, very often, relationships between politicians and journalists are perceived as a form of communication where actors cooperate and maintain room for discussion. A conclusion is hence that relationships and political communication in Poland have not been institutionalised, but communication between specific actors varies a lot depending on the individuals involved; the frequency of meetings, the intimacy of contact and the information that can be obtained from the sources vary from case to case. In this regard, one of the interviewed journalists remarked:

My reflection is that you shouldn't believe in the institutionalisation of relationships between politicians and journalists. We are only human beings and a lot depends on changes we undergo ourselves. I am sure you can define some trends or tendencies, but I don't think it is appropriate to talk about any patterns or models that determine these relationships. (Polish journalist 1)

This statement emphasises how different the communication between particular actors can be, and how much depends on individual factors and choices. Secondly, the perceptions that the actors have of each other also matter. Interviewed journalists and politicians pointed out the clear distinction between trusted personalities and new names in the profession (usually young journalists or deputies). We also assume that the journalists' and the politicians' perceptions of their own position and role in the communication structure influence their actions. This, in turn, brings us to the third factor – the fact that different actors possess varying power over the information process. This is recognized by all actors, and hence shapes both individual strategies and the general dynamics of political communication.

The following sections cover various aspects of media-politics relationships. The first two sections describe the daily routines of political journalists, including the process of content production. A third paragraph covers the role of social media in political communication and the different strategies pertaining to social media use. The chapter then carefully sketches the relationship between media and politics in Poland.

Daily routines of political journalists

The first finding is that the daily activities of the journalist respondents did not follow a schedule and differed a lot among individuals. Each of the interviewees had their own tasks and usually performed them in different ways. The journalists themselves pointed out that their daily work is very varied and that there are no set routines, as described below:

I spend most of my time in the office, but my working days are never the same. Apart from my own ideas for news stories, I also work on stories commissioned by the editor and on the issues in the schedule. That's when I cover events at the Sejm, and work according to the parliament's agenda, and I have no time to think of anything else. I just need to give an account of what's going on there – especially when there are some spectacular votes or when important bills are passed. (Polish journalist 2)

Nevertheless, we can assume that as the political agenda and the media agenda are interconnected, the activities of the different professional groups depend on the activities of each other (Dobek-Ostrowska, 2007: 165-168). All journalists are required to seek and maintain appropriate, verified and sufficient sources in order to tell a story (Reich, 2009). In the Polish case, we can distinguish five main sources from which journalists glean information: the parliament (Sejm), informants, social media, official political statements and other media companies. Starting with the parliament, the respondents agreed that this is one of the most important sources of political information in Poland. As described by one of them:

I sometimes spend my whole day in the office, but that's when I write. When I want to gather information, I go where the politicians are. I meet them at the governmental institutions, at the parliament building, or I go to the headquarters of the party I am writing about. (Polish journalist 4)

Another journalist added that:

The parliament is a mine of information. Here, both the opposition and the ruling party speak more freely and say more. (Polish journalist 2)

The parliament building is a special place for journalists as they are able to meet politicians in person there. An interesting fact in this context is that media access to the Sejm has been gradually restricted. Ludwik Dorn, marshal of the Sejm, issued

a decree in 2007 that gradually reduced the number of seats available for reporters. Accreditations to the Sejm were also limited under the following marshal, Bronisław Komorowski, as well as in 2008 when the head of the press office, Jarosław Szczepański, drastically limited the number of accreditations. As a result, the number of accredited journalists fell from 1,500 in 2007 to 900 in 2008. At the same time, journalists were restricted from accessing the Sejm lobby, as described by one journalist below:

Unfortunately, our access to politicians has been limited recently because we are no longer allowed into the lobby. It is not a big problem, but it is a disadvantage. Before that, it was easy to meet politicians who were stepping out from the sessions chamber for a while and talk to them unofficially. (Polish journalist 3)

It should be mentioned that the Law and Justice Party was strongly against these restrictions when the Civic Platform Party was in power, and tried to defend the journalists' right to report. Since 2015, however, the situation has been reversed. For example, marshal Marek Kuchciński attempted to limit the number of journalists allowed in the main parliament building to two under the pretext of a need for order.

In general, the daily routines of journalists revolve around the main task of producing content. Several interviewed journalists emphasised the need for thorough preparation and good research, not least by following other media outlets. Various information-gathering practices allow journalists to capture the wider context of an event and prevent them from being sidetracked. Following other media outlets is also a useful way to find some aspect in a reported story that can be told from another perspective. One journalist describes this process in the following way:

As far as inspiration is concerned, I would mention two things here. First of all, it is research into other media, especially newspapers. Research that is well done and well documented can result in a lot of news stories. While following an event covered in a newspaper, you can often find a lot of links there to what is going to happen to the case in the future. I always try to document it well, write it down and get back to it. (Polish journalist 6)

Many interviewed journalists described the process of content production as following a "story-breeds-story" logic, which further indicates the importance of research and staying informed. The description by the journalist below illustrates how content is produced:

In general, I draw inspiration from my own resources, my own sources. I make a "round of phone calls" or have meetings with politicians to find out what's going on in their parties and what they are going to do. Sometimes we need to "catch up with" the news we simply didn't know about. Once a week we have a meeting when everybody reports what they would like to deal with during the week. (Polish journalist 4)

The above statements highlight the importance of inspiration and ideas in publishing. This was mentioned by several respondents, for example in the quote below:

My inspiration for ideas comes mainly from the reality around us. It just generates ideas. I also conduct a lot of interviews – they are often comments on current affairs made by politicians or analysts. (Polish journalist 4)

The next section investigates a particular component of political communication frequently mentioned in the interviews – the use of social media.

Social media in the communication process

All respondents confirmed that social media is a very important and useful tool in their daily work. The majority of the journalists primarily used social media to stay up to date, although sometimes also as a way of contacting politicians or other actors, as described here:

It is a method for communicating with politicians and listeners and political commentators, as well as a way of forming your opinions and clashing them against others. (Polish journalist 1)

The journalists also indicated that social media is a space for opinion formation and discussion. In addition, many journalists also noted that social media offers a golden opportunity to obtain information or direct feedback from relevant sources. This was confirmed by the press secretaries, who described how social media allows them to respond and react to discussions about political issues:

Of course, thanks to this platform, we have an opportunity to react to Twitter debates – so we always know what's going on. (Polish press secretary 2)

On the same topic, one interviewed journalist said that:

People who are not journalists often share very interesting stories and discuss very important issues. (Polish journalist 5)

The reporters distinguished two groups of social media users: professionals, like politicians or press secretaries, and other people who possess knowledge, experience and access to information. The second group consists of non-professionals who operate without any formal membership. The latter group disseminates stories or comments of interest to journalists as well as politicians and press secretaries (Nożewski, 2017: 117-119). Despite the many advantages, several respondents emphasised that the openness of social media sometimes results in an uncontrolled information flow. In such cases, primarily press secretaries have to, or at least try to, react and respond. However, according to our respondents, there is no communication strategy concerning the nature of such a reaction. In general, spokespersons do not have any formal guidelines or requirements concerning their tasks, but operate and make decisions based on experience. One spokesperson describes this state of affairs below:

There are, of course, certain rules that spokespersons follow. A big one is the hierarchy of decisions taken that result in a specific statement. Long-term strategic planning is hard to imagine! In the dynamic world of administration, laws, etc., we can only talk about the usual procedures and our experience in effective communication. (Polish press secretary 1)

Spokespersons are in regular contact with the spokesperson for the government, and if anything happens in one of the ministries, they contact the PMO. Then it is decided who will communicate the information and at which level.

The interviewed politicians considered social media to be a platform for communication as well as a reflection of society, as demonstrated in the quote below:

Social media is a well of information that I also use. It reflects the public mood – and shows how different political issues are discussed and understood by the public. (Polish politician 3)

Specifically, politicians paid a lot of attention to Twitter and emphasised that the short and concise messages play an important role in the communication with others:

For me, Twitter is the main source of information. To be honest, I read the news on Twitter first and then I move on to other media. I am a great fan of the 140 characters! Twitter is the main source of information for me. As far as my contacts with journalists are concerned, I sometimes use Twitter for that purpose. I prefer short and precise messages. (Polish politician 5)

The political professionals described how carefully formulated Twitter messages represented the only way to avoid the spread of inaccurate information and unwanted discussions:

I try to express my opinions and share ideas through social media. Of course, a message needs to be short, concise, witty and appeal to my receivers. (Polish politician 4)

The daily routines described above, from the general patterns of information gathering to content production and social media use, shape the relationships between journalists and politicians and their staff. The following section describes these relationships in greater depth.

Relationships between journalists, politicians and media staff

Based on the interviews, we are able to identify three aspects of relationships between journalists and press secretaries in Poland: The choice of communication channels, the choice of information channels and both sides' perception of professional roles in the communication process. First of all, both professions use the same information channels. The most important ones are personal contacts and direct phone calls. Press conferences are also venues for information, but journalists do not particularly like

them because of the limited amount of time and the limited number of questions they can ask. As far as personal relationships are concerned, phone calls are considered the best way to communicate because of their immediateness. Both journalists and press secretaries also use email, but they all agree that this way of communicating is rather problematic since email inboxes are always full, making it hard to find important messages or get them through fast enough. Another finding is that reporters and press secretaries use similar information sources, namely dominant media outlets, to stay informed and be well prepared. This might be sustained by the fact that many press secretaries in Poland are former professional journalists who continue to work in a similar way in their new role. One interviewed press secretary described this part of the daily routine below:

I start my day early in the morning with a press review. I listen to the morning's interviews as well as to summaries of the previous night's interviews. From these I can glean a lot of useful information concerning the ministry. (Polish press secretary 1)

Turning to the relationships between journalists and politicians, the interviews show that both journalists and politicians perceive each other as professional. The following quote is an example of this, where the politician acknowledges the importance of the media:

Journalists and the media aren't enemies. They play a very important role and they are a very important link which connects the world of politics with the rest. (Polish politician 2)

Nonetheless, one journalist complained that most politicians do not understand the importance of having a smooth cooperation with journalists while keeping an appropriate distance. For journalists, the distance is necessary to preserve professional standards (Barczyszyn, 2016: 46).

Several reporters noted that politicians sometimes do not like what journalists write about them and take offence:

There are politicians who feel that the media is more favourable to them, while there are others who think that the media is less favourable to them. And a lot depends on it. (Polish journalist 6)

With regard to who controls or leads the communication process, the interviews identified the political side as the driving force behind journalist-politician relationships in Poland. As described by one journalist:

The governmental sources are definitely more active. The truth is that the main events are created by politicians in the government because they have more tools at their disposal. They have some ideas, bills, legislative proposals – and they simply want to boast about them and inform the public. (Polish journalist 5)

The same journalist added that:

Political sources usually initiate contact when they don't like an article in the newspaper. Then they want to tell me that something is wrong, that I must have misunderstood something or they want to ask why the information is so unfair. (Polish journalist 5)

Nonetheless, several of the interviewed politicians (both ministers and deputies) admitted to keeping their distance from journalists in order to maintain the professional relationship:

It seems that journalists see us as more detached than we really are. They think we put some distance between us, but I think we don't really deserve to be thought of in this way. But that opinion might result from the different forms of contact. Sometimes it might also be caused by the fact that the ruling party needs to create its own buffer zone. I guess we should keep our distance. (Polish politician 3)

Another dimension of the politics-media relationship is the relationships between politicians and their communication staff. Politicians and press secretaries often have a tight cooperation. One politician describes the value of press secretaries in the following way:

To be able to communicate with different social groups, you need to have a team of people who maintain this contact. In other words, they provide a medium for the flow of information between them (the feedback on what the groups expect) and me (the things that I would like to communicate). (Polish politician 1)

With regard to the role of press secretaries, the material does not reveal any centralisation tendencies in the sense of press secretaries being transferred to a central entity. Rather (as described earlier) press secretaries work for one particular minister at a specific ministry. In comparison to press advisors, press secretaries are therefore more exposed to journalists' attacks and function as a buffer for politicians in delicate political situations.

It also became evident that the press secretaries manage communication matters rather freely. One interviewed politician emphasised the importance of this separation of tasks:

Personally, I have never practised any media politics behind the backs of those responsible for that at the ministry – i.e. a spokesperson and a director of media relations. They prepare particular strategies, I accept them and we are obliged to abide by them. I can't answer for them, I don't know if it is good enough for journalists, I simply don't know. (Polish politician 3)

Despite this fact, many journalists said that they avoid contact with press secretaries and prefer contacting politicians directly. Nor did they have much contact with spokespersons, as described by one journalist below:

I think that a spokesperson is the last person a journalist turns to. I always try to contact a politician directly and only if I don't succeed do I approach a spokesperson to get an official statement. (Polish journalist 2)

Journalists also pointed out that departments and ministries vary a lot with regard to organisation and how they manage relationships with the media. Sometimes the cooperation works well, but sometimes journalists find it difficult to get in touch with the politician or minister. One journalist describes the variation in the following way:

There are politicians equipped with a very good PR and media apparatus, for example the ruling party "is equipped" with a reactive, image-creating apparatus. There are also politicians who pay no attention to such things. (Polish journalist 5)

According to the respondents, the individual variation is significant – some politicians do not pay much attention to media relations and think that social media is unnecessary. In those cases, media staff manage all communication.

Having described the general relationships between central communication actors, the next sections investigate the relationships between the political side and the media side of political communication in greater depth. More specifically, it discusses the relationship in terms of formal and informal relations.

Formal and informal relationships

The interview data show that relationships between journalists, politicians and press secretaries take many different forms. Most prominently, all respondents clearly distinguished between formal and informal relationships. It is worth noting here that all respondents agreed that "the more I know someone, the more I can trust them". The journalists in particular emphasised that informal relations are an indispensable part of their work, as in the quote below:

To be honest, I live off such contacts! If I had relied only on the official channel, I would never have written anything and my bosses would have fired me a long time ago. (Polish journalist 5)

According to the interviews, Polish reporters use informal contacts to a large extent and both groups confirmed that the world of politics and the world of media are close to each other. However, although journalists are aware of the value of informal relationships, they also pointed out that they do not let familiarity with politicians influence their work:

Their roles are definitely separate. A journalist is there to inform as soon as he/she finds something out. (Polish journalist 7)

Overall, journalists were very aware of this distinction, emphasising that the main aim of their work is to tell people the truth. As one of the interviewed reporters said:

Of course, informal relationships are very important! However, you need to be very careful – it is a very nice and tempting path but a very dangerous one at the same time. Too much fraternisation with politicians or with their surroundings can bring ruin to journalists. (Polish journalist 1)

The same reporter added that many of his colleagues actively avoid relationships with politicians, despite the fact that such relationships might be a way to access information. One of the press secretaries reasoned in a similar way, saying that:

It is good to be aware of that [the separation]! If we don't want to cause problems for ourselves and don't want to spoil our relationships with journalists, we should be careful what we say even when we meet outside of work. (Polish press secretary 3)

Some of the interviewed press secretaries even pointed out that they always avoid close contact with journalists. According to them, this could cause misinformation or, in the worst case, conflict.

At the same time, while recognising the need for distance, both journalists and politicians were aware of the many advantages of informal contacts. Below, a press secretary describes the mutual benefits of informality in politics-media relations:

Of course, such [informal] contacts are useful for both sides. First of all, for a politician if they want to spread information but also for a journalist because they can get a scoop, exclusive material or information before others. It definitely happens very often. (Polish politician 4)

The data also indicate that the informal relationships between journalists and other actors in political communication are somewhat hidden. As one of the journalists pointed out:

I know that the general mood within the party is not what it is officially claimed to be. I value these sources the most. They can tell me what kind of person Chairman Kaczyński is – because I know people who are close to him and when I talk to them I can create an image of him in my head. Of course, I can't use all the information I get. (Polish journalist 5)

Both journalists and politicians firmly distinguish between private and public in their mutual relationships. One of the press secretaries confirm this by saying that:

I was a journalist in regional radio. I left many of my colleagues there. Now, when we are talking about something associated with the ministry, I treat these kinds of contacts formally and officially. It does not matter if it is your friend or not – private is private and public is public. You can't talk to everyone about everything – you just can't! (Polish press secretary 1)

The majority of the interviewed journalists had alternative ways of getting information, namely by getting in touch with other people involved in politics. One of the journalists describes this in the following way:

I already have contacts but also form new social relationships with people from the world of politics or those who are close to it. (Polish journalist 2)

As the journalists pointed out, not all information becomes news. As one of the journalists noted, journalists follow professional rules when deciding what to report about:

There are taboo subjects in Poland connected to people's private sphere. And, therefore, in Poland you don't talk to politicians about their divorces, marital problems. You don't talk to politicians about their sex life, religion, etc. It is all based on common sense. (Polish journalist 6)

Another journalist added that he prefers to keep his distance so that politicians do not think that they can get preferential treatment. One politician expressed the same line of thought, saying that:

Even if a politician drinks beer with a journalist, it doesn't mean that they should be lenient with each other – nobody should get preferential treatment. (Polish politician 6)

Formal or informal relationships with politicians appear to be an almost integral part of daily journalistic activity. In addition to formal contacts, journalists use informal relationships with politicians, press secretaries and political advisors to complement a story. Informal relationships hence play a significant role in the production of news. However, both sides recognise that both formal and informal relations need to comply with professional standards, and avoid private or too personal subjects and relationships.

Against this background, the next section discusses the degree of professionalisation of political communication in the Polish context.

Professionalisation of political communication

The actors in the communication process act according to the norms of their particular professional role. Starting with the journalists, Hallin and Mancini (2004) summarise the norms inherent in journalistic professionalism as the norms of autonomy and service to the public. And, as exemplified by the quote below, the interviewed journalists adhered to those professional norms when asked to describe their daily routines:

There is one principle that you always stick to – you always ask the other side to confirm or deny the information. When you get information which might discredit somebody, or which is not favourable to somebody, you should comply with the journalistic ethics and commandments and call the person and ask them to comment. (Polish journalist 7)

Similarly, another reporter says that:

The role of a journalist is to get to as many readers as possible but also to the sources to make sure that the news story is unbiased. And it doesn't matter what the journalist-source relations are. (Polish journalist 4)

Another way to comply with the professional norm was to use many sources when covering a story, in order to represent as many perspectives as possible and report objectively (see also Nygren, 2015: 132). One journalist describes this in the following way:

A journalist who complies with the standards knows that a politician is only one of the sources. A journalist knows that he/she must broaden his/her knowledge by talking to experts, and is supposed to use his/her own experience and not to form his/her opinions only on the basis of what a politician says. (Polish journalist 5)

On the political side, professional norms concern following the established roles and routines. First of all, government communication in Poland is decentralised. Many decisions are made in accordance with the guidelines of the official party or government and in agreement with particular departments. Starting with the role of spokespersons, each ministry has a spokesperson that coordinates the media staff of the ministry, supported by the government information centre and under the coordination of the PM's spokesperson. One respondent describes the role of spokespersons below:

I participate in daily meetings with a minister and deputy ministers during which we try to set out a schedule of activities. During the meeting, we determine which questions from journalists we will answer and in what order. We must cooperate. Of course, we meet with a spokesperson for the government who presents us with their expectations but they don't impose anything on us. (Polish press secretary 4)

Each spokesperson organises their own workplace according to the principles of their departments. One spokesperson said:

There are some sets of regulatory competences, but a spokesperson tries to organise their own workplace. The tasks of a government spokesperson are divided into two categories: internal and external. Operating internally means that a spokesperson has to organise cooperation with the staff of media-related matters of particular ministries and be in touch with the government information centre. Operating externally simply means that a government spokesperson is obligated to maintain contact with journalists. (Polish press secretary 5)

In contrast, the role of a ministry press secretary entails a relatively high level of independence. Press secretaries present and communicate information (in consultation with the appropriate minister) from each ministry quite freely, and make their own decisions when it comes to communication and maintaining contacts with journalists. One of the respondents describes the role in the following way:

When I want to communicate something, I do it in accordance with the rules of the ministry. If I have some information, I just upload it onto social media. Thus I reach

the audience directly without journalistic interference. It must be said that sometimes journalists distort the proper meaning of a message. (Polish press secretary 3)

None of the journalist respondents had experienced any political pressure on, for example, editors to stop or change journalistic content, although political staff may get in touch to correct a particular story or add information. Below, two journalists discuss this theme:

There are no phone calls to the editor-in-chief from a minister who says “please restrain it” or “I demand this or that” – it doesn’t work this way. More often it is spokespersons who send us some material, data from ministries which stand in stark contrast to our material. (Polish journalist 5)

Politicians always want to present the issue from their own point of view – but journalists have their own brains. (Polish journalist 2)

Nonetheless, respondents representing the media raised some concerns about the nature of politics-press relations due to insufficient professionalism on the political side. One example was how the interviewed journalists complained about spokespersons often lacking experience:

Very often spokespersons seem to have been chosen by accident. They are not specialists in communication, but quite often they are somebody’s acquaintance, or party members, or a given politician’s acquaintance. (Polish journalist 3)

According to the journalists, this is due to the fact that ministries often employ young people as spokespersons. In addition, spokespersons sometimes play ugly, as described in this quote:

Unfortunately, spokespersons often have to lie. Sometimes they say: “No, there is no such issue”, or “There is no such document” or “It is not at this stage yet” even if they know the opposite to be true. There are also public relations specialists who work for politicians too, and who can show an issue in a different light. In this way they divert our attention from it. (Polish journalist 1)

But overall, journalists perceive politicians as professional in their communication activities, and consider the majority of political actors to be well prepared when it comes to talking about politics and related activities. They were also aware of the need for politicians to present themselves in the best light. According to journalists, politicians rely on their press secretaries to do that job, rather than using social media. One journalist found this somewhat surprising, saying that:

In my opinion, politicians generally pay too little attention to social media – they don’t seem to notice it. And if you don’t comment on an issue, your comment simply doesn’t exist in the public sphere. (Polish journalist 7)

And indeed, the staff for media-related matters are responsible for presenting the PMO and ministries' offices in the best way. It is therefore natural that the interviewed journalists often perceived press secretaries to act as "shields" for politicians.

In conclusion, given the well-defined roles of various units and functions, government communication in Poland can be categorised as professionalised. The next section discusses whether this and other aspects of the relationship have remained stable or changed over time.

Change over time

Our data show that both individual and structural factors influence relationships among journalists, press secretaries and politicians. For example, individual characteristics of a particular actor, e.g., a press secretary, influence the nature of press relations. Structural factors, such as technological development and new ways of expressing political opinions, also matter.

For a long time, the relationship between politicians and the media in Poland was characterised by the fact that most had a joint background in Solidarity in the 1990s. Many journalists and politicians were friends or at least acquaintances from that time. For example, one of the reporters commented on how the relationship had changed over time:

I remember the time when politicians and journalists were on friendlier terms than they are now, when different political-journalistic events were a daily routine and when the two worlds were younger and less separated from each other. Today, they are not very separated either but there is definitely less "feasting" with politicians than there used to be in the early 1990s when everything was new. (Polish journalist 1)

All journalists identified a change in the relationships between politics and the media since then. Before that, journalists literally needed to chase politicians to get any information. This is no longer the case, as described by one respondent below:

[When] politicians realised that current affairs stations lived off them, that they passed on information provided by politicians, it turned a tide. Politicians started contacting journalists more and more often. Then there was another metamorphosis, leading to journalists broadcasting everything politicians wanted to say. (Polish journalist 6)

In addition, government has better control over what information reaches the press – partly by using professional press secretaries, as described earlier.

Another change affecting the relationships between media and politics mentioned was the technological development. As a result of new technologies, communication has become much faster and multidirectional:

New channels of communication are sure to have some influence because they make online communication between a journalist and a politician more intense than it used

to be. I can leave the room now and go and write a controversial opinion on Twitter, politicians will start replying to it and we will engage in a discussion. It happens mostly via Twitter. It definitely changes the relationships and makes the world of politics and of journalism operate more online than in the past when there were no such tools. (Polish politician 3)

All respondents agreed that social media drastically changes the way particular actors communicate with each other (see the paragraph about daily routines above). Most prominently, social media makes communication with elites more accessible. One of the journalists explains how:

That's a kind of media revolution. When it comes to face-to-face contact, they don't change. If you have good relations with politicians, it doesn't matter if it was 20 years ago or if it is now – it works in the same way and is based on the same principle: it is based on trust. (Polish journalist 9)

The interviewed politicians, journalists and press secretaries agreed that while technological development has changed the way in which the media and the political side communicate, it hasn't changed the relationship in any fundamental way – politicians still want to present themselves in the best light and the press secretaries help them to achieve it. Journalists, on the other hand, perceive themselves as gatekeepers of the information flow and watchdogs of the exercise of political power.

The general political climate also matters – in particular, the journalists emphasised that politician-journalist relationships are better and more frequent when the political situation is less tense. As the political situation gets more complicated, there are fewer contacts with the press and those that exist are more formal. In addition to the current political situation, several journalists mentioned that the age of politicians and journalists also influences the relationships. Today, fewer journalists possess enough experience, which is sometimes used by politicians that want to get their message out.

Conclusions

This chapter uses in-depth interviews with journalists, politicians and government communication professionals to assess politics-media relationships in Poland (see Dobek-Ostrowska, 2015). The results show that relationships between politicians, journalists and press secretaries are professional, in the sense that each group has a recognised and defined role in the communication process. Relationships range from formal to informal, but both sides are determined not to jeopardise professional norms by getting too close. A comparison of relationships shows that spokespersons play a minor, or at least omitted, role in the press-politics relationships. Journalists prefer to contact politicians directly or, as a second choice, their press secretaries. It is evident that ministers and press secretaries have a very close relationship. In the decentralised structure, press secretaries are attached to a particular minister, and are

an indispensable element of political communication according to the interviewed politicians.

All the interviewed groups point to technological development as a factor that had changed the forms of political communication in Poland. Politicians and the media communicate via social media platforms (especially Facebook and Twitter) and use them to get in touch with each other. In addition, both politicians and the media use social media in their daily routines in order to stay informed. Social media is also recognised as an arena for self-presentation and a source of information. Despite the many advantages, the respondents also acknowledged that there are situations when other communication channels are better suited to establish contact with “the other side”. Journalists in particular said they sometimes preferred other, more traditional ways to establish contact or organise meetings.

Turning to the government side in the relationship, the data show a politicisation of civil servants in government communication. As an example, a significant number of spokespersons are members of political parties. However, the significance of spokespersons should not be exaggerated. Our analysis shows that the PM plays the leading role in government communication, followed by the political advisors, while civil servants have the least free and influential one.

Interestingly enough, none of the respondents (except for two journalists from a left-wing newspaper) mentioned the recent, rather dramatic political changes in Poland or the associated changes in the media landscape. To some extent, this is surprising as the changes have affected the daily routines of journalists, e.g., by limiting access to the parliament building. There are several potential explanations for the absence of this topic in the interviews. One possible explanation is that the changes did not cause any significant changes in the relationships between the media and politicians and were hence not relevant to the interviews. More specifically, the changes had not caused any noticeable change in the access to political sources, including sources linked to the president or the PM. Another possible explanation is that journalists use additional sources of information, which might reduce the effect of restricted access.

Notes

1. TVP1 (9%) and TVP2 (7.7%).
2. Prime minister from November 2015 until December 2017.

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Chapter 5

Sweden

A professionally symbiotic relationship

Karl Magnus Johansson, Milda Malling & Gunnar Nygren

Abstract

This chapter explores political executive-media relations in Sweden, with a particular focus on professional day-to-day relationships and habits. The analysis is mainly based on extensive interviews with journalists and government press secretaries, and it establishes the routinisation at work, as well as the professionalisation. The exchanges between journalists and their sources appear to be close but with recognition of each other's professional roles. Media developments influence the relationship, and the downsizing of newsrooms, multi-platform production 24/7 and increased competition for unique news have made journalists more dependent on available sources. At the same time, professionalisation of government communication makes news management more efficient and has centralising effects on executive systems. Together these trends shift the balance between journalists and their political sources in favour of the latter. The presented findings have important implications for research on journalism, media and political executives.

Keywords: political communication, political journalism, professionalisation, media-tisation, Sweden

Introduction

According to the political journalists and government press advisors that were interviewed, relationships between politicians and political journalists have changed in many ways in the last 20-30 years. One general explanation is the developments that have taken place on a systems level: the relationships have evolved from a system of cooperation and understanding, with its roots in the old party press system, to a system based on professionalisation on both sides. The relationship is still close, but as one press advisor formulates it, it is “professionally symbiotic”.

A good example of the development is the coverage of the government's presentation of the proposed state budget. In the 1980s, newsrooms received the documents in advance and could prepare to present news on the budget. By the 1990s, this system of cooperation had ended, and journalists had to look for leaks. In the 2010s, the govern-

ment has once again taken control over the coverage by giving parts of the proposal to selected news organisations in advance. Obviously, the reason behind this strategy is the wish to maximise coverage and publicity.

One senior reporter gives his version of this development:

When I started to work as a political reporter in the 1990s [...] and I succeeded in reporting on the plan for state finances the day before, it was regarded as great news. Now the government works this way itself [...] and offers the newsrooms part of the budget weeks before, and very few newsrooms manage to say no, even if they know this is only a part of the whole budget [...]. It becomes a problem because you are in their hands. (Swedish journalist 4)

According to the experienced reporters in the interviews, this is a typical example of how increased resources in government administration and stronger efforts to control the political news agenda are visible in their daily work. From the “other side”, attempts to control the agenda are confirmed in the descriptions of a detailed and advanced PR work from government information officials.

The analysis in this chapter is based on in-depth interviews, lasting on average around one hour, with both journalists and government press advisors/secretaries.¹ Ten political journalists and commentators in leading news media (including press, radio, TV and news agencies) were interviewed, most of them in the spring of 2016. From late 2014 to early 2017, 11 press advisors/secretaries working for the governments from 2006 and onwards were interviewed, among them press secretaries based both in the prime minister’s office (PMO) and in line ministries. Since the interviewees were granted anonymity, the descriptions of their positions are vague. In order to be able to make systematic comparisons, all interviews were transcribed and analysed thematically. To supplement this data, requests were placed with the government offices (GOs) to obtain documentation concerning communication and coordination.

The chapter proceeds as follows. First, we outline some specifics of the Swedish context. Second, we present our case study of political executive-media relations. Finally, we conclude by discussing the findings and their implications.

From party press to commercialism

Until the 1970s, Sweden had a party press with newspapers that were either owned or closely tied to the political parties. In this system, readers supported the party behind the newspaper that they read, and the newspapers were part of the political system – a kind of political parallelism, as described by Hallin and Mancini (2004). This system is now gone, and the newspapers are owned by companies that have both commercial and general publishing goals.

In broadcasting, public service held a monopoly until 1994, when commercial television was introduced. However, public service is still strong and enjoys broad political support. Among the commercial channels, only TV4 is producing news on a daily basis; the other commercial channels have a strong focus on entertainment.

Internet-based news media is almost completely connected to media companies in the traditional channels. The media company with the largest online presence is Schibsted, which controls two large newspapers, the largest news site and many online services. In addition to the news provided by the traditional companies, new niche sites have developed as “alternative news channels”, often giving voice to populist and xenophobic voices. However, these “alternative” online news providers have minor audiences compared to mainstream media.

Most newspapers are owned by foundations or families, and the majority of the newspapers represent some kind of “liberal” profile. Although the party press system has disappeared, politicians can still be found on the boards. This occurs mostly on the regional and local level; a consequence of it is occasional conflicts in relation to local scandals.

The Norwegian company Schibsted owns two Swedish newspapers – the social democratic tabloid *Aftonbladet* and the conservative quality paper *Svenska Dagbladet*. Thus, the two newspapers owned by Schibsted have completely different readers, and they cover two different segments of the market. For Schibsted, the political affiliation is only a kind of market definition. The same is true with regard to the social democratic newspapers that are owned by larger liberal newspapers; they are kept alive for market reasons and through state press subsidies.

Table 5.1 The political system and the media system in Sweden

Characteristics	Sweden
Political system	Unitary state with parliamentary system
Electoral system	Proportional representation (multi-member constituencies)
Party system	Fragmented (eight parties in parliament)
Turnout (national elections)	Around 80 per cent
Government	Coalition (Social Democrats and Green Party)
Media system	Dual public-private broadcasting system, private newspaper business
Public service broadcasting share of time in viewing (2016)	High (37%), with TV4 as domestic commercial competitor (22%)
Newspaper reading (subscriptions per 1,000 inhabitants, 2015)	Medium (191), in a market dominated by eight large groups

Source: Adapted from Strömbäck and van Aelst (2010). Statistics from Nordicom database.

Strong government communication

The role of the media in political communication has become increasingly important and the political control of the news media is weaker than before the fall of the party press system and the commercialisation of the media. Attempts to influence the coverage have been growing for many years (Esser & Strömbäck, 2014), and to a large extent, Swedish politics is mediatised politics. As elsewhere, there is an ongoing professionalisation of political/government communication in Sweden (Falasca & Nord, 2013; Strömbäck & Nord, 2008).

The resources allocated for government communication have grown massively over the past five decades. One very concrete expression of this decades-long process of change is the significant increase in staff, including staff for press and information, at the GO and the PMO. The central steps in this process are summarised in Table 5.2. Notably, the first press secretary ever was employed for the prime minister (PM) in 1963, when the PMO could still be described as very slim with a staff of just a few. Over the following decades the number of staff increased, reaching 187 at the end of 2017 (down from a peak of 203 in 2012) (Government offices of Sweden, 2017).

Table 5.2 Major changes in the system of government communication in Sweden

Year	Change
1963	The first press secretary is employed by the government offices (GOs) in the prime minister's office (PMO).
1970s	Additional press or information secretaries are employed.
1976	The non-socialist government speeds up the pace of "mediatisation" with the appointment of additional press or information secretaries.
1982	The Social Democrats return to power. Day-to-day coordination shifts from the ministries of the respective party leaders to the PMO.
1991	A chief press officer is appointed in the PMO. Day-to-day coordination by a new coordination secretariat in the PMO.
1994	The position of chief press officer is proposed in the preparations for the change in government, but is not appointed.
2000	The position of chief press officer is re-established in the PMO and put in charge of media management and coordination, working closely with the PM.
2006	The state secretary to the PM effectively undertakes the duties of a chief press officer. She resigns the following year and a chief press officer is appointed.
2010	A state secretary for communication is established in the PMO.
2011	The position of state secretary for communication in the PMO is abolished.
2014	All government press secretaries are employed by the PMO (and no longer at a specific ministry). Daily morning press meetings are held at the PMO with all press secretaries. Day-to-day policy coordination remains in the PMO.
2016	A strengthening of central government communication with the appointment of an additional deputy chief press officer designated to stand in for the chief press officer if necessary.

Source: Adapted and extended from Erlandsson (2008), and Falasca and Nord (2013).

The shift from a centre-right government to a social democratic-green government in 2014 brought about a further strengthening of the government communication machinery through centralisation to the PMO. Like his predecessor, the new PM brought the chief press officer from the party central office to the PMO.

All in all, today there is one chief press officer with two deputies (one from each governing party), 30 press secretaries, and a staff of press assistants, press coordinators and press communicators. Press assistants and press communicators are non-political and employed by each ministry or the PMO. They work very closely with the press secretaries and the political teams/staff.

Organisationally, all press secretaries are based at SB Press, directly under the PM. This is also where all ministerial press secretaries in the GO are employed. Press secretaries are all political appointees employed under the GO agreement on politically appointed staff, such as state secretaries, press secretaries and political advisors. Out of around 4,800 employees in the GO, some 200 are political appointees (Government offices of Sweden, 2017).

There are also numerous information officers or communicators who are non-political officials. Their external communication activities include communicating the government's policies and the work of the ministers, preparing public appearances and speeches, and replying to letters from members of the public and questions from the media. The activities of the government and the GO are communicated through various digital channels, including the official website and social media. Nowadays, there is also a policy document regulating how ministers should act in social media (Government offices of Sweden, 2016).²

The document "Communication policy for the government offices" regulates the internal and external communication and is the common basis for the communication activities (Government offices of Sweden, 2012).³ Interestingly, among the sources interviewed, only a few were aware of this document and none of them seemed to have read it. Our interpretation is that this document is primarily for information officers (the communicators who are not political appointees). To them, it is a steering document, whereas the political appointees are instead governed by the standard operating procedures evolving in their immediate environment. This is significant insofar as it reflects the emerging practices and the extent to which the operating procedures are informal. All in all, it is striking how little formalisation there is in the form of written documents on communication.

The policy contains objectives and core values and describes the division of responsibilities for communication activities in the GO: "A prerequisite for good communication is that it is coordinated and well considered. This is achieved through a clear division of responsibilities." For this, the "ultimate responsibility" lies with the PMO.

Changes over time in political journalism and politics

The time perspective and experience differ between press advisors and reporters. Many of the journalists have worked for a long time in the field, some of them for 25-30 years. In contrast, since the press advisors are politically appointed, they are generally replaced if the government changes after an election. The interviewed press advisors include both advisors connected to the former centre-right government from 2006 and advisors to the social democratic-green government from 2014.

Despite the differences with regard to time perspective and experience, the images conveyed by the groups are similar – both present a picture of a relationship marked by increased distance and professionalisation.

From the perspective of the journalists

The more senior reporters talked about closer relationships in the 1980s. At that time, it was common for political reporters to have a background in politics, perhaps in some newspapers connected to one of the political parties. One reporter in public service recalled:

If you had been in politics, you had some kind of competence, you understood the machinery and then you became a political journalist. But you still had the old relationships with part of the political sphere, a relationship that was not private, but on the border to being private [...]. Today, journalists are less corrupted by friendship than before. (Swedish journalist 5)

None of the ten political reporters in our study has a political background. They mention politically interested families, but their way into journalism has been through studies at universities and professional journalism education. This change is part of the professionalisation of journalism, and today nearly 90 per cent of all young journalists in Sweden have a professional education (Głowacki, 2015).

Another senior newspaper reporter described how, when he entered the field 25 years ago, journalists and politicians would have parties together. Today this is not so common, with the exception of the annual “politicians’ week” on the island of Gotland (and even this informal gathering has become more institutionalised; see Wendt, 2012).

However, one informal platform for journalists covering the parliament remains: the Association of parliamentary reporters. This organisation, which is quite small, invites politicians, including the PM with staff, to meet journalists and talk “off the record”. This organisation is mentioned by several reporters, and some of them question the meetings due to the closeness they may result in.

Another change mentioned by several of the older reporters is the increased security measures around government and parliamentary buildings. This development has had a strong impact on the possibilities for daily and close coverage of the

ministries and parliament. One senior reporter described the increasingly limited access in buildings in this way:

Security has changed things for the worse for us. Before, we could walk in and out of party offices in the parliament, now we can't even stand at the entrance of Rosenbad [the government headquarters]. The security police tell us to stand on the grass in the little park outside, and we have to shout at the ministers when they come for the weekly government meeting. (Swedish journalist 6)

Other reporters talked about times when it was possible just to knock on the party leader's door, and walk around in the ministries and in parliament asking for official documents and information. This is impossible now; every visit has to be announced in advance and a visiting journalist is followed all the time. Information is also more controlled, according to reporters with long experience. One reporter started to cover the government in 1992, and he describes an increased willingness to control:

People working in the ministries are much more nervous now about what can be handed out; the political influence is stronger and political secretaries are more influential. Everybody is more anxious about the images and pictures shown in public [...]. The officials are more anxious and afraid of talking. (Swedish journalist 1)

Another reporter with 20 years of experience in public service shared how press secretaries are more active in limiting the possibilities for direct contact with politicians – “they are a filter all the time [...], not only in contact with the government, but also with members of parliament”. This picture of increased information management in combination with fewer opportunities for spontaneous meetings with sources was confirmed by all the experienced reporters.

Other important changes have taken place in the newsrooms. Today, journalists regularly produce for several different platforms, and this takes time away from research and contact with sources. One reporter on a daily newspaper said that about half his time is devoted to web and online TV, and this gives him less time for traditional research:

The demand has increased on reporters [and] you have to be productive [...]. You have to produce TV and write for both the print edition and the web; you have to be all-round in the craft, but you also need deeper and broader knowledge in the area because there are fewer of us than before. (Swedish journalist 3)

Many newsrooms have downsized, with the consequence of there being less room for specialists and a larger demand for generalists among reporters. This was noted by a reporter in public service, and it has consequences for relationships with sources. This reporter is not only covering the government, but all kinds of news from five in the morning:

There are fewer journalists devoting much time to developing sources [and there are] fewer doing this kind of news that is revealing something [...]. Resources have been saved and downsized [...] and we notice it. (Swedish journalist 2)

From the perspective of the sources

The press secretaries emphasise the increased importance of communication. One of them works for a minister with experience from the government in the 1980s: “At that time they had 15 press secretaries, now it is about 150 [working with communication] – a kind of increased professionalisation not to give a messy impression.”

All of the interviewed press secretaries who are now employed by the GO started to work after the 2014 election, when the Social Democratic-Green government came to power. To provide us with a longer perspective, some press secretaries from the former centre-right government from 2006 were included in the sample. However, the personal experience of change is much shorter among government officials than among many of the journalists.

Most of the press secretaries have a similar background: work in youth or student organisations of the parties, a university education and some previous experience from working with either PR or corporate information. Many of the press secretaries emphasised the importance of an understanding of politics – “we work in a political environment, and for that you need both a political compass and political competence,” (Swedish press secretary 3) one of them explained.

Before 2006, Sweden had mostly had one-party governments with less need for coordinated communication, but when the centre-right coalition took over in 2006, communication was a crucial part of the strategy. In several books, journalists and the former PM describe how the chief press officer was placed in the small group of people effectively leading the Moderate Party (e.g., Kristofferson, 2006; Pihlblad, 2012). Consequently, when the centre-right coalition (“the Alliance”) came into government, information for all ministries was centralised under the PMO. That information from government was strongly coordinated is confirmed in the interviews with press secretaries working in 2006. One of them says:

All politics becomes media, because all politics is communication [...]. There is no one working with politics not dealing with media. Do you understand? It is not like a company where the CEO goes to the information director and in the end a press secretary sends out a bulletin... [In politics], everybody is in on the discussion... [A press secretary] has to be interested in politics, and understand politics and the culture of the party [...]. So, in politics a press secretary becomes a central station, a spider in the web. It is not like in a company. (Swedish press secretary 2)

Another press secretary from that time emphasised the increased speed in media coverage as another reason why there are more resources dedicated to communication and more coordination within the government: “Everything is much faster [...], when something is written on Twitter, it can be a news article” (Swedish press secretary 7).

The new Social Democratic-Green government from 2014 took over, and even strengthened, the model of centralised information in the GO. All press secretaries

are formally employed by the PMO, and coordination is strong with daily meetings. One of the press secretaries explained:

It is a result of the spirit of the times and the demands for better control of what different parts are doing. In more intense media coverage, we need to have better control over what we are sending out [...]. Just basic things such as ministers not having press conferences at the same time, releasing news that competes with each other [...]. We have a never-ending, 24-hour news cycle; everything happens at a crazy speed. (Swedish press secretary 7)

Thus, press secretaries from both the former and the new government notice the more intense pressure on journalists. Many reporters have worked in the industry for a long time and accumulated a lot of political knowledge. Sometimes they actually know more than the press secretaries, one of them said.

However, in a high-speed media environment, there is little time for fact checking in the newsroom. One press secretary has observed a change since 2006, and confirms the journalists' accounts about downsized newsrooms:

There are fewer specialised reporters, and you have to explain things more basically for the journalists [...]. As a press secretary you have to have more control. (Swedish press secretary 1)

Both the journalists and the press secretaries painted the same general picture of an increased level of planned communication in the government. There are many explanations behind this development, some of them are political and some of them are connected to the media. Among the political reasons are a greater need for coordination in coalition governments and an increased awareness of the role of communication in politics. This can be seen as an adaptation to media logic. At the same time, some of the changes are also affecting the media (e.g., increased speed and new media platforms). This brings us to our next analytical dimension: professionalisation.

Professionalisation on both sides

The development of political journalism and government communication can be analysed as processes of professionalisation. In western Europe, the professionalisation of journalism has emerged as a strong trend that parallels the decline of the party press and the commercialisation of the media system (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). In Sweden, professionalisation has been well documented since the 1960s and 1970s, often in terms of a gradual separation of journalism from the political system (Djerf-Pierre & Weibull, 2001). At the same time, surveys show that the political preferences of news reporters are quite different from those of the general population: journalists lean more to the left, and they often vote for small green and left-wing parties. This can be explained

by their professional ideology: journalists are supposed to oppose power (Asp, 2007).

Professionalisation is strong in Swedish legacy media, with a large degree of autonomy both in relation to owners and sources, at least according to answers from journalists in surveys (Nygren et al., 2015). The ideal of journalists being a watchdog for power has gradually become stronger, while the more passive ideal of being a “mirror of society” has become weaker (Wiik, 2010).

The standards of professional integrity make it problematic to move between journalism and the political sphere, but two of the interviewed press advisors have previously worked as journalists. This follows the results from a study of so-called “policy professionals” in Sweden (Garsten et al., 2015; see also Svallfors, 2017). This growing group (to which press advisors belong) consists of political employees – political actors who are not democratically elected and often have a background in PR and communication. In the study of Swedish “policy professionals”, it is shown that secretaries shape the public statements of ministers and work both with and against the media; journalists may be punished as well as rewarded for their work.

The professionalisation of government communication is more recent than that of journalism: in the interviews it is visible within a perspective of 15–20 years. The press advisors working in the centre-right coalition after the 2006 election emphasised how communication was placed at the political centre. One press advisor working close to the PM said that the PM made it clear that press advisors could disrupt any meeting he was having. In the new government, all press advisors to all ministers were put directly under the chief press officer and the PM himself (see above).

Press advisors are part of the political staff, together with the ministers, state secretaries, political advisors and a few other officials. All press advisors talked about daily briefings with the minister, and discussions on how to handle good or bad publicity. One senior press advisor explained the close relation between politics and communication:

If we have a discussion on why the media image became so bad, perhaps we should go back to discuss why we are dealing with politics [...]. If you want a good press advisor, it should be somebody that knows politics, because that is the thing! (Swedish press secretary 2)

Senior reporters with 20–25 years of experience talked about more active and more controlling press advisors. Often, press advisors are present in interviews with ministers; some ministers have them by their side for all kinds of communication. One reporter summarises the development:

My impression is that press departments have much more influence; they control more and this is mostly bad. They are very nervous and want to decide what ministers and politicians should say or not say, and they care very much about conveying the right message. Many are very young. They are political activists who love their parties and work for them. They are nice and pleasant, but the messages from politicians have become much more professionalised. (Swedish journalist 9)

One senior reporter called the press advisor “the butler of the minister” (Swedish journalist 10), and together with the state secretary, the press advisor is the minister’s most important co-worker. Another reporter said there are differences between press advisors. Some are very good and understand the role of the journalists, but others are more like gatekeepers: “They see their work as protecting the minister.” This impression is shared by other reporters. One senior reporter made a comparison to the 1990s:

Earlier you had a phone number directly to the minister, but now almost never. Everything is much more managed, and I have to phone the press advisor [...]. Ministers are quite different, some are not afraid at all and are used to media, but others are much more difficult to interview. They want more control and it also depends on what press advisor they have, if the press advisor is a control freak [...]. Some politicians never open their mouth without their press advisor behind them. (Swedish journalist 1)

The reporters considered this to be “planned communication” and labelled the press advisors critically as “spin doctors”. Many of the reporters said that press advisors made phone calls to offer them exclusive news. The carefully planned presentation of the state budget is just one example; there are daily examples of this active spread of positive news. The reporters are ambivalent about this kind of news: on the one hand, they can be the first to present exclusive news about government proposals; on the other hand, they have to give the news a presentation the sources are satisfied with. If they do not do this, there is always the risk that the press advisor decides to call somebody else the next time.

The politician or the official hopes you present it just like they want it, and without any critical questions. [And if you do this], then you will get the next news because you are reporting kindly. [The journalist] gets into some kind of dependence in relation to the person [...]. This kind of “giveaway news” packaged by information departments is very dull to report. (Swedish journalist 7)

Another reporter remarked that press advisors often call him directly, and not the editor at the desk. This is a more effective way to influence the presentation: the press advisors and the reporter already know one another and press advisors are very proactive in their work. But not only to promote positive news – one reporter told a story about a press advisor at the PMO who used to ask him to stop publishing news the PMO did not like.

[The press advisor] would scream into the telephone and threaten [...]; would say “this is wrong”, and in some way say, in a very threatening tone, that I was wrong about things [...]. It was an extremely aggressive effort to protect the prime minister [...]. And I have also had similar experiences with other press advisors who tried to take down the news I reported by their own press information and through Facebook. (Swedish journalist 3)

The relationship between professional actors on both sides is very much about the control of information. By taking control of information and, in some cases, negotiating with reporters, the press advisors work to promote “good” news. In this interplay, professional journalists try to navigate to find information and news without being too dependent on press advisors and other official sources, and without being transformed into a pawn in a political game. How this works in the daily routines is the subject of the next section.

Routines in daily work

According to both journalists and press secretaries, their daily work is very much decided by political structures: Calendars with meetings, conferences and travels provide the framework for daily work and coverage. A larger framework is provided by the schedule in parliament (days for different debates, budget procedures and proposals), party congresses and the four-year election cycle. This framework creates a steady flow of news that must be handled by both press secretaries and journalists. One journalist listed some examples:

If there is a committee on profits in the welfare systems, we do something about this and try to find out in advance what is in the proposals, who thinks what about it and get some reactions. If the Christian Democrats are going to elect a new leader, we follow it and try to find out how the discussion is progressing in the party. [My work] is quite influenced by the agenda in the political sphere. (Swedish Journalist 9)

The daily work of the press advisors is also structured around the calendar for the minister – travels, public speeches, meetings and other appointments. One press advisor to the PM gave this example:

There are many things that a prime minister does that need to be planned in detail. If we are going to visit somewhere, we have to decide where to go, where to stand, where to meet the press, who is going to be present, what will happen during what moment and how the transport will work [...]. I always have to be updated, always reachable, always be in control [...]. And when we are out, we meet a lot of journalists. (Swedish press secretary 1)

A regular day for the journalists and the press secretaries often begins the same way – checking social media and the most important media channels to see if there is any news that must be dealt with. Social media is mostly used as a tool to stay up to date with the latest events (see also Chapter 7). For this, Twitter is often used, even if many think Twitter is “dumbing down” the debate. Among them is one senior journalist:

I read mail and I check Facebook and Twitter [...] But Twitter, I have still not received any news there worth anything. It is a playground for idiots. (Swedish journalist 10)

Twitter is mostly used to get an overview of the flow of news and trends, both for journalists and political sources engaged with everyday politics (Berglez, 2016; Larsson & Kalsnes, 2014). Some journalists publish links to their stories on Twitter, and some press secretaries promote some news there, but the value of social media is not regarded very highly by either of the two groups. Twitter is very much regarded as a network for elites. Nevertheless, nobody dares not to follow Twitter and miss out on any news. A press secretary explains why the minister has chosen not to use Twitter – “it is a pond for ducks, always the same people there, and what kind of people do you reach on Twitter?” (Swedish press secretary 6)

In the ministries, the political staff hold daily meetings to plan the events for the day, evaluate the media flow and discuss possible actions to promote important issues for the minister. The political staff are quite small in number: The minister, the state secretary, the political advisors and the press advisor. In addition, all press secretaries have a daily 15-minute meeting (either at the PMO or on the telephone) with the chief press officer (or a deputy chief press officer) directly under the PM. Communication is coordinated to maximise the attention for the issues the government wants to promote.

In the newsrooms, the news flow of the day is also discussed at daily meetings. In some newsrooms, journalists are eager to emphasise that they decide the news agenda themselves; they do not want to follow the agenda of the political system. One reporter said:

We don't run to all press conferences [...]. We have our own journalism and we are working on stories on our own agenda. (Swedish journalist 6)

Another senior reporter emphasised that he chooses the stories himself, and that he is not influenced by any political agenda. This independence is important for all journalists, but many admit that, from a broader perspective, journalists are trapped in the flow of political issues created by the system they are supposed to cover.

Who leads the tango?

The question of which side is taking the lead in this dance is difficult to answer. Some researchers conclude that journalists generally take the lead (Strömbäck & Nord, 2006, 2008), but the pattern revealed in our study is more complicated. According to both journalists and sources, most of the agenda is decided by the political system. But how issues are covered, and which side has the initiative in the coverage of these issues, is the result of a complicated interplay. In the descriptions of the processes of collaboration and, in some cases, conflict, the interviews contain both similarities and differences.

How press secretaries work depends in part on which minister they work for. Press secretaries working for the PM or other ministers responsible for important and sensitive areas have to take many questions from journalists and work mostly *reactively*. Press secretaries who work for less-known ministers tend to work more *proactively*,

taking more contact themselves to compete for media attention. In order to achieve positive publicity, different news is provided to different news organisations:

If you work in the government, a lot of things are produced that can be news [...]. [Different] news fits different news organisations; newsrooms have different degrees of interest and we can practically decide that if we do it on TV or radio in the morning, we know that the large newspapers will write about it later during the day and the news will live on. (Swedish press secretary 7)

All press advisors said that news is given to the newsroom where the issue is likely to get the “best treatment”. One of them expressed this part of the work:

We tried to have some kind of balance between newsrooms, not to give the same things to the same media all the time. But of course, some news was better presented in a specific media [...]. And if we have something where we can decide when and how we should present it, why not? (Swedish press secretary 1)

Another press secretary described how the news about a state public inquiry into the welfare system was announced. First, the minister had an article published in DN Debatt (the place for public debate in the large newspaper *Dagens Nyheter*), and the same morning, the minister and another leading politician participated in morning TV to explain the issue. Further, in order for the competing commercial channel, TV4, to make news of the story, information was sent to the newsroom of TV4 in advance, and in the evening the minister was in the largest news show on public service TV.

We succeeded in directing the communication just as we wanted it [...]. We were able to plan the whole communication from the first article in the early morning to the last live-broadcast interview on TV in the evening. (Swedish press secretary 8)

These examples, of course, represent times when press secretaries felt they had full control. In other news stories, they may not have had such control and they may have had to perform some kind of crisis management. However, none of the press secretaries admitted that they had been involved in this kind of crisis, and when they were asked about crises in communication in other parts of the government, they avoided the question. Nevertheless, there is one example showing that some of the methods from the proactive work are also used in handling crises.

In November 2011, Dagens Eko, the public service radio news, disclosed a story on a secret agreement between Sweden and Saudi Arabia for the construction of an arms factory. To make it easier for the minister of defence to give his version, the press advisor consciously bypassed the reporters behind the story and contacted some other journalists at the radio. Moreover, in order to support the minister, the chief press officer at the PMO participated in the press conference held, and afterwards, the chief press officer tried to provide the reporters with background information and explain why this situation was difficult for the government to handle (Bodin & Öhman, 2014).

Other press advisors in our interviews confirmed the active role of this former chief press officer at the PMO. She wanted to decide on the details, i.e. “micromanage”, and she also tried to influence journalists with direct comments. Also, for the issue of the secret agreement with Saudi Arabia, communication staff at the PMO were directly involved in handling the media.

A press advisor in the government from 2014 explained how he tried to influence journalists when news was negative for the minister:

It is about selling things the right way, and talking things down if they are not so serious [...]. Often it is some kind of misunderstanding that leads to something bad [...]; then it is time for background conversations when I phone journalists to tell them what is happening and to explain this is not a big deal, blah blah blah... (Swedish press secretary 3)

But trying to influence a reporter is a very sensitive matter. For journalists, it can be regarded as a threat against their integrity, and it therefore creates strong emotions. One press advisor described a situation when a journalist conducted an interview with the PM and added some questions that had not been mentioned before the interview. When the press advisor discussed this with the journalist afterwards, the journalist reacted strongly:

[The reporter] became really mad and said that I tried to censor him afterwards, but that was not my intention [...]. There was a wild discussion and it ended with threats that he would write this and that [...]. Our communication after this was down to only SMS and he answered: “I don’t want to SMS with you.” (Swedish press secretary 1)

Among the interviewed journalists, the picture was quite similar regarding government press secretaries who actively try to place news in different news organisations. Many of the journalists regarded this kind of information as having become more intense over the last 10-15 years. One reporter in public service gave this version of the trade:

It has become an industry where parties try to place so-called “news” in different media. Sometimes they call us, and other times they call the newspapers, to tell us about their proposals. They call and try to sell the news: “I have a story here I think you would like to do.” Press secretaries do this a lot, and they make an agreement that we can run this story and they will have a press conference later the same day [...]. It is a kind of cooperation [...]. (Swedish journalist 9)

Sometimes, the journalists accept a story just to maintain good contacts with the government. If they refuse, they are afraid of being bypassed the next time. As one of the journalists expressed this dilemma: “If you say no, if you don’t want to have beer with your friend when he is calling you ten times, he will call somebody else.”

This trade puts the journalists in a position of dependence, some of the reporters said. One example is the coverage of the budget proposal. During the weeks leading up to the publication of the proposed state budget, the government leaks exclusive

news from the proposal to different news organisations, and, finally, when the whole proposal is published there is no news left to present. A senior reporter with 25 years of experience described this event:

I hate it! I am so angry about this; it is like a game. It is on the conditions decided by the government [...]. They chose what they think is positive and media writes what they want. They release just as much as they want, and I don't have a chance to get some kind of overview. So I cannot do any broad reporting [...]. I am trapped in this logic and say "yes", even if I should not do so for journalistic reasons [...]. I become part of their PR machine. (Swedish journalist 1)

Another senior reporter had a more pragmatic attitude to this exchange between sources and journalists:

It is a kind of trade where they get the publicity they want, and I get information that is newsworthy. I work in an organisation that survives on the distribution of news, and they work in an organisation that survives on having a positive image. (Swedish journalist 4)

The relationship between journalists and press secretaries seems to be an ongoing interplay. The sources try to control the flow of communication; one of them even describes how strict rules stop other officials from having contact with journalists. With this control, political press advisors try to "buy" publicity by offering exclusive news to leading news media.

Journalists, for their part, may accept the offers with a certain degree of professional mistrust and try to find sources who can provide them with news that is not prepared and "pre-cooked" by communication departments. This was acknowledged by one of the press advisors:

Skilled journalists work on having personal contacts within the parties, and they can bypass gatekeepers like myself [...]. I think they do this to get a broader picture. (Swedish press secretary 9)

Access to the "other side"

For both sides, daily work is very much about access to the other side. It is about physical spaces where journalists and political sources meet; it is about access to information through channels like telephones, text messages and social media platforms. All these kinds of interaction are related to one other. They support one other and make it easier for both sides to exchange the currency in this trade.

In the daily work, there are a number of physical spaces where journalists and political sources meet. These spaces have become increasingly important, as access to government buildings has become more restricted.

One of these spaces is the press conferences (Eriksson et al., 2013; Larsson, 2012). Journalists go to press conferences not only to cover the issue of the day but also to

meet sources and to chat about what is going on in other issues. A reporter in public service put it like this:

You can check what is going on, and they will see that you are there [...]. You can talk in a free and easy manner and ask about things going on, it is no secret meeting, but you can hear things. (Swedish journalist 2)

Another important space is the parliament building, where, during and after debates, wandering reporters may meet politicians. Some news organisations have offices in the parliament building, but reporters say there is less time to spend in the building today. Nonetheless, those who use this space think it is very fruitful:

When you come inside, it is a very open environment. You meet politicians all the time – at the coffee machine and in the lunch restaurant [...]. You get to know a lot, perhaps not what you were supposed to find out, but a lot of other information that can be of great value another day. (Swedish journalist 5)

Congresses and other party activities are also spaces for developing relationships between political sources and journalists. Both the journalists and the press advisors emphasise informal contacts as a basic method for both sides to exchange information and influence publicity. To reach this level of a relationship, both sides have to trust each other, and this trust is developed during a long period of personal contact. One press advisor at the PM explained:

You can have lunch with journalists and then it will be a longer and deeper conversation and you get to know each other better. Then we have those occasions when you see a lot of each other, like congresses or the political week in Almedalen [...] or when journalists follow us on travels [...]. All background conversations build on a relationship, a journalist cannot just phone me and expect a conversation “on background” if I don’t have a relationship with this person. (Swedish press secretary 11)

Another press advisor described these relationships as a form of “symbiosis”, and stressed that it takes time to build the relationships with journalists:

You have to have background conversations, if not you will not understand politics. You have to get close to understand [...]. It takes a while before you gain confidence, and the absolutely best journalists can have many professional background conversations with many people. Some of them have had relationships for 20-30 years that revolve around the background [...] and then you can do real news [...]. It is about confidence from both sides. (Swedish press secretary 2)

Other press advisors commented that background conversations are a way to give journalists more context and to frame the issue in a positive light for the political side. It is also important, though, to realise that everything you say can be used, even if the source is not mentioned.

You should not have any illusions about conversations with journalists about background. You can talk more freely, but what you say can be used [...]. (Swedish press secretary 9)

Informal conversations are also an important way for press advisors to learn more about how journalists think (Davis, 2009). Meeting journalists before an interview with a minister gives the press advisor more knowledge about the angle – the kind of story that the journalist has in mind. One press advisor described these conversations as a way to predict what is coming – to learn how journalists think in order to be able to draw better attention to the minister's own issues in the reporting.

Among journalists, informal conversations with sources are both a basic working method and a rather sensitive issue. For example, when former political reporter Erik Fichtelius published his background conversations with former PM Göran Persson in 2007, he received a lot of criticism for having had a secret agreement with the PM at a time when he was a reporter covering politics (Fichtelius, 2007).⁴ The agreement between Fichtelius and Persson was that the former was free to use the material as he wanted after Persson had resigned.

Several of the reporters in the interviews talked about informal background conversations with different political sources. The meetings are often held over lunch, but also at other places where they can talk freely. Some of the reporters talked about it, while others were more reluctant. One of the reporters often invited sources to lunch:

We talk about the political situation, about strategies and how they think [...]. I often get ideas from these meetings; I can feel if they are changing their policy or just the way they are talking about issues. (Swedish journalist 3)

SMS – the best communication link

In a country like Sweden, with only a few hundred politicians, press advisors and journalists, the political sphere is quite small, and personal relationships that allow for SMSs and quick calls are important. Face-to-face meetings are not necessary for a close relationship. One reporter said: "I don't have any need to meet these people, but we talk on the phone and send SMSs and emails." (Swedish journalist 2)

Many of the reporters mentioned the use of SMSs in their daily contact with sources. It is easy to send a short question, and the source is often able to answer even if they are in a meeting:

If you have contact with a person, you can just send an SMS and ask if something is correct. Have you heard [...]? What will your party say about NATO? [...] I don't write my name under the message, but they have my number from earlier contact, so they see it is from me. (Swedish journalist 2)

Another reporter said that text messages are more discreet, and that discretion is sometimes preferred:

Sometimes I have to take people aside, to talk where nobody can listen [...]. Sometimes I send an SMS [...]; it can be sensitive for people to talk, they don't want to be seen with me because I am known. So it can be better to send an SMS. I get some news by SMS nowadays. (Swedish journalist 3)

The sources are also aware of this use of SMS during important meetings and news developments. For example, when the Social Democratic Party discussed replacing the leader in January 2012, newspapers could report directly from an ongoing meeting with the help from participants at the meeting. After this, participants were requested to put their mobiles on the table in front of them (Suhonen, 2014).

The press advisors also use their contacts among journalists when they need to handle difficult situations. One press advisor said his work is to minimise the publicity on bad news:

I have tried several times to handle this by contacting journalists via Twitter or SMS [...]. I can offer an interview with the minister in a couple of days or perhaps see that he gets something more instead. (Swedish press secretary 10)

Within a small political universe, the informal web of contacts is the most important tool for both the journalists and the press advisors in their daily work. How this is related to formality and informality is the topic of the following analysis.

Formality and informality in relationships

It is difficult to draw a clear line between formality and informality in relationships (see Chapter 8). When analysing the material collected for this study, attention was given to how the actors themselves perceived the situation. One of the press advisors working directly for the PM rejected the division between the formal and informal in his work:

What could an informal contact be in my work? If I talk to a journalist, it is a formal contact [...]. To talk to journalists, to hand out information and spread the picture we want and the policy we are working for, that is my formal task [...]. In my daily work I have professional relationships [...] and talk to journalists all the time to make them understand how we think. (Swedish press secretary 7)

Another press advisor described how he spends a lot of time with journalists during trips and congresses, and on these occasions they get to know each other more closely. Nevertheless, the relationship is basically professional, and the press advisor emphasised that the talk must not be private and careless. There can be problems, though:

There is a line between background conversations and leaks, and it can be difficult to identify. I don't leak information even if it would help my party in the short run.

[Background] conversation adds one more communication channel for the government, and there is an agreement between the journalists and those politically employed, like me, that this will not be quoted and there will be no names. (Swedish press secretary 11)

One of the press advisors reflected on the fact that contacts can be both formal and informal at the same time. For example, when journalists wait outside the plenary hall of the parliament after a debate, the press advisors sometimes walk around and talk to them just to maintain social relationships. These relationships can be useful in other situations:

Sometimes I have quite difficult discussions, if something is wrong or misunderstood [...]. It is much easier if you already have a good relationship [...]. (Swedish press secretary 1)

For the journalists, there was no need to draw any strict division between formal and informal contacts – both are simply different ways of searching for information. One of the old reporters felt that there were more informal contacts before, when he could move more freely in the government offices. Another reporter said that the informal sources are still important, at least if there is a mutual interest in making some information public. One reporter was very clear about press advisors always doing their job, even if they know each other well. The relationship is basically professional and formal.

Press advisors are not always formal or informal, it is a moving scale all the time [...]. Sometimes you think you have a good, informal contact, but when the questions become hot the relationship clearly becomes formal [...]. So I don't believe in being a kind of friend to a press advisor. (Swedish journalist 9)

Formality and informality are two sides of the same coin in the relationships between journalists and the government. Sometimes the interaction is visible, sometimes it is not. And, importantly, in the time slots that occur during formal proceedings, relationships that can be beneficial to both parties are built and maintained.

Relationships between actors

Informality is very much about relationships, according to both the press advisors and the journalists. They all made it very clear that building relationships is the most important work method. However, it is also important to distinguish between personal and private relationships. In many of the interviews, both the press advisors and the journalists reflected on this difference and how difficult it can be.

The importance of personal relationships was articulated by several press advisors, both senior advisors close to the PM and other interviewees:

[Relationships] are the core of this profession, the ability to build human relationships not only as colleagues but also with journalists [...]. To build external relationships to spread our message [...] requires that we have a relationship somewhere, and it takes longer than you would expect to build these relationships. (Swedish press secretary 2)

Both sides emphasised that the relationships are professional, not private. One press advisor admitted that in a small country like Sweden, there are many close relationships. It might be difficult to keep a relationship solely on one side of the line – “it is all quite mucky, to be really honest”. Another press advisor in the PMO said he has some personal friends working in large newsrooms, but he never phones them, and they never phone him.

One press advisor explained the difference:

I need personal and professional relationships with journalists. But I will never have a *private* relationship with a journalist. It doesn't work that way, and they cannot have private ties to people like me either. They should not have, and I don't imagine they think they have [...]. They have no obligations to me, and my work is to have a good relationship and to give them things [...]. The relationship is professionally symbiotic. I would say they are dependent on us, and we on them [...] but the roles are very clear. (Swedish press secretary 9)

The journalists have many different groups of sources; press advisors are just one of the sources they must have to gain access to the minister. During their daily work, journalists develop different kinds of sources; one of the senior journalists, for example, said that he had had informal discussions on policy issues with a former PM. Other journalists said they had had professional relationships with politicians for years, but that they never met outside work.

For most journalists, it is very important to stress the line between personal and private. One experienced journalist said:

It may never change to a private relationship. Personal relationships are one thing; I mean, you will have a personal relationship with a person you meet over a long period of time. But that is not the same thing as having a private relationship with this person. You have to distinguish between job and privacy. (Swedish journalist 5)

The line between professional and private relations can be difficult to define, and it is sometimes hard to notice when a professional relationship changes to some kind of dependency. Some of the journalists reflected on this – when a professional relationship develops into a kind of symbiosis where the journalist loses critical distance. One journalist talked about the long hours of travel during election campaigns when journalists and politicians “laugh and talk and get to know one other”. This reporter explained:

This kind of relationship is about giving and taking, about being personal [...]. With many of them I have, well, I don't socialise with them, not with anybody, but they know very well who I am and how I live and all that. (Swedish journalist 6)

“Professionally symbiotic” is the term closest to the situation described by both the press advisors and the journalists when it comes to relationships between the two groups. Neither press advisors nor journalists want to mix private friendships and professional contacts; there is a border to the private sphere that is not to be crossed. This might be a problem in a small country such as Sweden, but most of our interviewees seem to think that the situation is not very problematic.

However, the journalists are the ones who seem to have the greatest need to define this border, and they often emphasise their professional role. For them, it is a question of integrity, of being trustworthy in their work, but there is still a “grey zone” of mutual relations where work and private life come close to each other.

Leaks and scandals

The press advisors are important sources when it comes to proactive news management, but the journalists have many additional sources, especially in connection with internal conflicts within parties and coalitions. For example, in January 2012, the chairman of the Social Democratic Party, Håkan Juholt, was forced to resign after intense media coverage of some mistakes in his personal finances. While Juholt’s own actions were the root of his problem, the process was fuelled by political enemies within the party who provided journalists with a steady flow of leaks (Suhonen, 2014).

Some of the press advisors referred to this as a “media scandal”. One of them said this scandal was driven by strong internal critics. He emphasised that he works hard in his position in the ministry to prevent leaks; good internal processes reduce the risk of leaks. Another press advisor with experience from the Social Democratic Party presented the same picture:

I saw a party organisation that was not feeling well and leaking extensively. Immediately after Juholt resigned [...] and the new leadership took over, the leaks stopped. It was an interesting phenomenon, because an organisation not feeling well leaks a lot in all directions. But when it feels a positive energy, a feeling of control and a leadership heading somewhere, the leaks stop. (Swedish press secretary 10)

Journalists emphasise leaks as an important source. In conflicts within parties or coalitions, actors try to use media coverage to strengthen their own position. Sources provide journalists with negative information about their political opponents. One journalist saw this pattern:

Many scandals we see do not come from political enemies or journalists who find something, but rather somebody who is close to the accused politician and not feeling appreciated. This person tells something to a journalist. There are a lot of personal motives behind great news. (Swedish journalist 5)

Other interviewed reporters also regarded leaks as important sources, and they had various methods for protecting their identity and continuing the relationship. However,

they also talked about the fear of being used in internal conflicts. In cases like these, it is important to have other kinds of sources to evaluate the information journalists receive. These kinds of relationships have to be built in advance and rest on a solid base of confidence. One reporter emphasised the knowledge base of the journalist – knowing how to evaluate the information and whom to contact.

These kinds of personal and informal sources are very valuable for journalists: they give insight into closed political processes. This exchange between journalists and sources is also in the interest of both sides. One reporter talked about the internal conflict in the Christian Democratic Party on the question of whether homosexuals should be allowed to adopt children. The reporter had followed this party for years and knew about the groups in the conflict. The reporter knew which persons to contact:

What is special with politicians is that they also have an interest in it. I know it and they know it. They talk not to be nice to me, but because they want to reach out and say they are against these adoptions. It favours them, and it favours me because it will be good news, interesting and relevant, mutual in some way. (Swedish journalist 2)

Both the press advisors and the political journalists consider relationships to be the core of their professions. These relationships are often personal, but not private. There is an invisible but clear line for most of them between personal and private. Mutual confidence and mutual interest are the basis for the relationship. But both sides also know that professional interest comes first, before any personal or private feelings. Therefore, many of the press advisors and journalists stated clearly that they do not mix friendship and professional relationships.

Conclusions: Media logics and political logics

The daily work of political journalists and their political sources is carried out in a small world. Some of the press advisors estimated this “universe” to have only a few hundred inhabitants: top politicians and their political staff, communication officials and less than a hundred political journalists in about ten leading newsrooms. In this small world, a shared culture holds all actors together – a political communication culture based on norms, values and attitudes (Pfetsch, 2014).

Within this culture, there is a daily struggle over the control of information flows. There are daily negotiations on what is newsworthy, what should be published and what should not be published. These negotiations are based on media logic – but this does not mean that the media decides on everything.

Political communication is mediated and the political actors have internalised media logic in their efforts to influence the actual output (Esser & Strömbäck, 2014). Thus, from the perspective of political actors, media logic is a means to gain influence according to political logic; it is through the skilful use of media logic that influence

on public opinion and political processes is achieved. Thereby, the two kinds of logics are closely linked in a complex pattern of interaction.

In the interviews with the journalists and press advisors, a common picture of these daily relationships became visible:

The professional roles for both journalists and press advisors are very clear. They have developed in a process of professionalisation, first among the journalists and then during the last 20-30 years among the press advisors too. Each group has common standards, mostly tacit values and norms guiding their behaviour in relation to each other.

The most important tool for both groups is a wide web of personal relations. The line between personal and private is mostly clear, and both groups described these relationships as “professional-personal”, not private. Ongoing daily background conversations give both groups insight into the processes – a mutual exchange of background information.

In these relationships, daily negotiations are held on the news value of information distributed from the GO. Journalists seek unique news stories, and sources/press advisors try to make sure “their” issues receive attention and a positive framing. The active party in setting the agenda is often the political side, but journalists have a wide network of sources giving them information on, for example, internal conflicts within parties and governments. In these cases, the source side may have to handle unwanted news.

The various locations for this interaction differ. Access to the government and parliament buildings has been restricted, but other means of communication have developed: mobile phones, SMS and Twitter, for example. Occasions in relation to formal events are important for developing professional-personal relationships.

These playgrounds can be both formal and informal. In a way, all interaction is formal in the sense that it is performed within the professional roles as a kind of role play. Sometimes this role play is visible (e.g., in press conferences and broadcast interviews), but most often it takes place behind the scenes. A large part of the trade is performed in background conversations, hidden communication in SMSs with select sources and other kinds of informal contacts.

A liquid power relation

It is difficult to say which side is the strongest in the relationship between journalists and political sources. Research emphasises the situational character of the power balance between actors (Pfetsch, 2014); often there are common interests in the trade, but sometimes there are conflicts.

By controlling the information, the political sources have a lot of influence on the agenda. News is distributed to select newsrooms, and carefully planned communication gives the sources an advantage in agenda building. Some journalists react to this, but it is difficult to refuse unique news offered by government sources.

When it comes to the framing of news, journalists have more influence than political actors. However, given the underlying threat of not cooperating with newsrooms likely to frame the issues negatively, sources have an indirect influence on the presentation. The power of journalists in this trade also depends on the position of the media outlet in the media landscape – a major TV channel or news agency has a much stronger position in relation to sources than small, niche media. These differences have been observed in earlier research: while sources are the ones with most influence over the agenda, journalists have the upper hand when it comes to how issues are framed (Pfetsch, 2014). However, the study at hand shows that the interviewed sources work very actively to influence the framing, using both soft and hard methods.

While there is no doubt that media logic is the basis for the daily negotiations between journalists and sources, the political side is not a victim of this logic. On the contrary, political actors today use media logic for their own purposes. This is obvious in internal conflicts in parties or coalitions, where leaks to the media are used to combat political opponents.

The return of political parallelism?

In the Nordic countries, relationships between journalists and political sources have been defined as being based on “professional distance” (Moring & Pfetsch, 2014). In the same vein, two characteristics of the overall media system in these countries are professionalisation and a lack of political parallelism (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). This professionalisation on both sides is confirmed in this study, but under this general conclusion some other trends are also visible.

Both sources and journalists described an increase in resources on the political side: today, there are more press advisors, more coordination and more active work in order to influence news reporting. At the same time, actors on both sides told the same story about downsized newsrooms, reporters without the knowledge needed to evaluate information, greater demands to produce content for different platforms and less time for journalistic research.

Taken together, the result is mediatised political communication that is more influenced by political sources. By adapting to media logic, political actors increase their influence on political reporting at the expense of the autonomy of professional journalism. In a way, this means a return to political parallelism through the back door. It is not the old version of political parallelism, but a modern type of political instrumentalisation of the media.

Notes

1. In this chapter, we use the terms “press secretary” and “media/press advisor” interchangeably.
2. It is issued by the Office for Administrative Affairs, to which the GO Communications Department belongs.

3. It is issued by the Office of the Permanent Secretary, which belongs to the PMO.
4. One hundred hours of conversations during the ten-year period between 1996 and 2006 were published, both as a book and a three-hour TV documentary.

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PART TWO

Chapter 6

Government communication in a comparative perspective

Karl Magnus Johansson & Tapio Raunio

Abstract

This chapter hypothesises that there is a trend of centralisation in government communication – a move upwards in the political executive towards central coordination and control. We test this argument empirically through an inventory of elite interview evidence and a four-country comparison including two case studies – Finland and Sweden – as well as two case illustrations – Lithuania and Poland. Based on, altogether, over 80 interviews with political journalists and political/media advisors or press secretaries in the four countries, the chapter analyses how government communication is structured. The cases of Finland and Sweden offer support for the centralisation hypothesis while those of Lithuania and Poland point out its limitations. We thus conclude that the extent to which government communication is centralised varies across contexts and that the variation is patterned.

Keywords: centralisation, coordination, executive, government communication, professionalisation

Introduction

Government communication is a central feature of political life. Over the past few decades, growing resources dedicated to communication has been a prominent trend in the organisation of political executives. It seems as though governments everywhere have allocated more and more resources to communication, both in terms of expenditure and personnel. Yet, despite the importance of communication for governance, it has been insufficiently recognised, conceptualised and explained in standard accounts of political executives. However, in contrast to its virtual neglect by political scientists, the theme has received considerable attention from political communication researchers.

This chapter sets out existing research on government communication and then proceeds to explore and compare government communication in different contexts. Our chapter is driven by the following question: Is government communication already centralised or undergoing further centralisation, becoming more hierarchical and top-down in its structures and coordination mechanisms?

We make two central contributions to the literature. First, we offer a theoretical argument for why and when government communication might tend towards centralisation or decentralisation. We argue and hypothesise that there is a trend of centralisation in government communication – a move upwards in the political executive towards central coordination and control. We submit that the push toward centralisation may be driven, at least in part, by professionalisation and a growing need and pressure for information and media management by the chief executive.¹ At the same time, however, we claim that centralisation or decentralisation is not a matter of either/or, but a matter of degree. It is a moving target, subject to change over time. Second, from an empirical perspective, this chapter offers the first systematic and comparative study of government communication across four cases: Finland, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden. Previous contributions on government communication primarily address bigger, Western countries, whereas systematic research on the cases covered here (especially Finland and Lithuania) is rare. Drawing on over 80 interviews, we carry out a detailed analysis of Finland and Sweden and provide more illustrative evidence from Lithuania and Poland. The interviews were conducted between 2014 and 2017 (mostly in 2016). The unique data set includes roughly the same number of respondents from both media and political elites. Specifically, it consists of interviews with media/political advisors or press secretaries and top-level civil servants who held communications-related positions in each respective government as well as political journalists in the four countries. In addition, we draw on official documents, particularly pertaining to government communication structures, policies and strategies. The interviews were semi-structured, based on a common interview guide, and the interviewees were granted anonymity (for more details on the data, see each country's chapter in this volume).

Before proceeding any further, however, we must explain why centralisation of government communication is a topic worth investigating. As outlined in the introductory chapter of this volume, political science scholars have noted a clear tendency towards empowerment of prime ministers and their offices (PMOs), or what Poguntke and Webb (2005) have labelled the “presidentialisation” of parliamentary regimes. Several factors have contributed to this development, from the personalisation of politics (Karvonen, 2010), including extensive media coverage, to increasing international contacts on the part of prime ministers (Johansson & Tallberg, 2010). Centralisation of government communication is plausibly also driven by the growing unpredictability and fragmentation of party systems. In coalition cabinets in particular, the desire to speak with one voice provides an incentive to centralise communication to the PMO. Hence, there is a need to pay attention to the interplay between government communication and the broader empowerment of prime ministers.

The chapter proceeds in four steps. In the first section, we outline the foundations of government communication as a field of research – conceptually, theoretically and empirically. The second section presents the empirical analysis of Finland and Sweden, examining how government communication has evolved in recent decades. The third

section addresses the extent to which the Finnish and Swedish experiences are shared by Lithuania and Poland. We conclude the chapter by discussing the main findings and their broader implications.

Government communication: Concepts, theories and applications

In this section, we map the essentials of the scholarly field of government communication, an emerging subfield within political communication. In particular, we address three dimensions: conceptual foundations, professionalisation and empirical studies of government communication.

Conceptual foundations

Government communication research looks, among other things, at political executive institutions in their communication aspects – the dimension we are particularly concerned with in this chapter. Government communication here denotes the study of structures and processes that take place in the relationship between the governmental and public spheres. Some scholars adopt a broad definition of government communication to also include public sector organisations, notably public sector administrative agencies. These are, however, beyond the scope of our study. We conceive of, and focus on, government communication as *central executive* government communication, encompassing the executive as the cabinet, the PMO, the line ministries and all units for communication at this central executive level. Comparatively, this complicates things, since there are many countries where administrative agencies and ministries form an integrated whole. In Finland and Sweden, however, public sector administrative agencies are at least formally more independent.

We conceptualise government communication as an organisation or practices for communication purposes exercised by and through political executive authority structures. We focus particularly on the structure of government communication, as we seek to identify institutions responsible for communication in political executives. A key point we would like to emphasise is that government communication, in essence, is about politics: how to either attract or avoid media coverage influences government communication practices and may promote institutional change in political executives. Political executives, and the PMO in particular, probably also strive for streamlined and cohesive communication, and individual parties or ministers may have their own needs in terms of signalling their views to their electorates, especially in coalition cabinets. This underlines the essentially political nature of government communication.

Exactly what is meant by government communication varies from author to author. For instance, Pasquier (2012: 1) defines government communication broadly as:

all the activities of public sector institutions and organizations that are aimed at conveying and sharing information, primarily for the purpose of presenting and

explaining government decisions and actions, promoting the legitimacy of these interventions, defending recognized values and helping to maintain social bonds.

Pasquier (2012: 2-3) distinguishes between several types of government communication. First, there is the government-wide communication involving the structures for communication under the auspices of heads of government or ministers. Second, there is communication emanating from the administration. While administrative communication in theory is highly factual, “it can also acquire a political quality depending, for example, on when the information in question is released”. Other types are, typically, communication activities pertaining to public policy, effectively constituting policy instruments. The next type, involving institutional communication, “consists in enhancing the visibility and influence of the organization”. The final type is crisis communication. Moreover, government communication research typically employs a multilevel analysis by looking at micro, meso and macro levels in the organisational structure (e.g., Esser & Pfetsch, 2004), including “meso-level central government structures” (Canel & Sanders, 2014: 104).

Canel and Sanders (2013: 3) note that the task of defining government communication can be approached at different levels – “looking at its actions (what *it does*) or looking at what *it is*”. For instance, defined as a policy tool (what *it does*), Howlett (2009:2 4; see also Hood & Margetts, 2007) sees government communication as a policy tool or instrument to give effect to policy goals: “the use of government informational resources to influence and direct policy actions through the provision or withholding of ‘information’ or ‘knowledge’ from societal actors.” Two examples of such tools are information and advertising.

In order to capture the full range of the possibilities of government communication, Canel and Sanders (2013: 4) suggest the following (working) definition of government communication:

The role, practice, aims and achievements of communication as it takes place in and on behalf of public institution(s) whose primary end is executive in the service of a political rationale, and that are constituted on the basis of the people’s indirect or direct consent and charged to enact their will.

While attractive in its breadth, this definition too is rather imprecise. Building on their previous work, Canel and Sanders (2016: 450) later defined government communication broadly as the:

area of practice and study of communication directed to key publics in the pursuit of both political and civic purposes. This communication is carried out by executive politicians and officials, usually in a managed way, working for public institutions that are constituted on the basis of citizens’ indirect or direct consent and are charged to enact their will.

This understanding of government communication focuses on *executive* communication and is widely defined as seeking not only *political* but also *civic* purposes. As we

emphasised above, government communication, of course, has a political dimension. Canel and Sanders (2016: 451) also take this into account:

Government communication must deal with considerable complexity in terms of goals, structures, and resources. It always has a political dimension and, in this sense, is always political communication which yet is, or is expected to be, differentiated from party political or electoral communication through its orientation to the broader public good.

Here, we find a cross-fertilisation between government communication and the likewise emerging fields of government or political public relations (e.g., Lee, 2008; Lee, et al., 2012; Strömbäck & Kioussis, 2011) and strategic communication (e.g., Holtzhausen & Zerfass, 2015). These publications look mainly at presidential communication in the United States.² Indeed, Canel and Sanders (2013: 3) noted that this literature “is often used to refer solely to top-level executive communication at the presidential or prime ministerial level...”, or what Sanders (2011: 257) described as the “West Wing Approach”. Canel and Sanders (2014: 100) have further shown that political communication scholars have produced most of the research in the field, with the following implications:

Government communication research in political communication has first focused on *chief* executive communication strategies, neglecting the multilayered character of government communication; and second, it has emphasized government communication’s *strategic* function as designed to gain and hold onto power; and finally, it has explored the exercise of government communication in the context of and in response to highly *mediated* environments.

Another approach treats government communication as a process and practice in public affairs or relations. For example, Hiebert (1981) presents a model of the *government communication process*, showing how the parts of the process of organising and communicating fit together. Hiebert (1981: 8) notes that many different decisions must be made in the process; first, one must decide upon one or more of four different strategies: withholding, releasing, staging and persuading. In each of these communication strategies, a variety of communication techniques can be used, each to a different effect (see also Graber, 2003: 237). The model also covers policy considerations and is deeply political.

Studies on government communication also include historical perspectives, implying that historical factors may shape today’s government communications. For one, lessons of the past may explain the trend in government communication to move away from a reactive approach to a more proactive approach.

Part of the government communication literature looks at trends in specific aspects of government communication, including staffing. This involves various practices, notably the way the role of the press secretary is evolving and actually plays out in the executive branch of government (e.g., Seymour-Ure, 2003). Here, we find studies on

government news management (e.g., Lieber & Golan, 2011; Pfetsch, 1998). Among other things, this literature encompasses communication strategies and the action repertoire of news management as well as political system factors such as presidential versus parliamentary government and communication roles, and institutions of government news management. Pfetsch (1998: 82) observes:

The role interpretation of the press secretary, as well as the forum for informal and interpersonal exchanges between government spokespeople and the media, vary in each country. [...] Every government maintains a more or less political public relations apparatus that varies in the degree to which professional political marketing methods are used to further government policies.

In sum, government communication is characterised by, and can be conceptualised as: (1) the institutional and organisational structures; (2) the process; and (3) the managerial aspects. The last of these includes the role of staff, what they actually do and where the lines are drawn between government employees who are non-partisan versus partisan. The question arises if all these government communication institutions and practices are institutionalised to the extent that there is institutional stability. Amidst change, or what may seem to be dramatic or radical change, there may well be more continuity and stability (e.g., Bellamy & Taylor, 1998). In any event, government communication comes with professionalisation, a phenomenon discussed in greater depth below.

Professionalisation of government communication

Professionalisation is a distinctive feature of modern political communication, including government communication. Professionalisation denotes the social process whereby an occupation – such as in communication – transforms itself into a true profession and by which the qualified are demarcated from the unqualified. The term *professionalisation* also describes the development of a separate group of professionals with their own values and standards (Freidson, 2001).

Professionalisation is identified as one of the future challenges for government communication research (Canel & Sanders, 2013: 309, 2014: 101). In the words of Canel and Sanders (2016: 455):

The definition of what is understood by professionalism and professionalization of government communication is also a task that challenges both researchers and practitioners. For example, in countries such as Poland and Sweden, studies have shown that increasing resources and developing a strategic communication capacity is seen as a step forward in professionalization. In the United Kingdom and Australia, on the other hand, this trend has spurred controversies about governments using their resources to pursue partisan goals and employing “spin” to manipulate the public and the media.

These changes have a number of practical implications, including for the definition of the role of the public administration in government communication (Canel & Sanders, 2016: 455). As Canel and Sanders (2013: 309) note, professionalisation in the meaning of “more strategic and resourced government communication” entails the risk of more manipulative communication. They further note that, for better or worse, digital technology through various platforms is one of the key developments in government communication. Obviously, these technological innovations must be accounted for if we are to understand the role and practice of government communication as it operates today (Raupp et al., 2018).

In this chapter, we are mainly interested in the consequences of professionalisation in relation to centralising/decentralising effects. We focus on the relationship between professionalisation, involving professions and centralisation; that is, whether potential centralisation is driven by the evolution and possible institutionalisation of these professionals.

Communication professionals can be expected to establish their own professional knowledge and status, and they are not elected politicians but employed in the government offices to perform their communication duties. The Swedish case chapter includes references to research on so-called “policy professionals” in Sweden (Garsten et al., 2015; see also, for example, Svallfors, 2017). This broad category, to which press secretaries belong, consists of political employees who often have a background in party politics and PR/communication; they are not politicians and not elected to any office. According to this previous research, press secretaries shape the public statements of ministers and work both against and with the media and may punish or reward journalists for their work. For example, these professionals may develop their own professional values relating to communication. However, policy professionals may be a less homogeneous category than implied in previous research.

To reiterate, political actors have been forced to develop strategies of news management “that mainly are entrusted to spin doctors and media professionals. In the process, sources of political information have become more and more professionalized” (Mancini, 1999: 240). Research on professionalisation of political/governmental communication usually studies elections and not everyday relations, which should be subjected to closer scrutiny (Canel & Sanders, 2014: 103; Holtz-Bacha, 2016). However, in our view, such professional communicative activities and strategies are not easily separated. Resources of the executive may be used to win elections; especially as politics resembles a “permanent campaign” (Blumenthal, 1980). Pfetsch (1998: 70-71) observes “the professionalization of political public relations” and underlines the “permanent campaign” between elections. Pfetsch simultaneously notes that the “approach of governments to public information has changed from a rather traditional press release policy—based on interpersonal exchanges between politicians and journalists—to a professionalized and specialized process of strategic communication controlling the flow of news”.

An ongoing process of professionalisation may generate a tendency toward uniformity in staffing arrangements. In his research on prime minister-media relations,

Seymour-Ure (2000, 2003) observes an ongoing process of centralisation in executive systems partly driven by the institutionalisation of staff functions, notably the office of press secretary to premiers. This development impacts on both the job of the PM and the relationships between political and non-political staff. Specifically, it may disturb such long-established principles as civil service non-partisanship and ministerial responsibility by blurring ministerial and civil service roles. A downgrading of the traditional civil service style of departmental information work may also follow. And, most notably, this may produce increasing centralisation of government media management.

Research suggests that processes of professionalisation and institutionalisation of staff functions explain tendencies toward the centralisation of governmental communication (Papathanassopoulos et al., 2007; see also Sanders & Canel, 2013, further below). Papathanassopoulos and colleagues (2007: 18) summarise as follows:

All the chapters [including that on Sweden] have identified a process of centralisation, both within political parties but also in government, that has created a tight framework for the control and conduct of communication functions. In probably all cases, more care has been taken to deal with communication, and to reflect and alter the processes and content of communication to meet the challenges that have arisen from the changing nature of media, changing nature of government and the changing nature of the parties themselves.

The ongoing professionalisation contributes to the consolidation of a particular political communication culture. In the same vein, Pfetsch (2014: 8) presents evidence of professional cultures, not only of journalists but also of political actors and their spokespersons, and of the importance of the roles of political spokespersons in media-politics relationships. Here, we find a crucial connection with the media, which arguably facilitates centralisation within the executive. Intended or not, responding to media requires the executive centre to control information in more complex processes of steering or governance (e.g., Dahlström et al., 2011; Jacobsson et al., 2015).

Next, the chapter will provide an overview of previous empirical research.

Empirical studies of government communication

Government communication has not just been undertheorised. Excluding literature on governments more generally, spin-doctoring more specifically and presidential communication in the United States, empirical studies of government communication are limited.

The volume edited by Sanders and Canel (2013), *Government Communication*, which includes 15 countries around the world, from Europe, among them Poland and Sweden, to countries as far afield as Chile, Australia and China, is the most comprehensive comparison. Summarising the country studies, Sanders and Canel (2013: 290-291) conclude (with particular attention to organisational structure):

As communication channels and objectives have become more complex, including – for example – the development of social media and citizen engagement goals, so governments’ organizational structure has become more specialized in a number of countries. [---] The units tend to be centrally located within government with communicators assigned specific tasks...

In almost all cases, the creation of centralised units shows some development of strategic capacity (Sanders & Canel, 2013: 299). Likewise, one common theme was the rising number of those employed in communication tasks by governments across the world, including in central executive government communication (Sanders & Canel, 2013: 303-304). Examining the broader picture, Sanders and Canel (2013: 309) conclude:

A common trend in all countries is a move towards giving more relevance and importance to communication in terms of capacity – structures, processes and knowledge. Practically every author charts a significant shift of institutional and human resources into government communication although, in several countries, the 2008 economic crisis has prompted budget and staff cuts.

As for non-partisanship, where communication is understood as being directed to serve the public rather than the political party in power, Sanders and Canel (2013: 302) report that “non-partisanship of government communication receives the most comprehensive underpinning in Sweden, Germany and the United Kingdom”. They further note that these countries “have developed extensive policy and/or guidance regarding the requirement for non-partisanship in government communication” (op. cit.). One indicator here is political appointments and the role of government spokespersons, with significant variation between the countries. Whereas this has not been the traditional practice in Sweden, it is fixed in Poland, which is among the countries where both political appointees and civil servants serve as government spokespersons (see more below and in Chapter 4 of this volume).

With regard to Sweden, Sanders and Canel (2013: 306) argue that “it has not developed a high strategic capacity: The changes reported by Falasca and Nord have produced a government communication structure that is flat, decentralized and rather fragmented”. Arguably, this was and remains an underestimation, both of the state-centredness of Swedish political culture and of the centralisation and coordination of the government communication structure (see more below and in Chapter 5 of this volume). However, Falasca and Nord (2013: 42) observe the introduction of new functions and departments “to improve coordination and efficiency of communication activities”. Significantly, the recent changes they observe suggest that government communication is becoming “more politicized”, used in part to promote political parties in government to facilitate their electoral success. Falasca and Nord (2013: 40) conclude that “government communication in Sweden has become professionalized to a considerable extent due to the expansion of the communication organization and the number of communication professionals as well as to the new emphasis on communication practices and strategies”.

Observing the rapid development of communication capacities in all parts of government organisation since the 1990s, Falasca and Nord (2013: 41) see this development from different perspectives:

either as a natural reflection of the increased information demands from the media and the public, or as an independent expansion of capacities in order to maintain influence in the public debate and keep the initiative in the political agenda-setting process. Perhaps, the most accurate way to explain this development is as arising out of a combination of both external and internal driving forces.

Yet, Falasca and Nord (2013: 41) conclude that, in the Swedish case, “the organization of government communication and its strategies is still rather fragmented. It is difficult to coordinate a unified communication strategy for the different ministries and departments as well as between politically employed and civil servant communicators”. They further note that more research is required in order to conclude how government communication in Sweden has gained strategic capacity.

In the chapter on Poland, Anaszewicz and Dobek-Ostrowska (2013: 161) observe that the government spokesperson “has a leading and coordinating role in the field of government communication, although there is no subordination between the government spokesperson and other spokespersons in ministries and other offices. The lack of subordination can cause some difficulties of coordination ...” Anaszewicz and Dobek-Ostrowska (2013: 167) conclude that “there is absence of both central management in government communication as well as clear structures and managerial rules for this communication”. As we discuss further below, there is a clear tendency in Poland towards decentralisation.

Other recent empirical literature includes works demonstrating how mediated communication practices and logics influence the behaviour of political bodies, for example central governmental organisations. Denmark reveals a “functional politicization”, reflecting “the involvement of civil servants in communicating and planning strategic external communication for pure political purposes related to their minister’s role as minister and being part of a government” (Salomonsen et al., 2016: 210). Likewise, the Norwegian experience shows blurred lines between politics and administration in communication. Figenschou and colleagues (2017: 411) “find that ministerial communication in Norway is strongly centred on the minister in both reactive media management and the proactive promotion of the minister and new policies”. Again, the divide between politically appointed staff and communication experts who are civil servants and subjected to rules regarding non-partisanship is not clear cut. The authors further underline the evolution and effect of the professionalisation of government communication.

Having set out the theoretical and empirical underpinnings, we will now turn to our comparative cases and analysis.

Comparing Finland and Sweden

We now test our hypothesis about centralisation in government communication: are Finland and Sweden following what appears to be a general trend of centralisation in the communication of governments?

Evidence from Finland

The Finnish case study (see Chapter 2) draws on 21 in-depth interviews with political journalists from all major media (n=12), civil servants at the PMO who either work primarily on communications matters or supervise such efforts as senior-level civil servants (n=5) and political advisors who have worked for recent prime ministers (n=4). The study also draws on a variety of governmental documents about communication structures and strategies. It establishes a relatively clear trend towards centralisation of government communications to the PMO. Moreover, it underlines the central role of party-political advisors at the PMO, while the civil servant media staff there seek to maintain a neutral position.

As a result of constitutional changes enacted since the late 1980s, the government has emerged from the shadow of the president as the main executive. The PM is the political leader of the country, making the way in which the government and the PM handle their communications more important than under the old constitution. Moreover, it is necessary to remember that Finland is typically governed by ideologically heterogeneous multi-party coalitions that often bring together parties from the left and the right (Karvonen, 2014; Karvonen et al., 2016). This should also create pressure towards more centralised coordination, as otherwise potentially contradictory messages from the line ministries or the junior cabinet parties might jeopardise government decision-making.

To begin with, we distinguish between political communication and civil servant communication. This is directly relevant in terms of our centralisation hypothesis as the increasing role of party-political assistants signals the attempt to control information flows and media relations from the centre (the PMO). The former refers to the immediate political staff of the PM and ministers, i.e. the special advisors, including political assistants or political advisors. The latter refers to the civil servant communications staff of the PMO, called the “government communications department” (GCD), and other ministries’ communications departments. The political advisors normally come and go with each minister, whereas the civil servants are bureaucrats who often spend their entire careers in the same ministry. While the number of party-political ministerial assistants has increased quite considerably, it is still rare for a minister to have an assistant that only deals with press matters. Instead, the assistants have broad duties, including acting as policy advisors. We refer to these actors as *political advisors*.³

Journalists see the role of political advisors as much more important than the role of civil servants. In the case of the PM, his chief advisor is the main channel through

which he can be reached when direct access is not possible. In contrast, the GCD is seen as having an almost “ceremonial role” in handling official government communications. One advisor’s account of their role is very telling of the position of advisors in terms of power: “We, the political advisors, function as a filter between the PM and the GCD.” However, according to both civil servants and political advisors, the main ministers (i.e. the leaders of cabinet parties) have the last say on communication strategies. As a rule of thumb, the more salient the issue, the more coordination there is with regards to communication. The GCD can participate in planning and might make recommendations, but the politicians and their advisors decide on the political substance, and to some extent on the timing.

Clear, although not very strong, signs of centralisation of communications under the PM and his office emerge in the interviews. First, journalists do not regard the other ministries or ministers as that important to follow. This also manifests itself in a tendency of the journalists to focus on the political advisors even more in the case of the other ministries. Some journalists described a hierarchy of importance: after the PMO comes the ministry of finance, then perhaps ministries of foreign affairs or defence – and after those, all the rest. Thus, as a whole, the civil servant communication staffs of the line ministries are the least important actors in the whole communications scheme.

Civil servants and political advisors provided a very coherent account of the division of labour between the PMO and the ministries. The GCD is responsible for the PM’s communications and governmental communications as a whole, while the communication departments of the line ministries handle their own ministry’s/minister’s communications – much of which consists of communications about decisions taken by the respective ministers. In addition, the GCD is responsible for all the main government press conferences that are held in the PMO’s conference room. In essence, the more important matters are handled by the PMO/GCD, whereas communications regarding more day-to-day policy-specific issues are dealt with by the ministries.

However, when specifically asked about centralisation, the verdict seems somewhat divided. Some agreed that centralisation has occurred, particularly through the strategic management doctrines discussed below. Others regarded the system as quite decentralised: the ministries do produce a lot of communications of their own, and numerically speaking, they also have most of the government media staff. As one interviewed journalist put it: “It is becoming more and more ... like the PMO’s communications are the most important, and the [other] ministries are a bit subordinate. They have reorganised communications, you know.” On the other hand, a civil servant argued that “[c]entralisation has not occurred so far. Only when there are horizontal and important matters should they be labelled as strategic and shared. Thus, they can be centralised”. Referring to the Sipilä cabinet appointed after the 2015 elections, one interviewee pointed out that:

the ministers said from the get-go that they wanted to assemble communications resources together, even to the extent of appointing political communication people

– that is, “model Sweden”. [...] We have had a lot of talk about if we should have fewer civil servant media staff and more in the ministers’ staffs ... you could say, communication professionals.

One of the interviewed political advisors also saw increasing pressures towards centralisation:

There has been an attempt to condense it, but, in my opinion, there is much work to do in this regard. Sometimes there was an idea that maybe there could be only one communications department, or pool, in the PMO, from which communications staff would be attributed to the ministries. To sort of... disband the ministries’ own CDs. Well, this was not done in the state administration reform [*valtionhallinnon uudistus*] for some reason, but... gradually it will change. At the moment, the ministries have good resources to do things.

Nonetheless, some kind of balance must be maintained between central control and delegation as everything cannot, or should not, be done by the PMO. As one respondent said, “the ship is just too big for that”.

When interpreting the findings, we must exercise caution. After all, while we asked our interviewees to reflect on developments over time (recent decades), we have no longitudinal interview data. Nonetheless, the trend towards more centralised government communication is clear, although it is not as strong as in Sweden (see below). Any causal mechanisms must also be approached with care, but three mutually enforcing explanations for the observed tendency deserve attention. Firstly, inside the government, the role of the PMO has overall become considerably stronger in recent decades. The PM has become the political leader of the country, including in European Union (EU) affairs and in foreign and security policy, which is co-directed between the president and the government. As a result, the staff and overall resources of the PMO have grown significantly. Secondly, as mentioned above, a typical Finnish cabinet is a surplus coalition bringing together parties from the left and the right. Hence, centralising communication more to the PMO appears logical if the goal is to ensure that the government speaks with one voice. Thirdly, the interviewed civil servants saw that the strategical management thinking in recent governments facilitated centralisation to the PMO. The cabinets appointed since the turn of the millennium have invested resources in improving coordination and strategic planning inside the entire executive branch, for example through various intersectoral policy programmes and government strategy documents (Kekkonen & Raunio, 2011). Obviously, this provides a further incentive for centralising government communications to the PMO.⁴ In sum, the case of Finland offers support for the centralisation hypothesis.

Evidence from Sweden

The Swedish case study – presented in Chapter 5 – builds mainly on interviews with journalists (n=10) and government press secretaries (n=11), complemented

by documentary evidence. This case study also identifies a trend of centralisation in government communication. It empirically documents major changes in the system of government communication and some of the important transitions in political/governmental communication that have taken place. In brief, professionalisation and increased resources dedicated to government communication make news management more efficient and have centralising effects on executive systems, strengthening the executive centre.

Step by step, the government has taken control of at least parts of the media coverage, as epitomised by the news management in relation to the presentation of the state budget. As one senior reporter said, “you are in their hands”. According to the experienced journalists who were interviewed, this is a typical example of how increased resources in government administration and stronger efforts to control the political news agenda are visible on a day-to-day basis. This change was also confirmed by the press secretaries in their descriptions of their work.

In the Swedish country chapter, government communication is characterised as strong. A measure of this is the extent to which resources for this purpose have increased, both in terms of funding and staffing. The resources allocated for government communication have grown significantly over the past 50 years.

As in Finland, and elsewhere, there is a divide between the party-political advisors, in this case the press secretaries in particular, and non-partisan civil servants or officials. In addition to the politically recruited press secretaries, there are the press assistants, press coordinators and press communicators, who are officially non-partisan but work closely with the press secretaries.

Another measure concerns the structure of government communication, i.e. its elements and organisation at different levels. More specifically, the structure of information or communication management within the government – how different parts of the government are coordinating their communication efforts. As shown in Table 5.2 in the chapter about Sweden, the system of government communication in Sweden has undergone a series of major changes over time, strengthening the centre. Over the past three decades, prime ministers have brought a shift to a more centralised structure for press/media coordination. The Social Democratic-Green government that came to office in 2014 further strengthened the government communication machinery through centralisation to the PMO; all press secretaries became employed by the PMO (and not by specific line ministries) and daily (morning press) meetings were introduced that were led by the chief press officer at the PMO. Communication has been coordinated to maximise the attention for the issues the government wants to promote. The unit for media coordination located at the PMO has been upgraded by a strengthened position for the chief press officer.

There are four press secretaries to the PM. Two of them do regular press secretary work. One works mainly with social media. One works with communication matters relating to the EU and foreign policy, including incoming international visits. There is also a press assistant alongside the chief press officer and the deputy chief

press officer. Moreover, there is the deputy chief press officer for the Green Party and a press secretary for the (Social Democratic) minister for policy coordination and energy. Both of them are based at the PMO. Further epitomising the strengthening of the centre, a new position was established in 2017: media strategist to the PM, a position at the level of political advisor with responsibility for the government's long-term and strategic communication. The person who currently holds this position, a former press secretary, works closely with the chief press officer and deputy chief press officer and also serves as a backup (for press secretaries) if needed – notably at the EU Social Summit in Gothenburg on 17 November 2017. In addition to the press contact function, the PMO also handles media logistics. This is one example of how chief executives through summitry have added an additional functional demand for staff handling media relations.

In all, there is more central coordination, planning and steering than before. What follows is a clear tendency towards centralisation of government communication as indicated in the interviews. In terms of the government communication process, it is evident from interviews that the job of these staff is to promote or hinder the publication of information and use communication channels to the greatest effect.

The work of the unit that provides strategic and operative support for the head of communication at the government offices (GOs) as well as technical and practical support (RK Kommunikation) is based on the document “Communication policy for the government offices”. This policy regulates the internal and external communication and is the basis for communication activities (Government offices of Sweden, 2012; it is issued by the office of the permanent secretary, which belongs to the PMO). As noted in Chapter 5, only a few of our source-side interviewees were aware of this document and nobody seemed to have read it. The interpretation is that this is primarily a document for communicators who are not political appointees. In brief, it is striking how little formalisation there is in the form of written documents on communication. The policy document describes the division of responsibilities for communication activities in the GO and the prerequisite of coordination for “good communication”. The “ultimate responsibility” for the coordination of both internal and external communication lies with the PMO. Another sign of centralisation, at least potentially, is the policy document regulating how ministers should act in social media; that is, a kind of social media communications policy (Government offices of Sweden, 2016; it is issued by the Office for administrative affairs, to which the GO communications department belongs. It also serves as the communications function of the PMO).

Another development pertains to the more public role of press secretaries. Despite the traditional norm that solely the PM and ministers should speak to media, their press secretaries increasingly appear as spokespersons. This is one difference between the cases of Finland and Sweden. Otherwise, these two cases broadly follow the same pattern of centralisation to the PMO. This pattern strongly underlines the structural rather than conditional nature of central executive communication. Therefore, this pattern can be expected to last.

The research data demonstrate that there is an ongoing professionalisation of political/government communication in Sweden. Both journalists and press secretaries described increasing resources on the political side – more coordination, more press secretaries and more active work from sources to influence news reporting. Over time, the system has changed fundamentally in terms of accessibility and management. According to the experienced journalists, there is more control of information by press secretaries. A journalist with 20 years of experience in public service explained how press secretaries are being more active in limiting the possibilities of direct contact with politicians – “they are a filter all the time ... not only in contact with the government, but also with members of parliament”. All the experienced journalists confirmed this picture of increased information management.

Also, among the press secretaries themselves, it was suggested that the expansion in their numbers along with other communication staff reflected “a kind of increased professionalisation not to give a messy impression”. One press secretary emphasised the increased speed in media coverage as another explanation for more resources on communication and more coordination within the government: “Everything is much faster... when something is written on Twitter, it can be a news article.” All press secretaries are formally employed by the PMO, and coordination is strong with daily meetings. One of the present press secretaries explained:

It is a result of the spirit of the times and the demands for better control of what different parts are doing. In more intense media coverage, we need to have better control over what we are sending out ... Just basic things as ministers not having press conferences at the same time, releasing news that competes with each other ... We have a never-ending, 24-hour news cycle – everything at a crazy speed.

Journalists and press secretaries gave the same general picture of an increased level of planned communication in the government. There are many reasons for this, some political while others are connected to media development. Among the political reasons are a greater need for coordination in coalition governments and increased awareness of the role of communication in politics.

Senior journalists with 20-25 years of experience talked about press advisors as being more active and more controlling, and often present in interviews with ministers. Some ministers have press advisors by their side in all kinds of communication. One senior journalist said that the press secretary, together with the state secretary, is the minister’s most important co-worker. Another journalist said that some press secretaries are more like gatekeepers: “They see their work as protecting the minister.” Other journalists shared this impression.

Professionalisation of government communication is very much about the control of information flows from the government and leading political parties. The press secretaries work constantly to promote good news to journalists and newsrooms and to avoid spreading bad news. They do that through the control of information and also, in some cases, through negotiations with journalists. This corresponds with the

government communication processes introduced in the previous section and attests to the essentially political nature of their work.

In summary, there are clear signs of professionalisation of government communication and functional pressures for the government to be as well coordinated as possible and be able to assert itself vis-à-vis the media and public – “to speak with one voice”, instead of speaking with conflicting/different voices. Put differently, a coherent approach requires centralised media/news management and resources, simply “not to give a messy impression”, as one interviewee put it (see above). More broadly, and cynically perhaps, this is a way of sustaining the image of the state/government as coordinated, coherent and controlled (Jacobsson et al., 2015: 38). In any event, Sweden is a case in point of growing resources put into government communication, a paradigmatic example of professionalised and centralised strategic communication, of central control and coordination. In sum, the case of Sweden offers support for the centralisation hypothesis.

Illustrative evidence from Lithuania and Poland

Lithuania

The Lithuanian case (Chapter 3 by Auksė Balčytienė & Milda Mallings), drawing on 20 interviews, demonstrates national specificities and trends pertaining to government communication, its structures and development based on the broader political communication system and culture. In brief, Lithuanian political culture is individualistic and personalised. Lithuania has a semi-presidential, dual executive structure. The president and the prime minister share power. While the president has substantial constitutional prerogatives, the prime minister has a very strong position as the head of the government.

According to interviewees, attempts to centralise (or decentralise) the government's communication efforts depended on the preferences of the specific government and its constellation. During the period of our research (2014-2016), the structure of government communication was decentralised. Different ministries could make their own decisions regarding communication and coordination from the PMO was not strong. The PM's communication team organised a weekly meeting with the press at which the government's press office delivered the most important news. This way, those issues could potentially receive more media attention.

Coordination of government communication can be organised for specific issues, such as, for example, the refugee crisis, where several ministries coordinated their communication on a regular basis in order to provide a coherent message. In general, however, a lack of coordination is the biggest shortcoming in the government's communication. The interviewed press advisors, but also the journalists, noticed that the functions allocated to the press advisors or communication departments are very much person dependent, which means that different ministers organised the work

of their communication departments differently. There were few written strategies or documents that were actually used when planning government communication, and the ones that existed were treated more as formalities.

In conclusion, cultural legacies continue to define power structures in Lithuania. Overall, Lithuania exhibits quite weakly institutionalised government communication. Government communication is mainly issue based where ministries are in charge of their own communication and coordination between ministries is rather limited.

Poland

Poland (Chapter 4 by Bogusława Dobek-Ostrowska & Jacek Nożewski) reveals a similar pattern. As with Lithuania, the Polish case must be understood in its post-communist and specific political setting (Anaszewicz & Dobek-Ostrowska, 2013). In essence, the Polish government communication system is similarly decentralised and fragmented.

Drawing on 23 interviews, the country experts note that government communication in Poland is based mainly on cooperation between a spokesperson for the PM and a spokesperson for a particular ministry. Government communication is thus professional inasmuch as the activities of particular spokespersons are supported by the government information centre and coordinated by the PM's spokesperson. However, the structure of communication is decentralised and press secretaries of ministries are free to present and communicate information in consultation with the minister without any real control by the PMO. Many decisions are made in accordance with guidelines from the party/government. Journalists perceive press secretaries as shields for politicians in press-politics relations.

Civil servants do not have an independent position, and there is a process of politicisation of communication staff. A significant number of spokespersons are members of political parties, and they speak in the name of the ruling party and their leaders. The PM plays the main role in the government communication process; political advisors are located just below and civil servants come last. At the same time, for the first time since the collapse of communism in 1989, the leader of the ruling Law and Justice Party, Jarosław Kaczyński, has no official position as the president or prime minister. However, he plays a fundamental role in politics and, in fact, decides on government policy. All official state functionaries are in his shadow. Notwithstanding the recent dramatic changes in Poland, including in its media system, there is nonetheless considerable stability at the intersection of the media and everyday politics. One explanation for this might be that existing journalist-source relations have developed over time and remain stable despite the political change.

In conclusion, the analysis of government communication in Poland shows that a key characteristic of the system is fragmentation or decentralisation, which makes it difficult for the executive to maintain a centralised managerial approach.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have established that centralisation in government communication is the predominant observable pattern in Finland and Sweden, relatively more so in Sweden and less so in Lithuania and Poland. The results show that we have discovered some patterned variation. Finland and Sweden offer support for the centralisation hypothesis, while Lithuania and Poland point out the limitations of the centralisation hypothesis.

In their analysis of media and politics in Sweden, Strömbäck and Nord (2008: 119) found “no reason to expect the Swedish political communication system to change dramatically”. However, the changes or transitions in political/government communication that have taken place are more fundamental than recognised in previous research. Notably, a more central or strategic coordination approach has emerged over time. This supports the centralisation hypothesis and the presence of a functionalist logic. The media generates functional pressures for the centralisation of government news management. Amidst the increasing fragmentation of the media landscape, we have identified a clear trend of centralisation in the political executive, particularly in Sweden but in Finland as well.

In conclusion, empirical evidence on the development of government communication in both Nordic countries paints a relatively homogeneous picture. The trend in Finland and Sweden is clear: Centralisation, with PMOs to an increasing extent being responsible for government communication while the role of media/political advisors has grown at the expense of civil servants. By way of comparison, the Lithuanian and Polish systems can be described as relatively fragmented with relatively thin coordination and strategising from the centre. Lithuania and Poland exhibit decentralised government communication systems, where ministries are more independent in their communication. Hence, there are close resemblances between the Lithuanian and Polish systems with respect to how their government communication structures and practices have evolved. Their experience illustrates another insight into government communication: the limits of central control and of hierarchy of roles (Graber, 2003: 58). Moreover, decentralised communication can also be professional, provided that the decentralised approach is intentional and coordinated from the centre. In our view, such coordination is not really happening in Lithuania and Poland.

While the extent of centralisation clearly varies among our cases, we have identified a general move towards a stronger executive centre – a trend that is very likely to continue. As outlined in the introductory section of this chapter, political scientists have uncovered a trend towards empowerment of prime ministers. Also, public administration scholars have argued that there is a strengthening – via an increased capacity to coordinate and control policy – of the prime minister’s office at the heart of government (e.g., Dahlström et al., 2011; Kolltveit, 2015). As a result, the centralisation of government communication should be understood in the context of broader empowerment of prime ministers and their offices. Furthermore, govern-

ments throughout the world feel increasing pressures to centralise as they face the challenge of “speaking with one voice”. Here, the fragmentation of party systems, including the rise of populist or nationalist parties, and the ensuing need to build often quite ideologically heterogeneous coalition cabinets contributes to centralisation of communication. Other plausible driving factors are fake news and threats associated with information leaks. This chapter joins other recent contributions in showing the tendencies towards central control of government communication (e.g., Downer, 2015; Marland et al., 2017; Peters, 2016). At the same time, our findings suggest that existing research, which is heavily focused on Western states, underestimates cross-national variation in government communication.

Notes

1. In this chapter we use the terms “head of government”, “premier”, “prime minister” and “chief executive” interchangeably. We also use the terms “press secretary”, “media/press advisor” and “political advisor” interchangeably. They are politically appointed. In Finland, there are not any specific “media advisors” (in the PMO or line ministries) – instead, they are political advisors that also deal with media and carry out communication duties.
2. For an overview, from a leadership perspective, see Cohen (2014). Key works include Grossman and Kumar (1981), Maltese (1994) and Kumar (2010).
3. See Chapter 2 and Figure 2.1 therein for a more detailed account of the structure of government communications in Finland.
4. As also became evident in the interviews, the current government led by Sipilä is probably the most interdisciplinary of all Finnish cabinets, with a large number of horizontal projects, meaning that the GCD has more coordination duties than before.

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Chapter 7

Social media in political communication

A substitute for conventional media?

Elena Johansson

Abstract

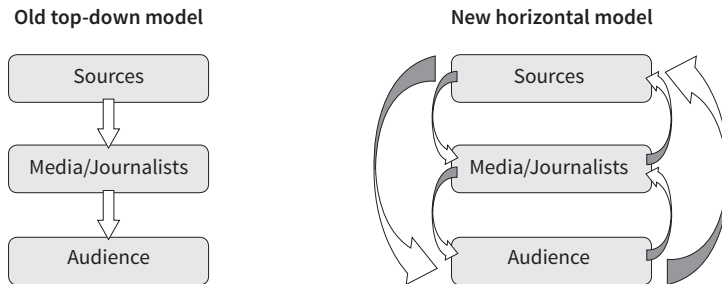
Technological development has led to the emergence of newer media channels, and traditional media logic has been amplified with network and social media logic. These changes have influenced political communication, not the least by producing a shift from top-down communication patterns toward horizontal and interactive ones. This chapter looks at models of government communication on Facebook and Twitter in Finland, Poland, and Sweden. The results show that ministers in the three countries of the study use Facebook and Twitter differently, but that some general trends are similar across national contexts. The public pages of Facebook serve as top-down channels for personal branding and bypassing conventional media, while Twitter provides informational exchange with professional elites. In general, the model of government communication combines features of traditional and new media practices and follows a *mixed logic*: media logic and network/social media logics. According to the results, press secretaries and press assistants could play the role of gatekeeper in this communication.

Keywords: strategies of communication, government communication, political communication, social media, government ministers

Introduction

Since the beginning of the 1990s, communicational processes have undergone significant transformation. Rapid technological development has drastically changed the media world and brought communicative technologies into a new, digital era. After World War II, the main channel for political communication was the press, and television served as the prime medium for a long time, up until the digital revolution. Both the press and TV represented a top-down model of communication, where journalists played the role of mediators between political sources and the audience and controlled or at least influenced the process of communication. In the past two decades, so-called “new media” has become widespread across the globe, replacing the old order and introducing a more horizontal model of communication. The transformation has implications for political communication, specifically by resulting in disintermediation

Johansson, Elena (2019). Social media in political communication: A substitute for conventional media? in Karl Magnus Johansson & Gunnar Nygren (eds.) *Close and distant: Political executive-media relations in four countries*, pp. 149-174. Göteborg: Nordicom.

Figure 7.1 Models of mediated communication

– a reduction of the role of journalism in mediating the relationship between citizens and politicians (McQuail, 2010). Figure 7.1 depicts these two contrasting models of mediated communication.

The transformed nature of communication has reshaped the media system as well. As new media forms and channels of communication have arisen, their popularity has increased and they have become an equal and important element in the media system. At the same time, older or traditional media develop their channels of delivery and hone their practices to hold onto audiences. Chadwick (2013: 4) suggests the concept of a modern *hybrid media system* to describe this development, implying that new (or perhaps more appropriately, newer) and old (older) media forms and logics interact, compete, and mingle with each other, resulting in a process of simultaneous integration and fragmentation. This hybridisation shapes power relations among actors and ultimately affects the flows and meanings of news (Chadwick, 2013: 63).

Political and government communication is generally understood as a set of activities directed to the public that fulfil political and civil purposes. This type of communication is usually realised by executive politicians and officials in a *managed way* to provide information, explain and promote public policy, build a reputation, maintain social links, and so on.

One of the most prominent trends in political and government communication in recent decades is increased professionalisation. In the context of political, and more specifically, government communication, professionalisation can be understood as the creation of more relevant organisational structures and practices to use media skilfully, apply campaigning techniques more effectively, provide better management in media-politics relations, and increase centralisation in the coordination of publicity measures (Negrine et al., 2007: 11). Political professionalism suggests an employment of technical experts who sell their services in the open market (Mancini, 1999: 243).

Under conditions of permanent media tumult, increased Internet connectivity, transparency, and interactivity, continuous control of communications channels has become a key element in governance. As a result, Marland and colleagues (2017: 125, 130) point to an increasing centralisation of government communication in the age

of social media. For example, political elites use a specific branding strategy in their media coverage and messengers, enforcing “conformity within the organization and projecting a cohesive outward-facing image” (Marland et al., 2017: 126). According to the authors, the strategy is characterised by central control, a marketing ethos, a master brand, communications cohesiveness, and message simplicity.

In sum, newer media forms presuppose interactive and personal models of communication. It is not necessary anymore to be engaged with traditional media or organise face-to-face meetings to reach the public. This advantage provides plenty of opportunities to produce one’s own media content and bypass conventional media, but it is also a challenge because it requires certain skills, both technical and other. The government elites try to elaborate specific communicative strategies in the social media. They are adopting traditional media practices (*normalisation*) but are at the same time looking for new modified media practices. The professionalisation of political communication and centralisation of government communication give press officers an increasingly important role in the relationships among politicians, journalists, and the public and in social media.

Facebook vs. Twitter?

A number of studies on social media in political communication focus on election campaigning. Studies of political actors’ social media practices in general are rarer, particularly ones taking a comparative perspective. This is surprising as the country-specific aspects of the political system, sociocultural traditions, and general social media adoptive patterns are likely to play a significant role in social media use (Keller & Kleinen-von Königsłow, 2018).

Similarly, a comparably small amount of research has focused on the role of press staffers in online political communication despite the fact that political communication in the digital age appears to be increasingly strategic and professionalised. One example is Johansson and Nożewski (2018) examining journalist-political source relations in Swedish and Polish Twitter networks and the role of press secretaries in this communication. According to the findings, Swedish stakeholders are better interconnected in Twitter; there are more ties between them and more opportunities to spread information through the platform. Swedish press secretaries form two clear network communities: one with ministers and one with journalists. Polish press secretaries, on the other hand, with the exception of the state minister’s press secretary, are marginalised and much closer to the ministers than to journalists. As a result, Swedish journalists and Polish political sources possess more “communicative capability” or “accumulated communicative resources” than Polish press secretaries and have greater chances to act as gatekeepers in Twitter networks.

Another limitation in the existing literature is that researchers often concentrate on a single, isolated social media platform and try to infer their findings from one

platform (overwhelmingly Twitter, rarely Facebook) to social media as a whole. However, Twitter and Facebook have different audiences and different styles of interaction: Facebook interactions are passive, less frequent, longer, and not as time-sensitive as Twitter tweets. Twitter is more dynamic and mobile, with interactions “centered on topics in the here and now” (Quinlan et al., 2017).

Before 2007, the “personal profiles” format was dominant on Facebook. Personal profiles can be *open* (where all users despite their relationship with the profile owner are able to access all information and also comment on status updates) as well as *closed* (restricted or unavailable for non-friends) or *semi-open* (non-friends can see but not comment on status updates). The restricted data access this entails makes both communication and research difficult. This is one of the main reasons why researchers have mainly preferred Twitter. As a platform, Twitter is open by default; it only has personal profiles and its networks do not require reciprocity.

However, in 2007, Facebook launched the format “public profile” or “public pages”. The main advantage of these is that the number of followers, or users, who are subscribed to the page, and fans, users who *like* the page, is unlimited (personal profiles may have an unlimited number of followers, but only 5,000 friends). In addition, connections with followers via personal profiles are one-directional – only friends can have a reciprocal connection. In contrast, the information on public pages is open for all users, and everybody can engage in a conversation with the page creator by posting comments to status updates. The public pages format on Facebook offers new possibilities. Originally intended for businesses and advertising, the format quickly obtained popularity among celebrities, public figures, politicians, and professionals.

This study addresses the gaps in the knowledge regarding the usage of Facebook public pages and Twitter personal profiles, making a clear distinction between the platforms. The research questions seek to understand how Polish, Finnish, and Swedish political executives shape their communication on Facebook and Twitter between elections. The questions read as follows:

RQ1: Do Polish, Finnish, and Swedish political executives communicate in similar ways on social media platforms Facebook and Twitter or not, and are there country-specific differences?

RQ2: What role does press staff play in this communication?

Through quantitative and qualitative approaches, this study will contribute with insights into how ministers exercise externally directed communication in the digital media environment. This issue is especially interesting with regard to the non-election working routine, as the majority of studies in this area are devoted to social media activities during election campaigns (Stier et al., 2018).

New media – New model of communication

New forms of communication, organised around the Internet and horizontal digital communication networks, are defined by Castells (2011: 779) as *mass self-communication*, connoting a self-generated, self-directed, and self-selected communication model positioned in between interpersonal and traditional mass communication. One of the key distinctive characteristics is new forms of interactivity. Traditionally, interaction in the communicative process took one of three forms: *face-to-face interaction*, *mediated interaction*, and *mediated quasi-interaction* (Thompson, 1995: 82). This list has now been updated to include *computer-mediated human interaction*, a form that prolongs “interaction between two or more people through the channel of a computer network” (Stromer-Galley, 2000: 117). According to this approach, communication can be interactive if it has a high degree of responsiveness and reflexivity. Jensen (1998: 201) defines interactivity as “a measure of a media’s potential ability to let the user exert an influence on the content and/or form of the mediated communication”.

Based on McQuail’s classical model of communication, Jensen (1998) distinguishes between one-way communication modes – *transmissional* and *consultational* – and two-way communication modes – *registrational* and *conversational*. Adding to this understanding, McMillan (2002) suggests a model of *cyber-interactivity*. Cyber-interactivity has two forms of one-way communication – monologue and feedback – and two forms of two-way communication – responsive dialogue and mutual discourse.

Communication in social media can take a number of different modes. Larsson (2015: 1) categorises the various forms of communication as *broadcasting*, *redistributing*, *interacting*, and *acknowledging*. Facebook and Twitter differ in their technical infrastructure, terminology, appearance, and end-user details. However, the users of Facebook and Twitter face similar options for usage and similarities in the modes of communication. Because social media platforms are constantly evolving and new func-

Figure 7.2 Modes of communication on Facebook and Twitter and interactivity patterns

	Twitter	Facebook	Cyber-interactivity patterns
Broadcasting	Tweet	Post	One-way communication (monologue and feedback)
Redistributing	Retweet	Share	
Interacting	Mentions, @reply (Direct message)	Comment (Chat (in Messenger*) Reply*	Two-way communication (responsive dialogue and mutual discourse)
Acknowledging	Favourite Like *	Like React*	Two-way communication (but neither responsive dialogue nor mutual discourse)

Source: Based on McMillan (2002) and Larsson (2015) (*extended by author).

tions frequently appear, I suggest developing Larsson's approach. This is done in Figure 7.2. By applying McMillan's approach to Larsson's concept we see the various combinations of communication patterns available on social media platforms. *Broadcasting* and *redistributing* are mostly associated with one-way communication patterns, while *interacting* is rather related to two-way communication. *Acknowledging* could formally refer to the two-way pattern, but this type of interaction does not necessarily mean a dialogue or a mutual discourse.

New media – New logics

Mass media logic

Mass media logic is one of the most prominent concepts in political communication, usually related to the production of media content and the field of media effects. The starting point in the definition of media logic is the formats in which the media produces content and constructs messages (Altheide & Snow, 1979), referring to rules and methods for defining, selecting, and presenting media content. Broadly used, especially in the context of mediatisation (e.g., Asp 1990; Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999; Strömbäck, 2008), however, this concept is often criticised for abstractedness, lack of analyticity, confluence with more established journalistic practices and, finally, its inability to be applied in conditions of new media reality where journalists failed in their traditional monopoly of the selection, production, and definition of news (Brants & Van Praag, 2015. See also Figure 7.1).

Social media logic

The Internet is unique in that it embraces many different media formats and producers of media content, including non-professional ones. As a result, the internet is not guided by any one logic but includes many, competing logics (Chadwick, 2013). To capture this, Van Dijck and Poell (2013: 5) suggest using the concept *social media logic* connoting a set of processes, principles, and practices through which new media platforms “process information, news, and communication, and more generally, how they channel social traffic”. Social media logic and mass media logic are hence two distinct sets of strategies and tactics that have different technological and economic origins. These two logics, however, coexist and mix with each other in modern communication processes.

According to Van Dijck and Poell (2013), social media logic includes four basic elements: *popularity*, *connectivity*, *datafication*, and *programmability*. *Popularity* is rooted in the mass media logic mechanism for pushing “likeable” people to become media personalities. Online *popularity* is based on “most likeable” content. *Connectivity* is linked to the mutual shaping of users, platforms, and advertisers and is related to the formation of groups and communities. *Datafication* refers to the ability of networked platforms to render information into quantified data, for example customers' demographic or profiling data, GPS-inferred locations, *likes*, *shares*, and so on that can be

“datafied” via social media. Finally, *programmability* refers to a process when users “post content and steer information streams, while the sites’ owners may tweak their platforms’ algorithms and interfaces to influence data traffic” (Van Dijck & Poell, 2013: 22). This factor can significantly influence the ability to provide a network gatekeeping function. Elements of the social media logic are inherent to communication and information processes in modern social life and play a crucial role in the shaping of social traffic, public opinion, and political communication.

Network media logic

Klinger and Svensson (2016) introduce the concept of *network media logic*. This concept is based on a comparison of mass media logic and network media logic within three dimensions: *production*, *distribution*, and *media use*. Each dimension is considered through three perspectives: *ideal*, *commercial imperatives*, and *technology*. To some extent, Klinger and Svensson’s approach overlaps and extends the concept of social media logic suggested by Van Dijck and Poell (2013).

Figure 7.3 Dimensions of media logics

	Mass media logic	Network media logic
<i>Production</i>		
Ideal	Traditional journalism: autonomous, following ideals of news values in the service of what is referred to as public interest	User-generated content: based on ideas of produsage, reflexivity, and personalisation
Commercial imperatives	High organisational costs for business models related to infotainment	Low organisational costs for business models related to personal relationships
Technology	Affordance for a single public sphere	Affordance for a fragmented public
<i>Distribution</i>		
Ideal	Mass dissemination to subscribers	Viral distribution to like-minded
Commercial imperatives	Business models depend on centralised distribution by professional journalists	Business models depend on principles of connectivity and popularity
Technology	Affordance for broadcasting	Affordance for updating in peer networks
<i>Media use</i>		
Ideal	Consumption of professionally selected and framed information	Sharing reflexive and personal information among peers and like-minded
Commercial imperatives	Business models depend on advertisements and subscriptions	Business models depend on data mining, targeted advertising, and surveillance
Technology	Affordance for passive use along geographical boundaries	Affordance for interactive use in peer and online networks

Source: Based on Klinger & Svensson, 2016.

When political actors use Facebook and Twitter, they need feedback, such as *reactions*, *likes*, or *comments*. Such feedback increases their visibility, including in traditional media, and may engage more followers and fans.

Previous research

The development of online media has led to a division of views on the role of social media in political communication: *Internet optimism* and *Internet pessimism*. Existing research about the adoption of social media by politicians has primarily been viewed through the *normalisation–equalisation* prism. The *equalisation hypothesis* supposes that social media will foster a new online politics that could be revolutionary and revitalise citizenship and democracy. The *normalisation argument* assumes that the Internet simply mirrors and reinforces behavioural patterns in the real (offline) world (no-change scenario). Thus, these sceptical cyber-realists assert that a new politics online will “have been shattered by ordinary politics and commercial activity, which have invaded and captured cyberspace” (Deželan & Vobič, 2016).

Most empirical findings seem to support the concept of “politics as usual”, suggested by Margolis and Resnick (2000). Dissemination of information in a Web 1.0 style over Web 2.0 platforms has been labelled in “Web 1.5” style (Jackson & Lilleker, 2009). Oelsner and Heimrich (2015) suppose that politicians adhere to offline strategies “due to the fear of losing control”. Some research findings support combined *equalisation* and *normalisation* (Van Aelst et al., 2017). An alternative approach proposes a position between the positive and the negative paradigms, suggesting to go beyond the dichotomy of the role of social media to fully understand its adoption by politicians (Karlsson & Åström 2018; Larsson & Svensson, 2014; Quinlan et al., 2017; Wright Scott, 2012).

Whether following *normalisation* patterns or not, politicians around the globe use social media differently, for different purposes, to gain different benefits. In addition, they have different abilities to do so. Social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter enable politicians to directly reach out to voters and mobilise supporters (e.g., Grzywinska, 2013; Laaksonen et al., 2017; Stetka et al., 2014); to convey information quickly and create “a buzz” (e.g., Bruns & Stieglitz 2014; Di Fraia & Missaglia 2014; Grusell & Nord, 2012; Krzatala-Jaworska, 2013); to influence the public agenda, e.g. bypassing conventional media channels (e.g., Skovsgaard & Van Dalen, 2013); for branding (e.g. Borah, 2014; Ceccobelli, 2016; Ekman & Widholm, 2014; Espino Sánchez, 2013); or simply to join a “fashion trend” or a “bandwagon” (Larsson, 2013).

Following gratifications theory Hoffmann and colleagues (2016) assert that all purposes for social media usage can be grouped around three salient motives: *promotion*, *information-seeking*, and *entertainment*. *Self-promotion* appears to be the most important motive. Making connections does not emerge as a distinct motive. Indeed, communication on social media platforms is less interactive than it could

be (Jungherr, 2016; Khaldarova et al., 2012; Nożewski, 2017; Stepinska, 2017). Most politicians use monologic (one-way) forms of communication and avoid dialogic forms of interactivity (Grusell & Nord, 2012; Grzywinska, 2013; Herkman, 2011; Oelsner & Heimrich, 2015). Stromer-Galley (2000) points to the three main reasons for such behaviour by candidates in election campaigns: the burden that interaction places on the campaign, the risk of losing control of the communication environment, and an inability to provide an ambitious discourse. In sum, most politicians simply do not appreciate social media's interactive potential.

According to Keller and Kleinen-von Königslöw (2018), digital debates do not play a significant role in successful communication. Instead, successful social media communication depends on a number of other factors: personal background, such as age, gender, and education; political activity; and media coverage; and structural characteristics such as key position, vote percentage, and financial power. The authors further argue that the success of political actors' communication on social media platforms should be defined "by the size of their followership (e.g., fans and followers) and the number of reactions their social media actions receive (e.g., likes and retweets)". Thus, the authors relate politicians' success on social media primarily to their ability to build a large digital followership and trigger as many *reactions* from their followers as possible. The desired outcomes of this large digital fellowship are visibility (with more media coverage), organisation (citizens are invited to participate in politics on social media platforms), micro-donations (money, time, or ideas), mobilisation, and feedback.

So far, most studies around social media in political communication focus on one isolated platform, usually Twitter (Jungherr, 2016) and rarely Facebook (e.g., Espino Sánchez, 2013; Larsson & Kalsnes, 2014). As mentioned, users' accounts on Twitter are usually publicly visible and accessible, while Facebook personal profiles (in particular before 2007) more often are private and require reciprocal friendship ties for use. In the Scandinavian countries, Finland, Switzerland, and some other countries, Twitter has obtained a reputation as an urban, elite social media platform involving journalists, politicians, and other professional groups (Keller & Kleinen-von Königslöw, 2018; Khaldarova, Laaksonen & Matikainen, 2012; Larsson & Moe, 2011).

Several cross-media studies show several relevant differences in the political communication on different social media platforms, i.e., that politicians adapt their messages to different audiences and tailor their communication to the socio-technical environments of platforms (Stier et al., 2018). Keller and Kleinen-von Königslöw (2018) indicate that politicians effectively reach other political actors and journalists via Twitter but prefer using Facebook to better address the general public. Popularity on Facebook is related to a larger vote share: politicians attract more fans on Facebook than on Twitter, and the large digital followership provides active reactions to their posts and future mobilisation at the next election.

Quinlan and colleagues (2017) assert that the adoption of Facebook and Twitter is driven by primarily two factors: money and party. In impact, however, these factors

play out slightly differently for Facebook and Twitter: “While the influence of money is homogenous with the more resources candidates have, the more likely they are to adopt, and the effect is stronger for Facebook. Conversely, the impact of party on adoption is heterogeneous across channels, a pattern we suggest is driven by the different audiences each medium attracts”. Larsson and Skogerbø (2018) provide evidence from Norway and find that Facebook is the most popular social medium for local politicians, females in particular, while national politicians seem to prefer Twitter.

Methods and sampling

The chapter analyses the use of Facebook and Twitter in government communication in Sweden, Finland, and Poland. Facebook was the most popular social media platform in Sweden in 2016; 71 per cent of Swedes used this platform every day. Instagram was next; 26 per cent used it daily. Twitter came third, with only 18 per cent preferring this service for everyday communication (Davidsson & Finndahl, 2016). In Poland, Youtube and Facebook were the most popular social networking services in 2016; 64 per cent and 62 per cent of population, respectively, had active accounts with these platforms. Twitter lagged behind, with 24 per cent of the Polish people using the microblog (Statista – The portal for statistics, Poland). In Finland, 60 per cent used Facebook daily in 2016. Fifty per cent used Whatsapp, and Youtube and Instagram were third, with roughly the same frequency (26 per cent and 25 per cent, respectively). Twitter only engaged 10 per cent of users (Statista – The portal for statistics, Finland).

Sampling

For this study, two sample groups were selected in each country: ministers and their press staffers. The data were gathered from publicly available government websites.¹ Some individuals were identified on Facebook and Twitter (see Table 7.1). The data sample from Facebook public pages consisted of all posts written by ministers in 2017. The data from Twitter consisted of all the *tweets/retweets* during 2017 for both sample groups.

Data

The study is based on two data sets: 1) data from the ministers’ Facebook pages and Twitter personal profiles; 2) interviews with ministers, press staffers, and political journalists.

- Data from public profiles on Facebook (pages) and personal profiles on Twitter, provide the basis for the quantitative analysis. These Facebook pages and Twitter personal profiles were analysed in terms of their modes of communication (as shown in Figure 7.2), and the interactive and dialogical potential of communication was estimated.

Statistical data, such as social media messages posted and shared by ministers as well as the comments to their posts and the ministers' replies, were collected by the free Facebook application Netvizz and the free online service Inteltechniques² for Twitter during the research period.

- Interviews conducted under the condition of anonymity during 2016-2017. Interviewees were asked to answer questions regarding the purposes of social media usage and communication with journalists, ministers, and press staff via social media. The following groups in each country were interviewed:
 - In Finland: 12 journalists, 4 political press advisors, and 5 civil servants;
 - In Poland: 4 press secretaries, 5 ministers, and 4 journalists;
 - In Sweden: 11 press advisors and press secretaries and 11 journalists.

Limitations

This study has some limitations. First of all, it embraces data collected only for specific governments over a specific period of time. Second, it only evaluates ministers' intended communication; we do not know how that communication really works because received networks are changing over time. We can talk hence only about probabilities and opportunities based on the capacities of the selected social media platforms. At a minimum, it is necessary to conduct a content analysis of social media messages to fully understand the communication between political executives and other users on Facebook and Twitter.

Findings

1. Quantitative analysis of Facebook pages and Twitter profiles

The ministers in all sample groups were mainly represented on Facebook public profiles (pages). Many of them also have personal profiles, but these profiles were often *closed* and *semi-closed* and/or abandoned (as shown in Table 7.1). This is probably an indication that ministers wish to keep public and personal matters separate in cyberspace and protect their personal lives. Almost all of the ministers' public pages have a similar mode and identical design and are related to professional activity, in particular to the building of a personal brand. Press staffers mainly have personal profiles on Facebook, often *closed* or *semi-closed*. The majority of ministers and press staffers in all of the countries in the study also have active personal profiles on Twitter. In all the three countries studied, ministers updated Twitter almost twice as often as they updated Facebook. The ministers' Twitter networks were bigger than their Facebook networks in all three countries, indicating that Twitter attracts a broader audience than does Facebook. Table 7.1 summarises the results from the quantitative analysis of how Twitter and Facebook are used in political communication.

Table 7.1 Network characteristics: Facebook and Twitter, 2017

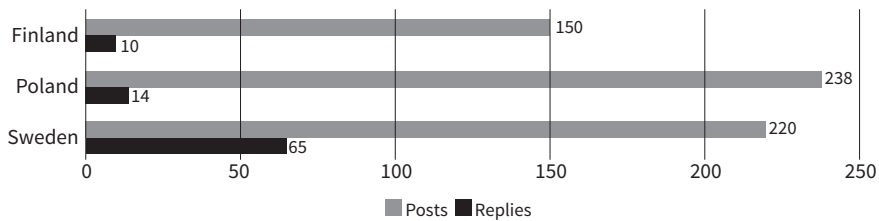
Country	Number	Sample group	FB					Twitter			
			Personal profiles		Public pages	Frequency (posts/day), mean	Fans, mean	Personal profiles		Frequency (tweets/day), mean	Followers, mean
			All	Accessible				All	Active		
Finland	17	Ministers	11	6	14	0.4	7,610	13	13	0.9	20,241
	13	Press assistants	11	4	2			12	12 (1)*	1.4	
Poland	22	Ministers	10	5	21	0.7	18,431	14	14 (1)*	1.2	56,074
	18	Press secretaries	10	4	3			10	10	4.5	
Sweden	23	Ministers	14	9	22	0.7	15,802	20	16 (3)*	2.3	32,251
	42	Press secretaries/ assistants	39	21	2			37	34 (9)*	1.1	

() * - inactive last 6 months

1a. Modes of communication on Facebook

Data collected from Facebook depict the ministers' preferred modes of communication: they are more active in posting than replying. The correlation between ministers' posts and their replies is presented in Figure 7.4. In other words, their communication is not very dialogical. Only two Polish and three Finnish ministers actively reply to the other users' comments; the others prefer to only convey information in the top-down manner.

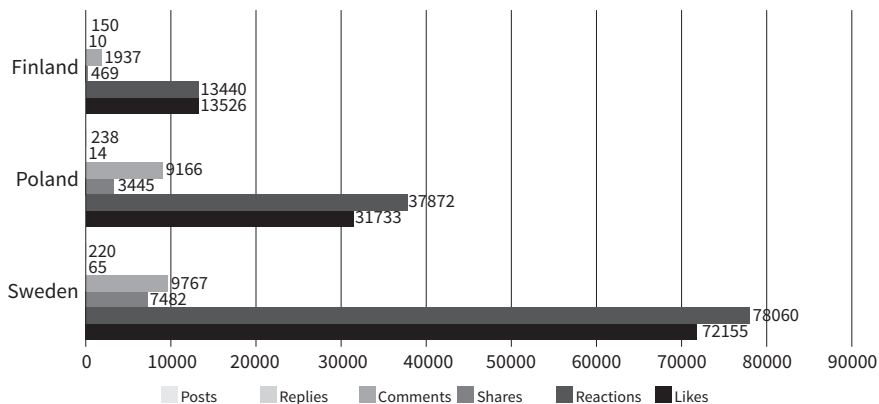
Figure 7.4 Comparison of number of ministers' posts and replies (mean, 2017)



In comparison, Swedish ministers are most active on Facebook and have more conversations with followers. One possible explanation for this phenomenon could be that the Swedish government has a higher number of press officers employed than do the Finnish and Polish governments (see Table 7.1). These professional staff members might help their bosses to communicate on Facebook.

At the same time, as shown in Figure 7.5, the Swedish case also displays meaningful and significant feedback from followers. However, in all three cases, feedback takes the form of *reactions* and *likes* rather than *comments* and *shares*. This means that the emotional component of the interaction on Facebook pages is more significant than the discursive component. A large share of *likes* reveals plenty of supporters among ministers' followers.

Figure 7.5 Followers' feedback compared to number of ministers' posts and replies (mean, 2017)

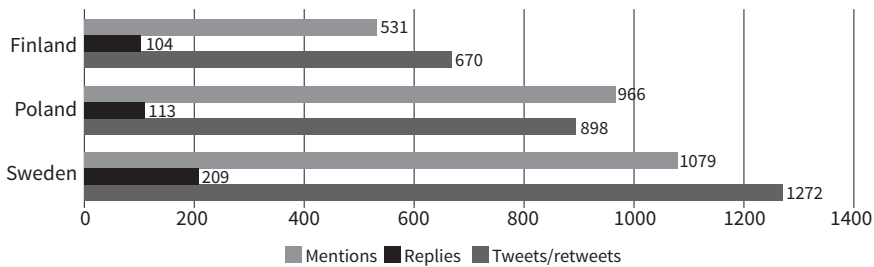


1b. Modes of communication on Twitter

Interaction on Twitter appears to be more dialogical than on Facebook, mostly because of the platform's technical specificity: short messages; more interactive tools, dynamics, and mobility. The dialogical component (*replies*) is quite insignificant in comparison to produced and redistributed content (*tweets* and *retweets*). However, *mentions* can compensate for the lack of this exchange. However, ministers' dialogues on Twitter mostly target limited groups of people and not average users.

Figure 7.6 shows the results of the analysis of Twitter data. As on Facebook, ministers do not reply very frequently to followers' comments on Twitter. However, the use of *mentions* in tweets indicates that the dialogical component is more significant on Twitter than on Facebook. Swedish ministers come out on top when it comes to the number of replies as well as *mentions*.

Figure 7.6 Modes of ministers' communication on Twitter (mean, 2017)



The online service Inteltechniques does not provide full data regarding followers' feedback, with the exception of redistribution (*retweets*). Followers in Finland, Poland, and Sweden retweet ministers' content to varying degrees, and the Swedish followers are the most active (on average 477,936 retweets), while Finnish followers are less interested in redistribution (on average 14,502 retweets). Polish users are in the middle: 51,997 retweets (on average).

2. Interviews³

After the emergence of social media around 2005, the media in general changed. As one Swedish press secretary said, it was "an explosion" and "a revolution". Political communication fundamentally changed; it lost its hierarchical nature, its tempo increased significantly, and conditions on the media market became harder. This means that the requirements on public persons are higher, too. As one Polish minister said, social media is a "mine of information" that reflects the general public mood and shows how different political issues are discussed and understood by the public.

According to the Polish journalists, social media negatively influenced their relationships with sources. Politicians, on the other hand, thought that journalists would

use everything the politicians write in social media so they don't want to say anything: "It is enough to post a tweet and it sets the ball rolling – a new subject appears". Some journalists dislike when politicians refer to their official statements on Facebook and Twitter without additional comments. The next sections discuss the results from the interviews regarding the use of social media in political communication.

2a. Purposes for using social media

The interviewed Polish and Swedish ministers and press secretaries said that they usually start the day by checking social media feeds and the websites of the most influential media outlets. As the Polish ministers said, social media is a "kind of informational database which we can use in many ways", and that it is "a huge and very rich source of information". According to a Finnish press assistant, social media is helpful in creating "our own picture" of the world, through opinions or social moods. Press assistants also noted that social media is a good way to communicate because "you can get news directly without any manipulation by journalists".

On the other hand, social media is also a channel for conveying information, for example information published on the government's website. According to the Polish journalists, spokespersons more frequently announce information first on social media, then on websites and later still through traditional channels.

Nonetheless, journalists and their political sources in all three countries still prefer traditional ways of communication. Both sides usually contact one another using telephone, email, and face-to-face meetings, as described in the quote below:

When it comes to communication with voters or more broadly receivers of our messages – farmers – we obviously use social media. When it comes to cooperation with journalists, this mechanism is rarely used. I rather try to talk with them directly – interpersonal form – and in this way have the possibility to deliver more information and explain more things to them in more detail. On the one hand, information disseminated through social media is characterised by dynamics – news reaches a large number of receivers immediately; personally, I have a solid 5,000 receivers in social media. On the other hand, when I speak with journalists who have an objective to create and shape public awareness, I rather prefer more personal and direct contacts or conversations. (Polish press secretary 5)

The Finnish press assistants confirm that *tête-a-tête* contacts with journalists are more effective. The journalists agree with the politicians regarding the higher value of face-to-face meetings or phone conversations. Such direct contacts provide a chance to avoid misunderstandings but also to obtain exclusive information. The Polish journalists mentioned that politicians usually use social media to build an image, and that journalists do not want to take part in that image-creating process. They need information, and preferably exclusive information, that can be interesting for readers. As one Polish journalist said, "I don't practice herd journalism – I am against it ... I don't ask questions on Twitter – I don't want my colleagues-journalists to know what I'm working on."

However, the importance of social media in communication is apparent. Twitter is the primary tool, but social media in general is used as an additional channel of communication for both parties. As one Polish minister said, “When a journalist writes a private message to me on Twitter to quickly get some information, it is not a problem for me.” And indeed, journalists in all three countries use social media, such as direct messages on Twitter, to contact politicians if the politicians do not answer phone calls. Finnish journalists, however, noted that some groups of sources are easier to contact on social media while email or SMS work best for others. In general, the journalists prefer to contact their sources by email, SMS, phone calls, and in some cases via press assistants.

According to Finnish journalists, news from social media fits better into “yellow press” than it does into quality media like the public service broadcaster Yle or the daily newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat*. One Finnish journalist stated that social media is not so important for news because “no politician will post something in social media that has news value”. Social media is rather for the understanding of “an atmosphere prompting decision making”. Journalists and political sources in Poland and Sweden agreed, saying that social media is a very important tool for monitoring “the general mood of different social groups and trade unions”, “to stay up to date” on the latest events, and for tracing “who says what”:

It can be used for building relationships, for example with journalists and others. But this is not enough. I think this is a bit overestimated ... now, I follow cultural journalists more often than before ... [in] social media you can hear a conversation you probably could never hear some other way. In particular from cultural journalists. But on the other hand, it would be wrong to think that this is a public debate. This is only a small part of the public discussion. (Swedish press assistant 8)

Social media, particularly Twitter, emerged as an additional channel to reach political goals. A Swedish journalist described it as a crucial place for “opinion making”, and a Finnish civil servant said that “You can effectively spread your own ideas using Twitter”. Polish journalists mentioned that political parties pay more and more attention to social media, especially right-wing parties compared to liberal parties, because “if you don’t comment on an issue, your comment simply doesn’t exist in the public sphere”. In Sweden, journalists related that politicians and political officers are highly active on Twitter, and continue to tweet and attempt to influence public opinion via different organisations also after leaving a political party.

2b. Social media strategies

The data show that ministers use social media platforms differently. First, their choice is driven as a consequence of personal preferences: some prefer only Twitter, others like Facebook or Instagram, while some ministers want to be present everywhere or use alternative platforms, such as Snapchat. For example, the Finnish press staff actively use Flickr as a photo bank to share pictures on other social media platforms.

According to one interviewed officer, they shared about 1,000 photos in 2017, and the Finnish media used all of them.

Social media is an important tool for communication with different target groups. The respondents described how the specificity of every platform defines the *modus operandi* of each:

It is like building a house ... you can't use a hammer for everything. You should change the tool depending on what the question is ... we use social media as a part of this strategy ... when we want to get a certain question ... we use Twitter and Facebook, especially Facebook ... Then it should be possible to follow his [the minister's] entire day or even week to depict more clearly who he is, what he does, where he goes, what problems he solves ... simply talking, all the events in the minister's life ... essentially, we use this to build his personality ... (Swedish press assistant 10)

Swedish respondents identified Twitter as more “elitist”. To some extent, Finnish journalists agreed, saying that Twitter is a platform for informational exchange of financial, economic, and media elites. Swedish press staffers said that for Swedish politicians, Facebook is a place for political partisans while Instagram attracts younger people – (potential) voters and people who have an interest in politics. Yet another example is how Polish ministers try to engage a younger public through Youtube, as described in the following quote:

We used social media very intensely when we ran a campaign to promote vocational education. We had invited Rezi to work with us. He is one of the most popular You-Tubers in Poland. [...] It was amazing because it was the first time my own children became interested in my press conference. They were angry with me – how could I not have told them that I knew Rezi. I also met junior high school students who told me, “...you are very lucky because you know Rezi”. Adults had no idea that such a person existed and was so important. After we uploaded a video to the website of the Ministry of National Education, it had 100 hits one hour later. We all cheered. I made a short video with a famous youtuber in which we said hello to the internet users, and after one hour we got 30,000 likes. It is a totally different world – impossible to overestimate. (Polish press secretary 3)

Social media is also significant in the building of the personal brand. Press staffers realise that politicians can be recognisable only if they are mentioned in the traditional media. One way to make that happen is to be visible in social networking sites, because newspapers, radio, and TV channels often refer to user-generated content in their coverage.

We had a situation where our response was needed immediately, and when I was watching TV I realised that our Twitter was the most quoted. This medium reaches journalists really quickly. It is the fastest way for a simple and quick statement to get the journalists' attention. Almost all journalists working in newsrooms have their own information channels – Twitter, Facebook, email, and website. If we

want to boast about something – to draw attention to an event we organised, we use Facebook. Thanks to this medium you can add a photo album, write a longer text, or make some strategic projections come true. As a ministry, we arranged an event called Tweetup – a meeting where they could meet the scientific community. (Polish press secretary 4)

One of the main challenges for modern politicians and other public figures is to control the information flow, and they always risk being taken by surprise. The quote below illustrates how press secretaries and ministers have to be particularly careful and circumspect.

Since social media emerged, everything changed, especially for politicians and other public figures, because everybody has a camera all the time. But ... this is completely different ... If you tell a message wrong, you will be punished. You will get three Youtube videos about you, they became viral, and finally it will be a page in the tabloid. (Swedish press assistant 1)

According to an interviewed Swedish press secretary, it is necessary to have “a unique angle” to be popular. At the same time, one also has to remember that “if anybody writes something on Twitter it can immediately be in the news”. A Polish minister demonstrated exactly such an awareness when saying that the message in social media “needs to be well-thought-out and relevant” as well as “short, concise, and witty and appeal to receivers’ sensitivity”. When communicating on social media, it is important to be transparent. At the same time, quality control is difficult, as described by a press secretary below.

Social media often tends to repeat information found on the Internet without verifying it. It is quite dangerous if you don’t react in time. Most of all because of the cascade of information from social media, which leads to situations in which it is extremely difficult to take things back. That’s why I pay attention to these types of services, but I don’t like it – even though it is a sign of the times, that, for example, in the USA the most important decisions are sometimes announced via Twitter. Personally, even though I use different social media, I think that there are decisions that should have some significance attached to them and they shouldn’t be as impersonal as they happen to be on social media. (Polish press secretary 4)

A Swedish press secretary mentioned that social media may be used strategically to take control of informational flows. She said she was lucky when she was able “to kill a question before it would pose a big problem” on Twitter and prevent an “embarrassing” issue from becoming news. The Polish press secretaries followed a similar strategy, writing statements on Facebook or Twitter if they wanted “to make some information immediately available to journalists, broadly, or to the public” or “to confirm or deny something”.

The results also show that both politicians and staffers participate in content production on social media. According to one Swedish press secretary, ministers personally write on social media when they want to express their views, but also often ask

their staffers to manage their profiles and pages. Another press secretary confirmed that the ministers' Facebook pages are usually updated by staffers; sometimes they also write on Twitter on behalf of the ministers. One Polish minister said that he/she "needs people to help me control social media and contact and consult other people through this media". This was also acknowledged by Polish journalists, saying that "Each politician is only a human being and I don't think any of them would manage to deal with everything on their own".

As recognised by one Swedish press secretary, not all ministers are open to new communication technologies, especially not in the older generation. However, politicians want to be present in social media to gain more symbolic capital. Thus, press secretaries often update their ministers' profiles simply because they are more technically versed. Finnish press staffers mentioned that Finnish ministers should be more active in social media and noted that "social media [use] is not so interactive". According to them, their bosses followed social media but were not very active in discussions, leaving room for improvement.

According to one Swedish press secretary, some social media material is prepared by the staff members, for example content related to reforms, the budget, and the [global] climate, and there is an internal document on social media policy of the government. In Poland, the government information centre is responsible for social media in the case of the prime minister's office. In addition, each ministry has its own website containing a link to the ministry's profile in social media. These profiles are used to post announcements for journalists and very often become an element of narration to the media and journalists. As one Polish press secretary said, social media is "one of the main tools in the communication department". Ministers' use of Instagram seems more personal; for example, some ministers prefer to take selfies themselves. This varied between countries, as according to a Polish press secretary, Polish ministers rarely use Instagram and prefer Twitter and Facebook.

Twitter is more used in government communication than Facebook in all three countries in the study. However, this demands a lot of time and a non-stop presence. As one Finnish civil servant said, "We always have some piquant news ... but we are just lazy in this sense. We already have a lot of work and to write [in social media, author] is not for us ..." This is why some ministers avoid this service.

You can spend all day on social media but fortunately you don't have time for this [...] I suppose that Finland is so small, it is like Twitter itself and everybody knows everyone else's points of views and origin, so you don't need to change people's opinions. We are not "a great nation". But it [social media, author] works conveniently as a means of communication. (Finnish press assistant 2)

During the interviews, some journalists expressed that they are sceptical about Twitter. A Swedish journalist said that it is a "playground for idiots"; another mentioned that people often write foolishness or attack each other, making the exchange meaningless. An interviewed Swedish press secretary called Twitter a "duck pond"

because the same people are always there; another said that it is a “mix of trolls and serious people”.

A final point of comparison concerns the social media use of press staffers. Swedish press secretaries reported using their own social media profiles mostly for private purposes, while some Polish press secretaries said that they use Twitter mostly for work. The Finnish press staffers also mentioned using social media platforms more actively on a private basis than for official work.

Conclusions and discussion

This study shows the communicative patterns of political executives on social media in Finland, Poland, and Sweden. Using two complementary data sets, it enhances the understanding of the varying practices of political executives on Twitter and Facebook.

These two social media platforms differ in terms of their aims, communication processes, audiences, and generated networks. They also represent various communication modes. The findings presented above indicate that political executives in the three countries of the study therefore use Facebook in different ways and for different purposes than Twitter. However, independent of national context, ministers follow similar communication practices on each of the platforms.

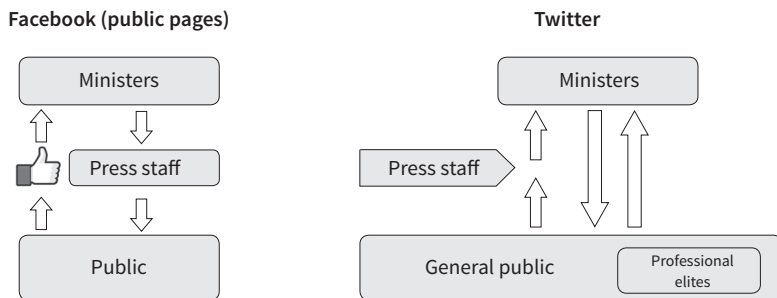
Politicians began to use Facebook effectively in 2007, when Facebook public profiles/pages were introduced. It became a new professional tool, utilised primarily for personal branding of public figures. The personal profiles that were previously used then became a zone mostly for personal use or were abandoned. According to the data, ministers' Facebook pages appear to be new channels for top-down communication, with limited discursive and dialogical components but a developed segment of emotional followers' feedback (see Figure 7.5). In the terms of Jensen (1998), this communication is representing a *transmissional*, top-down model of interactivity. In other words, it predominantly uses a one-way pattern of *cyber-interactivity*, such as monologue and feedback (McMillan, 2002).

In all three countries, ministers' public profiles/pages on Facebook usually have similar installation-specific settings and identical design. According to some interviews, Facebook public profiles/pages are often maintained by the press staffers. This indicates that staffers might play a role as gatekeepers on Facebook, challenging the thesis about the trend toward disintermediation of social media (McQuail, 2010). On social media, intermediation might be provided through press staffers, similar to how journalists perform this role in traditional media. Thus, to some extent Facebook public profiles/pages may provide a professionally driven substitute for conventional media in online political communication.

The results further show that Twitter is considered an online venue for professional elites, namely politicians and journalists. On Twitter, ministers' communication with other users appears to be more *conversational* (Jensen, 1998), *dialogical*, or/and *discur-*

sive or two-way directed (McMillan, 2002) than on Facebook. However, this difference depends on the technological characteristics of the platform; Twitter provides more mobile tools for a topic starter's own feedback (for example, *mentions*). In addition, this reciprocal communication is directed mostly to a limited group of users. According to the interviewees, it is the role of the press staff to monitor the field on Twitter. Figure 7.7 summarises the chapter conclusion

Figure 7.7 General models of political executives' communications emerging on Facebook and Twitter



It would be appropriate to mention that social media have a significant potential to polarize people because they offer “readily available” information to groups of like-minded individuals. Within such structures, users can easily abandon or avoid contrary information flows. This generates various communities in different informational networks, which become isolated cultural and ideological groups or “bubbles” (Gainous & Wagner, 2014: 14). This is a subject matter for a new case study analysing content. However, the results in this chapter show that at least structurally, ministers' communication on Twitter takes place within a “bubble” of professional elites.

The results demonstrate that political executives mix different logics in social media communication. On the one hand, in accordance with the network and social media logics, ministers publish user-generated content based on ideas of produsage, reflexivity, and personalisation. This content is viral and distributed to like-minded individuals (Klinger & Svensson, 2016) or corresponds to the principle of popularity (Van Dijck & Poell, 2013). On the other hand, affordable broadcasting and the consumption of professionally selected and framed information are used according to assumptions about traditional media logic (Klinger & Svensson, 2016).

Political communication is shaped differently on different social media platforms. Political executives in the three countries pursue different objectives when it comes to using Facebook, Twitter, and probably other social media platforms as well. This is probably related to the distinct target audiences provided by these social media platforms and the varying “sociotechnical affordances” (Stier et al., 2018) of each platform. This choice is strategic; political executives are not able to engage on every

social media platform and sometimes are not sufficiently skilled to operate in this resource-intensive environment.

In conclusion, the communication strategy of political executives in social media appears to be hybrid. It is based on a synergy of top-down and horizontal models of communication, mass media, and social media/network media logics, resulting in a mix of *normalisation* and *equalisation* effects of social media. The participation of skilled staff is an important part of communication strategies and might be an increasingly important influence in the reciprocal informational exchange. The fact that the larger number of employed press staffers in Sweden correlates with higher frequency of feedback on Facebook (Figure 7.5) indicates that this might be the case. However, it is unclear whether the dialogue with the public corresponds to an actual need or is simply a way to engage more followers.

Last but not least, the results add a new meaning and scope to the famous McLuhan quotation that “the medium is the message”. Usually this phrase is understood to mean that the form for media communication is more important than the information itself – that the effects of technology are so significant because “it is the medium that shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action” (McLuhan, 1994). Talking about online media, Castells questions this thesis by stating that “The message is the medium”. The meaning here is that the content of the message organises the process of communication (Rantanen, 2005). Indeed, McLuhan’s point was more relevant to the pre-digital era. However, it obtains a new meaning in the context of social media as the socio-technical characteristics of a platform can influence and define the specificity of transmitted “information”. When analysing ministers’ communication on Facebook and Twitter, we can see some supportive evidence that in a hybrid, media-saturated environment both approaches are able to coexist and develop simultaneously.

Notes

1. Finnish government website <http://valtioneuvosto.fi/en/sipila/ministers>. Polish government website <https://www.premier.gov.pl>. Swedish government website <http://www.regeringen.se/sb/d/385>.
2. <https://inteltechniques.com>
3. Interviews for this chapter were conducted by Milda Malling, Karl Magnus Johansson, Risto Niemikari and Jacek Nożewski.

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Chapter 8

Power and exchange in formal and informal interaction between journalists and their sources

Milda Malling

Abstract

This chapter sets out to answer a number of questions concerning the relationship between media and political executives in political communication, centring on how the exchange and power balance between journalists and their political sources differ depending on whether the interaction is formal or informal. The results are based on 43 qualitative interviews with journalists who cover national politics and governmental press advisors in Lithuania and Sweden. The findings indicate that formal interaction is advantageous for professional sources in agenda-based news. In non-agenda news and in times of political conflict, journalists as well as some political sources prefer informal interaction. While top political leaders and their press advisors are most often isolated from informal interactions, other political sources might gain from communicating informally. Finally, the results show that media-source exchange in informal relationships reaches beyond “information in exchange for publicity” and that informal relationships allow participants to step outside their traditional professional roles.

Keywords: journalist-source relations, interaction, informality, professionalisation, political communication, exchange

Introduction

Journalist-source relationships are interdependent, and in the political beat the exchange between a journalist and his/her sources can last for decades. A senior journalist from a renowned media channel rather casually described a journalist-source situation as just another day at work: “I can drop by the prime minister’s simply to ask, ‘What’s up?’ And the prime minister sometimes calls me and complains about the opposition” (Lithuanian journalist 7). In this case, the relationship started years ago when the now prime minister was head of some committee and the journalist was a junior reporter. Since then, they have been meeting each other in the parliament corridors and during and after press conferences, verifying facts and perhaps staying for a drink after work.

Most studies of journalist-source relations focus on the formal interaction, i.e., interaction that is on the record, documented, and most often visible to others. The in-

terdependency between journalists and their sources in this interaction is traditionally summarised as “information in exchange for publicity” (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995).

At the same time, there is scholarly agreement that informal relationships are an important component in political communication (Pfetsch & Esser, 2012). However, the empirical research on these types of relationships is limited (Kamps, 2013). The lack of research risks simplifying our knowledge about what real trade-offs both sides are making to achieve their professional goals.

In response to this gap, this chapter aims to understand whether the process of the exchange between journalists and political sources differs between formal and informal situations and how this difference is reflected in the balance of power between 1) journalists and the sources and 2) different groups of sources. The chapter addresses the following questions:

- How do journalists and their sources perceive and use formal interaction in their professional work?
- How do journalists and their sources perceive and use informal interaction in their professional work?
- What are the differences in the perceived power and exchange between journalists and their sources depending on the chosen type of interaction?

Media systems as well as the formal organisation of government communication differ from country to country. The chapter therefore expects informal interaction and norms to be culturally bound and context dependent as well. However, it is an empirical question to find out whether this is the case. Formal and informal interaction in journalist–source relations can be seen as two sides of the same coin because many situations include both formal and informal aspects. The way formal communication is organised, therefore, is likely reflected in how the respondents perceive and use informal relationships.

Current research often emphasises the need for data from different countries and cross-country comparison. So far, the country chapters of this book demonstrate that, despite the differences in country size, media system, or government communication patterns, the informal part of the journalist–source interaction is considered to be an inevitable component in political communication. Bogusława Dobek-Ostrowska and Jacek Nożewski note the importance of maintaining professional boundaries and being aware of each other’s interests even in informal situations (in Poland). They also emphasise that informal interaction is vital to achieving professional goals. In another chapter, Tapio Raunio, Tom Moring, and Risto Niemikari discuss the benefits of informal exchange for journalists and their sources. In the Finnish case, the importance of informality was even defined in documents provided by the government communications department, stating that “Building a personal network of relationships makes it easier for a journalist to contact you in particular, and also enables you to present the PMO’s point of view”.

This chapter goes deeper into examples from two contrasting cases: Sweden and Lithuania. The results are based on 43 qualitative interviews with journalists and professionalised political sources, represented by governmental and presidential press advisors, in Sweden and Lithuania. Results show that Sweden is an example of professionalised and centralised political communication, where governmental communication efforts are coordinated with the prime minister's office and journalistic professionalisation is strong. In Lithuania, political communication is still under professionalisation, communication efforts are less coordinated, and political journalism is less professionalised than in Sweden. The chapter also concludes that both countries face similar pressures in the media market.

Power and exchange in journalist-source relations

To fully understand the effects of, for example, professionalised political communication or cuts in newsroom budgets on political journalism and communication, it is beneficial to analyse formal as well as informal interactions and the norms related to them within the same context, at the same time. It is reasonable to expect that norms and exchange practices in formal interactions between journalists and their political sources affect norms and practices in informal relations and vice versa. The relationship between journalists and their sources is often described as a negotiated, interdependent exchange. Both sides are adaptive, role-regulated actors acting in a "shared culture" (Davis, 2009; Larsson, 2002). Cooperation in these relationships is based on trust, which in turn depends on personal ties, perception and knowledge about each other's intentions, experiences from the past, or expectations about future cooperation. Hence, both journalists and their sources have to trust each other, i.e., "to believe that the results of somebody's intended action will be appropriate from our point of view" (Misztal, 1996: 24). Pfetsch (2014) describes the interdependency between journalists and sources as a co-created, reflexive relationship where each side contributes to and influences the expectations of the other side.

Another central discussion in the research of journalism and political communication is the discussion of power. Power can be conceptualised as "a struggle over meaning and the ability of individuals or groups to control and shape interpretations" (Mumby, 2001: 595). The question "Who is leading whom?", asked initially by Sigal (1973) and Gans (1979), has been posed many times. The insights of Sigal (1973) suggest that the power to instigate stories is in the hands of sources, as they have better access to information. These insights are still supported several decades later (Reich, 2009). However, in the steps of framing and editing the final copy, journalists have more power (Strömbäck & Nord, 2006). Therefore, power over media content varies depending on the stage (information gathering, verification, final editing) in the news-making process.

It should be possible to expand the knowledge regarding power, exchange, and trust in journalist-source relations by considering that sources are not a homog-

enous group. In that case, competition among different types of sources to get their message through also matters. Studies show how the possibilities for sources to get their message through vary depending on a number of circumstances. For example, journalists might prefer some sources over others, depending on their perceived trustworthiness or a long-lasting cooperation with these sources. As an illustration, efforts by spin doctors are more likely to be successful in situations where alternative sources are not available (Manning, 2001). This could explain why staffing up ministers' communication departments does not necessarily imply more power over communication for the minister. Journalistic training and professional values usually generate a certain amount of scepticism toward PR staff, and as a result, journalists at times consider press advisors to be burdens rather than sources who provide information.

A source who is able to persuade journalists about what angle of the news is the most important and a journalist who manages to access exclusive information can be said to have power. Such power is achieved by choosing successful working strategies regarding with whom, when, and how to make contact given different situations. On the one hand, there is a chance that a developed political communication machinery, which has diminished direct access to the politicians and developed pre-made content production, gives more power to sources – in particular to sources with a strong communications team. On the other hand, an *éminence grise* in a political party who acts behind the scenes and is perceived to be a trustworthy source in the eyes of journalists can be much more powerful than any press advisor when it comes to influencing how journalists will define different political matters.

Therefore, it is important to consider whether some forms of interaction grant more power to journalists, sources, or maybe only to a particular group of sources. This chapter approaches this matter by distinguishing between formal and informal interaction.

Formal and informal interaction

Previous scholarship focusing on the relationship between journalists and sources does not offer an established definition of informal relationships. According to Baugut and Reinemann (2013: 25), this is partly the reason why little is still known about this type of communication. According to the authors, situations that “are planned, follow certain fixed rules, occur in the context of repeatedly held events, [use] standard language [and] have a more or less official character” can be described as formal. Misztal (2000: 18-19) defines the terms “informality” and “informal” as “more intimate, face-to-face social relationships or more personal modes of social control or types of social organization and pressures” and a “feature of interpersonal, less routine, less rigid and less ceremonial relationships, which rely more on tacit knowledge than on prescribed norms”. According to Baugut and Reinemann (2013: 25), informal relationships are “more spontaneous” and “off-the-record” and include “acting beyond

role expectation”; most importantly, “the content of the communication can remain invisible to the public”.

In the scope of this research, the same situation might contain both formal and informal elements. A press conference and conversations behind the scenes following the press conference are examples of the fine line between formality and informality. In the context of this chapter, the analysis gives account to how the actors themselves perceive the situation. Interactions that are planned, public, and documented, and where journalists and their sources do not know each other very well, are called “formal”. Interactions that are off the record, that include references on a first-name basis, or where the actors know each other outside the working context, are called “informal”.

How journalists view the presence of informal contacts and friends among political sources also varies between countries. In some countries, informal interactions are seen as a necessity, while in others they are considered to conflict with professional values (Camarano & Medrano, 2014). Norms and values guiding journalist–source relations also vary between professional cultures (Pfetsch, 2014). For journalists, having personal contacts and an informal access to their sources might increase their chances of acquiring exclusive information before their competitors (Baugut & Reinemann, 2013). Politicians might also be interested in maintaining more informal contacts. For example, those who disagree with the communication strategies might prefer to have the option to reach out to the media directly, because the official communication does not serve their needs. This case also demonstrates how conditions on the formal level are likely to affect outcomes on the informal level.

Existing research provides ambiguous answers about whether interactions between journalists and their political sources are becoming more formal or informal. According to Davis (2010), who studied the relationship between journalists and political sources in Great Britain, the growing demand for efficiency that politicians and journalists are facing resulted in fewer opportunities for informal communication. This is because informality requires investments in the form of building trust and time-intensive, face-to-face conversations. Granovetter (1983) finds that newsrooms are reducing their staff, and fewer journalists must now deal with a growing number of communication professionals or other types of officers serving the politicians. The journalist–source relationship no longer relies on a few strong social ties, but rather on a wider social network and a greater number of weaker ties. According to the study, this could potentially lead to more formalised and routine political public relations, which would empower sources, i.e., professional communicators and political leaders.

German scholars Baugut and Reinemann (2013) studied how politicians tend to share information with journalists informally during political negotiations and in this way mediatise the political process. The politicians who act as informal sources and leak information possibly gain more communication power and fight the political battle through the media. The study concludes that, although political communication is being professionalised, informal communication between journalists and politicians remains important for both sides.

The results of the two last studies are clearly contradictory: in Great Britain, the formal sources seem to gain more power, while in Germany, informal channels are still important. A possible explanation could be that each of the studies focused exclusively on a single-country context. However, this also underlines the risks involved in treating sources as a single homogenic group that follows the same interactional pattern and either gains or loses power in specific situations. This study avoids this peril by distinguishing between formal and informal interaction and analysing how different types of sources use these types of interaction in professional work. The aim is to understand whether power and the content of exchange between journalists and sources differ between informal and formal interactions.

Methods and data

The results in this chapter are based on 43 qualitative, semi-structured interviews in Lithuania and Sweden with journalists who cover national politics in the main media outlets (newspapers, TV, radio, news agencies, and professional Internet news sites) and press advisors to the ministers and the prime minister (Sweden and Lithuania) and the president's press advisor (Lithuania). Press advisors do not necessarily provide the same view as politicians. However, they are the actors who are directly involved, or even driving, the professionalisation of political communication. They also have first-hand knowledge about the communication styles and routines of the politicians they represent, making them relevant informants in this study.

The response rate in Lithuania was high; only one out of 26 contacted interviewees refused to participate. In Sweden, about half of the press advisors and two journalists declined to be interviewed. The interviews lasted on average about 80 minutes and were recorded. The conversations were held in the respondents' native language (Lithuanian or Swedish). All interviewees were informed that they would remain anonymous and that their answers would be presented in a country context without revealing their name or workplace. Because the interviewees of this type of study are usually the most media-trained people in their countries, they were instructed that the focus of the research would be on their working practices and perceptions rather than on their names and organisations. This hopefully increased the possibility to receive honest answers.

Interviewees were asked to briefly describe their background and how they were recruited to their current position. This made it possible to identify whether any of the respondents had been engaged on the opposite side – politics and PR (for journalists) or journalism (for the sources) – which might have allowed them to create a stronger social network. The interview questions that followed concerned issues such as their daily routines at work, responsibilities, professional roles and values, where their story ideas come from (in the case of journalists), examples of different types of interaction, advantages or disadvantages related to their interactions, and perceived

changes over time. Respondents were also asked to elaborate and provide examples from their professional lives about how the trust between journalists and sources is built and how this trust can be strengthened or weakened.

The interviews were analysed using NVivo 11 Plus software for qualitative data analysis and thematic coding (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). The answers were sorted thematically by coding *formal* and *informal* (some of the situations included both) aspects of communication and the perceived advantages and disadvantages of each type. The analysis indicated that aspects of *exchange* and *trust* in the interactions of the respondents are central for both journalists and sources, justifying a closer look (for example at the perceived currency in the exchange).

Usage and perceptions of formal interactions

Formal interaction with sources takes up a significant part of the journalists' daily work, especially for those working with daily news. Their work includes following the parliamentary agenda and news agencies, attending press conferences, and following other media, including politicians' social media. In these situations, sources hold the initial information and therefore potentially have more power than the journalists. Cases where the information does not immediately interest the media represent an exception. Such situations might tip the power balance over to journalists, as sources then need to fight for media attention.

Interviewees in both countries pointed to the increasing presence of press advisors in recent decades. However, the importance of these advisors in Lithuania and Sweden seems to differ.

In Sweden, professional communication coordinators seem to play a more significant role in journalist-political source relations than in Lithuania. The Swedish journalists emphasised that press advisors are active and attempt to promote certain agenda-related news angles. In Sweden, advisors suggest stories, initiate exclusive interviews with preferred media outlets, and offer individual journalists the chance to be the first to report certain news, which keeps the journalists interested in maintaining a good relationship with the press departments. On the other hand, centralised (co-ordinated from the prime minister's office) interaction sometimes prevents journalists from getting the full overview of a situation. Journalists who work in particular with news reporting in Sweden therefore expressed that they find themselves in a dependent position. Information is presented under conditions that are advantageous for the source, and news reporting is based on the schedule made by the government's communication department.

When [the government] announces the budget, it chooses the timing, media, and even the specific journalists. Instead of presenting the whole budget, it presents the budget in small bites. If you say "Yes", you promise to announce the information at

a specific time and you are subject to the conditions posed by the press advisor. It is hard to say “No”, even if some parts are less interesting, because you hope to be contacted the next time. (Swedish journalist 9)

According to Swedish journalists, this type of information management introduces a risk that journalists can become “megaphones” for well-planned governmental PR. According to our interviews, few Swedish journalists contact high-ranking politicians directly; they almost always have to go through press advisors, who then coordinate the meetings or even are present during the interviews, including some off-the-record conversations after press conferences. According to the journalists, this changes the nature of the conversation and creates a more controlled atmosphere. To prevent politicians from saying something wrong, and in cases where politicians are to reveal delicate details, press advisors might step in and warn them not to say anything more, or ask a journalist not to quote the politician (Swedish journalist 1). The politicians undergo comprehensive media training, during which press advisors carefully go through the wording of quotes for the media. A Swedish journalist illustrated this point, saying,

One day when I was to hold an interview with a politician on a live show, I happened to receive (from an anonymous source) an envelope with pre-prepared answers to all the questions that the politician’s advisors assumed I would ask during the program. (Swedish journalist 4)

In Lithuania, governmental communication is less centralised and professionalised than in Sweden. The Lithuanian journalists described press advisors as coordinators who answer media inquiries and only contact them “as much as necessary”, “when the politician in question is not available”, or when “the question is too small to disturb a minister” (Lithuanian journalist 1, Lithuanian journalist 2). Because most politicians in Lithuania answer their mobile phones, contact with a press advisor (unless it is the advisor to the prime minister or president) is considered a method largely for beginners. This creates opportunities for more personal, informal relationships between journalists and politicians. On the other hand, this type of communication is harder to coordinate. In some cases, it might even result in small scandals or mediated political fights between different ministries (or ministers) or coalition partners or inter-party fights. Lithuanian press advisors are usually present only during interviews with the highest-level political leaders (president and prime minister). In other cases, they coordinate meetings and provide the politician with the necessary background information when preparing for the interview.

Interviewees in Sweden (and to some extent in Lithuania) pointed out another aspect that has made journalists more dependent on press departments: It is harder to gain access to governmental buildings today than it was a few decades ago. Today, journalists are required to stay within defined press zones and are expected to follow the formal procedures set by the press department when contacting political sources. Moreover, government employees are advised to refer journalists to the press department so the journalists will get the “right” answers. These changes diminish the chances

of obtaining direct contact with politicians or their staff (Swedish journalist 1). Even if journalists have direct telephone numbers for their potential sources, journalists are often referred to the press department as part of the official procedure of the institution or political party in question. As stated by one interviewee, “I call the politicians’ direct mobile number, but it is a press secretary who calls me back. Some parties are extremely strict about obeying these policies” (Swedish journalist 6).

On the one hand, this practice can be understood as a part of the formalisation of journalist-source relations, where sources potentially might gain more power. On the other hand, the journalists reported that not being able to contact politicians directly increases the need to find alternative, informal sources “who would be able to talk without referring to the communication department” (Swedish journalist 6). This leads to a paradox, as the political leaders who rely on formal communication procedures may all of a sudden find themselves at a disadvantage. When journalists then use alternative sources (often political rivals or critical insiders), who remain anonymous and criticise the position of the leaders, these sources get to frame the news about what is happening while the press department is figuring out the official answer.

Exchange in formal journalist–source interaction

When it comes to formal interaction, both journalists and press advisors mostly described the journalist-source exchange in a way that corresponds to the classical literature about journalist-source relations: the source offers information in exchange for publicity. However, both sides also named several unwritten rules that are expected to be followed. These rules were the same for both Lithuania and Sweden, despite the formalisation of the communication within the Swedish government and the stronger professionalisation of both journalists and press advisors in Sweden.

First of all, the journalists found it difficult to reject stories that were offered repeatedly by a single source, as they feared that this source would then contact a competing media company the next time a good story emerged. On their side, press advisors expect journalists with whom they have friendlier relationships and who have received good stories in the past to accept less interesting news when needed (Lithuanian press advisor 4). The journalists accordingly noted that good relationships in the past can give rewards today. For example, one Swedish senior reporter thought that a good relationship with a press advisor was the reason behind an offer for an exclusive interview with a top UN officer (Swedish journalist 3).

Attending formal media events emerged as a potential way to build relationships with sources. Although most of the journalists were rather sceptical about the usefulness of press conferences (because live broadcasts and news agencies can provide the same information), they valued the opportunity to ask individual or off-the-record questions after the event, thus securing information and contacts. For example, a younger journalist reasoned that “the source will recognise me the next time I call if

I attend the press conference” (Lithuanian journalist 8). In some cases in Lithuania, journalists expressed the view that attending some “rather boring” press conferences ensured a friendlier relationship with press advisors in the future: “You attend in the hope that you will get something interesting in the future” (Lithuanian journalist 6). This shows how formal events are valued for the relationship-building aspects with the source, in general, as well as for the informal, off-the-record part after these events. In this situation, aspects of formal and informal interaction and exchange are closely interrelated.

The next section discusses how journalists and political sources use informal interactions and how they perceive the informal component of journalist–source relationships.

Usage and perceptions of informal interaction

In both Lithuania and Sweden (but also Finland and Poland) the network of “own sources” and informal interaction were described as a vital part of the journalist profession. A senior Lithuanian journalist said, “My ideas come from conversations based on trust and personal relationships. It is the core of journalism” (Lithuanian journalist 7). Informal sources can provide information off the record and outside the formal communication system. The news reporters explained that informal contacts allow them to win time and “be ready”, “be one step ahead”, or “make a correct guess”. Senior journalists, political analysts, and those working for the print media needed informal sources to provide ideas for investigations or a deeper understanding of the background – “what is really going on” (Swedish journalist 8) – especially if official information is scarce. Further highlighting this role of informal interactions, several newspaper reporters in both countries mentioned that their newsrooms made the decision to shift focus away from agenda events covered by the agencies, radio, or the online news sites to new, original angles to attract a paying audience:

Last year we changed our newsroom policies in order to provide more specialised information. We decided that reporters covering politics should avoid reporting from press conferences or other similar events since this information is available from the news agencies or our website editors. Instead, we would try to focus on providing more of our own stories, special news and investigations. One year later, I can say that it saved us time, not having to run from one press conference to another. (Swedish journalist 6)

According to the interviewees, informal sources are most important when internal conflicts within political units – parties or coalitions – take place, as well as during debates related to who should take over important positions in the government and other similar situations. The journalists reported that people who are close to the leaders of the political parties, political rivals (often within the same party), and the

second highest or middle-level public officers are the main groups of informal sources. In Lithuania, people working for institutions such as national intelligence and the courts were also named as possible informal sources when reporting on politics. In addition, informal sources were mentioned as useful for soft news or “infotainment”, for which there is a huge demand in the 24/7 news market.

One of the differences between the countries was that Lithuanian senior journalists said that they could hold conversations off the record even with the highest-level politicians (ministers and even the prime minister in some cases). On the other hand, interviewed Swedes said that the important informal sources tended to be one or a couple of levels lower, and that direct access to the highest-level politicians in Sweden was difficult.

The interviews showed that informality was important not only for journalists but for press advisors as well. A press advisor from the Swedish government said that “Maintaining good relationships with the journalists allows me to gain insight into what angles they are working on and what we could expect” (Swedish press advisor 10). In addition, press advisors expressed that close cooperation with some reporters allowed them to suggest angles or even headlines (in Sweden), “create a mutual understanding of the situation” (Lithuanian press advisor 6), or strategically leak some information (both countries).

Even though the press advisors said it was important to have an informal network of journalists, they seemed to use informality spontaneously rather than professionally. Almost none of the press advisors could mention any written or unwritten strategies for how informal relationships should be established. Nor could they name internal guidelines within their organisation regarding informal communication with the media, in order, for example, to prevent leaks in the strategically wrong moment. According to the interviews, press advisors are either unaware or unwilling to admit that some leaks take place without their knowledge. One Swedish press advisor said, “I would be very angry if I found out that someone from the ministry shared information with the media without my knowledge” (Swedish press advisor 3). At the same time, informal sources and leaks were very common in this particular organisation, according to Swedish journalists.

Nevertheless, some of the press advisors encouraged informal communication. Here, certain aspects of *formalised informality* can be noted. In Lithuania, some press advisors invite journalists to informal briefings to provide information about matters that are important for their institution. On those occasions, the entire meeting is off the record and, according to the journalists, “only the preferred journalists” are invited (Lithuanian journalist 6, 7 and 10). The topics discussed at these meetings can vary from state security and foreign policy to current internal affairs issues and do not necessarily constitute very sensitive information. Nevertheless, this practice might raise some ethical concerns because it enables the institution to indirectly set the agenda for the media without being quoted (due to the off-the-record rule) and to mediatise some preferred issues and frames. There are no rules for what issues are off

the record, in which cases issues should be discussed more publicly, which journalists should be invited to off-the-record meetings, or in what cases it would be acceptable to invite only the selected journalists. Off-the-record conversations were not as regular and routine in Sweden, although one of the Swedish press advisors mentioned that off-the-record conversations are important when it comes to some strategic issues (Swedish press advisor 11).

Despite the efforts of press advisors, informal relationships with political sources take a form that is not accessible for press advisors most of the time. Informal sources are usually political opponents who are dissatisfied with some decisions and seek contact with the media or are contacted by journalists. They simply circumvent the formal communication channels. Both politicians and journalists are interested in maintaining this informality, seemingly even more so in a context of increasing professionalisation of political communication. This observation opens up a discussion about whether a reliance on informal information equips those who act as informal sources with extra power to set the agenda for the media, leaving top political leaders and their press advisors isolated from this informal interaction and left to rely on formal means of communication.

Swedish and Lithuanian interviewees expressed similar motivations for informality, despite the organisation of the government communication in the countries being so different. The more similar the professional background of the interviewees (younger or senior journalists, working for print or broadcast/web media, or press advisors), the more similar were their answers. This demonstrates that norms regarding informality are common for professional groups and reach beyond national boundaries.

Finally, journalists were asked if they believe that the informal aspect of journalist–source interaction has changed over time. Interviewees in both countries believed that relationships between journalists and political sources have become more formal compared to 20 years ago, when journalists and politicians attended the same clubs or social events. However, the explanation for this change varied between the countries.

According to the Swedes, the change is due to fewer opportunities for face-to-face meetings at parliament because fewer journalists spend their time there as a result of increased security requirements. The need to produce more news over a shorter period of time also gives journalists less time to be present in parliament. As one Swedish journalist explained, “You cannot walk freely in the corridors, drop in on someone and ask ‘What’s up?’ the same way you could a few decades ago” (Swedish journalist 1). These examples illustrate how changes on the structural level (saving resources in the media market or security constraints) are reflected in informal interaction practices. In addition, journalists said that in situations where they contact sources by phone or SMS, a relationship already needs to have been established to get a prompt answer. “You know someone who is in the meeting, you send an SMS and get an answer before the others. But this person has to know who you are, the relationship from before is needed” (Swedish journalist 2). This becomes rarer as many press advisors today have a background in politics or professional PR rather than journalism.

In Lithuania, relationships between journalists and political sources have also changed and become more distant. The respondents attributed this to changing political and journalistic culture rather than to the emergence of professionalised political sources. More specifically, Lithuanian journalists referred to historical reasons: How the relationship between journalists and politicians changed from “fighting for common goals” (democracy, independence, market economy) during the independence period to a “watchdog vs. power” relationship during the period when independent journalism was established (Lithuanian journalist 1, Lithuanian journalist 11).

To summarise, informal interaction in journalist–source relations is primarily a way to achieve pragmatic professional goals: get the news first, find original angles, or, in the case of the political sources, get media attention.

Next, the chapter investigates the exchange in informal journalist–source interaction. Specifically, it asks whether there is a difference between formal and informal interactions in this regard.

Exchange in informal journalist-source interaction

The interviews show that the journalist-source exchange in informal relationships is driven by unwritten agreements and communication culture. The phrases “earning trust”, “long-term”, and “cultivating the relationships” were most commonly used to describe how to build a relationship with sources able to provide information informally. These phrases refer directly to the aspect of long-lasting exchange. A Swedish journalist pointed out that “It takes a long time [to earn trust] because the sources have to see how I work” (Swedish journalist 2).

The respondents further noted that one of the most important prerequisites for the exchange was that both sides belong to the same level in the hierarchy, e.g., well-established media and well-renowned politicians, or the same generation. This is confirmed by the quote below, where a younger journalist describes the purposeful work to build up a network.

The ministers are much older in age and can by no means be my informal sources, but maybe they are for somebody else [for senior journalists]. My sources’ ages are similar to mine ... I tried especially in the beginning of my career to attend after-works and parties in the hope that I would get to know some of the sources. (Lithuanian journalist 6)

Another example, that of a politician climbing the career ladder and seeking an informal relationship with a well-established journalist who was not much older, also demonstrates the invisible boundaries in journalist-source relationships. The journalist described the situation in the following way: “The new politicians try to play like the old ones. One of them invited me for a beer more than 10 times ... This behaviour is so bizarre!” (Lithuanian journalist 5).

It is impossible to be categorical about whether informality is in the interest of journalists or sources. The interviews show that both journalists and sources, depending on the situation, can seek these types of informal interactions. For this reason, a number of Swedish respondents were hesitant to take the credit for being popular among sources or journalists. They explained that they are in demand because they work for a certain organisation (some ministries are more popular in the media than others, and some media outlets are more popular than others) and not because of their personal qualities or successful informal networks. Nonetheless, access to informal contacts equals social capital in the profession. One journalist reflected on this topic, saying this:

Sources are not motivated by ideal purposes, and they expect their views to be presented in a more favourable light ... I also think that they, as well as I and many of my journalist colleagues, think that this game is a bit exciting. It is easy to feel important: "I have a contact with the state secretary!" Or a press advisor can tell their boss: "It was me who started the spin on this matter since I know that fabulous radio host!" You try to make yourself interesting and important, and career and financial factors should not be underestimated here. (Swedish journalist 4)

The interactional pattern between journalists and informal sources has several elements that position the pattern as a middle ground between personal and professional relationships. The interviewees often called this middle ground a *professional friendship*. It has higher social demands than purely formal communication but is also characterised by certain boundaries that should not be crossed.

One of the social norms that was named in the interviews was that journalists and press advisors contact each other even in situations "when we do not need anything in particular, just to check what is up" (Lithuanian journalist 6), so as not to be the one who only calls when they need something. Both journalists and press advisors also mentioned that informal cooperation is only possible when there is mutual "chemistry", both on a social level and when it comes to values. A senior journalist illustrated the point with the following observation:

We met A and B [names politicians from traditional parties], but it would be weird to play tennis or go for a beer with C [from the party considered to be populist], even though C kept asking. I [lied] and said that it was not me who was sending the invitation. (Lithuanian journalist 5)

This indicates that journalists' political views or perceptions about which politicians are serious play a role when it comes to informality (just like they would in any other social relationship). It also emphasises that journalists have the power to choose with whom to socialise and interact. The same is true for political sources and press advisors – although they are obliged to formally provide equal access to information for all media; Lithuanian respondents in particular mentioned that "serious" journalists or those who "did a good job in the past" would be remembered first when something turns up (Lithuanian press advisor 4 and Lithuanian politician 1).

On the other hand, getting too close to each other was perceived to be a risk; the relationships should not extend into the private sphere. The journalists in Sweden declared that they purposely avoid becoming personal friends with their political sources. A typical answer in Sweden was, "I can eat an alcohol-free lunch with a source, but then it is paid by my newsroom" (Swedish journalist 3). Lithuanian journalists too thought personal relationships might become a disadvantage, as described by the following comment: "Say that your friend, who is a politician, tells an interesting story during a party, but says that 'this is not for the record' – then you lose a topic and soon cannot write about anything" (Lithuanian journalist 6).

In many cases, the interviewees thought that personal relationships that cross the boundaries into *professional friendship* could become a limitation at work. To avoid such dilemmas and conflicting interests, journalists in both Lithuania and Sweden said that topics that would reflect negatively on their informal sources should be analysed by other colleagues in the newsroom (Lithuanian journalist 1).

Even though the journalists talked about their access to the source network with pride, they were also eager to emphasise the boundaries, risks, and ethical considerations of such relationships. This indicates that informal communication has somewhat of a negative connotation for the interviewees (especially journalists). This might partly be related to professional culture, for example the challenges of remaining autonomous and objective while maintaining access to the sources. It might also indicate that the exchange between journalists and informal sources is more complex than simply "information for publicity" and that some compromises are made along the way. In some cases, journalists did seem to overstep the boundaries of their traditional professional role in order to be perceived as trustworthy. For example, journalists sometimes advised the source to stay anonymous or agreed to leave some facts out of the story. An example brought up by a younger reporter illustrates this point.

If you are friends with somebody, they could always ask you 'Can you please leave this fact out of the story?' Maybe some tiny fact. Often it is important for the source to stay anonymous, or the story with that fact mentioned would look even more scandalous, etc. I take these wishes into account. (Lithuanian journalist 6)

In this example, the exchange involved *information in exchange for silence*.

In some cases, important anonymous sources might look at the final copy of the story to make sure the details are correct. Sometimes journalists even discuss the timing for when certain information could be announced with the source, as indicated by this comment:

The sources cannot state the conditions, but it is often in my interest to discuss how they should be presented or whether they would like to stay anonymous. I want to maintain my sources. Sometimes, we agree about when the news can be broadcasted. The sources can ask us to wait one day, and I can ask how many [other newsrooms] know that information. If it is many, then I am in a hurry. If it is only me, then I can wait. So, we coordinate a bit. (Swedish journalist 4)

These answers expand the conventional understanding of journalist-source relations. They illustrate that the interaction is complex and that journalists in some cases act as advisors (“I see that it would be risky for the source to be mentioned in this context” (Lithuanian journalist 1)) for their political sources. In extension, journalists might become a part of the political process by opening doors to potential publicity or offering sources a chance to set the agenda indirectly while maintaining anonymity. On the other hand, the power of whether the story will be published at all is always in the hands of journalists and their newsroom, and the sources providing the information must accept this (Swedish journalist 4).

Another aspect of informal relationships is who gets the story or the information. Both Swedish and Lithuanian press advisors admitted that journalists who demonstrated knowledge and interest in the subject and “who report correctly” could expect more exclusive angles or story suggestions on some occasions.

Usually it is an unwritten agreement, when I [the press advisor] have something exclusive and special and give it to you and not to some other journalists. Of course, if it is a big issue, we hold a press conference. But some news is better suited for radio and not TV, for example. So, I suggest it to the journalist who keeps in touch, who has helped ... The news might be about my own institution, but I might even advise them to look into some other subject that I know of since I know a lot about what is happening within the government. (Lithuanian press advisor 4)

A journalist confirmed that breaking the unwritten rules in this exchange can result in lost trust between journalists and sources: “I assume with time [the sources] learn who to contact [with information], so that it works out as [the source] intended” (Swedish journalist 4). One of the usual fears regarding informal journalist-source relations is that journalists will be less objective when reporting about politicians who also act as important sources. In this study, the interviewed journalists hardly admitted this risk. According to them, in terms of the relationships with the sources, it did not matter whether or not the story was critical as long as it was well grounded in facts. “The source understands that it is my job [to be critical]” is a typical quote attributed to the journalists in both Sweden and Lithuania. On the other hand, press advisors said that journalists who lose trust “rely on the wrong sources” or “use information in the wrong context” (Swedish press advisor 10):

Once we provided very good information to a journalist, but the journalist afterwards relied on the wrong sources and the story was incorrect. I have not had any contact with this journalist ever since. (Swedish press advisor 10)

This attitude illustrates that sources place certain expectations on journalists and the behavioural norms and compromises that could be anticipated in the exchange between journalists and sources. For example, some of the journalists in Lithuania felt that they were not welcome at the informal meetings organised by the president’s office because they had reported critically or used information they heard during the

informal briefings in the past: “I think I am not welcome there now. I did not get an invitation and I feel that [my critical reporting] is the reason.” (Lithuanian journalist 6). Journalists might find it difficult to name any such compromises, especially as some might conflict with their own professional values and normative ideals of the objective, autonomous journalist. However, the feeling that critical reporting might conflict with future opportunities to access information (especially informal) illustrates the norms and challenges in journalist-source relations. These unwritten, often not even articulated, norms and perceptions of each other’s expectations can influence work. For example, a journalist might fear that some actions (such as a critical article) will let the source down and limit future access.

Another risk with journalists relying on informality is that few journalists in either of the countries had an equally good network of sources across the entire spectrum of political parties. This might be a result of the earlier described tendencies of homophily and aspects of personal preferences. Although political parallelism is not strong in Lithuania and Sweden, the asymmetry indicates that “mainstream” parties have better contact with “mainstream” media. It turns out that the parties most difficult to access are those that are perceived to be somewhat radical or populist. Yet this access could be important, as noted by one Swedish journalist:

When reporting on somewhat closed organisations, like a radical-right political party, informal contacts in that party are especially important because the official channels in the party would not let you know what really is going on. (Swedish journalist 3)

The Lithuanian interviews communicated a clear division between media that perceives itself to be “mainstream” and media that, despite high circulation, is sometimes described as “marginal”. The journalists from the media outlet that others called “marginal” reported that they lack contacts in some of the mainstream parties. In contrast, they had informal contacts in one of the parties that was often considered by the rest of the Lithuanian interviewees (Lithuanian journalist 9, Lithuanian journalist 10) to be hard to access. The fact that different media rely on different groups of informal sources could present a risk to the objectivity of the media, as the available source network might influence news selection.

Conclusions

This chapter analyses the exchange between journalists and their political sources to understand how these processes differ depending on whether the form of interaction is formal or informal. It has looked deeper into the journalists’ and governmental press advisors’ use of both formal and informal interaction, keeping in mind that professionalisation of political communication could be an influential factor. Professionalisation could make relationships more formal, and thus give more power to

professional communication staff, or, on the contrary, open the door to alternative, informal sources.

The analysis shows that the processes of professionalising government communication and the demand for informal communication alternatives are interrelated. To understand the power and exchange in journalist-source relationships, both interaction levels (formal and informal) need to be considered. Journalists and sources exist in a co-created, reflexive professional culture. This study demonstrates that changes on the formal level of communication (like an increased control and professionalisation) inspire reactions on the informal level (such as a resistance to use formal communication channels or an increasing demand for informality). As a result, investments in professionalised political communication do not necessarily grant the most power to political leaders served by communication departments, often isolated from informal access to journalists. Such investments can even be counterproductive: the more the government attempts to control and coordinate communication, the greater the need among both journalists and politicians (or other political sources) to go around the official communication system and use informal sources.

Having access to a variety of informal sources is a professional strength and power for journalists in both Lithuania and Sweden, especially when it comes to getting ideas for non-agenda stories or investigative stories that require deeper research. However, it is often challenging to build up a network of sources that is equally well connected to different political parties and organisations. In both countries, journalists described some political parties or organisations as harder to access than others.

The results also show that political sources' ability to gain power from the interaction with journalists depends not only on the type of source (e.g., if the source is an elite source) or the stage of the news production. The gains also depend on whether the access and interaction with the journalist is formal or informal. The type of interaction therefore needs to be considered when analysing power and exchange in journalist-source relationships. The type of interaction (formal/informal) could potentially be an important attribute for future research in journalist-source relations when evaluating why and how certain sources became important in specific situations. The same journalists or sources might be rather powerful in one situation and less influential in another, depending on the type of communication tactics they apply. Studies that don't take this into account might overestimate the power of one side in journalist-source relations.

To sum up, the study reaches the following conclusions:

- The exchange process on the informal level exceeds the boundaries of "information in exchange for publicity".

In both Lithuania and Sweden, having informal access is considered to be a vital part of the profession and of social capital, especially among journalists. However, such access requires long-term engagement; cooperation in the past is important for relationships in the future. The interaction often occurs on a regular basis, and in situations

outside the actual story production. Informal interaction between journalists and their sources can thus be described as a middle ground between purely professional and purely personal relationships. Social preferences and experiences in the past play a role when choosing which sources/journalists can be trusted. This highlights how the informal relationships exchange is complex and goes beyond the traditional definitions of professional roles. It expands the understanding of journalist–source relations as “information in exchange for publicity”. In informal relationships, journalists are not only offering anonymity and possible publicity, but they also take on the role of advisor, both for communication purposes and more in general, to maintain a good relationship with their political sources. This means that some journalists are not only watchdogs but also actors in the political arena. In this exchange, journalists have power over the sources because sources are never guaranteed that the information they provide will be used in the way they intended. In other words, the sources are always taking a risk. On the other hand, journalists are aware of the sources’ expectations, and these expectations, both openly declared or only perceived, play a role in the journalistic decision making.

Theoretically, based on this research, journalists’ power and ability to remain autonomous and objective depends on 1) the strength of and support from their media organisation, which needs to prioritise journalistic integrity over financial pressures and temporary success; this factor would make journalists more resistant to the pressures they experience from the sources; and 2) journalists’ ability to have access to as evenly distributed a social network of informal sources as possible, where voices from different political parties are equally heard. The latter is hard to achieve in practice because the informal cooperation between journalists and sources often requires that they belong to the same generation and hierarchies in the political and media landscape and even share personal preferences.

- Formal interaction is beneficial for professionalised communicators in agenda-based news.

Political communication has successfully adapted to the changing media environment, potentially giving more power to professional political sources, in particular when it comes to formal interaction and agenda-based news reporting. This trend is especially distinct in Sweden, where the political communication is somewhat more developed and centralised than in Lithuania. Professional sources offering information exclusively to their chosen media outlet succeed in making agreements that information will be published via a specific media format at a specific time. This intrudes not only on the instigation of news but also into later phases of news production. The currency of the exchange in these relations corresponds to descriptions in the classical literature on journalist–source relations: “information for publicity.”

- In non-agenda-based news, informal interaction is more beneficial than formal interaction for both sides.

Both journalists and the sources prefer informal interaction when it comes to long-lasting processes and deeper investigations, as well as relatively small news, like daily political scandals or fights for certain positions in a party. Sources who act informally seem to gain a significant advantage over formal sources when it comes to leaks and unscheduled news. Those who provide information informally (who, as a rule with some exceptions, do not belong to or coordinate with communication departments) remain invisible to the public and, in many cases, their own political organisations. Nonetheless, journalists tend to rely on them heavily wherefore these sources potentially gain significant power over formal sources in the public sphere.

This chapter also shows that press advisors, despite their knowledge of how important informal communication channels are, seldom succeed in using these channels for their own purposes. Attempts of *formalised informality* during off-the-record meetings are noteworthy exceptions. Such informality allows them to claim some parts of the political agenda without being directly mentioned in the media. This type of interaction therefore deserves separate ethical considerations. On the other hand, if professional communication departments would ignore or fail to find a way to join the informal conversations with journalists, political leaders and their press advisors might find themselves in a rather isolated position.

Last but not least, the chapter discusses whether informal interaction is more culturally bound than formal interaction. The differences between the two analysed countries seem to be smaller than expected. Journalists and sources in both Lithuania and Sweden have developed similar informal codes of conduct when it comes to working with sources and informal interaction with them. This suggests common, transnational trends for the profession in a broad sense. Further investigation is required (for example, reconstruction or ethnological studies of the news production) to verify how the perceptions of formality/informality are reflected in the daily work.

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Chapter 9

Media logics as parts of the political toolkit

A critical discussion on theories of mediatisation of politics

Gunnar Nygren & Risto Niemikari

Abstract

In research on mediatisation, the political system is often described as a victim of media logics. According to this theory, the logics of politics are overruled by media logics, and the political institutions become dependent on the media. This chapter questions this dichotomy between the two logics and asks to what extent media logics are used by political actors to achieve political goals. Based on the results from interviews in four countries, the relationship between politics and the media is discussed from both perspectives. The chapter also discusses different logics and functions of the media and describes a complex picture of interdependency and mutual interests. It concludes that new types of political instrumentalisation of the media are developed in the close relationship between the news media and their sources in government.

Keywords: mediatisation, political journalism, media management, media logic, political logic

Introduction

When Congressman Frank Underwood and political reporter Zoe Barnes meet for the last time in a dark train station, the result is tragic. Zoe Barnes knows too much about the hidden and cruel struggles in top politics. Frank Underwood has been her lover and given her a lot of news stories, but this time she herself becomes the news as she gets pushed in front of the train.

The intimate relationship between the characters had at one time been useful for both – in the political game for one and for the journalistic career of the other. Ultimately, however, it becomes clear that one person held the power – and one person ended up under the train. *House of Cards* is TV fiction, but just like many successful fictional stories its roots can be found in real life. In real life, the power relationship between the media and politics is more complicated than in this fictional story, but *House of Cards* still offers a different view than many media studies.

During the past decade, the relationship between the media and politics has often been described as a process of *mediatisation*. According to this theory, politics is a kind of victim of the central mechanisms of media logic: “mediatized politics is politics that has lost its autonomy, has become dependent in its central functions on mass media and is continuously shaped by their interactions with mass media” (Mazzoleni & Schultz, 1999: 250). Hjarvard describes the process as “the political institution gradually becoming dependent on media and their logic” (2013: 43). In later definitions, mediatisation of politics has been described as a long-term process where the importance of the media for political processes, institutions and actors, and “spill-over effects” has increased (Strömbäck & Esser, 2014a: 6). This theory assumes that different logics dominate these two spheres: political logic and media logic. Political logic is supposed to have three major dimensions: polity (the institutional framework), policy (decision-based production of politics), and politics (power and the winning of support). Media logic, on the other hand, is supposed to be guided by norms such as professionalism, commercialism, and the technical conditions of news production. According to this definition of mediatisation, media logic is taking over political logic and is to an increasing degree deciding political processes (Strömbäck & Esser, 2014a: 14–19).

Is this really the case, though? Probably not in the relationship between Frank Underwood and Zoe Barnes, where the young female journalist becomes a victim of the older cynical politician. What if we turn to the real world? Is this theory useful to explain the relationship between the media and politics, or is there something else to this relationship? Is an increased power of the media visible in the daily interaction between journalists and political actors, or are there other fundamental factors, not included in theories of mediatisation? These two logics can indeed be considered as opposites, but there is also another possibility: That the political sphere can use mechanisms of media logics to achieve a political *instrumentalisation* of media. This would ultimately mean that in the end, political logic is working on another level than media logics in news production, and that political actors use media to achieve political goals.

In political processes, media is both an *arena* for political actors and an *actor* on its own (Pettersson & Carlberg, 1990). In today’s politics, political actors demand increasing attention in the public sphere to gain influence and legitimacy (Marcinkowski & Steiner, 2014). In this struggle for attention, media logic determines the basic rules of admission to the public sphere. The relationship between the political need for attention and the internal logics of the media sets the basic conditions for daily politics. From a political perspective, it can be described as a mediatisation of politics. However, from a communication perspective, when political actors use media logic in the daily struggle of agenda setting and framing of politics in the public sphere, it can be described as a new form of political instrumentalisation of the media.

The purpose of this chapter is to critically discuss the theories of mediatisation. On the basis of empirical studies of the relationships between political journalists

and their sources in four countries – Finland, Lithuania, Poland, and Sweden – the chapter poses four questions:

- Are the *dimensions of mediatisation* visible in the interaction between political journalists and their sources? If so, to what extent and how?
- How is the relationship between *media logic and political logic* visible in this interaction? To what degree is the political system adapting to the media logic, and what does this mean for the political logic?
- What is the relationship between *mediatisation* of political communication and *political instrumentalisation* of the media? Is it mutually exclusive, or can it be mutually reinforcing?
- What are the main similarities and differences regarding mediatisation in the four countries? What are the explanations, for example differences in political cultures and media systems?

In this chapter, we first seek to understand political logic in relation to media logic. Based on literature in political science and media research we discuss the two kinds of logics and whether they are mutually exclusive. We also list some examples of recent critics of mediatisation theories. In the second part of the chapter, we assess the empirical findings in the four countries in light of the power relationship between the political sphere and the media on the micro, meso, and macro level.

Mediatisation and the two logics

The relationship between the media and politics is often analysed as a question of power: What kind of influence do these groups of actors have on each other and in society? This question of power has two dimensions (Asp & Bjerling, 2014). The *first dimension* is the power of the media to influence the audience and public debate – the question of media effects on democracy. There are conflicting theories regarding this issue: the media may be a negative factor undermining democracy (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995) but might still contribute to political interest and participation (Norris, 2000). The *second dimension* concerns power over media content: Who and what mechanisms influence the content? Some schools emphasise that sources are the decisive actors, while others assert that journalists decide what news should be reported and how issues are framed in news reporting. There is also a middle ground describing the relationship as an ongoing negotiation and a mutual dependency (Berkowitz, 2009). These two dimensions are related, but there is no given relationship beforehand. It is possible that the media has a great influence on audiences and the behaviour of citizens in democratic processes. It is similarly possible that the media/journalists have a minor influence over the actual media content. Conversely, it is also possible that the media has full control over content but only a minor influence in society.

This chapter focuses on the second of these dimensions of power, asking who has the decisive influence over media content and the mechanisms and structures in the relationship between the media (journalists) and politics (political sources within the government).

As already mentioned, a key notion in this field of research is *mediatisation*. The term has been defined as a general social process in which the media has become increasingly influential and deeply integrated in different spheres of society (Hjarvard, 2013; Strömbäck & Esser, 2014a). It is a slow and structural change in society and a question of how society in general has adapted to the logics of the media. In the field of politics, mediatisation is defined as a long-term process that has increased the importance of the media and various spillover effects on political processes, institutions, organisations, and actors (Strömbäck & Esser, 2014a: 6).

This mediatisation of politics has four strongly interconnected dimensions. Each of them is a matter of degree, and varying degrees of mediatisation can occur in each one (Strömbäck & Esser, 2014a: 7-9). The four dimensions of mediatisation are these:

(D1) The degree to which the media is the most important source for information about politics.

(D2) The degree to which the media is independent from other political and social institutions.

(D3) The degree to which media content is guided by media logic (instead of political logic).

(D4) The degree to which political actors are guided by media logic (instead of political logic).

Strömbäck and Esser (2014a) note that the four dimensions work together, with D4 dealing with “the very essence of the mediatization of politics, that is, the ripple effects of media in political processes and on political actors and institutions”, while D1 – that is, the degree of *mediation of politics* – serves as a prerequisite for D2, D3, and D4.

Thus, the ideal mediatised system would be one in which there is a maximum degree of mediatisation in all four dimensions. In an earlier work, Strömbäck (2008: 240) notes that while D3 means that political actors “adapt” to media logic, they have completely “adopted” it in D4, making the mediatisation process complete. Conversely, a non-mediatised system would be one in which the media is not the most important source of information about politics (D1), the media is mainly dependent on political institutions (D2), media content is guided mainly by political logic (D3), and political actors are mainly operating according to political logic (D4).

Strömbäck and Esser raise the important concern of how the key concepts of “media logic” and “political logic” are often left undefined or only vaguely described in the mediatisation literature. As much of the previous research focuses on the media side, political logic seems to be particularly problematic. It should also be noted that there is not much discussion on the notion of “logic”, either. Strömbäck and Esser (2014a: 14)

define logic in this context as expected behaviour or as the “logic of appropriateness”. The notion of a clear dichotomy between political and media logic, first introduced by Mazzoleni (1987), can be called into question as well (Donges & Jarren, 2014; Lundby, 2009). Furthermore, Kunelius and Reunanen (2012a) note that the mere juxtaposition of the two logics fails to explain how and why mediatisation occurs.

Strömbäck and Esser (2014a: 14-16) name three dimensions – *polity*, *policy*, and *politics* – that “together shape political logic”. Note, however, that this description still falls short of describing how political logic actually works. Media logic, in turn, is described through the concepts of *professionalism*, *commercialism*, and *media technology* (Strömbäck & Esser, 2014a: 17-19). Asp (2014: 19-20) gives more detailed accounts of how media logic plays out, listing independence and objectivity as professional norms of the media, and audience-centred and efficiency-seeking rules of craft and form as professional standards. A broader definition of media logic is given by Hjarvard: “technological, aesthetical and institutional *modus operandi* by which they (the media) allocate material and symbolic resources and work through formal and informal rules” (Hjarvard, 2013: 44).

Another problem in the theory of these two logics is a too simplified notion of a single logic guiding all of politics and the media. Donges and Jarren (2014) argue for a more detailed notion of media logic, while Van Aelst and colleagues (2014) seek to refine a closer look on political logic. Strömbäck and Esser (2014a, 2014b) and Asp (2014) choose to focus on *news media logic*, while D’Angelo and colleagues (2014), in a similar fashion, analyse *political campaign logic*. As has been mentioned, the concept of political logic in particular suffers from vague definitions and conceptualisation in previous research. The next paragraph discusses this issue more in depth.

The difficult political logic

The *-isms* of professionalism and commercialism imply that media logic is defined in altogether different terms than political logic. The dimensions of political logic (*polity*, *policy*, and *politics*) do not seem commensurable with the dimensions of media logic (*professionalism*, *commercialism*, and *media technology*). As Strömbäck and Esser (2014a: 7) speak of “media logic as *opposed to* political logic” (our emphasis), it would mean that dimensions D3 and D4 of mediatisation effectively call for dichotomies among *polity*, *policy*, and *politics*, on the one hand, and *professionalism*, *commercialism*, and *media technology*, on the other. Such dichotomies seem difficult to compose. Moreover, the notion of *politics* as a dimension of *politics* adds to the confusion, and is also a sign of the arguable vocabulary issues of politics and political science (Palonen, 1993, 2003). There is also some overlap between the notions of *policy*, which includes “finding enough support for taking political decisions”, and *politics*, which “refers to the processes of garnering support for one’s candidacy, party or political program” (Strömbäck & Esser, 2014a: 15).

Furthermore, the theory of mediatisation seems to presuppose a parliamentary democratic system. As Strömbäck and Esser (2014a) note that polity is the dimension of politics most likely to be unaffected by mediatisation, it is useful to focus on the other two dimensions: policy and politics. A closer look at how political logic works on these dimensions would call for an analysis looking at the *institutions* in question – the kind of analysis that Asp (2014) carries out for media logic. A general problem with defining political logic through the notions of polity, policy, and politics alone is that the terms *policy* and *politics* are too vague. However, the fact that mediatisation theory subscribes to a parliamentary democratic polity narrows down the possible universe of policy and politics. Thus, to describe political logic in a sense that is commensurable with Strömbäck and Esser's (2014a) definition of media logic would be to note that the expected behaviour and actions of political actors are guided by the institutions of democracy and parliamentarism.

Donges and Jarren (2014: 184) note that an earlier work by Van Aelst and colleagues (2008) takes “a shortcut by describing media logic as absence of party logic”. Given the apparent difference in the level of detail between accounts on media logic and political logic, it seems that, in a sense, many studies on mediatisation take a similar shortcut by describing political logic as an absence of media logic. For instance, Haßler and colleagues (2014) name the absence of policy issues, personalisation, negativity, topicality and ambiguity as five aspects of media logic that distinguish media logic from political logic. However, they note that politics and the media seem to share the tendencies for personalisation and negativity.

The origins of the term “political logic” also seem unclear. While the notion of media logic can be traced back and attributed to Altheide and Snow (1979), as Haßler and colleagues (2014) do, no similar starting point has been identified for the notion of political logic. Mazzoleni and Schulz's (1999) classic article “Mediatization of Politics: A Challenge for Democracy?” is taken to be one of the most important starting points for theories on mediatisation (Strömbäck & Esser, 2014b). While discussing media logic, Mazzoleni and Schulz (1999) do not come up with any clear definition of political logic. The earlier Mazzoleni article (1987) spoke of party logic instead of political logic.

From a political science perspective, the notion of a political logic seems somewhat slippery. Marcinkowski (2014: 15) notes that this is most notably because of the political science concept of *governance*, which implies a complex set of mechanisms that coordinate action in society instead of a clear political logic. Indeed, if there are any approaches to political logic within political science, these are found in systems theoretical approaches such as that of Easton (1965). Mediatisation, then, would have to be about the framing of reality, that is, who gets to decide what counts as outputs and inputs in the political system. Interestingly, Vos and Van Aelst (2018) label the polity aspect of Esser's political logic as “political system logic” in their analysis of politicians' media visibility.

Esser (2013: 164) maintains that “politics cannot be reduced to one dimension only”, and moves on to discuss political logic through the central triad of *politics*, *policy*,

and *polity*. In addition to analysing what is political and what is not – a fundamental theme in political science – Esser claims that the triad has also been developed “to distinguish political logic from the logics of other societal spheres like economics, sports, or the media” (ibid). Here, Esser cites a study by Pennings, Keman, and Klein-nijenhuis (2006: 23-26), which is not primarily a discussion of what mediatisation theorists call political logic, either. To sum up, it seems that an exegesis of the concept of political logic cannot provide a clear definition of it.

Instead, a discussion on political logic quickly boils down to a discussion on the nature of politics itself, as happens with Strömbäck and Esser (2014a: 14-15). They find their conception of politics in Lasswell’s (1958) classical notion of “who gets what, when, and how”. Despite this general approach, in practice, the theory and studies of mediatisation are based on a rather narrow conception of politics, as they focus on politics as an activity within the institutions of a parliamentary democratic system. Another broad understanding of politics is found in Lasswell and Kaplan’s (1950: xiv) conception of political science as “the study of the shaping and sharing of power”, where the corresponding conception of politics as shaping and distributing power arises.

The very core of politics is to define it. This is why political scientists are very aware that they might have to wait forever to agree on the topic (Leftwich, 2004). As noted outright by political theorist Carl Schmitt (1976 [1932]: 20) in the beginning of his classic essay “The Concept of the Political”, “One seldom finds a clear definition of the political”. Indeed, it is important to note that there is a risk that getting bogged down in a debate on the nature of politics will even further diminish the ability to operationalise political logic.

In this chapter, we propose that the dichotomy between media logic and political logic, in the way it is construed in theories of mediatisation, might be misleading. Instead, if one turns to the more abstract definition of political logic as shaping and (re)distributing power, it can be noted that the logic of politics as power operates on a higher level than media logic. That is, politics, even when it seemingly appropriates itself to the calculi of (news) media, still does so to its own ends (Van Aelst et al., 2014).

Beyond the dichotomy

Several researchers question the dichotomy between the two distinct logics of politics and media. Esmark and Mayerhöffer study agenda setting and write that political use of media logic for agenda-setting purposes does not necessarily mean subjugation. Even if political actors adapt to media standards, this may be due to a preservation of political rationality in the context of media formats. Tailoring strategies of agenda setting to media logic might equally imply a reassertion of political authority (Esmark & Mayerhöffer, 2014: 221, also Bjerling, 2012). As Holtzhausen and Zerfass (2015: 8) note, it is “important for strategic communicators to *understand* and *utilize* ‘mediatization’” (our emphasis). In a Finnish study, Kunelius and Reunanen also conclude

that it is necessary to go beyond the dichotomy of media logic vs. political logic. By analysing power as a relationship between actors, they look at the media as a part of the construction of political power inside the political system.

On a general level, political power adapts to media logic as described by theories on mediatisation. However, this is done to communicate power, making the impact of the media on the actual decision making less predictable. Mediatisation also seems to correlate with other power resources, as for example those actively involved in policy networks also make use of media resources (Kunelius & Reunanen, 2012b: 71-72).

The notion of politics as power, and the seeking and usage of power as an underlying premise of all political logic, is important for understanding the implications of the mediatisation of politics for politics and democracy. Asp (2014) notes that the mediatisation of politics does not necessarily equal a weakened democracy. Furthermore, as Van Aelst and colleagues put it,

even when political actors take over media issues, they do this often on their own terms and with clear strategic goals. In a sense, rather than to a general decline of power of political actors, mediatization probably leads to a *redistribution* of power in politics, with some actors profiting and other paying a higher price ... close interactions between media and politics take place as a result of *overlapping logics*, rather than one logic dominating the other. (Van Aelst et al., 2014: 214)

In fact, the whole idea of mediatisation as a process that represents an increase of the power of the media without consent from political actors may well be called into question. As the German researchers Marcinkowski and Steiner (our emphasis) put it:

Therefore, the mediatization of the political sphere is not to be interpreted as a sign of a declining political culture nor of the pathological colonization of politics by media; rather, it serves first and foremost to *make politics possible* under conditions of *increased interdependencies*, high political complexity and inclusivity. (Marcinkowski & Steiner, 2014: 88)

Marcinkowski and Steiner have a broader perspective than many media researchers, starting with the functional differentiation of modern societies. Different systems in society – the economy, juridical system, science, politics, the media, etc. – have their own perspectives but influence each other and are interdependent. The special function of the media is to create attention for issues in the greater social communication, and other systems want to use this for their own needs.

Following this perspective, the reasons for mediatisation of politics are not to be found in the media but in politics itself. Modern and complex politics, where citizens are more demanding and more volatile as voters, has increased the political need for attention and acceptance. In a society where the basic condition is an abundance of information and a deficiency of attention, the struggle for attention is becoming more important for the political system. Politicians must obtain the consent of the population, and there is a greater need for confirmation and legitimization of political decisions.

This is especially true in times of political campaigning. As stated by Marcinkowski and Steiner (2014: 86), “It is politics itself that realizes its dependency on media more than ever and therefore is reprogramming itself to appear more attractive”.

From this perspective, there is no basic contradiction between political logic and media logic. For the political system, media logic is a means to achieve the public attention necessary in the political struggle for power (or to shield political actors from unwanted publicity). Marcinkowski goes as far as questioning the whole notion of mediatisation:

We may therefore wonder whether the process described here really can be called the mediatisation of politics, when it is actually about intended publicity, which, in turn, is used as a means to the end of managing assent, ensuring legitimacy, maintaining or gaining power – that is for genuinely political ends. (Marcinkowski, 2014: 19)

In his analysis, Marcinkowski changes perspective from a media-centric one to one that centres on political actors. Similarly, Van Aelst and Walgrave (2017) propose a functional model for studying the relationships between politics and media that takes the political actors as a starting point. Asking why and how political actors are using the media to reach political goals, they distinguish two main functions of the media for political actors (Van Aelst & Walgrave, 2017: 5-10):

- Information function: to get information about problems in society, public opinion and other political actors. Both in a passive role as consumers and in an active role in using information in their political agenda.
- Arena function: to reach out with their message and be visible themselves.

To use these functions, politicians must learn and incorporate media rules into their daily work. This is not equally important for all politicians and in all situations; for example, a minority needs more public attention to balance the governing majority than the majority does. The competitors of politicians in this work are not journalists but other politicians. The functional perspective hence examines whether and how media affects the balance of power among politicians.

Brants and Van Praag also take the analysis beyond the dichotomy of media logic and political logic (2014). They identify a more powerful logic of the public – *vox populi* – dominated by anti-establishment rhetoric against both mainstream media and the political system. This logic is visible in online platforms and changes the logics of media based on the market or, at least, on assumptions about what the market wants. This logic driven by the public is however too fragmented and contradictory to speak of one certain, specific logic. They conclude:

The inevitable conclusion will have to be that there is not one structural power, not one single dominating logic, but an often unpredictable interaction between public, media and politics with mutual influence and changing positions of power. With political logic passé and ambiguous proof of media logic, it is better to stop talking

about logics in political communication all together. Except maybe, as a historical category. (Brants & Van Praag, 2017: 11)

Relationships between media and politics

The area of the media and politics is one of the most studied areas in media research. Michael Schudson describes political institutions and media institutions as deeply intertwined “in a complex dance with each other, that it is not easy to distinguish where one begins and the other leaves off” (Schudson, 2003: 154). He concludes that the media does not define politics more than political structures define the media. According to Schudson, there have been many changes in the broad political culture, creating a system where the role of the media is central – not supreme but indispensable. He also warns against generalising too much about the relationship between the media and politics as differences are large between countries and over time. Variations in laws, political institutions, and political culture have to be considered. The central idea is the basic understanding that journalism does not stand outside politics looking in; journalism is an element of politics (Schudson, 2003: 166).

In recent years, a number of comparative studies on political journalism have been conducted in Western Europe. A study of five countries concludes that historical heritage and social/political/economical differences are keys to understanding political journalism in Europe (Nielsen, 2014). There is no clear “Americanisation” found in Europe; some trends are similar, such as fragmentation of audiences and an accelerated news cycle. Other trends in US political journalism are not really found in Europe (so far), for example the increased partisan polarisation in media and decreasing trust in legacy media (Nielsen, 2014: 191).

Nielsen and Kuhn (2014) do not use the notion of mediatisation but give a nuanced picture of the complex relationship between media and politics. The authors find continuity in terms of national differences and in the relationship between the political and journalistic elites, the closeness between journalism and the political system, and being part of “the same bubble” of intimate relations. The study asks for more research on the informal and formal ties binding actors together in relationships that are both adversarial and symbiotic. The authors also note a technological shift in media systems and a professionalisation of political sources.

Yet another study compares political journalism in four Western European countries and finds clear differences between Northern and Southern Europe (Albaek et al., 2014). The authors conclude that even if politics becomes more dependent on the media, this does not mean that journalism becomes more independent of political pressure. On the contrary, political pressure from sources and the political interests of media owners are still strong. Political spin doctors help politicians accommodate the media, and the power balance does not tip in favour of the media. The development

of mediatisation varies widely between the four countries, and there is no evident one-directional shift from political logic to media logic (Albaek et al., 2014: 175). On the contrary, an increased importance of the media may give political sources a stronger position in relation to journalists, according to a Danish study. More competition among media outlets gives political sources more power and influence over the public image (Elmelund-Praestkaer et al., 2011).

A limitation in the theory of mediatisation is the empirical basis: it is based on research in liberal democracies with independent media organisations. It remains to be seen if the theory can be used in other kinds of media systems as well, for example semi-authoritarian systems with a strong political influence on the media. For example, many hybrid media systems have a long tradition of political influence on the media through ownership and censorship. Outside the Western world, it might therefore be difficult to apply theories on media systems (Voltmer, 2012).

The relationship between politics and the media in Central and Eastern Europe is often described in terms of party colonisation and clientelism. An analysis of five countries (Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovenia) finds different kinds of patterns in the relationships between parties and the media, but all of them include some kind of party colonisation of the media. Such a system, with many parties and no dominant party, allows for a high degree of press freedom. With a one-party colonisation of the media, like in Hungary and Poland under Kaczyński, the degree of press freedom is low (Bajomi-Lazar, 2015). Another study of five Central European countries analyses clientelistic links between political and media elites. Clientelist networks, characterised by the exchange of favours and resources between politicians and media owners or in the form of media owners who themselves are politicians, are found in all five countries. Advertorials and kompromat (negative news about opponents) are used to influence public opinion (Örnebring, 2012).

The political systems in Central and Eastern Europe are operating in a borderland between semi-authoritarian regimes and multiparty systems close to the liberal model. Mediatisation, supposed to be found only in Western democracies, is also found in these countries in Central Europe. A study from Slovenia, one of the most stable democracies in the region, shows a strong political use of the media (following a *commodity logic* where politics and politicians imitate commodities that can be “sold” to the “consumer”) by adapting messages to the media logic (Amon-Prodnik, 2016).

To summarise, theoretical perspectives of European research on the media and politics offer a lot of arguments against a simple model of mediatisation as media logic replacing a political logic in political processes. It is difficult to define any special political logic interchangeable with the logics governing media production – professional standards, commercialism, and technological conditions. The relationship is much more complicated, and the logic of politics operates on a different level than what is defined as media logic.

Power relationships in four countries

All relationships contain a question of power – whether one side in the relationship has the power to influence the other to do something. There are also questions about mutual and diverging interests in a relationship – what are the common interests and what is in the interest of one part in the relationship but not of the other. A relationship also entails questions about the degree of closeness and distance (the theme of the present volume). A relationship contains both, but to a varying degree depending on the time and situation.

When it comes to the actors in our study – the media and political actors – the question of power concerns the influence over media coverage. How can the two groups of actors use closeness and distance to gain power over the media content? The struggle is about control over information flows and agenda setting – who decides what news is to be told and what issues are to be covered (McCombs, 2014). The struggle is also about framing – how the actors can influence how news stories are told and what impression they give to the audience, an audience both defined as citizens in a democracy and customers on a market of media systems and political parties (Nord & Strömbäck, 2003).

The full empirical findings from each country are reported in other chapters in this volume. In this chapter, we look at the results from a comparative perspective, focusing on the power relationship on three different levels:

- *Micro level*: personal history of the actors and personal relationships between actors; informal relations and networks (see also Chapter 8) on a personal level; social background and social values.
- *Meso level*: relationships between organisations in daily work; professional interaction between newsrooms and government communication.
- *Macro level*: ownership and control over media organisations; laws and other frames put up by the political sphere; media structures and technological changes as new platforms for communication.

In the final part, we discuss to what extent theories of mediatisation can explain the distribution of power among the groups of actors on these three levels.

Micro-level relations

On a personal level, journalists in all four countries talked about a long-term development of more distance towards political actors. Finland has a tradition of political consensus, and journalists described two schools of attitudes in the relationship between the media and politics: the old school of close relationships, where journalists and politicians even went out drinking together, and the new school of keeping

a distance from such activities. Journalists in Sweden, with an old tradition of party press, also described more distance today when political journalists no longer have a background in politics. The professionalisation of journalism is behind this change, as it separates the media from the political system on an institutional level. In Poland and Lithuania, more experienced journalists talked about the struggle for democracy in the 1980s-1990s and how this struggle for a common goal united journalists and politicians. The following quote from a Lithuanian journalist illustrates this experience.

Right after the independence, the media had to redefine itself. It had to change. The same applies to the politicians. All of them (journalists and politicians) were friends. All of them were “pro-Lithuania” ... Politicians were visiting the house of my parents, who were also journalists. They all were striving for the same goal. And the media at that time was not critical, around 1990-1991. It began later on: politics, scandals, intrigues. (Lithuanian journalist 1)

The same story is told by Polish journalists looking back at the time of Solidarity [trade union] when everyone (journalists and political actors) were parts of the same movement, “when different political-journalistic events were a daily routine and when the two worlds were younger and less separated from each other” (Polish journalist 1).

Still, journalists and political actors in all four countries emphasised that personal contacts and informal networks remain a basic condition for their daily work. They described how they build and nurture these networks whenever they interact: At press conferences, in parliament, at political events, and during election campaigns during long trips together in buses and planes. Off-the-record lunches are a daily part of the work, and during years of close contact journalists and political sources build personal relationships. Through these networks, journalists get a picture of political developments and avoid being only reactive and dependent on sources. Politicians, in turn, are able to use stable relationships with specific journalists for leaks and other similar methods. Thus, the relationships are beneficial for both sides; “both sides are in contact with each other for beneficial purposes and both sides are aware of this ... they are relationships of utility” (Finnish journalist 2).

There are structures keeping these networks together. In Sweden and Finland, there are special associations for political reporters where they can meet politicians informally, and in some of the countries the political side arranges informal briefings for journalists. In addition, technological development provides new tools to maintain and develop the networks; these include both public tools like Twitter and other social media and closed channels like mobile phones.

There is a clear social closeness between the two groups of actors; they are both part of a political communication elite. In Poland and Lithuania, all the press advisors are former journalists. In Finland, this is sometimes the case as well, while it is rarer in Sweden. Nonetheless, the two elite groups in the two Scandinavian societies, usually labelled consensus-oriented (Lijphart, 2012; Arter, 2016), often share the same values. In three of the countries (Finland, Lithuania, and Sweden), the political communication

elite of journalists and political actors is quite small and has many connections from social and professional life, schools, and personal history. At the same time, journalists and press advisors in Sweden and Finland clearly distinguish between personal and private relationships. Even if the relationship is personal, journalists emphasise that it is still fundamentally professional. Journalists in Poland are also aware of the danger of having relationships that are too close, as the following quote emphasises: “Too much fraternization with politicians or with their surroundings can bring ruin to journalists” (Polish journalist 1).

Press advisors mostly describe informality and personal relationships with journalists as non-controversial. A typical quote from an experienced Swedish press advisor states that

It is about selling things the right way, also talking things down if they are not so serious ... often it is some kind of misunderstanding that leads to something bad ... then it is time for background conversations when I phone journalists to tell what is happening and to explain this is not a big deal bla bla bla ... (Swedish press advisor 3)

The relationship is often described as cooperation, especially in the Nordic countries with a political culture of consensus and corporatism. It can be described as a game in which the actors share the same rules of mutual trust and informal agreement. One Finnish journalist describes it as “a fairly functional relationship, because it is kind of symbiotic in the sense that both sides need each other”. (Finnish journalist 7)

For journalists, this closeness comes at a price; a basic part of their professional role is to be an independent watchdog. Being too close to the sources might bring this independence into question. In Sweden, journalists talked about publishing stories from their sources just to keep them happy – a kind of yielding to pressure to keep relationships good for the future. The same pressure is found in Lithuania, where journalists experienced being excluded from the informal briefings of the president if they were too critical (although this, of course, has not been confirmed by press secretaries of the president). In Finland, journalists generally maintained that they are able to balance closeness with journalistic values.

Meso-level relations

On the meso level, there has been a clear development towards professionalisation on both sides of the political communication relationships in all four countries. However, the development is uneven and differs among the countries with regards to both time and strength.

Professionalisation in journalism has been very strong in Sweden and Finland since the 1970s. The party-press system was abandoned, and public service values of objectivity and autonomy from both owners and sources became dominant among journalists. Professional education and organisations became guards of those profes-

sional values and ethics (Djerf-Pierre & Weibull, 2001). In Poland and Lithuania, this development became possible only after the fall of communism in 1989-1991, and the level of professionalisation is still weaker than in many Western countries, according to earlier research. Poland has a strong tradition of politicised media, and Polish journalists experienced strong political pressure from both owners and political actors (Nygren & Dobek-Ostrowska, 2015). In Lithuania, the journalistic traditions are weak, and there is hidden pressure from politicians and business interests to buy influence in the media (Balčytienė, 2012).

The different degrees of professionalisation in journalism were reflected in the interviews with journalists. In Sweden, experienced political reporters reacted against strong news management, and in Poland journalists tried to avoid communication officials. Professional integrity and autonomy are evidently an important part of journalists' self-understanding.

Professional norms in journalism are under pressure in today's processes of media production. This pressure is sometimes labelled as a "de-professionalization" of journalism (Witschge & Nygren, 2009); newsrooms are being downsized, and resources for political coverage are diminishing. Journalists have less time while also being expected to produce content for more platforms in their daily work. New platforms such as social media increase the speed and amount of developing news. These trends allow less time for meeting sources, spending time in the parliament building, and searching for stories in background conversations. Many interviews revealed a strong frustration about this, with journalists reluctantly taking the "information subsidies" produced by government communication to meet the quantitative demands of production.

On the other side of the relationship, there is a similarly clear and strong trend towards professionalisation of political communication and increasing government control over information flows (see also Chapter 6). This process came later than the professionalisation of journalism and at present seems to be strong in all four countries. In Sweden and Finland, government communication resources have increased, and centralised control seems to be on its way. Communication is regarded to be at the very heart of the political processes. As explained by a former head of information at the PMO in Sweden,

All politics becomes media, because all politics is communication ... There is no one working with politics not dealing with media. Do you understand? It is not like a company where the CEO goes to the information director and then a press secretary sends out a bulletin ... [In politics] everybody is in the discussion ... [A press secretary] has to be somebody interested in politics, who knows politics and the culture of the party ... (Swedish press advisor 2)

Press advisors in Sweden often have a background in politics or corporate PR. They are part of an expanding group of professionals working in politics without being elected politicians (Garsten et al., 2015). They work actively to promote good news in

important channels and to downplay news that is not in favour of the government. With their many personal contacts among political journalists and in leading newsrooms, it is possible to plan communication activities in favour of the government. This also makes it possible to handle leaks, both those in favour of the government and those that result from internal struggles within the government and the parties. Much of this is also evident in Finland, where journalists regard ministers' press advisors as key players in the scheme of government communications. Generally speaking, journalists seem happy with the level of access to political sources.

Poland and Lithuania have seen an increase in the resources used in government communication. Former journalists have been hired as press advisors, but the communication seems to be less centralised than in Sweden and Finland, and political journalists regard these press advisors as less important. Instead, journalists have their own direct channels to the ministers. Government communication seems to be less coordinated and more dependent on personal connections. Both sides, journalists and press advisors, emphasised the need for personal contacts and mutual understanding.

Government communication is also about controlling the political side of the interaction. Press advisors talked about how they try to discipline politicians into not talking too freely with journalists, and journalists talked about press advisors acting like shields for politicians. One part of this increased control over information is restricted access to government and parliament buildings. In Sweden, access has been restricted for security reasons, and seasoned journalists miss the old days when it was possible to walk freely in and out of ministries to meet sources and get all the off the record talk. In Poland, too, access to the parliament building has been restricted by the former liberal and the present right-wing government. The arguments put forward have been to not disturb the work of parliament, but journalists describe it as an obstacle in their daily work. Some doors are closed today in Lithuania as well, making direct contact more difficult. The Finnish parliament, however, remains remarkably open for journalists – a feature of the Finnish system that was hailed as useful and unique in international comparison by most interviewees.

Professionalised government communication is ultimately about news management – how to promote good news and how to play down bad news. The toolbox for doing so includes everything from official press conferences and leaks to targeting journalists and informal contacts. However, communication officials and politicians are also worried about decreasing resources and coverage in the mainstream media. In Finland, interviewees from both sides described the growing influence of “reckless” communication behaviour in social media and other online platforms and expressed a concern over the weakened state of serious media. In Lithuania, the political side seemed even more concerned than the journalists. According to the interviews, both sources and journalists have a mutual interest in preserving the political communication elite.

It is important to clarify that professional government communication is not necessarily negative for democracy. In the struggle for attention in today's society, the political system has to use communication strategies based on media logics to produce politics. At the same time, resources in newsrooms are diminishing, resulting in a changed power balance between the media and political power. This influences the role of the media in democracy, for example the ability to provide critical coverage on a daily basis to fulfil the role as a watchdog over political power.

Macro-level relations

Relationships between government and political journalists on the macro level are about structural factors: the role of public service, commercialisation, and new technical platforms outside traditional media. All of these factors influence the relationships in political communication.

Public service TV and radio are the most important part of the media structure that is under some kind of societal and political control. Public service media can be a relatively independent construction, as in Sweden and Finland, or under direct political control through the appointments of public service managers and director, as in Poland. In all four countries, however, the political system ultimately sets the framework and decides how public service should be financed.

In Sweden, this is a sensitive issue. When a public inquiry suggested a new tax to replace the old licence fee, critics warned about the increased political influence in public service.

In Finland, the public broadcaster Yle has been funded by a special tax since 2013, the board is semi-political, and the ties to the political system are not as close as they once were. Still, there have been cases of political pressure towards Yle related to the coverage of a scandal close to the prime minister (see Chapter 2). The prime minister has also been able to use prime-time TV for a live political speech. This shows that even an independent public service construction can leave room for political pressure on media content.

Poland is a typical TV country, and newspapers have a very limited audience (see Chapter 4). There is also a strong tradition of politicised media, and when the Law and Justice government took power after the elections in 2015, hundreds of journalists had to leave public service TV and radio. New, politically appointed editors were installed by the new government, and the state channel broadcasts clearly pro-government content. Other media was politicised too, as commercial media companies became channels for criticising the government.

Outside public service, commercialisation has been strong in all four countries. There are still some local links between political parties and newspapers in Sweden and Finland, but in general, commercial interests have replaced the party press. In Poland, newspaper coverage is defined in political terms as either for or against the

government. Many newspapers have foreign owners, mostly German companies, that have commercial motives and lack political connections. These newspapers have more freedom to criticise political actors. In Lithuania, media ownership is less transparent, and political and business interests can buy influence or pressure journalists and in that way influence media content.

Commercialisation is a double-edged sword in relation to political journalism. On the one hand, commercialisation gives media organisations a more independent role in relation to politics, i.e., more space for critical coverage. On the other hand, political journalism is often not given a high priority in the commercial media. In Sweden, only one of the commercial TV channels (TV4) produces daily news, and these broadcasts have been downsized dramatically: in 2014, all regional coverage was closed down and the channel only produces national news. In the commercial media, other areas, such as sports, lifestyle, and entertainment, are expanding. Furthermore, some interviewees mentioned that the element of entertainmentisation is visible even in some of the news reporting usually regarded as serious. However, there is no consensus as to whether this trend is caused by the politicians or the media, or both.

The third macro area identified in the interviews is the changing media system. New online communication is expanding in all countries: social media, blogs, and websites. Politicians and government communication put a lot of effort into these new kinds of direct communication with other actors and citizens, bypassing the traditional media (see also Chapter 7). In Poland and Lithuania, online news is the most important source of information for citizens. Interviews in these two countries show that political sources prefer communication on platforms they control, such as social media.

In Sweden and Finland, attitudes among communication officials are more ambivalent. Governments naturally use their own websites as well as social media, predominantly Twitter, to disseminate news and press releases. Press advisors use social media mostly to follow the flow of discussions and news, but emphasise traditional media with a larger reach in their own communication efforts. Government communication is focused on traditional media, and political reporters they know very well are considered to be safe partners in communication. In contrast, populist parties distrust legacy media and rely on social media and their own online platforms.

Although developments in the media are changing patterns of media use and political communication, political journalists and government officials in this study still seem to be focused on traditional media. Direct online communication is still a minor issue for the political system as a whole, and social media is seen mostly as an additional aspect of the communication landscape. Twitter, in particular, is often regarded as communication among the elite (see also Chapter 7).

Conclusions

In our conclusions, we take stock of our findings. First, we assess our findings in the light of the four dimensions of mediatisation and connect this discussion with national political cultures in the four countries examined. Finally, we bring the discussion back to the debate about political logic and media logic, as depicted in the beginning of this chapter.

Four dimensions of mediatisation with other perspectives

In their analysis of the mediatisation of politics, Strömbäck and Esser define four dimensions of mediatisation (2014a). These dimensions are present in the interaction between journalists and political sources in the four countries in the study. In a broader perspective, however, these dimensions give a more complicated picture of the power relationships between politics and the media.

The first dimension concerns the degree to which the media is an important information source for the audience. This is not the subject of research in this volume, but previous research in all four countries shows that citizens are dependent on the media for information about politics. For instance, Finnish voters report traditional media channels such as television and the press as major sources of information regarding parliamentary elections, and traditional media outlets also enjoy strong positions among internet sources that Finns follow (Grönlund, 2016: 67-73; Moring & Mykkänen, 2009: 47-48). Our research shows another kind of increasing dependency: The government and leading politicians are dependent on the media to communicate politics, even in the social media age. The interviews with political press advisors and politicians show a high awareness of this “Politics is communication”, as one leading press advisor in Sweden said. In today’s abundance of information, news management is necessary to attract public attention. The increase in communication resources in all four countries shows how important it is for the political system to control information flows and the image of politics in the public sphere.

The second dimension concerns the degree to which media institutions are independent from the political system. In some aspects, the results show an increasing distance between the media and the political system. There is less personal affiliation between the two and less political ownership in the media. But the two spheres are still closely connected both by structures and daily social interaction. Political journalists, political advisors, and top politicians belong to the same political communication elite. They have the same kind of social position, and the mutual dependency in daily work deeply intertwines media institutions and government/political communication in a common political communication culture (Pfetsch, 2014; Schudson, 2003). The results show close informal relations between political sources and journalists based on mutual dependency and trust.

There is also a structural closeness mainly through public service in radio and TV. In Poland, state control has been used in recent years to politicise public service TV

and radio in support of the government. Hundreds of journalists have been forced to leave their jobs. There has also been an intense discussion in Finland about how the prime minister tried to influence the coverage of news connected to a relative. In Lithuania, media ownership is not transparent, and financial and political interests influence coverage. In total, the degree of independence of the media in relation to politics differs among the four countries and also among various kinds of media.

The third dimension concerns media logic and to what degree the media is guided by media logic. We did not study media content in our project, but previous research has shown a strong influence of mechanisms of media logic in political coverage (Strömbäck, 2015). According to the interviews in the project, media logic guides the selection and framing of content among journalists as well as press advisors. Mechanisms of media logic are so internalised in political work that media logic seems natural and becomes invisible. However, there is not only *one* media logic; each platform or media type has its own internal logic. Public service has a strong democratic mission and role within the corporate culture of public service companies. In contrast, the commercial media is more guided by market thinking, audience ratings, and costs of production. In the commercial media, the public service orientation of professional journalism is mixed with commercialism. In social media, new logics are developed (Chapter 7). Here, the logics differ more clearly according to spreadability and the need to be simplified and short. In conclusion, there is not one single media logic. Political sources know how to combine different media logics to achieve wide public attention for their political interests.

The fourth dimension concerns the political actors and to what degree they are guided by media logic. This is the basis for the growth of communication resources in all four countries. The political system needs communication specialists to control the daily flow of information and gain access to the public sphere. Media logic is integrated into political processes, and press advisors are close to ministers and the PMO. This is called self-mediatization (Meyer, 2002; Strömbäck & Esser, 2014a: 21), and the result is an increased influence of political actors in the news media and political processes adapted to different kinds of media logic. The interviews with political advisors and politicians show a strong awareness of the rules put up by media logics. These logics are used in the political game, by promoting positive information and by leaking negative information about political rivals. To what extent political advisors succeed in this work depends on the strength of their informal networks and the development of news management strategies.

This fourth dimension is the key to understanding political communication from the perspective of the political system. This brings the analysis close to the functional perspective raised by Marcinkowski and Steiner (2014) and Van Aelst and Walgrave (2017). Leaving the media-centric perspective, political sources need journalism to access information and the public arena. The rules for this access are written by media logics, i.e., the rules for gaining public attention, but the purpose behind these functional needs is political.

National political cultures

The general trends are the same in the four countries studied in this project: professionalisation on both sides and integration of media logics into political processes. However, the levels and shape vary according to the political communication cultures of each country.

In Sweden and Finland, the mediatisation of politics is strong in all aspects: strong professionalisation and the development of strategic news management in government communication put media in the centre of political processes. At the same time, a political culture of consensus and cooperation supports a close cooperation between actors in spite of journalistic standards of detachment and integrity. There is an increased distance between journalists and political actors. At the same time, the media is more dependent on sources and information subsidies when newsrooms are downsized while the demand for content is the same or increasing.

In Poland and Lithuania, old structures of political influence, through ownership and clientelism, are still visible, and there are strong trends towards a professionalisation of government communication. For example, politicians bypass legacy media by using new online platforms. The traditions of political instrumentalisation are still strong in the media, especially in state-owned radio and TV. Traditions of partisan journalism are also strong in journalistic cultures in Poland and Lithuania, despite close to 30 years of Western “liberal” influence.

The results confirm the existence of the four dimensions of mediatisation and show how political systems and structures are adapted to the media logic in a daily struggle for attention. The consequence of this, however, is not a transfer of power from political institutions to media institutions. On the contrary, professionalised government communication is learning how to play the game with the media according to media logic. By transforming the political system and integrating media logic into political processes, a political instrumentalisation of the media is developing.

This brings the analysis close to other theoretical perspectives on contemporary political communication, namely functional analysis from a political perspective. The key question is perhaps not how the media is changing politics, but how the political system uses the media according to the basic political logic still in place.

Two coexisting logics

The theme of this chapter has been mediatisation and the different kind of logics behind daily political communication processes. A key question is the relationship between media logics and the logics of political processes. The results show that these two logics are not operating at the same level. It is more accurate to describe media logic and political logics as overlapping, not mutually exclusive (Van Aelst et al., 2014). The political communication process is based on media logic, and the political system uses media logic to reach political goals. Media content is produced according to log-

ics of professionalisation and logics of the commercial demands and technological possibilities of different platforms. To exist in the public sphere created by the media, the political system has to adapt to the logics of media. However, the motives for influencing the media coverage remain political: influence the public agenda and the framing of issues discussed in political debate.

The use of media logics does not replace political logics. Instead, the media is used in politics to create support and increase influence over decision processes in the political system. Politics is about power: how to gather support, reach political power, and realise political goals. In these political processes, media logics can be used as a tool (or be an obstacle). Mediatised politics in this perspective is still ruled by the basic political logic of gaining power to reach political goals.

This development is in one sense a paradox: by adapting to media logic, the political system can develop a new kind of political instrumentalisation of the media. Instead of old structures of state propaganda in authoritarian societies with hard methods (ownership, censorship, and legal means), the mediatised political system can control the information flow with soft methods (news management strategies).

The two logics create a common frame for the daily exchange between journalists and political sources. Journalists need information that fits the logics of media production (news value, personalisation, conflict and so on). The political sources need attention and space in the public sphere in daily political processes that in turn follow political logics. The currency in this trade is news. News is hence produced within a system of mutual exchange and interest. Media logics set the rules of the game, and political sources can play the game to reach their goals according to political logics. They are two separate logics, which do not replace one another but exist in healthy professional symbiosis.

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Chapter 10

Variations in political communication culture

New forms of political parallelisms and media-politics coalitions

Auksė Balčytienė & Tom Moring

Abstract

This chapter compares the political cultures in the four countries analysed in this volume. Based on an inductive qualitative approach that singles out specificities in how political communication advisors and journalists interact within historical/institutional and professionalist/normative conditions and related constraints, the findings challenge earlier research on political communication culture. The chapter shows how political communication culture may act as a modifying factor in times of systemic change. It also reveals differences between and within countries that are often seen as forming distinct groups: Finland and Sweden as Nordic countries and Lithuania and Poland as Central European countries that have undergone recent fundamental system changes. The chapter ends with a discussion of how changes in the technological communication environment may affect political communication culture simultaneously in all four countries.

Keywords: political communication culture, comparative communication research, media systems, political journalism, political PR

Introduction

Comparative research of political and media systems has produced categorisations of countries into relatively homogeneous European regions (Brüggemann et al., 2014; Castro Herrero et al., 2017; Dobek-Ostrowska, 2015; Esser & Pfetsch, 2004; Hallin & Mancini, 2004, 2012; Peruško et al., 2015; Pfetsch, 2014). In this project we explore the interaction between political executives and the media in Finland, Lithuania, Poland, and Sweden, allowing us to comparatively test the consistency of the proposed allocation of countries into groups. Furthermore, we include two East-Central European, new democracies in our study on political communication cultures around the Baltic basin. By doing so, we aim to also examine the potential consistency and consequences brought on by “path dependencies” (cf. Eckiert & Ziblatt, 2013) in societal relationships and routines practiced by media and political professionals in the studied region. As will be discussed in more detail in the following sections, histories and traditions (cf.

Gross, 2002, 2004; Rupnik & Zielonka, 2013) are some of the vitally influential factors that shape professional performance despite the influx of new technologies and global trends identified in the practices of the two groups of actors.

The current situation – which is dynamic in political as well as technological terms – calls for a reconsideration of some previous claims. Specifically, we wish to challenge understandings linked to the still-apparent persistence in comparative media analyses of the Cold War thinking and endurance of politico-geographic dichotomies and contrasts between Western and Eastern Europe. These understandings are most evident in overtly simplified attempts to allocate states from the former communist region of Europe into one group of East-Central European countries. The history of this region quite vividly shows that the pre-communist times as well as the communist decades in the region varied between countries. This diversity continues to prevail. The systemic features of the communist-ruled states in Central, Eastern, and Southern (Balkan) Europe reflect various ways of life and self-organisation and, quite analogously, today's Central and Eastern European (CEE) region is nothing more nor less than a heterogeneous collection of constituencies.

The studies that this chapter builds on call for a more detailed analysis that can specify similarities and differences among the four countries to better understand the currents that underpin the daily practices in political communication in various contexts. This chapter draws on a project that operates through in-depth discussions with political and media actors that surround the top political elites – the prime ministers – in four countries. Two of the countries are usually seen as part of a Nordic region, and two are seen as part of the formerly socialist CEE countries. The method of comparison applied in this chapter is open to observations that cannot be foreseen in broad comparative studies that are based on standardised questionnaires. We wish to maintain an open mind towards diversities within and among the four countries that could go undetected when studied through other approaches. We also look for eventual homologous developments in all four countries.

As revealed in the country-specific chapters, differences in the media–politics relationship may lie in various features that contribute to what broadly can be named *political communication culture*. Such features include historical differences in state formation and consequent homogeneity of its geopolitical position and its demography; structural differences based on legislation, regulations, and institutional practices; professionalisation of politicians and journalists; the size of the country in terms of geographical and social/professional proximity; and new trends in media and political currents that are fundamentally transforming the contemporary political landscape in today's Europe. In this paper, we identify political culture inductively and aim at approaching the concept through the observations that have been collected through qualitative research on the ground in the four countries.

Our curiosity is thus directed towards 1) how media infrastructures as well as media contents are nationally defined and restricted and 2) the influence of European and global politics as well as transnational infrastructures and contents that are growing

with accelerating speed, promoted in particular by the networked communications on the Internet and in social networks. How do these factors relate to intra-group and inter-group differences and similarities?

The following sections take a closer look at the impacts of these two factors, namely locally and transnationally fashioned stimuli that affect manifestations of specificities in media–politics interactions in the four countries. The chapter specifically looks at the systemic factors (which are highly specified by contextual conditions) and functional factors (which are nuanced by professional behaviour, roles, and functions) regulating media–political cooperation.

Theoretical insight: Cultures of political communication

Political communication is an exceedingly complex field that links together different functions and roles of actors in the media–politics relationship and observes how these are affected by a more general culture of a country (AIM, 2007; Esser & Pfetsch, 2004; Moring & Pfetsch, 2014). The question of what is decided by whom in the media–politics interaction remains the most important performance test in political communication. Speaking in normative terms, there is a clearly identifiable impetus setting the character of the relationship: ideally, political parties should mobilise citizens by recruiting political candidates and formulating commonly agreed policies, whereas political journalists are supposed to provide a platform for critical and thorough scrutiny of political views in the interest of represented citizens.

Though this arrangement might still be functional in the sense of manifesting different degrees of reliance and dependency, i.e., between the politicians and the press, recent developments in contemporary European democracies are signalling deviating and worrying tendencies. A clear tension, recognised globally, links increasing usage of networked communications and decaying political and civic engagement (Cardoso, 2011; Grabe & Myrick, 2016). Conventional forms of societal involvement, such as voting in elections or associational participation, seem to be in decline. Also, public trust in traditional societal institutions appears to be weakening, which is an additional feature that contributes to the rise of various oppositions, clashes, conflicts, and disagreements already firmly rooted in daily European realities (Berg, 2017: 14).

On the whole, the acquired impression of direct correspondence between evident system changes and transformations and arising public uncertainties is nothing new. As noticed, the feelings of insecurity and societal discontent or even apathy and vagueness stem from and are maintained by the general atmosphere of uncontrolled societal change (Balčytienė, 2015a; Balčytienė & Juraitė, 2015; Bauman, 2000). Significant layers of society air feelings of uncertainty that reflect today's democracy; economy; and social, cultural, and moral values (Bauman & Donskis, 2013). What appears novel is the fact that these trends (of dissatisfaction and discontent) are identified in European

states that have been consistently labelled as solid European democracies, such as the five Nordic countries with their stable economic structures and a general feeling of egalitarianism, social trust, satisfaction, and happiness.

All in all, the identified appearances suggest that what was previously recognised and known as an apparently “symbiotic relationship” between politicians and journalists (Nygren & Niemikari in this volume; Pfetsch, et al., 2014) should be reconsidered by taking into account the impact of contextually infused nuances in political communication. In the political sphere, a clearly identifiable turn from mass political belongingness to entrepreneurial and performative political affiliation has taken place. In both older and younger European democracies, there are signs of shifts from systemic to anti-systemic forms of political inclusiveness (Bajomi-Lázár, 2014; Berg, 2017; Navickas, 2017). In the past decade, mass parties in many countries around Europe have gradually transformed into campaign organisations in which entrepreneurial leaders try to win elections by shaping their teams of loyal politicians, communication advisors, marketing experts, sponsors, volunteers, policy experts, and spin doctors (Albaek et al., 2014; McNair, 2011). These tendencies are especially noticeable in younger European democracies, where parties have gradually grown into political organisations reliant on financial inputs and marketing communication rather than public popular support (Bajomi-Lázár, 2014). Pressured by wide-ranging marketisation and mediatisation, political parties are more inclined to shape their media presence and influence and control the media by establishing direct contact with media owners and editors and pushing promotional news, or, alternatively, by pressuring journalists through leaks and off-the-record briefings. Journalists, on the other hand, try to penetrate the political process of agenda setting and debate and control its outcome. In short, in political communication, both parties appear to be on the winning side but in different situations.

As will be shown in our study, both groups of actors – political journalists and their sources – in all four countries engage in professionally shaped communication that involves continuous shifts of power in informational exchanges within established hierarchies and personal networks. None of the country studies prove the independence of journalists or a comprehensive and deeply penetrating control of the media by political sources. Instead, the political–media interactions described are varied and manoeuvrable within contextually defined power hierarchies, suggesting nuanced and evidently deviant outcomes.

In fact, the diversity of political communication practices disclosed in this project should not come as a big surprise. Though certain similarities might be identified between the histories and cultures of Finland and Sweden, on the one hand, and Lithuania and Poland, on the other, the most decisive factor contributing to diverging paths in the evolution of political communication practices in each country is determined by its own patterns of today’s politics, socio-economic development, and media structures.

Multi-directional comparisons: Constructing culture inductively

Comparative research is often guided by the theory of agreement and difference, as inspired by the work of J. S. Mill in *A System of Logic*. National comparisons are thus designed according to alleged similarities and differences between groups of nations, where a *most similar systems design* anticipates that “if some important differences are found among these otherwise similar countries, then the number of factors attributable to these differences will be sufficiently small to warrant explanation in terms of those differences alone” (Przeworsky & Teune, 1970: 32). On the other hand, a *most different systems design* focuses on eliminating irrelevant systemic factors, assuming that the data are drawn from the same population: “systemic factors are not given any special place among the possible predictors of behavior” (Przeworski & Teune, 1970: 34).

Whilst these strategies are mostly applied in quantitative research based on statistically significant sets of data, we use this method as an inspiration for our way of organising observations derived from in-depth qualitative studies. We are looking at four countries that due to their “economic, cultural and political characteristics” (Przeworski & Teune, 1970: 32) are expected to form two relatively homogeneous groups, although we operationalise these characteristics through historical, institutional, professional, and technological differences.

It goes without saying that the richness of background variables cannot be systematically covered in terms of quantifiable measures with the number of cases (four) at our disposal. Thus our comparison will build on principles that are closer to case studies based on qualitative data. By showing deviant observations, we may be able to falsify some claims, and by showing unexpected similarities, we may suggest heuristically valuable paths for further inquiry.

Our data are qualitative and focus on relatively particular processes in the interaction between politicians (through their communication advisors) and journalists. We focus on the top of the iceberg, the prime minister’s office and journalists who cover news related to this particular institution. We will thus have to accept that the explanatory power of our analysis is limited to tentative suggestions with regard to broader layers of politics–media relations.

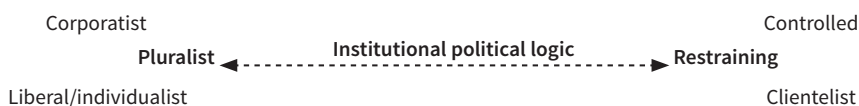
As noted in the introduction to this chapter, the identification of a political communication culture by studying relationships between the two core professions, politicians and journalists, requires an understanding of several aspects that underpin these linkages. According to Gross (2008: 139), it is crucial in the study of media and politics to understand the histories of development as well as “the dominant values, attitudes, behaviours and mentalities that fuel the functioning in politics, political, economic and social systems and institutions”. We suggest that this argument can be turned around by looking at the arising mode, i.e., the specific manner and qualitative features that underpin the attitudinal and behavioural characteristics of these two groups of actors. We mentioned above a number of comparative indicators, namely historical differences in state formation and consequent homogeneity of geopolitical

position and demography; structural differences based on legislation, regulations, and institutional practices; professionalisation of politicians and journalists; the size of the country in terms of geographical and social/professional proximity; and new trends in the media and politics. We will discuss these aspects from the perspective of two dimensions: political roles that are shaped by historically/institutionally determined routines and media roles shaped by professional/normative intentions (see Figures 10.1 and 10.2).

All aspects considered, the challenge in comparing political communication cultures lies in the multilayered character of the comparison. Research is expected to, on the one hand, highlight the orientations of different actors within countries that may be more or less converged, and at the same time cover professional orientations of the two groups of actors (politicians/political communication advisors and journalists) whose orientations across countries may be more or less similar (Pfetsch et al., 2014: 78). We look at institutional system characteristics through their historical and proximity aspects and the professional characteristics through their professionalisation and technological aspects. The fundamental similarities as well as differences in media–politics interactions across the four studied countries can be identified at the intersection of the two dimensions, presented in Figures 10.1 and 10.2.

The first dimension, based on earlier research by Hallin and Mancini (2004, 2012), can be named the *mode of political institutional functioning*. The specificities of this dimension are determined by a number of factors, such as historical development, institutional structures, and traditions that underpin the characteristics of the political system in each of the four countries. By functioning, we are inspired by the approach taken by Gross (2008: 139), quoted above, as we need to include modes of action within a system. Thus this concept is used here in a wider sense than in a more limited reference to how systems function. This dimension has two contrasting continuums (or modes) identifying possible variation and manifestations of norms that guide the institutional performance of political actors. One continuum is defined as *pluralist*, with two competing characteristics of how such a mode is achieved: *corporatist* and *liberalist/individualist* (or organised vs. individual pluralism, cf. Hallin & Mancini, 2004). We call the other end of the dimension *restraining*, with two possible variations: *controlled* and *clientelist* (Mancini et al., 2007; Örnebring, 2012).

Figure 10.1 Variations of modes within norms denoting characteristics of institutional political functioning

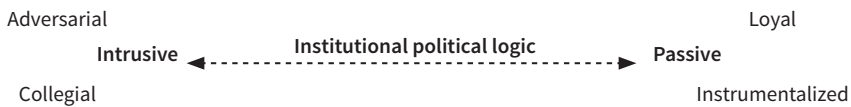


The left side of Figure 10.1 denotes a pluralist mode that is determined by *institutional political functioning* and might be achieved in two ways: negotiations and agreements

(as is typical for corporatist political systems) or, to the contrary, through individually shaped and competing processes leading to a diversity of actions (as achieved within the liberalist political system). The other end of the dimension presents modes of restraining institutional political functions with different qualitative characteristics. They denote a directly or indirectly managed control that might be achieved either through explicit power manifestations (as in the controlling mode) or hidden hierarchies of interactions sustained through clientelist and manipulative arrangements.

Correspondingly, the other dimension, *mode of media professional functioning*, looks closer into the norms that guide the actual roles and practices of the media (Figure 10.2). The two extremes of this dimension are *intrusive* (denoting adversarial or collaborative, i.e., collegial media aspects and professional norms) and *passive* (norms that support loyal or instrumentalised media practices).

Figure 10.2 Variations within norms denoting the mode of media professional functioning



Intrusive media professional roles functioning is characterised by a journalism that acts within a framework that in (Western) academic literature is described as “professionalised” norms (Hanitzsch, 2007; Nygren, 2008). Such norms might refer to whether journalists tend to perform a socially responsible role by being interventionist, for example by acting in an adversarial way (as a watchdog or professional activist, see Esser, Reinemann & Fan, 2001), or by collegially participating in communicating elite-level politics (i.e., partnership and cooperation, cf. Hallin & Mancini, 2004). In both cases, journalists function with a high degree of professional autonomy, although – as we will see – they may be affected by political communication advisers in different ways.

The other end of this dimension denotes an opposing type of performance – the type of journalism that plays a passive role of a mere observer/transmitter of information. Here, two qualitative characteristics appear significant – that of loyalty, which is straightforwardly adopted by the media, and that of instrumentalisation, which is determined not by the media but by some influences (e.g., for political or economic reasons) from the outside.

As has been shown by Pfetsch and colleagues (2014: 94-98), the communication culture in the two Nordic countries in this study (Finland and Sweden) is considered more media driven than the culture in many other Western European countries.¹ The autonomy of the media is pronounced among both politicians and journalists. As in other Western European countries, the authors found intra-country convergence in understandings of systemic features and inter-country convergence in self-perceptions of the two professional groups. In other words, politicians and journalists in the

countries of the study had similar views on systemic features but diverging views on the roles of the other professional group. And, vice versa, the authors found that the understandings of professional roles converged among countries, whereas they differed in regard to systemic features.

We hypothesize that our four-country comparison will show a similar pattern in the two Nordic countries, namely: 1) a convergence in the views on institutional characteristics, which falls into the *pluralised* category; 2) a convergence in the understanding of the respective roles of politicians and journalists as characterised by professionalisation, however tainted by a diverging understanding of the nature of their respective roles, which falls into the *intrusive* category. On the other hand, the hypothetical expectation for the two younger democracies in Lithuania and Poland that experienced a dramatic system change in the 1990s would be: 1) a convergence in the views on institutional characteristics that would fall into the *restraining* category; and 2) a convergence in the understanding of the respective roles of politicians and journalists that would fall into the *passive* category.

Media–politics interaction in the four countries

We proceed towards our analysis on the basis of the underpinning studies (see Johansson & Raunio in this volume).

In this analysis, we follow an approach that might be best identified as a cultural approach to institutional change. It seeks to capture cultural aspects in behavioural practices – and their formal and informal variations – that are performed within certain institutional structures (Balčytienė, 2015a; Gross, 2002). Such an approach advocates the idea that institutions provide certain schemes and structures within which people create order by following certain professional roles and functions and performing routine behaviours (North, 1990). Naturally and to a certain extent, such practices also are inclined to reproduce some part of the more general societal culture, which leans on specific characteristics determined by historical experience and are authenticated in that particular context (Carey, 1989; Chalaby, 1998).

There are several reasons to choose this approach. As popularly conceived, history and traditions play a powerful role especially in times of unprecedented institutional change; hence, the disclosure of these features seems to be amongst the most vital questions social scientists aim to understand. One important finding from the studies of democratisation is linked to the fact that all changes in younger European democracies have happened in a very “compressed period of time” (Balčytienė, 2015a). Even more, these changes have been implemented within an atmosphere of high impulsiveness, volatility, and flux, requiring rapid design of rules and simultaneous adaptations and adjustments to changed societal conditions (Balčytienė, 2013; Donskis, 2011). Our approach is sensitive to the idea that dramatic change by itself appears to be one of the reasons why specific cultural manifestations, such as widely disputed informality,

emerge as essential characteristics shaping society's life. This corresponds to observations made across Central and Eastern Europe today (Kryger, 2015; Rupnik & Zielonka, 2013; Voltmer, 2015). So it is not surprising that spontaneity, the absence of agreed-upon social guidelines and moral rules, as well as other features, are often described as emblematic qualities detected in various types of political, economic, and legal changes and instabilities typical of post-communist societies of today (Balčytienė, 2015b).

Institutions, in general, offer some "rules of the game" (North, 1990), whereas people engaged in them are defined as players with some purposeful activity. The constraints imposed by the institutional framework, which might be both formal and informal, define the field of opportunities and choices and hence shape what kind of organisational cultures will come into existence. Changes in the formal rules, for instance, may come about as a result of the adoption of and adaptation to new governance or business models or as a result of legislative changes. On the other hand, informal constraints, which go hand in hand with formalisation and institutionalisation practices, are adjusted within the framework of personal values and norms (such as popularly conceived principles of fairness, honesty, trustworthiness, or service), which are deeply rooted in the cultural context and have a much steadier character (Eckiert & Ziblatt, 2012). Hence formal rules may change overnight, but informal constraints do not.

Still, as also explored by North (1990), changes in informal constraints have the same originating sources as changes in formal rules, but without the rapidity. Informal ways change gradually and slowly, and also quite unconsciously, as individuals develop alternative patterns of behaviour consistent with newly perceived needs, costs, and benefits. The change of informal constraints may also be looked at as an ongoing, almost endless process of the marginalisation of behavioural patterns incompatible with the newly emergent understanding, and the stabilisation of those in harmony with it (Bajomi-Lázár, 2008).

In spite of its obvious limitations, the approach suggested here demonstrates the importance of culture in the study of how societies function – how humans behave and on what standards, ideals, and imaginaries they create, manage and change institutions. While the main emphasis of our chapter is on commonalities as well as differences that can be detected in political communication cultures, the chapter also highlights other aspects pertaining to the particularities of media–politics interactions in the four studied countries.

As stated earlier, political communication, in general, appears to be a complex and multidimensional process. The two broad groups of actors, namely the journalists and the politicians/political communication advisors, who are in the centre of this type of interaction, are not acting in a vacuum. They are both functioning according to norms and principles of their own distinctive and diverging professional ideologies. The two groups are also pressured and driven by their own systems of benefits, i.e., the complex structure of actual inputs and perceived returns. Politicians need the media to be seen and to reproduce political messages. Information management from that perspective is hence linked with political public relations, such as selecting a special

time for information announcements, spin doctoring, and other aspects of communication with both journalists and the general public. From the media's point of view, news management is related to giving publicity to political messages according to the rules of a particular news organisation. Journalists need background information that news sources can offer and therefore forge close partnerships and acquire information in off-the-record and confidential situations.

To summarise this point, the interaction between the two groups is governed by certain professional ideologies as well as cultural norms. Hence it is important to question where these norms are rooted, whether it is political or media logic, i.e., their rules and customs, that takes the upper hand, and whether this process is in any way determined by the specificities of politico-economic (i.e., national) conditions or shaped by transnationally equivalent and analogous trends.

As verified by a large-scale comparative political communication analysis (AIM, 2007), the system of prospective arrangements of interactions between the media and politics across Western European countries tends to follow the logic of country groupings as projected in the seminal book *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics* by Hallin and Mancini (2004). The founding statement of this book presents the idea that characteristics of a distinct political communication culture are dependent on characteristics of the local politico-economic context, which, evidently, also acts as a core determinant for particular journalism cultures. The distinct national context also sets the character of how politicians perceive communication and media relations in general. This argument also appears to be verified when comparing post-communist media and political systems, which allows detection of supplementary categories of countries that have different contextual characteristics.

According to Hallin and Mancini (2004), the relationship between politicians and journalists covering politics in older European democracies (Germany, the Netherlands) appears to be a close partnership and characterised by cooperation rather than an obvious rivalry, whereas the media in countries classified as liberalist (the UK) tends to critically report on politics and play a watchdog role. Yet in some other political cultures (the Nordic countries), this relationship is based on mutual understanding and respect for each other's (politicians' and the media's) goals. In younger, and hence more volatile, European democracies (the CEE countries) that are still challenged by systemic shifts, the media tends to be characterised as practicing a consumerist approach towards their audiences while at the same time favouring the agendas of politicians (Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

As previously observed, all societal institutions, generally, are cultural organisations that operate within institutional and normative contexts. Their culture predominantly tends to become important in times of change and in conditions of vulnerability and extreme instabilities; then all societal institutions – political, economic, legal, as well as media industries – grow increasingly differentiated yet remain mutually interconnected and interdependent. For our analysis, the key problem is to detect how the actual interaction between the media and politics is sustained in different conditions

of societal change. Following the line of the above argumentation, the mechanism of sustainability is an indicator of a certain functioning logic and internal rationality for how societal relations are maintained and how democracy functions on a daily basis in each of the four countries. As will be further discussed in the next section, though, certain convergences might be identified in the professional habits of professionals in different countries. It is the cultural element that acts as a moderating factor, affecting the nuances in the actual professional performance and functioning.

Media–politics interaction in the four countries

The two Nordic countries, Finland and Sweden, share many systemic features despite their differences. They have a common history in the ancient past, similar legislation, a relatively stable economy as the basis of a welfare state, and a relatively stable five-party structure that has gradually developed with the emergence of an environmental party and the later emergence of right-wing populism (Strömbäck et al., 2008). The two countries in the southern part of the Baltic basin, Lithuania and Poland, also share systemic features. They have a common history in the ancient past, a period of socialism coloured by external oppression, a sudden and profound system change in the early 1990s towards independence and a market economy, and a subsequent instability in the political party structure.

The media structures also manifest characteristic similarities, although these are more consistent in the case of the two Nordic countries. In Finland and Sweden, a dual media system was established already in the early 20th century. It featured a relatively strong public service sector that had a dominant position in broadcasting until the early 1980s, when deregulation and rapidly growing commercial broadcasting followed. The commercial press had high readership and close to total reach, although it has gradually moved away from political parallelism (Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Moring, 2008; Strömbäck & Nord, 2008). Today, the commercial press is complemented but not substituted by politically active social media communication on blogs, Twitter and Facebook.

Lithuania and Poland, commonly studied and identified as the young players in the consortium of European Union democracies (Dobek-Ostrowska & Głowacki, 2015), have gradually taken divergent approaches in their political development. Politics in Lithuania still appears to be highly preoccupied with a drive towards interests and benefits-oriented thinking that permeates all actions, including relationships with the media. On the other hand, current political developments in Poland seem to suggest changes towards steady and systemic de-democratisation. Speaking in terms of viability and profitability, the Lithuanian media functions in a clearly less advantageous position in terms of market size. This factor, combined with dominant liberal policies, appears to be the strongest determinant of structural media specificities. In contrast to the other three countries, two broad media sectors are decisive in setting the po-

litical agenda in Lithuania: broadcasting and online media. In the other countries, print media formats (dailies, weeklies and political news magazines) still succeed as sources of political information.

Based on the studies conducted in each of the four countries included in this project,² the characteristics of the four countries in terms of the two dimensions presented in Figures 10.1 and 10.2 can be presented in a matrix as shown in Table 10.1.

Table 10.1 Combined modes of political institutional and media professional roles functioning in the four studied countries

			Mode of media professional functioning			
			Intrusive		Passive	
			Adversarial	Collegial	Instrumen- talisated	Loyal
Mode of institu- tional political functioning	Pluralist	Liberalist/ individualist				
		Corporatist	Sweden	Finland		
	Restraining	Controlled (centrally)			Poland	
		Clientelist (interests controlled)	Lithuania			

The analysis gives support to our reluctance to accept expectations derived from the typologisation of the four countries into two homogeneous groups. Table 10.1 shows quite fundamental variations in the combination of government institutional vs. media professional logics in all four countries. As previously specified, the behavioural routines on both sides are evolving within two sets of determinants (i.e., functioning logics or occupational reasoning): governmental institutional/organisational arrangements and media professional orientations. These are explored more in depth below.

Finland

The historical development of independent Finland is closely related to its long common history with Sweden (until 1808), followed by a formative period of nation building as an autonomous Grand Duchy of the Russian Empire under the rule of the Russian emperor (1809-1917). According to some historians, liberalism developed differently in Finland compared to Sweden in that Finland kept traces of the authoritarian constitutional system that prevailed in Sweden before the Russian takeover (Stenius & Turunen, 1995). This has left traces of bureaucratic control and hierarchic state structures that deviate from the system that developed in Sweden during the democratisation of the monarchy in the 19th century. The overall Finnish political culture (see Niemikari, Raunio & Moring in this volume) is often described as

pragmatic and consensual, with party-political cooperation across the political spectrum and active links with various stakeholders such as trade unions and other interest groups. Recent constitutional reforms have nonetheless quite radically changed the Finnish political regime, with the PM and the Government emerging from the shadow of the president as the political leader of the country ... Interestingly, the Finnish political system has also been noted for the small scale and tight connections among its elites that cover not only the political side but also business interests, trade unions and the media.

Thus Finland qualifies for a position in the corporatist/collegial cell of the matrix. This is further supported by how the professional role divisions between politicians and journalists are described by Niemikari, Raunio, and Moring (this volume) as a continuation of the historically strong position of civil servants, who are in many cases independent of changes in the political composition of the government.

Lithuania

Lithuania is the smallest of the four countries in the study.³ In addition to its size, which plays a decisive role in determining its social and political identification as well as the specificities of institutional performance, the country's peripheral location and its marginality evident in linguistic exceptionalism also contribute to the cultural character of interactions (Balčytienė, 2006, 2012). The historically embedded centrality of isolationist and protectionist attitudes still permeates the ideological thinking and policy making of elites, and, by such undertakings, differentiates Lithuanian politics from politics in other countries in the region. The exercising of cultural specificity has also played a decisive role in nationalist awakenings of the country (Balčytienė, 2012).

The cultural specificities show in media–politics interactions. In Lithuania, typical of all small countries, the fields of both politics and media are evolving as a joined assemblage of connections. The partnership, however, has been closer in times of democratic breakthrough than it is now when the aims and goals of the two actors have separated. Among the most obvious is the objective “distanciation” between the two groups. “Fighting for common goals” belongs to the past, whereas “scrutinising each other” appears to be a trend of the current practice (Balčytienė & Mallin in this volume).

This places Lithuania in the interest-controlled/adversarial cell of the matrix. In general terms, the media appears to be a place where power relationships in society are negotiated, and politicians cannot resist the temptation of being there. The media takes an active part and appears to be an active player in setting political–media interactions.

In other international comparisons, Lithuania is also described as a country with a more liberal media market than European countries in general. And state intervention in the media is indeed moderate. The media acts as a critical scrutiniser: It declares independence, closely monitors the national political life, and has a very adversarial

relationship with political figures. Even though media professionals strive for and desire to achieve an objective balance, their reporting is tainted by their interests. Strong clientelist habits in the country result in an acceptance of a publicly hidden agenda in which parties tend to act like in-groups and even clans instead of defenders of the public interests. Weak civil society, weak professional associations, and a lack of social responsibility by public actors create an atmosphere of hybrid – clientelist–liberal – arrangements in media–politics relationships. This contradicts practices observed in media–politics in the pluralist and structured contexts of the two Nordic countries.

Poland

While manifesting clear parallels to societal changes and transformations in the other post-communist countries, Poland's historical experience portrays a distinctive story. Poland has traditionally been a country of two-fold diversions. It is a big nation⁴ and a large media market; its distinctiveness and principled standing were predominantly prevailing and convincing during the political breakthroughs in 1989.

During the years of Soviet rule, the Polish media and journalists functioned under so-called atypical conditions: the Polish media was more liberal and more open than in other communist states of the Soviet-bloc countries (Hadamik, 2005; Dobek-Ostrowska, 2012). It is not by accident that the strongest and most organised opposition to communism developed in Poland. The systemic duality of official and unofficial discussions and communist-controlled and semi-private ownership permeated all societal spheres, including that of politics and the media.

The tradition of political embeddedness is present in contemporary media–politics relationships. According to Dobek-Ostrowska and Nożewski in this volume, the “media take sides in the political conflict and play the role of a participant in the political process ... The high polarization is noted not only in the political arena. It is reflected strongly also in the media.” As a result, an instrumentalised version of parallelism appears to be a reality in Poland. Polish journalists confessed to feeling most comfortable in the company of people most similar to them; liberal politicians are more likely to feel comfortable among liberal journalists, just as right-wing politicians feel better among right-wing journalists.

This places Poland in the instrumentalised/politically controlled cell of the matrix. Though the data did not indicate any direct impacts of instrumentalised communication, they did register indirect ones: The instrumentalisation of politically managed strategic communication permeates official infrastructures. Communication professionals working as civil servants in ministries have political affiliations. “A significant number of spokespeople are members of political parties and they speak in the name of the ruling party and their chiefs” (Dobek-Ostrowska & Nożewski, this volume). The communications pyramid is well structured: the prime minister plays the main role in the communication process of the government, political advisors are located just below, while civil servants are in the shadow and not independent.

To conclude, the exceptionality of Poland in the context of the cross-country comparison results from many factors. Yet the most evident one is the public invisibility of the mechanisms of instrumentalisation. Recently, a tradition from the decades after 1989 giving the leader of the major political party the ruling post as president or prime minister was broken. As verified in the analysis, the official state functionaries are performing public functions whereas the political leadership is in the shadows (Dobek-Ostrowska & Nożewski, this volume).

Sweden

The historical development of Sweden has formed a strong base for what is today called “bloc politics”, consisting of two blocs around which there are parties on the left (led by the Social Democratic Party) and the right (today led by the liberal-conservative Moderate Party). This dualism has been challenged in recent years as the populist and right-wing nationalist Sweden Democrats have gained a position that prevents the two blocs from gaining a majority in parliament. The dualism has gradually also affected the administrative layers of government, where appointments follow the political colour of the government.

The media sector was also divided for a long time, with newspapers that had a leaning towards parties within either bloc and a strong state-owned broadcasting sector with a national monopoly. However, beginning in the late decades of the past millennium, this division has been breaking up, press parallelism has been reduced, and the private broadcasting sector has been growing.

The role of the media in political communication has become more important, but at the same time political control of the media is weaker after the decline of the party press and commercialisation of the media system. Politics is to a large extent mediatised, and the need of the political system to influence media images of politics has been increasing for many years (Esser & Strömbäck, 2014). As elsewhere, there is an ongoing professionalisation of political/government communication (Falasca & Nord, 2013; Strömbäck & Nord, 2008). The professional role divisions have been accentuated in recent decades. According to Johansson, Mallin and Nygren (this volume), “The resources allocated for government communication have grown massively over the past five decades. A very concrete expression of this decades-long process of change is the significant expansion in staff, including staff for press and information, at the GO and the PMO specifically over this period of time.” Journalism has been professionalised as well. Johansson, Mallin and Nygren report a growing influence of the political administration, partly due to downsizing of newsrooms, but conclude that a balance remains:

Relationships between the political system and political journalists have changed in many ways the last 20-30 years in Sweden, according to the interviews with political journalists and government press advisors. The relationships have evolved from a system of cooperation and understanding with the roots in the old system of party

press to a system based on professionalisation on both sides. The relationship is still close, but as one press advisor formulates it – it is “professionally symbiotic”.

Based on earlier research, Johansson, Mallin and Nygren further note that “Professionalisation is strong in Swedish legacy media, with a large degree of autonomy both in relation to owners and sources, at least according to answers from journalists in surveys”. Also, unlike in the other countries included in this project, “The standards of professional integrity also make it difficult to move between journalism and the political sphere – only two of the press advisors in the interviews have any experience as professional journalists.”

This places Sweden in the corporatist/adversarial cell of the matrix. In conclusion, the Swedish system has historically developed a vivid political dualism around two blocs. Revolving doors between professions is rare; few press advisors have a background in journalism. The traditional media system, based on a politically engaged press and a state monopoly in broadcasting, has been replaced with an equally strong but depoliticised press that maintains an adversarial approach to politicians while still being dependent on the increasingly skilful communication strategies of the political advisors.

Discussion

Above, we hypothesised that our four-country comparison would show a similar pattern in the two Nordic countries: 1) convergence in the views on institutional characteristics that would fall into the pluralised category, and 2) convergence in the understanding of the respective roles of politicians and journalists as being characterised by professionalisation, however tainted by a diverging understanding of the nature of their respective roles that would fall into the intrusive/invasive category. These expectations were supported in our analysis (see Table 10.1).

On the other hand, the hypothetical expectation for the two younger democracies Lithuania and Poland, which experienced a dramatic system change in the 1990s, were: 1) convergence in the views on institutional characteristics that would fall into the restrictive category, and 2) convergence in the understanding of the respective roles of politicians and journalists that would fall into the passive/inert category. Here the first hypothesis was supported, whereas the second was not.

Politically controlled governmental communications combined with potentially instrumentalised media functioning was detected in Poland, while clientelist-adversarial arrangements characterised the interaction in Lithuania. In addition, corporatist-advocating activities were noted in Finland, but corporatist-adversarial intentions and combined logic were identified in Sweden.

The analysis also shows similarities among the four countries. It strikes the eye that one row and one column in Table 10.1 remain empty: the media are not loyalist and the institutional characteristics are not overly individualistic (liberalistic). When looking closer at the similarities, one of the dominant observations is that the journal-

ist–source relationship is professionally maintained in all four countries. This notion is supported by several tendencies, for example the growing accessibility and availability of political information and sources. Several factors contribute to this outcome. In all four countries, political communication via social networks and greater participation in such communication by both politicians and journalists have significantly intensified over the past years. Another factor is related to increased efforts to coordinate governmental communication and evidently increasing investments and attempts to institutionalise information management. Even in countries where governmental communication appears to be predominantly individualised and personified, and, hence, de-centralised (as in Lithuania), the evident struggles and efforts by governmental press and communications officers to impose greater management and control of communications appears to be a prevailing practice. However, what appears as a mere generalisation is bound up with characteristics eventually producing slightly deviating outcomes: while greater information supply and source availability to comment on political issues may manifest professional distancing and lead to autonomy in both the political and the journalistic fields in some countries (as in Sweden and Finland), the same phenomenon in other political-economic contexts might be a straight indicator of increased one-directional political influence and media capture (as in Poland), or predominance of media–political hierarchies and syndicates (as in Lithuania).

Another observed tendency in all four countries is linked to a homogenisation or a kind of blending of journalism practices. Equally so, we also would like to highlight a kind of internationalisation of political communication professionalisation, which, as it appears from our analysis, is a process that becomes less dependent on the specificities of national contexts. With the influx of interactive and networked communications, journalists in general appear to be more and more influenced and dependent on what information seems to be available online. They are pressured by the economic changes within the media industry (such as downsizing of newsrooms, increased requests for news production to fit all platforms, and increased competition for unique news content, which makes them even more dependent on sources). Social media and developments in information and communications technology (ICT) unmistakably promote shifts in the setting of agendas – in politics as well as in the media.

Predominantly the latter aspect, i.e., intensified networked communications, contributes to making political information provision the principal supervisor and even controller of the public agenda. This outcome appears to be determined by the institutional roles of both the media and political sources; though journalists are concerned and preoccupied with ethical aspects in setting the tone and character of the interaction, the political side does not seem to be disturbed by such issues. This is apparent in all four countries despite the nuances in their political cultures. Indeed, the last aspect linked with declining political responsibility appears to be neglected in most contemporary political communication analyses.

To conclude, societal change by itself and the existence of shifting conditions may be two of the reasons why informality appears to be an analogous factor shaping and

determining the relation between the media and politics in all four countries. Whereas volatility is perhaps the most indicative feature predominant in the younger democracies (Lithuania and Poland), where variations between clientelist and controlled governmental communications were registered, feelings of instability permeate media–politics relationships in the two Nordic nations as well. Still, these two countries have a functioning safety net, i.e., reputable conventional media (predominantly print media and public service broadcasting sectors), and relatively stable professional and civil society associations ensuring gradual equilibration of people’s reactions and adjustments to the arising changes through negotiations and agreements. In such socially unbroken and uninterrupted conditions, all requests for choices among people fall within well-designed and established routines and behaviours. Hence less extreme instabilities or turbulences are documented or felt in the Nordic countries.

Departing from the fact that ongoing institutional change increases the likelihood of uncertainty and hesitation and thus the probability of conflicts and confrontations that might lead to ambiguous choices, at least two findings appear to be of central importance. One is the fact that contextual circumstances (histories and traditions, values and ideals, and other cultural legacies) appear to be of high significance in the shaping of the transformations in each of the countries, contributing to the observed outcomes. Another central finding is related to the outcome of a more global, i.e., transferrable, nature, namely the impacts that come from information abundance, on the one hand, and intensified communications and the infusion of ICTs in all professional fields, including the media and politics, on the other.

A key focus throughout this study is how contextual circumstances (history and traditions, which we have discussed under the heading *mode of institutional political functioning*) could reveal values and ideals as well as other cultural legacies that are shaping the trajectories of media–politics relationships. We expected our four-country comparison to show a similar pattern in the two Nordic countries: Convergence in the views on institutional characteristics that would fall into the pluralised category. The expectation for the two younger democracies, Lithuania and Poland, that experienced a dramatic system change in the 1990s was to find convergence in the views on institutional characteristics that would fall into the restrictive category. These expectations were supported in our analysis. However, we also found some particularities that contrast with the intra-group similarities. In the three small countries (Lithuania, Sweden and Finland), direct access to ministers is normal; in the political culture of the largest country, Poland, this is less so.

With regard to our second dimension, picking up on the professionalisation of journalists and political media advisors, we expected the two Nordic countries to show a convergence in the understanding of the roles of politicians and journalists as being characterised by professionalisation, tainted by a diverging understanding of the nature of their respective roles, that would fall into the intrusive/invasive category. For the two new democracies, we expected convergence in the understanding of the respective roles that would fall into the passive category. Here Lithuania is the deviant

case, falling into the adversarial mode of the intrusive category, even passing Finland. Finland, in turn, appears to represent a less adversarial and more advocational political culture in the professional aspects of media behaviour. We also found new forms of political/politicised parallelisms stemming from the professionalisation of political communication advisors in Sweden, Lithuania, and Poland. This does not appear to be the case in Finland.

However, there are also similarities among the four countries. Social media forms new information links between politicians and journalists – as well as between these two groups and the audience – that sidestep traditional media. This aspect appears to be most pronounced in Finland, whereas the legacy media in Sweden, with its digital extensions, appears to have maintained a relatively stronger grip as a forum for political communication. This finding, however, requires further qualification, as our research does not cover audience behaviour.

In reality, it appears that the grouping of countries turned out to be a much more difficult exercise than we initially envisioned. One feature that appears to explain the falsification of some of the hypotheses is the existence of a shared professional culture among political journalists. Particularly younger journalists appear to maintain similar visions and ideals of what professional journalism is and ought to be. Much more varied and contrasting views and patterns of performance were uncovered on the political side. Within particular institutional frameworks, on the systemic level, historical as well as cultural factors appear to have the fiercest influence and weight over outcomes. However, we also find variation that counters our expectations of intra-group similarities. In Sweden, it appears to be almost out of the question for journalists to enter careers as political communication advisors, whereas this appears to be more or less the rule among the top-level political communication advisors in Finland and also quite normal in Lithuania and Poland. In all countries, informal contacts between politicians and journalists appear to raise ethical issues among the journalists but not so much for the politicians. Apparently it is seen as a legitimate part of the game for the politician to try to influence the media, but not for the journalist to succumb to such influence.

One of the fundamental societal transformations identified in diverse political and media environments across Europe is, as illustratively argued by various social thinkers (Bauman, 2000; Eriksen, 2001, 2016), a shift from “momentous changes” to “accelerated acceleration” (Eriksen, 2016). Since the turn of the millennium, changes in political environments have only accelerated, and changes in media environments and political communication practices have been amplified (Blumler, 2016). As argued by various social thinkers, critical time periods – or specific situations and modes charged with dramatic developments – are exceptional in their various calls and urgent requests for significant choices and decisions. Perhaps the biggest challenge with change arises from the fact that a changing society (Lithuania and Poland) lacks a solid and comforting social and ideological base that can support institutional continuity. Thus impulsiveness, volatility, and flux appear to be amongst the most dominant cultural qualities

identified in all social fields (politics and the media included) in these two countries. Changes of such magnitude are not recognised in societies where societal structures and conditions have been stable over a longer period of time (Sweden and Finland). Changes are taking place in those contexts as well, but are followed by uninterrupted, marginal adjustments. These allow for a gradual equilibration of people's reactions and the design of formal institutions and agreed-upon rules. When considering these contextual features, what meets the eye is the similarities rather than the differences detected in our analysis – specifically, how professional cultures appear to have stabilising potential in times of change.

A question that arises is how the role of professional cultures will interact with the dynamics in today's interconnected world, where stability is challenged and geographic distance does not leave people free from intellectual or ideological influence. In today's Europe, current crises, battles, and conflicts appear to be ongoing and organic rather than temporary and transitional. We would like to end our analysis with the note that societal change by itself may be one of the reasons why informality appears to be an analogous factor determining the relationships between the media and politics in the four studied countries.

Notes

1. The countries compared by Pfetsch and colleagues were Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. See Pfetsch (2014).
2. See Balčytienė & Malling, Dobek-Ostrowska & Nożewski, Johansson, Malling & Nygren, and Niemikari, Raunio & Moring in this volume.
3. With a population of 2.8 million (as of 2016), Lithuania can be defined as a small media marketplace, yet relatively varied and dynamic. The country is described as an ethnically homogeneous country, with Polish and Russian speakers being the largest minorities (6.6% and 5.8%, respectively, of the total population). The official language of the country is Lithuanian.
4. The national media environment in Poland is shaped by population size, demographic structure, and economic conditions. Poland's population of 38.4 million creates a relatively big market for the sectors that comprise the national media. The ethnic and linguistic structure of the population is relatively homogenous, with 97 per cent of the country's citizens identifying with a Polish nationality.

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PART THREE

Chapter 11

Locked in a mutual dependency

Media and the political executive in close interplay

Karl Magnus Johansson & Gunnar Nygren

The focus of this anthology has been the relationship between political journalists and their sources in government. The results from this three-year project show the many dimensions, contradictions, and uncertainties of the relationship. Both sides need each other in their daily work, but there are also conflicting interests in the struggle for control of information flows. Both sides need close and personal relationships, but also distance and a division of roles.

Journalists and sources perform a daily trade of information in exchange for publicity – a daily negotiation based on power and personal contacts. The rules governing this trade are written by media logics, and both parts know these rules and use them for their own purposes. The negotiations are mostly hidden, but their results are visible in the public image of government politics and the control of information flows in politics.

This anthology lists many examples of this daily exchange between political journalists and the political machinery in government. In this final chapter, we summarise some of the results from the four countries: Finland, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden. We also offer some preliminary answers to our questions for this research project:

- How can the relationship between political journalists and their sources be described? Is it mutually reinforcing and symbiotic or more fundamentally adversarial?
- What are journalists and political sources actually doing in their daily work? What means and methods are they using to control the flow of information? What are the differences between exchanges in formal and informal settings?
- What trends are common in different kinds of media systems, and what differences can be traced to political cultures and history? How are the relationships between the political system and the media changing – are they becoming closer or more distant? Or perhaps both?

- What are the implications for modern democracy and its institutions? In other words, what are the implications with regard to transparency, accountability, legitimacy, and power relationships in the political process?

The analysis is based on theories outlined in earlier chapters: the exchange model, the mediatisation of politics, the centralisation of executive power, and theories from comparative media research. In this book, we critically examine how these theories fit when analysing the changing political communication.

Summary of the empirical findings

While existing research is rich in descriptions of the relationships between the media and politics, most research adopts a systemic approach and a single-country analysis. In this volume, we have identified and assessed patterns of interaction within as well as across countries.

The findings are based mainly on extensive qualitative interview data and supplemented by documentary evidence. Altogether, more than 80 face-to-face interviews were conducted with political journalists and government media/political advisors, press secretaries, and politicians. Based on these interviews, we described the roles of both sides and the trends that are visible. We established that there is an ongoing professionalisation of both the practices and interactive modes of both sides but also that the degree of professionalisation differs between the countries. Below, we highlight the principal results.

Finland: A mutual interdependence

In Chapter 2, Risto Niemikari, Tapio Raunio, and Tom Moring focused on the relationships between the political executive and the media in Finland. The authors concluded that these relationships characteristically feature a system of interdependence between politicians and journalists, where journalists rely on politicians for information and politicians, in turn, rely on journalists for publicity. A high degree of access to political sources is described as a distinct feature of the Finnish system. Alongside this openness operates a culture of informal interaction, as the management of pre-public information is crucial for politicians, journalists, and civil servants.

Relationships between the journalists and political sources are generally good, with both sides describing a shift towards more professional and ethical conduct. However, occasional antagonisms do arise, with each PM having phases of poor media relations at some point. While social media is widely used and helps politicians bypass the traditional media, social media is still less important than legacy media.

One specific subject deserving closer examination is the role of political advisors. They hold a central role, while civil servant media staffers seek to maintain a neutral position. The importance of political advisors is also related to the centralisation of

government communication, which at least partly appears to be driven by increasing use of horizontal policy packages and ideological heterogeneity (Finnish multi-party cabinets typically bring together parties that have quite different preferences).

Journalists tend to follow the PMO and certain key ministries (such as finance and foreign affairs) far more closely than they follow other groups; in essence, they follow the most important sources.

Amidst all these changes, both in the media system and inside the government, the interviews clearly show that journalism still counts. Old habits die hard, with MPs, ministers, and journalists still regularly interacting face to face. Informality is strongly present. Nonetheless, as news is delivered through various channels, more or less direct from the source, journalists may find their future role to be more as pundits or interpreters of political affairs. Such tendencies can already be observed. A consequence of this may be an elitisation of political journalism in the future, where the most prominent political journalists become more like experts, providing coverage to a circle of politically interested citizens. Moreover, with growing distance between the two professional groups and relationships between politicians and journalists becoming increasingly formal, the inner tensions for those who perform duties between the two groups are likely to grow.

Lithuania: Informal social networks and power relations

In Chapter 3, Aukšė Balčytienė and Milda Malling discussed how the media and political information sources in Lithuania are navigating change – how they adjust their needs-oriented behaviour to changing conditions. Even though the media and political sources gain power in different situations, both sides function in reciprocal interdependence. Formal contacts are quite consistent and professionalised, but these contacts continue to work in the shadow of informal social networks, which create their own power relations, dynamics, and hierarchical structures.

In Lithuania, having access to politicians of the highest rank appears to be quite common. This is attributed not only to the smallness of the country, and hence interpersonal closeness, but also to other characteristics such as politics tailored to personal interests, which also sets the stage for informal linkages.

The unusual proximity between journalists and politicians can also be traced back to the situation in the 1990s. At the time of the transition to independence, journalists and politicians were fighting for common goals, with the result of there being many personal friendships and connections. Cultural legacies tend to persist and shape how power structures are formed and maintained in a country. In Lithuania, there are situations in which each side seeks to go around the official communication system, stepping outside their anticipated role and opening up for new forms of informality. While such findings are contextually shaped, the views regarding the interaction indicate broader trends of professionalisation, which have also been identified in other cultures and political conditions.

In Lithuania, the media and politics are evolving into fields that are cooperatively formed and close but at the same time also highly safeguarded (and on the side of the media, professionally skilled). The official communication between the two sides is friendly and appears to be honest; yet at the same time it is careful, fairly suspicious, and on occasion quite tense and even sceptical. Overall, it is sustained and regulated by needs-oriented performance.

In contrast to previous research, this analysis paints a somewhat different picture and suggests that both the media and politics are evolving and function in close interconnectedness, and each side (to a varying degree) is inclined to professionalise and protect its own occupational logic and ideology. Hence, Lithuania, too, displays both closeness and distance in the relationship between media and politics.

Poland: Structures remain despite political change

In Chapter 4, Bogusława Dobek-Ostrowska and Jacek Nożewski discussed how political executive–media relations are shaped by cultural and historical legacies (in a post-communist Polish context). In Poland, recent political changes have had a major impact and restructured the relationships among journalists, press secretaries, and politicians. Yet within these structures, very much remains the same. Journalists have (largely) avoided political pressure and maintain their previous ways of obtaining information from their sources.

Whereas the analysis stresses the interdependence that underlies the relation, the interviews also reveal an invisible conflict: press secretaries are often used as “shields” for politicians. Both the journalists and their sources seek to maintain their contacts, especially the informal ones, but they also try to keep a certain distance. Another important finding concerns social media, which is widely used for self-presentation in Poland, with both the politicians and the media using these platforms (especially Facebook and Twitter).

It is striking how stable the political communication system appears to be. While there have been many changes in the media following the country’s recent and dramatic political change, journalists have not observed any limitations on their access to sources. However, one area where the political changes have had an impact is routines. In the chapter, Dobek-Ostrowska and Nożewski also discussed how the communication staff, including the spokespeople, is undergoing a process of politicisation.

The chapter makes the claim that the prime minister plays the main role in the communication process of the government, followed by political advisors and, finally, civil servants. Overall, the Polish case study reveals both how close and how distant the media and the politicians may be from each other.

Sweden: A professional symbiosis

In Chapter 5, Karl Magnus Johansson, Milda Malling and Gunnar Nygren similarly discussed a complex pattern of interaction, an exchange that is best described as interdependency. Journalist–source relationships were described as professionally symbiotic; exchanges are close but with recognition of each other’s professional roles at the heart of the relationship.

The analysis establishes the routinisation at work, as well as the professionalisation. The authors described a shared political communication culture based on norms, values, and attitudes of the actors. Within this culture, there is a daily struggle for the control of information flows. There are daily negotiations on what is newsworthy, what should be published, and what should not. It is difficult to say which side is the strongest, but political sources do have a large influence on the agenda by controlling the information.

The study also discussed the active efforts from sources to influence how news is framed, using both soft and hard methods. Clearly, the political side is not a victim of media logic; on the contrary, it uses this logic for its own objectives.

Both the sources and the journalists described increasing resources on the political side. At the same time, actors on both sides told the same story about downsized newsrooms, journalists who are less specialised and have less knowledge for evaluating information, higher demands to produce content for different platforms, and less time for journalistic research. Taken together, the result of this development is political communication that is increasingly influenced by the political actors. By adapting to media logic, the political actors increase their influence on political reporting at the expense of the autonomy of professional journalism. To some extent, this means a return to political parallelism. While it is not the old version of political parallelism, it is a modern type of political instrumentalisation through the back door.

A changing balance of power?

Results from the four countries support the basic exchange model explaining the relationship between journalists and political sources (Berkowitz, 2009; Hall et al., 1978; Manning, 2001). This relationship is simultaneously adversarial and symbiotic. Both groups of actors struggle to control the flow of information, but they also need each other in their daily work; information is exchanged for publicity and space in the public sphere.

This trade occurs within a shared culture created in the daily interaction between journalists and their political sources, a culture binding the parts together in ongoing negotiations (Pfetsch, 2014). It can also be described as an interpretative community filled with a tacit understanding about its rules and norms. In this community, interaction is governed by values developed from normative departures about the role of

the media in society. Over time, these values have become internalised in the patterns of interaction that structure the system.

In this professional political communication culture, the borders between the actors have become increasingly blurred. Actors jump between jobs on each side, from newsrooms to government PR consultants and then back to journalism (Falkheimer, 2012). From a media content perspective, content marketing and other new commercial features are mixed with journalism, making it increasingly difficult to evaluate trustworthiness (e.g., whether political news is produced by journalists or political actors; whether the news is verified or simply a political statement).

The balance of power between the actors is not established at a single point in time, but evolves with the media development and policies of the political executive. Notably, in all four countries, there has been an increase in governmental resources and efforts to influence the public agenda and the public image of politics (see Chapter 6). This coincides with an increasing centralisation of government communication. The level of this kind of news management differs among the four countries: While centralisation is prominent in Finland and Sweden, a development towards more central coordination and control is less visible in Lithuania and Poland. Hence the extent to which government communication is centralised varies, and the variation is patterned and clustered. The findings suggest that previous research, which focused heavily on Western states, underestimates cross-national variation in government communication.

By the strategic use of new digital platforms, technological developments have given political actors new possibilities to bypass the traditional media and create the public images that they prefer (see Chapter 7). There is evidence of a pattern here. While Facebook serves as a top-down channel for personal branding and dissemination of information, Twitter provides informational exchange with professional elites, including media elites. Moreover, while press staffers are rather marginalised in the Finnish and Polish networks, they are very integrated in the Swedish network. In conclusion, government communication in social media appears to be hybrid; it is based on a synergy of top-down and horizontal models of communication, mass media and social media/network media logics, and both traditional and new-media practices.

On the media side, political journalism faces decreasing resources in the newsrooms. There are fewer journalists developing their own networks of sources, and those still covering politics have to produce more for multiple platforms. This weakens the position of journalism in relation to the growing staff of communicators within the political machinery.

While the trend is the same in all four countries, the strength of the change differs. However, as the influence of professional journalism decreases, powerful sources will be increasingly able to influence and shape the public image of government politics.

Daily interaction and informality

The second group of questions concerned the daily interaction between political journalists and sources within the government. Interviews in all four countries showed many examples of this interaction, formal and public as well as informal and hidden. In this interaction, both mutual interests and conflicts are expressed in the daily negotiations between journalists and sources.

In the first chapter of this book, a four-square matrix was presented to explain the different dimensions of interaction. The dimensions captured whether the interaction is, on the one hand, adversarial or symbiotic and, on the other hand, whether it is public or hidden. The utility of this matrix was confirmed in all four countries, and it was shown that the form of interaction matters for the exchange and its trust and balance of power between the actors. An overall finding was that different groups of sources gain power in different situations. Formal situations and agenda-based news are advantageous for professional sources; informal sources gain power over formal sources during political conflicts and in relation to non-agenda news. In the cases of informal journalist–source interaction, journalists are sometimes not only offering anonymity and publicity; to maintain good relationships with their sources they sometimes also take on the role of advisor (see Chapter 8; cf. Davis, 2009, 2010).

Instead of serving as watchdogs, journalists in this way become actors in the political arena. That the type of interaction influences the content of exchange and the balance of power are findings that call for the reconsideration of existing theories on interdependency.

Mediatisation and control of information flows

In prior research, mediatisation has been conceived as a slow and gradual change. It is not a question of media effects but of how society in general adapts to the logics of the media. With regard to politics, it is defined as a long-term process through which the importance of the media on political processes, institutions, organisations, and actors has increased (Esser & Strömbäck, 2014; Mazzoleni & Schultz, 1999).

Theories on the mediatisation of politics are based on the assumption that some kind of political logic within political institutions and processes is increasingly replaced by media logic (Esser & Strömbäck, 2014). A closer look at the two logics, however, shows that there are some major problems; they are not mutually exclusive and can rather be described as “overlapping” (Marcinkowski, 2014; Van Aelst et al., 2014). While the empirical results from the four countries show that the political system has adapted to media logic, the consequence of this is not a transfer of power from political institutions to media institutions (see Chapter 9). Instead, professionalised government communication has incorporated the rules of media logic and learned how to play the game with the media.

Indeed, combining downsized, commercial media outlets with increasingly resource-strong and professional government communication, an interpretation emerges that differs from the more common one. By transforming the political system and integrating media logic into political processes, a new kind of political instrumentalisation has arisen. From a political perspective, this brings the analysis close to the functional analysis (cf. Van Aelst & Walgrave, 2017). Here the key question is not whether the media has gained power in relation to politics, but how the political system uses the media for political purposes, i.e., to achieve political goals.

In the old top-down media system, political power tried to control information flows by hard methods, like ownership, censorship, and legal means. In the four countries in our study, political power is still trying to control information flows but now by using soft tools, like news management, spin doctors, informal personal networks, and the bypassing of traditional media.

Political journalism in a comparative perspective

The third group of questions concerns the comparative perspective: Similarities and differences among the countries that were examined. According to Kuhn and Kleis Nielsen (2014), political journalism is characterised by both continuity and change. While media development and social change influence the conditions, political journalism is still based in different media systems with various kinds of relations between politics and media.

One of four key variables in the model for analysing media systems created by Hallin and Mancini (2004) is the degree of political parallelism. This is defined as structural ties between media and political organisations – the political affiliation of journalists, owners, and media managers; media content; and news consumption patterns. Many of the results in this anthology concern the first part of the definition – the structural relationships and political affiliations of the media (see Chapter 10). The presented results show both differences and similarities among the four countries.

In all four countries, the journalist–source relationship is professionally maintained. There are, however, clear differences between, on the one side, Poland and Lithuania, and, on the other side, Sweden and Finland. In Poland and Lithuania, there is a recent history of a common struggle for democracy, and in this struggle the two groups worked closely together. Due to this, there are still close relationships between the groups, and nearly all press advisors in the government have a background in the media. Moreover, the partisan tradition is still strong among journalists, and many are expected to pick sides in daily politics. In contrast to this, in Sweden and Finland there is a long history of professionalisation among journalists and less fluid borders between the professions. Despite this, there are examples of mixing journalistic and political careers also in these countries.

In all four countries, there is a professionalisation of government communication (see Chapter 6). The development includes an element of centralisation of control over government communication and the adoption of sophisticated strategies for news management. However, while the trend is common to all four countries, there are differences regarding its intensity and degree. In Sweden, centralised news management has been crucial for all governments since 2006, and the size of this communication structure has grown steadily. The government in Finland also has strong communication structures, even if the politically appointed part is less dominant. In Poland and Lithuania, these trends are visible, but they are not as strong as in the other two countries. Instead, old and informal paths for communication are important, and in a small country like Lithuania, personal contacts are especially important.

When it comes to the organisational connections between politics and the media, the patterns are contradictory. In Poland and, to some extent, Finland, the political sphere uses or tries to use its influence on public service broadcasting. Polish newspapers are also clearly politically affiliated, while in Lithuania they are more connected to commercial interests. In Sweden, finally, political influence is not observed directly, but the journalists talk about higher demands on news production and a dependency on “information subsidies” from political sources. Instead of direct control, the provision of political information becomes the principal means to supervise and control the public agenda (see Chapter 10).

Two dimensions of the relationships between political journalists and their sources are analysed in Chapter 10: the mode of political institutional logic and the mode of media professional logic. The results show Sweden and Finland close to each other in a pluralistic corporatist political logic. When it comes to media logics, though, a comparison between Finnish and Swedish journalists shows that Finnish journalists pursue more of an advocacy ideal, whereas Swedish journalists have adopted a watchdog ideal. In comparison, the relationships in Poland and Lithuania are more influenced by a restrictive political logic, in Poland controlled by central political agents and in Lithuania by different clientelist interests. Also, there are clear differences between the two countries with regard to journalism: In Poland, journalism is to a great extent instrumentalised by politics, whereas Lithuanian journalism is more adversarial and in the interests of owners and others.

The conclusion of this analysis is that contextual circumstances such as historical legacy and political culture are still of high significance in shaping the relationships between journalists and their sources. There are strong factors of change in all four countries (e.g., development of ICT and journalists’ increasing dependence on online sources), and both economic demands and multi-platform production have changed the conditions for journalists’ daily work. The results of these changes, though, still differ depending on the political culture legacy.

The same conclusions are made by Hallin and Mancini (2017) in an analysis 10 years after the publication of “Comparing Media Systems”. While in 2004 they predicted a convergence towards the liberal model, 10 years later they conclude that “differences

among national media systems are in important ways quite resilient” (Hallin & Mancini, 2017: 162). Other research has confirmed patterns of difference among media systems, and Hallin and Mancini conclude that it is time to abandon the view that national differences will disappear. The same conclusion is reached from the analysis of the four countries in this book.

In the book, we have also discussed the development towards a new kind of political instrumentalisation of the media. Whereas the old type of political parallelism was based on party press and external pluralism, with media outlets representing different political actors/parties, the new kind is largely hidden and the result of political professionalisation and centralisation. Resources in government communication have increased, and government communication has over time become more centralised and advanced. At the same time, political journalists are struggling to cope with rising demands, not least stemming from multi-platform production and fewer journalists in the newsrooms.

This trend is perhaps most visible in the two Nordic countries, but it is present in all four countries.

What are the consequences for democracy?

The last group of questions concerns the implications for modern democracy and its institutions. In normative theories of the division of power in liberal democracies, the media independently scrutinises power and creates a public sphere for deliberative public debate (Christians et al., 2009; Dahl, 1989). In this theoretical model, there is a clear division between the role of the media and the roles of the political system. This division is fundamental for the role of journalism in Western democracies, as formulated by Kovach and Rosenstiel in “The Elements of Journalism” (2007: 17): “The primary purpose of journalism is to provide citizens with the information they need to be free and self-governing”. To achieve this, journalism has to be independent from those it covers and serve as independent watchdogs of power. To fulfil this task, journalists’ first loyalty must be to the citizens and their first obligation to the truth; the essence of journalism is a discipline of verification.

However, ideal models are seldom reflected in existing societies. Reality is much more complicated, with many power relationships, both visible and invisible. Moreover, political resources are not distributed equally. Liberal democracy has an elitist character, with elites in leadership positions. Our results show a close interdependency between political journalists and their sources; both groups are parts of the same elite.

Our findings raise an important normative issue: Is it good or bad that the media and political elites interact through interdependent relations? Rather than offering an answer, we outline the alternatives. The traditional interpretation in research is to regret elite collusion effects from a democratic perspective. If opinions and values of the citizenry on policies, politicians, and institutions can be easily manipulated by

elites to serve their interests, this is bad news for democratic politics. This concern is echoed in theories of democracy that emphasise the importance of bottom-up processes of preference formation and representation as well as accountability and participation and deliberation.

The professionalisation of political communication has consequences. Observing that communicative functions of political systems have increasingly become the domain brief of professionals, notably spin doctors, Hamelink (2007: 179) asks what happens to the political process and what the consequences are “for the democratic quality of the polity”. Hamelink sees a tendency towards “the centralisation of communication activities in both government and political parties ... and the growth of cynicism among citizens” (2007: 180), and suggests that the development reinforces the “elitist” element of liberal democracy, turning it into a “thin democracy” (2007: 185).

This concern with democratic consequences is reinforced when populist politicians accuse the media of being part of the establishment; traditional politics and the media are treated as part of the same old structure that populists want to overthrow. At the same time, these populist movements use the media and its logics to present themselves as “outsiders”.

In parallel, however, elite communication and public contestation are natural and necessary components of the process through which individuals develop political attitudes. Forming an opinion involves assessing, accepting, and rejecting competing frames communicated in the public realm. This perspective is reflected in theories privileging elite competition as a normal component of democratic rule.

From a mediatisation perspective, political actors have to adapt to their communication environment and the rules of the game set by the media. In the 1960s, television changed the rules of political communication when politicians could communicate directly with voters in their living rooms. Today, social media is again changing communication, making it possible for political actors to bypass newsrooms and journalists to communicate directly with citizens. A new elite, an elite with communication skills, is replacing the campaign worker and the party bureaucrat (Manin, 1997). These mediatisation effects present challenges to democracy.

A group that clearly belongs to the new political elite is the group of so-called “policy professionals” (Garsten et al., 2015; Svallfors, 2017). Their services have become increasingly important, and as they control information and assist elected politicians, members of the group have also gained power in political processes. This brings us to the changes within political systems.

Research on the presidentialisation of politics in parliamentary systems has addressed the ways in which the political chief executive has been empowered in a broad set of countries. The explanations advanced emphasise a range of contingent and structural factors, best conceived of as complementary. Accounts that centre on the “logic of modern mass media” or the “changing structure of mass communication” (Poguntke & Webb, 2005) stress the extent to which the media, especially television, nurture a focus on personalities (e.g., Karvonen, 2010; Krauss & Nyblade, 2005;

Mughan, 2000). This development is claimed to benefit chief executives, who become natural foci of media coverage and often reinforce this development themselves by cultivating personal images tailored for modern media. Thus, political leaders themselves are an active part in this development.

We share important analytical affinities with accounts that privilege the media or communication as a source of chief executive empowerment. Yet we are dissatisfied with the existing status of this explanation for two reasons. First, there is a strong tendency in existing research to refer broadly to the media or mediatisation without specifying in detail what it is about this process that empowers chief executives at the expense of other actors. Second, where accounts offer such specifications, they centre primarily on personalisation effects of the media. Yet, as we argue, the contribution of the media to chief executive empowerment goes further than that. The media pressure requires chief executives to possess independent resources. Most importantly, it extends to long-term institutional changes. Through our focus on political executive–media relations, our results endorse the notion that the media serves to redistribute power among political actors in favour of political leaders and their aides at the heart of power. It is here that the literature on presidentialisation, along with research on the professionalisation of political communication, helps us to better understand what is going on in modern government and in the interplay between the media and the political executive.

The tendency towards a strengthening of the executive centre has important consequences for democracy as we know it. The criteria for a vibrant democratic process include the media and its role in promoting open government and holding governors accountable. It is a matter of discussion whether strong professionalised political sources contribute to openness or whether the changing power relation instead leads to increased secrecy and government hush-hush.

An area demanding further studies

This volume has explored the question of how and with what consequences political executives and the media interact. In particular, we have examined the relationship from an exchange perspective. The volume describes a relationship between the media and political executives that strongly affects both groups and where professionals, we argue, are in a kind of working relationship with one another. Various kinds of media have become a fixture among political executives. It seems that no government is immune to the media. This in itself justifies a close look at the politics–media relationship to further the development of research on the media and politics in its broadest sense. In conclusion, the study of the interplay between the media and the political executive offers a wide range of challenges to researchers. It also covers a crucial part of liberal Western democracy: the idea of power division and independent media as a fourth estate in society. We bring this book to a close with a plea for more interdisciplinary and comparative research in this area.

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List of abbreviations

AIM	Adequate information management in Europe
CEECOM	Central and East European Communication and Media Consortium
CD	Communications Department (Finland)
CEE	Central and Eastern Europe
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
EU	European Union
FB	Facebook
GCD	Government Communications Department (Finland)
GO	Government Offices (Sweden)
GPS	Global Positioning System
ICA	International Communication Association
IT	Information Technology
LNK	Laisvas ir nepriklausomas kanalas (Lithuanian broadcaster, private)
LRT	Lietuvos nacionalinis radijas ir televizija (Lithuanian National Radio and Television, public)
MP	Member of Parliament
MTV	Music Television
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
Nordicom	Nordic Information Centre for Media and Communication Research
PBS	Partner in Business Strategies (Poland)
PiS	Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice, Poland)
PM	Prime Minister
PMO	Prime Minister's Office
PR	Public relations
PSL	Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe (The Polish People's Party, Poland)
RK	Regeringskansliet (Sweden)
RQ	Research Question

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SB	Statsrådsberedningen (Sweden)
SMS	Short Message Service
TNS	Kantar TNS, formerly Taylor Nelson Sofres (TNS Lithuania)
TV	Television
TVP	Telewizja Polska (Polish Television, public)
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
US	United States
Yle	Yleisradio (Finland)

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This book explores the interplay between government and media drawing on unique evidence from, and in-depth analysis of, four national cases: Finland, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden. Based on the chapters dedicated to each country, five additional chapters address the following cross-national themes: government communication, social media, formality/informality in journalist-source relations, mediatization of politics, and political communication culture.

The book reveals what really goes on between the political executive and the media in everyday practices within these countries. First, it uncovers a process of mediated political-cultural change within media-political systems. Second, it illustrates the workings of prime ministerial power and communication aides at this apex of political power and the media and those who work there. Third, it examines both the struggle within governing institutions to control the flow of information and the tensions between civil servants and political aides, and takes the reader through the four media-political contexts rooted in a deep knowledge of these relationships.

The result is an illuminating and original analysis of politics, political communication, media and journalism, and offers greater understanding of the realities of government – and democracy – and media in practice as well as the role of media within contemporary politics.

Karl Magnus Johansson is a Professor of Political Science and **Gunnar Nygren** is a Professor of Journalism, both in the School of Social Sciences at Södertörn University, Stockholm.

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