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CONTEXT MATTERS

Interactions between news media, political
actors and citizens in elections and crises

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Sundsvall, April 2015
Kajsa Falasca

INTRODUCTION

Context matters - interactions between news media, political actors and citizens in elections and crises

ARTICLE I

Political news journalism: Mediatization across three news reporting contexts

European Journal of Communication, 29(5), 583-597, (2014).

ARTICLE II

Framing the financial crisis: An unexpected interaction between the government and the press

Observatorio (OBS*), 8(1), (2014).

ARTICLE III

Priming effects during the financial crisis: Accessibility and applicability mechanisms behind government approval

European Political Science Review, 6(4), 597-620, (2014) (with Adam Shehata).

ARTICLE IV

Non-significant or difficult to measure: A panel study of agenda-setting effects in the contemporary media environment

Resubmitted to Scandinavian Political Studies.

ARTICLE V

Where you lead we will follow: A longitudinal study of strategic political communication and inter-party relations in election campaigning

Submitted to International Journal of Strategic Communication (with Christina Grandien).

Context matters

Interactions between news media, political actors and citizens in elections and crises

In a comprehensive review of the state-of-the-art of political communication in 2012, the editors Semetko and Scammell state two major developments that call for updated future studies: 'the expanding field of political communication and the era of continuous connectivity' (Semetko and Scammell, 2012: 1-5). Further they argue that due to the rapidly changing conditions scholars must constantly reassess their research priorities in the field of political communication. Many scholars in the field have addressed these developments concluding that the changing media environment and the expanding field of political communication affects media consumption, media content and political actors' communication, all of which are important phenomenon in political communication research (Shehata and Strömbäck, 2011; Weeks and Holbert, 2013; Farrell, 2012; Neuman et al., 2014). However, the degree to which these developments affect political communication processes in society can be assumed to vary across time and space if they are regarded as dynamic rather than linear and deterministic. Ultimately, the expected transformation of the political communication field must be an empirical question requiring empirical research.

In general, the social sciences are concerned with finding the rules that guide processes in society (George and Bennett, 2005). Rules are the theoretical frameworks that guide our understanding of processes in society. It is important for theory building and validation to examine and add significant cases that fit theoretical expectations to the research agenda. In research we should find out the rules but it is equally important to look for pieces that do not fit the rules (disruptions) and identify when they occur in order to test theories. Examinations of deviant cases that run counter to theories are thus important for theoretical development. By focusing on such deviant cases, the rules can be updated, developed and even altered. Theories in social science can only be regarded as the

best explanation and understanding of reality at the moment. Thus, old theories can be surpassed by new theories as new scientific studies are conducted since social sciences are works in progress. However, in the pursuit of finding general theories that explains processes in society contextualization has sometimes suffered. For research in the social sciences, contextualization is important as it allows us to put data in a context in order to understand or explain. Research that is insensitive to context does not tell us much, or in other words context matters.

Context may matter and affect political communication in different ways and can be identified on different levels (individual, social) and as different types (nation, organization, situation) of context. It is relatively uncontroversial to argue that the political and media setting of different countries are important for political communication. Numerous comparative studies in political communication have concluded that national context is crucial for understanding the development of the news media (Hallin and Mancini, 2004), differences in election news coverage (Strömbäck and Kaid, 2008) and election campaigning (Negrine et al., 2007). Following the aforementioned statement by Scammell and Semetko I also consider it important to include various types of contexts in political communication research and not only focus on election studies. The political sphere is naturally larger than the election context of traditional political communication research. Electoral campaigns are important periods for political communication but at the same time, very specific periods. Conclusions about political communication in general should not be drawn exclusively from electoral research since communication and politics also intersect outside of the campaign context. Political communication research has thus increasingly come to include studies of political actors' communication strategies, news coverage and media effects on public opinion outside of the election campaign (Ragas et al., 2014; Bennett et al., 2006; Boomgaarden et al., 2011; Shehata, 2007).

Following these scholarly discussions, the starting point for this dissertation was to empirically test the relevance of some foundational political communication theories in the Swedish national context. The questions asked in political communication research about access and control, choice and content, and effects on opinion are thus also driving the studies in this dissertation (Semetko and Scammell, 2012; Graber and Smith, 2005). Additionally I wanted to empirically test some theories outside of the election context in order to investigate if specific contextual features are likely to influence or condition news content or media effects on citizens' opinions. So, at the heart of this dissertation is an investigation of the importance of different contextual features for political communication processes.

PURPOSE OF DISSERTATION

This dissertation addresses some of the issues raised by political communications scholars concerning the relevance of foundational theories in the field. It revisits a number of classical theories of political communication in the Swedish media environment. Furthermore, the studies presented also investigate various contexts of an expanded field in political communication research.

All articles in this dissertation focus on the Swedish case and the different articles focus on different aspects of political communication and the relationship between political actors, the news media and citizens. The purpose is to investigate theoretical claims regarding the increased mediatization of news media, the influence of news media on citizens, and political actors' interaction with news media and citizens. The theories in the studies thus apply to different areas of the political communication field.

The different articles focus on the importance of contextual features in research. The first article, *Political news journalism: Mediatization across three news reporting contexts*, empirically investigates the degree of mediatization of political news content and aims to answer the question of whether or not election news coverage is representative for non-election political news. This study tests the theoretically grounded claim of increased mediatization in a non-electoral context. The second article, *Framing the Financial Crisis: An unexpected interaction between the government and the press*, explores the interaction between the news media and the government in a frame-building process during the eruption of a crisis. The non-election context provides contextual features that can be important for the frame-building process. The two following articles analyse the influence of news media on citizens in two different contexts: first, *Priming effects during the Financial Crisis: Accessibility and applicability mechanisms behind government approval*, focusing on priming effects during the Financial Crisis; and second, *Non-significant or difficult to measure: A panel study of agenda-setting effects in the contemporary media environment*, focusing on agenda-setting effects during an election campaign. Both these studies also highlight the importance of a methodological approach and design when investigating media effects in a contemporary media environment. The final article, *Where you lead we will follow: A longitudinal study of strategic political communication and inter-party relations in election campaigning*, focuses on political parties and their election campaign communication. The study explores the development of strategic political communication and the role of the political party as it reflects on and strategically operates within the context in which it is embedded.

In sum, the separate articles of this dissertation empirically investigate and test theories that apply to different areas of the political communication field. It does not claim to be comprehensive and cover all interactions between news media, political actors and citizens neither in elections nor in crises. That would be far beyond the scope of a dissertation project. The dissertation consists of this introduction and five separate articles. Next, we will turn the attention to a description of the theories and concepts relevant to this dissertation. After that, the different studies will be summarized and discussed. Finally, the scope and methodological implications of the studies in this dissertation will be discussed.

MEDIATIZATION AND NEWS JOURNALISM FRAMING

Mediatization is an important theoretical concept for understanding the impact of media in modern society and is widely understood as a process of increased media influence at the expense of other actors in society (Asp, 1986; Altheide, 2013; Lundby, 2009; Meyer, 2002; Mazzoleni and Schulz, 1999). In political communication, the concept of mediatization is defined as ‘a long-term process through which the importance and influence of media in political processes and over political institutions, organizations and actors has increased’ (Strömbäck and Esser, 2014b). Their conceptualization introduces four dimensions of mediatization: (1) the extent to which the media is the most important source of information and channel of communication, (2) the degree of the media’s independence from political institutions, (3) the degree to which media content is governed by political or media logic, (4) the degree to which political actors are governed by political or media logic (Strömbäck, 2008; Strömbäck and Esser, 2009; Strömbäck, 2011a). Specifically, the third dimension focusing on media content, links mediatization with one of the most popular concepts in the field of communication: framing. Journalistic news framing is a key indicator of mediatization, where media interventionism becomes an additional indicator of news that is actively shaped by media logic (De Vreese, 2014). In other words, journalistic news frames that translates politics into news stories.

Extensive framing research during election periods indicates increased mediatization since election news coverage increasingly frames politics as a strategic game, includes a conflict frame and turns journalists into interpreters of events and issues (Aalberg et al., 2012). The concept of increasing journalistic independence is thus widely recognized among political communication scholars. However, political news research outside of the election campaign indicates that the news media is less independent from political actors (Lawrence, 2010). Lawrence

(2010) presents a number of cases that do not fit theoretical expectations of mediatization where political actors are recognized as more dominant and influential in the framing of news content. What these contradicting findings indicate is that news framing might be moderated by different news dynamics depending on the context of an event such as an election, a crisis or routine political coverage.

The lack of understanding of framing as a process with contextual features is discussed as problematic in a review of current frame and framing research (Vliegenthart and van Zoonen, 2011). The authors call for more sociologically informed research where framing concerns processes of news production rather than traits of autonomous journalists or news media outlets. A model of news dynamics guiding media independence would move focus from the discussion of who dominates the politician-journalist relationship to a discussion of the contextual importance of this relationship. In other words, the relationship between politicians and journalists can still be described as semi-independent (Bennett and Livingston, 2003) but the variations between media independence and dependence can be explained by contextual features that guide the news process.

Increased mediatization during election periods might thus be moderated by one news dynamic created by the fact that elections are most often scheduled and coverage can thus be planned in advance. An election follows a predicted pattern that journalists can be more or less prepared for and control; the 'know-how of covering an election' can be passed along from journalist to journalist. Moreover news media outlets usually have a well-prepared strategy for how to cover an election (Strömbäck and Kaid, 2008). On the other hand, normal periods, with continuous day-to-day routine coverage, can be moderated by another news dynamic. Outside of the special and recognizable election period, media content might be guided by political logic since political actors then have more control of the political process and can use the advantage of knowing 'what is going on' as well as newsworthy information (Shehata, 2010a; Wolfsfeld and Sheafer, 2006). Finally, unexpected events can unleash another specific news dynamic where neither politicians nor journalists are prepared for how to make sense of or frame an event (Bennett et al., 2006; Tambini, 2010; Shehata, 2007). Both problem definitions and media access for different actors can be different during a crisis, since no one is prepared and there are no pre-planned strategies to follow. Thus, news production can be more or less guided by media or political logic depending on who first grasps the situation. Just as mediatization is viewed as a dynamic process (Strömbäck and Dimitrova, 2011; Zeh and Hopmann, 2013), framing in political news could benefit

from such a perspective where the degree of mediatization is expected to vary across time and space. With a process perspective on news framing, specific news-contexts can entail different news dynamics with different independent norms for journalists and the news media.

The fourth dimension of mediatization focuses on the degree to which political actors are governed by political or media logic (Esser and Strömbäck, 2014). The mediatization perspective suggests that political actors have to adapt to the norms and demands of news media and is often researched by analysing the news management strategies of political parties and their influence in election campaigns (Strömbäck, 2011b; Hopmann et al., 2012). Increased use and successful results of news management are part of strategic political communication – a concept referring to a political party’s purposeful use of information and communication as strategically and effectively as possible in order to reach its objectives (Strömbäck and Kiouisis, 2014).

Political parties’ communication and election campaigning are dynamic and shaped by various contextual conditions such as political system, media independence, political culture and the parties themselves. Adaption to media logic has been regarded as very influential for the development of strategic political communication as news media occupies a central position as both an arena and an actor for political communication (Esser and Strömbäck, 2012a; Negrine, 2008). However, while research has revealed country-differences related to national media differences, not many studies have been devoted to the role of the political party itself. Therefore, research on strategic political communication is lacking a party perspective on the contextual conditions that affect the development of strategic political communication and whether or not this development is mainly driven by the news media. It is important to identify macro-trends but it is also important to consider the local context of a political party.

NEWS MEDIA EFFECTS

As with any political communication research, this dissertation relies on the idea that news media plays an important role in how citizens understand and perceive politics (Lippmann, 1997). This idea is foundational in the media effect paradigm in political communication that concerns the influence on public opinion, perceptions and behaviours (Bryant and Oliver, 2009; Neuman and Guggenheim, 2011; Scheufele and Tewksbury, 2007; Potter, 2011). Nevertheless, the perception of the degree of the media’s influence on citizens has varied from minimal to strong and has circled back to a new discussion of minimal effects (Bryant and Zillmann, 2009). Furthermore, there is still a continuing discussion con-

cerning who is influenced based on the notion of an active citizen who weighs political news against existent values and beliefs (Hoffman and Goldthwaite Young, 2011; Potter, 2012). Societal changes combined with scholarly interest and new research approaches are of importance for these reconsiderations of media effects. The consequence of today's fast evolving media landscape for media effects on public opinion, draws attention to the questions regarding degree of influence (Bennett and Iyengar, 2008; Holbert et al., 2010). However, and most importantly, it raises the question of how and who is influenced.

There are three important developments that challenge the idea and influence of the mass-mediated political communication. First, due to technological development, the media environment is distinguished by a proliferation of media channels and outlets. Second, this media environment offers a multitude of media content from different sources e.g., traditional news media, user-generated content and social media. Third, a segmentation of media content can increase the fragmentation of audiences as consumers increasingly choose and design their own media agenda. Due to these developments, the picture of media effects can change again. Chaffee and Metzger (2001), for example, argue that 'The key problem for agenda-setting theory will change from what issues media tell people to think about to what issues people tell the media they want to think about' (375). This idea not only challenges theory but also research methods since media effects might become increasingly difficult to measure. The discussion concerning research approaches in the media effects paradigm point out two crucial things. First, effects will be highly difficult to measure on an aggregate level and second, individual traits of citizens can increasingly mediate or reinforce media effects (Valkenburg and Peter, 2013; Fishbein and Hornik, 2008; Shehata, 2010b). It is thus important to consider both media variables, such as media use and media processing, as well as non-media variables such as individual difference variables, in media effects research.

Due to the proliferation of media and media-multitasking, one important challenge is to measure media use reliably and validly (Valkenburg and Peter, 2013). In media effects research, there are three broad approaches to measuring exposure, all with different merits as well as limitations. In experiments, exposure can be deliberately varied and controlled. The most common approach assigns individuals different levels of exposure based on survey self-reports. The third measures what is available in media content and focuses on the aggregate rather than individual levels of exposure (Fishbein and Hornik, 2008). Using experiments, exposure can be assured but the unnatural setting can affect the results. With self-reports of exposure in surveys, the actual expo-

sure compared to that reported is assumed to vary. However, according to Valkenburg and Peter (2013) media use measured by media diaries converge with self-report measures in surveys. Variations in media coverage of a specific issue, such as exposure, assumes that content makes its way to individuals either by direct exposure or indirectly through others. This is often assumed when a specific issue dominates the media agenda, as in traditional agenda-setting effects studies; however, it might be out of place in a contemporary media environment due to fragmentation. Nevertheless, despite proliferation of media channels, research has found overlapping patterns of attention rather than isolated individual media consumers (Webster and Ksiazek, 2012). Thus, exposure measures have different qualities and it is always difficult to know whether true media use is measured. It is thus important to consider if results of small and inconsistent media effects can be due to methodological weaknesses. Particularly those media use measures which can lead to attenuation of media effect sizes (Valkenburg and Peter, 2013).

The inclusion of individual difference variables in research approaches can also affect media effects research results. Susceptibility to media effects varies between individuals and is well documented in research (Potter, 2012; Neuman and Guggenheim, 2011; Bryant and Oliver, 2009). However, not all research regards individual susceptibility variables as having two roles, both as predictors and moderators of media use and responsiveness to media (Valkenburg and Peter, 2013). However, by including different individual non-media variables as both predictors and moderators we can explain why and how some individuals are more susceptible to media effects. First, individual variables are pre-existing and thus act as predictors of media use, e.g., interest, values, attitudes, beliefs, etc. Second, the same individual variables can also act as moderators for the effect of media use on media effects. In other words, individual predispositions such as political interest or values might influence individual media use (Bennett and Iyengar, 2008). Furthermore, individual predispositions such as political values or attitudes might influence how the media content is interpreted or how it affects the individual (Althaus and Kim, 2006; Roskos-Ewoldsen and Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2009).

Finally, when researching media effects, in the increasingly digital media environment it is important to recognize that media content, to a varying extent, is constructed from interactions between audiences and media providers (Neuman et al., 2014). Media providers are able to see exactly what their audience is doing on digital platforms. Such media measures ensure that the media can adjust their content to audience preferences, in other words, the media can provide users with the content they are interested in based on previous consumption (Webster and Ksiazek, 2012). In this way, media providers and media use could

be regarded as involved in a recursive process producing media content.

THE ARTICLES

The first study of this dissertation, *Political news journalism: Mediatization across three news reporting contexts* (Article I), focuses on the question of whether or not election coverage is representative of other political journalism in terms of degree of mediatization. The study empirically investigates and compares news coverage of the Financial Crisis in 2008, the election campaign in 2010 and routine political news in 2012. A systematic comparison of news content from these three periods revealed substantial differences in news framing and thus, media independence strategies. The main conclusion is that mediatization along the third dimension, focusing of media content, is substantially influenced by the specific context of the news coverage. Election coverage is far more influenced by journalists in comparison to both crisis and routine political news in terms of framing. Media's independence varies across different contexts, and points at varying conditions influencing whether a theoretical proposition of increased mediatization holds. It suggests that political news might be moderated by different news dynamics depending on the context of an event such as an election, a crisis or routine political coverage. Differing journalistic norms, routines and practices could be a function of the specific context of political journalism.

The second study, *Framing the Financial Crisis: An unexpected interaction between the government and the press*, (Article II) explores framing in a specific as well as non-electoral context, namely the Financial Crisis that erupted in 2008. It focuses on the interaction between political actors and news media on the process of constructing and shaping news frames (Zhou and Moy, 2007; Tuchman, 1978; Coombs, 2011). Frame-building involves both political influence and journalistic routines that affect news content and emphasizes the aforementioned key question in the literature on media framing: How independently from political actors do news media frame political events and issues? (Vliegenthart, 2012; Bennett et al., 2007; Entman, 2003; Sheafer and Gabay, 2009; Wolfsfeld and Sheafer, 2006). As opposed to framing research that assumes that news media and journalists are relatively autonomous in news production (Patterson, 1994; Cappella and Jamieson, 1996; Althaus, 2003; Aalberg et al., 2012; H. De Vreese, 2001), the findings of this study indicate unexpected results as the government dominates the frame-building process. Hence, the findings align with the 'older' predicted pattern of indexing that proposes that news frames are likely to be driven by powerful political actors thus limiting press independence (Bennett, 1990). The results of this study thus seem confounding in the light of increased mediati-

zation with a proposed increase of news media independence and the importance of journalistic norms for news production (De Vreese, 2012; Strömbäck and Esser, 2009; Strömbäck and Esser, 2014a). However, the findings highlight the conclusion from the first study that the context of news production affects news framing. The frame-building article of this dissertation is an attempt to explore such a process with important contextual features.

The before mentioned challenges for media effects research are discussed and underlie the research designs of the two following articles, *Priming effects during the Financial Crisis: Accessibility and applicability mechanisms behind government approval*, (Article III) concerning priming effects and, *Non-significant or difficult to measure: A panel study of agenda-setting effects in the contemporary media environment*, (Article IV) concerning agenda setting effects. The global Financial Crisis erupted in September 2008 and rapidly came to dominate the political and media agenda across the world. The crisis contained several components that are considered conducive to strong priming effects. However, despite a dramatic increase in negative media coverage of economic issues, followed by growing public concern during the Financial Crisis, priming of economic considerations did not occur (Boomgaarden et al., 2011; Peter, 2004). This deviant case offered us a puzzle that could be important to examine in order to further understand media effects. Research on media priming has shown that news media can influence the standards people use when evaluating political actors (Scheufele and Tewksbury, 2007; Iyengar and Kinder, 1987). The basic priming hypothesis suggests that economic considerations should become more important as evaluation criteria for government approval assessment, especially in light of the unfolding Financial Crisis that dominates the media agenda (Sheaffer, 2007; Noelle-Neumann and Mathes, 1987). Since such priming did not occur, we suggest in this study that priming is not only dependent on the salience of an issue but also on how citizens attribute responsibility. In other words, priming is a two-step process involving perceived applicability or perceived relevance and not just a function of heightened salience and accessibility (Althaus and Kim, 2006; Kimball, 2005; Roskos-Ewoldsen and Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2009). We found that the interplay between personal political motivations and applicability was critical for priming to occur. The results of the study support the notion of priming as a more active process and highlight the importance of incorporating individual-level factors in media effects research. In sum, the most important merit of this article concerns the exploration of the mechanisms behind priming effects such as the role of individual perceptions for priming effects. For future research this entails the notion

that media effects models might be more complex and not as parsimonious as direct media effects.

Non-significant or difficult to measure: A panel study of agenda-setting effects in the contemporary media environment (Article IV) investigates another important media effects research challenge and focuses on agenda setting in the contemporary media landscape. Since the media environment is rather dissimilar to the mass-media environment that dominated when the agenda-setting hypothesis originated, the impact of media effects on public opinion has been questioned (Takeshita, 2006; Neuman and Guggenheim, 2011). The impact of media content on public opinion stated by traditional agenda-setting might be out of place in an environment of fast evolving digital media and online publics (Russell Neuman et al., 2014). This study compares the agenda-setting effects of different media consumption measures on individual issue perception during the 2010 Swedish election campaign. The study is based on a four-wave panel survey and uses measures of individual news media attention as well as exposure to traditional news media, online news media and political social media. The panel data design enables stricter control over the chain of causality and opens up the opportunity for making causal inferences about agenda-setting effects at the individual level (Eveland Jr and Morey, 2010; Finkel, 1995). Most importantly, the findings of the autoregressive models in this study indicate the importance of the methodological approach when investigating media effects. The findings suggest that general news media attention is a significant measure for news media consumption in a high-choice media environment rather than exposure to specific media types. The main conclusion from this study is that agenda-setting in a contemporary media environment is not becoming non-significant but rather difficult to measure.

The final article of this dissertation *Where you lead we will follow: A longitudinal study of strategic political communication and inter-party relations in election campaigning* (Article V) focuses on political actors' strategic communication during election campaigns. The article empirically illustrates how political parties lead and follow each other in the development of strategic political communication. So far, most research has focused on the importance of structural factors in the social, medial and political environment of political parties when explaining developments and differences in strategic political communication (Esser and Strömbäck, 2012b; Negrine, 2007; Farrell and Webb, 2000; Strömbäck and Kiousis, 2014). The departure point of this study is that it is important to explore the role of the political party as there is also a process where political parties reflect on and strategically operate within the context in which they are embedded (Lawrence et al., 2009). This study highlights that

parallel to the process of adaption to macro changes and challenges such as increasing mediatization, the circulation of ideas and new practices of election campaigning between political parties additionally influences the development of strategic political communication.

SCOPE AND IMPLICATIONS

Finally, a discussion concerning the scope, the methodological approaches and implications of the studies in this dissertation is necessary. Even though the specific articles deal with questions concerning these issues in more detail, there are a few important and more general discussions on which I will focus.

The separate articles in this dissertation are all based on different research designs as well as different methodological approaches that consequently have different implications. The combination of different research designs is based on the perspective that a dichotomy between qualitative and quantitative methods is unproductive. The use of different methods should furthermore be considered and reflected upon in practice rather than relying on an unreflecting use of methods (Furlong and Marsh, 2010). The inclusion of individual-level factors or the use of different media consumption measurements were for example crucial for the priming and agenda-setting studies. Furthermore, I believe in the importance of using different social science methods that correspond to the different issues and needs of the particular research problem. By combining interviews with a comparative longitudinal analysis we could investigate election campaign strategies over time, which was crucial for the research problem of the study concerning development of strategic political communication. With respect to the various research problems, the weaknesses and strengths of the different designs and methods of each specific study in this dissertation are elaborated upon and discussed in more detail in the respective articles.

All articles in this dissertation focus on political communication in Sweden, which raises necessary questions concerning country selection and its implications for both internal and external validity. As most of the theoretical concepts of each specific study are international and their prior empirical evidence comes from international research, the question of applicability in the Swedish case is relevant. However, the theories were all developed in Western democracies that share some crucial traits, such as a parliamentary system, free elections, free media and freedom of speech, with Sweden. Furthermore, transnational trends of developments in political communication have been observed in many countries through comparative studies (Swanson, 2004). Comparative studies have also shown that there are, of course, variations between dif-

ferent Western democracies that affect political communication in specific countries. The classic study by Hallin and Mancini (2004) focused on the relationship between media systems and political systems in Western democracies and identified three models of political media systems. According to this labelling, Sweden belongs to the group of democratic corporatist models characterized by the highly developed newspaper market, a tradition of political parallelism, a high degree of journalistic professionalism, and a rather extensive state intervention in the media system (Hallin and Mancini, 2004). However, there are signs that a shift is taking place in Sweden towards the Liberal model since newspapers have lost their party press character, press subsidies have been reduced and the deregulation of TV and radio has taken place (Strömbäck and Nord, 2008; Nord, 2007). Since Sweden represents a case of a Democratic Corporatist country with influences from the Liberal model, it is a relevant case for theories from a wider international research context.

However, the conclusions from the separate article are not assumed to be valid everywhere since contextual features on different levels and of different types affect the different political communication processes investigated. The research findings clearly point to the importance of regarding mediatization, framing, priming, agenda-setting and the development of election campaigning as processes that vary across time and space. If theories of social science are regarded as the best explanation and understanding of processes in society at the moment contextual features must be taken into consideration. This dissertation illustrates that context matters in political communication research. Contextual features on different levels such as national political and media setting matter for the media environment, specific contexts as in an election or a crisis matter for journalistic independence from political actors, and organizational context as for political parties matter when developing election campaigning. In sum this dissertation highlights the need for contextualization in political communication research before drawing conclusions that challenge the theoretical foundations of the field. The changing media environment and the expanding field of political communication might challenge foundational theories in the field but the empirical evidence from the studies in this dissertation tells us that the degree to which this is actually happening is dependent on context. This suggests the need for caution before drawing conclusions concerning the significance of theories in the field based on an idea of homogenization of media environments and media systems across the world.

This dissertation covers a range of topics related to the interaction between news media, political actors and citizens in contemporary society. Still, there are several other topics that are relevant to explore and

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several other research designs and methods could have been used. As mentioned at the beginning of the introduction, the intention of this dissertation is to add empirical evidence and new knowledge in a cumulative research approach. However, the general conclusion is that in future research the importance of contextual features should be taken into consideration when studying other topics and theories of political communication. Future studies should therefore avoid naïve universalism due to the developments of a changing media environment and the expanding field of political communication.

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