Sources that Trigger the News: Multiplexity of Social Ties in News Discovery

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ABSTRACT

The study explores how the content of the social ties between journalists and their sources, and the multiplexity of the ties in particular, is reflected in the news discovery practices in the political beat. Some of the news ideas come from publicly available channels while others derive from journalists' unique networks of social contacts (often to some degree informal). The sources connected to journalists via single vs. multiplex social ties achieve a discursive power (Jungerr et al. 2019) in different ways. The study is based on reconstructed news discovery situations (n = 162) from two different political journalism environments: Lithuania and Sweden, and combines quantitative and qualitative questions. First, it measures the prevalence of the multiplex social ties between journalists and the sources. Second, it analyzes how the multiplexity of these ties is reflected in the process of the news discovery and, third, the outcome—the news content. The results show that the prevalence of multiplex social ties, and the social network behind them, is reflected in what news journalists can access and select as newsworthy. Process-wise, multiplex social ties work as a shortcut but require a balance between maintaining the access to the network and distance to the source.

Introduction

"News is what your friends talked about by the dinner table last night," experienced editors say at newsroom meetings where journalists are brainstorming for story ideas. The news is socially constructed via interactions (Tuchman 1978; Paul and Berkowitz 2021). This puts the focus on the variety of social contacts leading up to the news discovery—the moment when a source shares the information and a journalist accesses it (Reich 2009). Some of the information is available or can be accessed upon a formal request, while other information needs informal access and is acquired via personal connections.

Information transferred via multiplex social ties, tends to be more influential, but these ties create greater obligation (Ho and Levesque 2005). Therefore content of the social ties

between two actors not only influences *what* information can be transferred but also *how* it can be transferred and how it will be *perceived*, as the studies on network analysis in organizational and business and political contexts indicate (Granovetter 1973; Scott 2013; Zagenczyk, Purvis, and Shoss 2015; McClurg, Klofstad, and Sokhey 2017). Even though access to various competent and credible sources is the biggest resource and social capital of a journalist (Manning 2001), few studies have approached the issues on how the multiplexity of social roles in journalist-source relationships is reflected in journalistic practice, and news discovery in particular.

Exploring the interactions that draw the media's attention to certain topics is crucial in order to understand why the media content looks the way it does. News discovery sources have a chance to initially define the news. Their contribution inspires subsequent journalistic questions and decisions, including the selection of other sources. All these decisions turn into content and have an agenda-building effect—a discursive power—defined as "the proven ability of contributors (…) to introduce, amplify, and maintain topics, frames, and speakers that come to dominate attention in ongoing political discourse" (Jungherr, Possega, and An 2019, 17).

This article analyzes how the multiplexity of the social ties and roles that a journalist and a source hold toward each other contributes to the news discovery.

Repetitive interactions within a limited circle of social contacts can turn some professional ties into friendships and vice versa (Borgatti, Everett, and Johnson 2013). Organizing journalistic work into beats in order to increase the efficiency in the news work strengthens the tendency to reuse sources who proved to be credible in the past (Barnoy and Reich 2020; Reich 2009; Dick 2012) and exclude others (Manning 2001; Carlson 2009). Beat reporters can be too reliant on similar news-finding patterns and certain groups of sources (Dick 2012; Davis 2019) and reminiscent of a "micro-culture" (Ericson, Baranek, and Chan 1989, 34): the same reporters interviewing the same sources and continuing to produce the same narratives. It makes beat journalists, and reporters of the political beat in particular, especially suitable for analyzing the role of multiplex social ties in the journalistic practice. Politics utilizes onstage and backstage processes (Dindler 2015; Arceneaux, Borden, and Golan 2019), is deliberative in nature, and consists of both formal and informal exchanges between a journalist and a source (Baugut and Reinemann 2013). At the same time, social proximity between journalists and their sources cannot be taken for granted, due to professionalization of the political communication, growing amount of communication intermediaries and less direct access between journalists and the politicians (Davis 2009). Davis (2009) notes that the these trends increased the number of social ties and made them shallower.

In order not to misjudge the role of the multiplex social ties in the professional practice, it is advantageous to compare the prevalence and contribution of these ties in at least two different contexts within the same study. The data of this article therefore includes reconstruction interviews (Reich 2009) on 162 news discovery situations in Lithuania ($n = 89$) and Sweden ($n = 73$). This method allows the journalists to recreate in detail and reflect on their working process for concrete news stories, while keeping the sources in those stories anonymous from the researcher. Due to the sensitivity of discussing how professional and private roles intertwine in the relationship between the journalist and source, this method was advantageous. While both Lithuania and Sweden are relatively small media markets, meaning potentially more intense contact within a small circle of

actors in the field of politics and political journalism, they differ in their degree of professionalization in journalism and political communication. It is higher in Sweden, which should imply a larger distance between the professional roles of journalists and their political sources. However, it remains an empirical question to find out whether this distance is reflected in the prevalence and contribution of the multiplex social ties in the news discovery.

The article is organized around three research questions. First, it maps the **prevalence** of the multiplex social ties between journalists and their news discovery sources in the two countries. Second, it looks at whether the news discovery **process** differs when the news derives from single or multiplex social ties. Third, it explores how the information acquired via multiplex social ties **contribute** to the type of news that is discovered.

Prevalence of Multiplex Social Ties

The multiplexity of social ties is defined as the number of content forms contained in a relationship (Kilduff and Tsai 2003), in this case the multiple roles that sources and journalists might hold. They act within their formal professional roles (sharing or gathering information), but they might also be related by other ties that range from purely formal to semi-formal or informal, such as professional friendship or even socializing outside of the professional context.

Contact with sources is a part of the journalistic routines, and these routines both shape social activities and are shaped by them (Westlund and Ekström 2019). In this sense, what social ties journalists and the sources establish and how they use it in the news discovery is a dependent variable just like the media content, as described in the hierarchy of influences model by Shoemaker and Reese (2014, originally 1989). According to them, none of the levels of influence can be an explanatory factor on their own. Instead, what matters are the connections, combinations and interactions *between* the different levels.
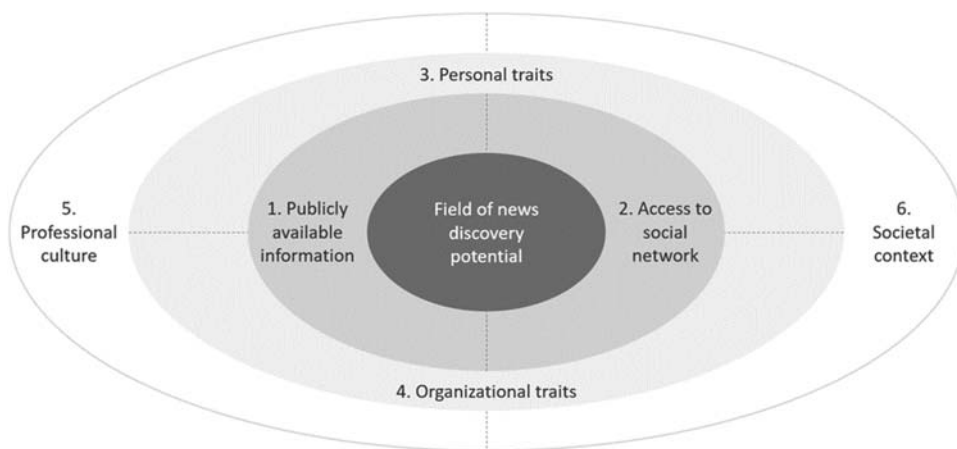

Figure 1. Each journalist has at their disposal a field of news discovery potential. This field consists of access to public information (1) and the journalists' social network (2) and is conditioned by the personal traits (3) and newsroom organization (4) all of which in turn are influenced by professional culture (5) and societal context (6). Own picture.

When looking for news stories, a journalist works within their own unique field of opportunities and restraints, which have been summarized in a model of the *field of news discovery potential* (Figure 1).

According to the model, the ties that connect journalists and news discovery sources (Figure 1, number 1 and 2) are conditioned by contextual factors. First, it matters what kind of relationships are common and accepted in a certain professional culture as well as how communication processes are organized there (Pfetsch 2014) (Figure 1, number 5). The tendency of having more or fewer intertwined networks between journalists and their political sources can differ in national contexts, as demonstrated by Cammarano and Medrano (2014) (number 6), who compared the prevalence of friendship ties between journalists and their political sources in a number of European countries. Second, the ties that connect journalists and news discovery sources are conditioned by the resources for source work allocated by the newsrooms (McManus 1994) and news discovery routines which vary between different media organizations (Stroobant, De Dobbelaer, and Raeymaeckers 2018) (number 4). The centralization of the newsroom, the story selection autonomy of the reporter, and the specialization of the reporter in the topic of the story influence the news discovery channels that journalists use in their work (Boesman, d'Haenens, and Van Gorp 2015). Finally, individual characteristics (number 3) of the journalists influence what source networks they can and choose to access and how (Peiser 2000; Zoch and Turk 1998), and diversity in the newsroom could mean access to different source networks. Also, politicians tend to have closer relationships with the journalists they perceive to share their views (Maurer and Beiler 2018).

Therefore, the social ties that are established and how they are used at an aggregate level can differ from one societal context to another and one organization to another, but they can also be viewed as social capital and a competitive advantage that distinguishes individual journalists or individual sources. In order to understand the degree to which the multiplexity of social ties plays a role in the professional context, the article asks:

RQ 1. How prevalent are multiplex social ties in the news discovery in Lithuania and Sweden?

Multiplexity of Social Ties in the News Discovery Process

Access to any social network is restrained by formal or informal social rules or obligations. Some of these rules derive not just from a specific interaction but rather from how an actor perceives the network and adjusts their behavior in response to this perception (McClurg, Klofstad, and Sokhey 2017). Therefore, news discovery as a *process* can differ between single and multiplex social ties due to both the ways and circumstances under which information is transferred and the expectations of the actors regarding this transfer.

In the case of single social ties, the interaction between a journalist and a source is defined by the media-relations policies of the source's organization and its ethical rules and news-gathering routines. In the case of multiplex social ties, contexts overlap, which introduces not only more flexibility but also more uncertainty. Consequently, multiplex social ties require more trust and intuitive adaptation from the actors (Misztal 1996). It is important that both sides correctly interpret the unwritten conditions for this transaction, since failing to meet each other's expectations might threaten both the

professional and the social ties (Hansen 1999). Practical examples of such interpretation could be attributing the sources who shared the information or, on the contrary, keeping the sources in the background (Allern and Pollack 2019; Dindler 2015). Another example could be the different patterns of initiative for the first contact (Reich 2009).

Even though McManus (1994) generally classified news discovery via active source-contacts as requiring more active effort in comparison to passive news discovery (for example, by reusing PR material), he did not take into account that each of the social ties between a journalist and a source differs in quality. Therefore, it is still an open question as to whether news discovery via multiplex social ties creates a shortcut or an extra step in the journalistic process. Therefore:

RQ 2: How is the multiplexity of the social ties reflected in the news discovery process?

Multiplex Social Ties and News Content

The degree of the strength of the social ties facilitates the transmission of different types of knowledge (Hansen 1999). Generally, the higher the variety and number of weak ties, the more diverse the information, and the stronger the ties, the more complex and deep the knowledge (Granovetter 1973). Therefore, it is possible to expect that multiplex social ties would allow access to different types of news than single social ties. For example, multiplex social ties can be advantageous for sources who disagree with the official organization line and, often in disguise, act against it (Ericson, Baranek, and Chan 1989).

Regular socialization within a certain environment is a prerequisite for establishing stronger and in some cases multiplex social ties with the sources from that environment. It also increases opportunities for accessing the information. Because journalists find themselves caught between the meanings constructed by their organization and the meanings of their source networks (Berkowitz 2019), and since multiplex social ties mean more trust as well as more potential influence (Ho and Levesque 2005), journalists are able to not only access various types of information but also construct the frames for the news selection, such as relevant angles or subsequent sources in the story. One example of how exposure to a certain interpretative environment (even though not necessarily through the multiplex ties) is the network study of German journalists, who adopted the frames of the elite politicians (Krüger 2015).

Therefore, the last research question is:

RQ 3. What type of stories are discovered and selected via single social ties and multiplex social ties?

Method and Data

Many of the factors at play in news discovery, from the relationships in an individual network to reliance on the subsidies from formal sources, are not visible in the final media content (Reich 2009). When focusing on the content of the social ties between journalists and sources, as well as on the detailed circumstances leading up to the news discovery, it was important to ensure that the journalists' sources remained anonymous for the researcher, which ruled out methods of observation or classical social network analysis.

Reconstruction interviews (Reich 2009; Reich and Barnoy 2016), therefore, were the most optimal for this study. They provided comparable data on each news discovery situation and allowed both human and non-human actors, including the contributions that journalists did not find reference worthy, like PR material or brief conversations with colleagues or private individuals. Unlike qualitative interviews, reconstruction interviews also captured the routines and sources behind the news discovery that the journalists themselves considered too ordinary to mention.

The interviews were conducted with 33 journalists and included 162 news discovery moments in Lithuania (LT $n = 89$) and Sweden (SE $n = 73$) during a non-election period in the spring and fall of 2016. This time period provided insight into ordinary journalistic practice that was not affected by extreme circumstances since the purpose of the study was to capture the general prevalence of multiplexity of the social ties in the news discovery process, unaffected by specific-case circumstances.

Sampling

The total population of reporters covering national politics in each of the countries is difficult to estimate. In order to create a sample of interviewees, we monitored for sixty days the news on national politics in the media outlets that were the main political news providers and reached the largest and most demographically diverse audience in each respective country (Table 1).

Later, the political news journalists who contributed the most in each of the outlets were asked to participate in the reconstruction interview (one to three journalists were asked). The researchers collected the material that the journalists produced during the month immediately preceding the date of the interview to ensure that the journalists would be able to recall as many details from their working process as possible. The participation rate was 4.5 out of 5.

The Interviews

The journalists received the articles or the transcribed radio or TV stories that they had produced during over the past four weeks (on average 9 items), which were numbered. By picking a card with a number and without revealing the number to the interviewer, the journalists answered questions about the story. The journalists were promised confidentiality since some of the questions were related to information about personal social ties

Table 1. The sample of interviewed journalists and the types of media outlets in Lithuania and Sweden.

Media outlet	Lithuanian respondents	Swedish respondents
News agency	2	2
Public service radio	2	3
Public service TV	1	3
Daily newspaper	4	6
Evening newspaper	2	2
Internet news website	5	N/A
Monthly magazine	1	0
Total:	17	16

and sources. The journalists could talk about their interactions and relationships with specific sources without there being a risk of the interviewer understanding who they were referring to, which was the greatest advantage of the reconstruction interview method for this research. This was especially important for questions related to information leaks or personal relationships.

In total, twenty variables in the questionnaire were covered using predefined answer categories, but journalists were allowed to use free narratives to recall the circumstances and motivation for working in a certain way, which also made it possible to create new categories. The journalists were asked to remember how they got the story idea/assignment, the circumstances, conversations or written information that inspired the story idea, and what made them proceed with the story. These initial contributors were registered as the discovery sources. Some of the other variables used in this article included the institution/sector of the source and the source's rank, the type of contact (face-to-face meeting, formal or informal event, written or online contact, outgoing or incoming telephone call, etc.), contact frequency (to measure the inclusiveness of the network in terms of new vs. established sources), who initiated the contact (to measure initiative and direction of the tie), the perceived degree of formality/informality of the relationship with the source (to identify multiplexity of the social ties), the regularity of the contact with the source, and whether the source was mentioned or hinted at in the final version of the story. In cases where a human source handed over or sent written information, the journalists described their relationship and interaction with the sender. Some of the answers were followed up with qualitative, open-ended questions, for example why a certain type of interaction was preferred or why the source was not mentioned.

The interviews lasted one to two hours and were conducted in the interviewees' native language by the author of this study. Each of the interviewed journalists reconstructed around five stories on average.

Analysis

Both transcription and coding of the interviews was done by the same person, the author of this study. While the quantitative parts of the data enabled the mapping of the prevalence of the multiplex social ties in the news discovery processes in the two countries (RQ1) the qualitative parts generated reflective accounts on the working processes in the specific news situations and thus allowed a narrative analysis that focused on the question, "how journalists make sense of what happened and to what effect" (Bryman 2012; Coffey and Atkinson 1996). The qualitative information provided narratives on perceived advantages and disadvantages of the multiplexity of the social ties, and the norms related to the information-sharing and -using process, as well as on how the journalists perceived sources' motives and expectations while sharing the information (RQ2), as well as details of the social proximity in the particular source-journalist relationship. It gave an insight into situational but also longer-term relational circumstances leading to the story discovery via multiplex social ties and how they played a role in the discovery of the particular story (RQ3). The answers were coded, looking for the patterns in how the content of the social ties was reflected in the sources' potential discursive power (introducing topics, speakers, angles).

Contexts in Lithuania and Sweden

The two countries, Lithuania and Sweden, were chosen to explore whether the prevalence of the types of social ties between journalists and their sources is part of the professional practice (the way journalists-sources access each other) or strongly dependent on context. It is crucial not to overestimate or underestimate the findings. The countries are not meant to represent specific cases of closeness or distance in the professional context. However, a brief background on the countries could help in the interpretation of the findings.

Both Lithuania and Sweden have relatively small media markets. However, Sweden has a long tradition of free press, its level of journalistic and political communication professionalization is advanced, and its government communication is centralized, which can mean more coordination and a stronger role of the intermediaries in the daily press-relations (Nygren and Johansson 2019; Johansson and Raunio 2019). These factors can mean more defined professional roles and thus larger social distance between journalists and their sources.

Meanwhile, Lithuanian journalists have been transitioning from the unusual proximity of the early 1990s (both journalists and politicians strived for the same goals: country independence and democracy) to freedom of the press and professionalization. Only in recent decades have political sources in Lithuania started to establish professional PR departments (Balčytienė and Malling 2019). In comparison to Sweden, we can expect to find that the social distance between Lithuanian journalists and their political sources will not be as clear.

There is no formal political parallelism in either of the countries. The media in both countries is currently experiencing the need to rethink business strategies, which is expressed by the need to create content that attracts a paying audience (therefore, exclusive content) while simultaneously balancing this against the efficient use of resources. Both of these factors might be reflected in the news discovery practice.

Results. The Role of Multiplex Ties in News Discovery

Prevalence of Multiplex Social Ties Between Journalists and News Discovery Sources

The reconstruction interviews provided detailed accounts on how the idea for each of the stories was born and the kind of relationship the journalists had with their human discovery sources.

This allowed us to address RQ 1: How prevalent are multiplex social ties in the news discovery in Lithuania and Sweden?

First, we looked how the journalists described their relationships with their discovery sources in terms of formality and informality to identify the general prevalence of multiplex social ties between journalists and discovery sources in Lithuania and Sweden.

We analyzed the descriptions of the relationships ("How did you interact with the source in the particular situation?" and "How closely do you know the source in general?") and, based on the information transaction within the relationships, divided them into categories. We identified relationships where both the journalist and the source encountered each other only within the professional context and the information

the source shares could have easily been shared with other journalists as *single formal*. We identified relationships where a source interacts only within the working context but shares exclusive, off-the-record information with the particular journalist as *semi-formal multiplex*. We identified relationships where the journalist and the source interact mainly within the professional context but with information including both professional and private topics as *multiplex informal*. Finally, we identified sources related to the journalists even outside the professional context (for example, via family or friendship ties) as *private multiplex*.

Both Swedish and Lithuanian journalists describe a major share of their discovery sources as single formal relationships (Figure 2). The differences between Lithuania and Sweden become clearer when it comes to the usage of semi-formal and informal contacts. In Sweden, almost 36 percent of all sources were described as semi-formal multiplex, meaning that even though exclusive content can be transferred, it is always work-related. In Lithuania, such sources make up 15 percent. The semi-formality of the interaction here prescribes the role of a network-builder. Even though no personal aspects might be involved in such relationships, they open up for future cooperation and access.

The third group, multiplex informal, is more common in Lithuania (26 percent) than in Sweden (17 percent). The relationship includes work-related communication outside the working environment, for example during a lunch where the conversation might include some personal details and the tone is perceived as informal. These sources represent already established networks and can be interpreted as having closer ties than the second group.

Finally, the multiplex private group was almost absent in Sweden (2 percent) and the smallest group in Lithuania (13 percent). These contacts interact in several social contexts, which leads to multiple ethical considerations not only when it comes to the journalist/source roles but also other social roles.

It is possible to conclude that even though both countries have a similar share of purely formal discovery sources, Lithuanian journalists tend to have closer and more informal relationships with their discovery sources than their Swedish counterparts.
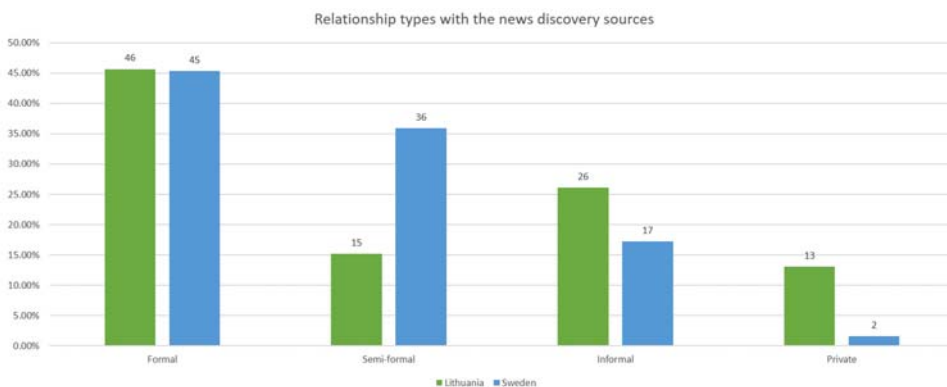

Figure 2. Types of relationships with news discovery sources as a percentage of all human discovery sources in Lithuania (*n* = 48) and Sweden (*n* = 65).

However, knowing a source on an informal basis does not mean that information deriving from that source cannot be accessed via other channels. An example could be a journalist attending a press-conference organized by a person they know even from informal contexts. Even though it indeed could be that the socialization with the closely known source strengthened the importance of the event in the eyes of the journalist (due to interpretive frames via socialization), the event was also available to access for other journalists, thereby implying that the multiplexity of the social ties was not the only factor leading to the news discovery.

In order to find the news that journalists became aware of *explicitly due to the multiplexity* of the social ties, we coded the qualitative part of the interviews, focusing on how and why certain contacts lead to the news stories and why the journalist chose to report this particular story. This enabled us to find out whether the story was exclusive and accessible via multiplex social ties or available via other public channels.

Based on this analysis, we split the news discoveries into two groups: those "accessed via network" (multiplex social ties) and those deriving from the "publicly available sources" (single social ties).

The analysis showed that despite Lithuanian journalists generally reporting somewhat closer social ties to their news discovery sources (Figure 1), the share of the stories that could be accessed via multiplex social ties was very similar in both countries (Table 2).

In some cases, the journalists acquired the information via brokers who were familiar both with the journalist and the news source. This meant two-step ties, with multiplexity existing between at least two of the actors, although not between the journalist and the source directly. Trust for the broker conveyed some trust to the recommended source, and vice versa.

> I did not know the sources, but I as recommended to them, and therefore they shared the information (about suspected corruption) that later on proved to be correct. I could fully trust the person who recommended me the sources. (Lithuanian journalist 5)

Unsuccessful cooperation in this case would have been a likely influence on the relationship with the broker. Accessing the discovery sources via the brokers was more common in Lithuania (10 percent of all the news discoveries) than in Sweden (2 percent). Since many of the brokers came from the newsroom, it shows that the newsroom plays a role as a mediator, and the source relationships to the senior members of the newsroom play a larger role in Lithuania than in Sweden.

Prevalence of multiplex social ties can be a comparative variable, i.e., what practice is perceived as acceptable in a certain professional environment and what type of fields of the news discovery potential journalists are able to construct. In both countries, journalists expressed generally positive views regarding the multiplex (though not private) ties with the sources. Having such contacts was perceived as a competitive advantage, social

Table 2. News discovery cases via networks and publicly available sources in Lithuania and Sweden.

	Reconstructed news discoveries	News accessed via network	News accessed via publicly available sources
Lithuania	89	26 (29%)	63 (71%)
Sweden	73	23 (31.5%)	50 (68.5%)
Both countries	162	49 (30%)	113 (70%)

capital and a result of years of experience. Less experienced journalists describe them as an admirable professional goal:

> There are three journalists in the country who will walk through the corridors of the Parliament and get their news first. They know everyone. They are walking, hanging in a café and chatting, and they always come back to the newsroom with a story. (Lithuanian journalist 3)

Having a network of exclusive sources was also perceived as social capital, something that would increase the journalist's image in the eyes of other potential sources: " … other sources will see that I have good sources, and they will want to come to me with their stories" (Swedish journalist 7). It addresses future aspirations, that accessing some of the exclusive news should increase a journalist's chances to grow their network of sources and access even more information.

News Discovery via Multiplex Social Ties as Process

The next step was to look at the way news gets discovered via single and multiplex social ties.

> RQ 2: How is the multiplexity of the social ties reflected in the news discovery process?

When analyzing news discovery through single and multiplex social ties, we looked into the direction of the social ties (whether it is the journalist or the source who initiates the first contact), how the sources accessed through single and multiplex social ties contribute by providing the initial information, the context leading up to the moment of news discovery through single and multiplex social ties and the conditions for accessing the information.

The multiplexity of the social ties in the news discovery process can be analyzed in the context of previous research claiming that contact with the human sources requires more active effort from journalists than relying on information that is publicly available or received in a form of news subsidies (McManus 1994).

In their reconstructions, the journalists talked about the circumstances that lead to the news idea and tried to remember what specifically sparked the idea and how they came into contact with their initial source. The journalists registered who—journalist or source—initiated the first contact, and this provided the first indication of different news discovery patterns for single and multiplex ties. Sources were more active in initiating the news when they knew the journalist: 46 percent of the contact via multiplex social ties were initiated by sources. For contact via single social ties, 28 percent were initiated by sources, meaning that closer social contact encouraged the sources to suggest the news topics (Table 3).

Table 3. Cases of source initiative in news discovery and attribution to the discovery source in stories discovered via multiplex vs. single social ties.

	Via multiplex social ties	Via single social ties or public information	Total
News discovery cases, of which:	52 (100%)	110 (100%)	162
News discoveries initiated by source	24 (46%)	31 (28%)	55 (33%)
Stories with attributed discovery source	8 (15%)	52 (47%)	60 (37%)

> Every day the source writes me about something interesting in his (very large) organization. We were roommates as students a few decades ago, and he helps me out because he knows I have a lot to do. It is not his job; he is doing it because of the friendship. I might pay for a beer when we meet once in a while. (Lithuanian journalist 2)

In addition, the sources accessed through multiplex ties tend to contribute more already at the discovery phase. For example, some of them supplied the information that the journalist would have otherwise had to request, including relevant documents and referrals to other sources. Therefore, closer relationships with the journalists, as well as trust and knowledge deriving from those relationships allowed the sources to introduce topics, angles or speakers in a potentially more appealing manner. At the same time, it offered practical shortcuts for the journalists:

> When I need an interview with the Prime Minister, I do not call his official press advisor. I call one level higher, because I know this person from before and it makes the process smoother. (Swedish journalist 10)

While requesting information from the "neutral" bureaucratic sources could require more journalistic research and time, as noted by McManus 1994, established and somewhat informal relationships with the sources in those institutions allowed journalists to skip some of the formal procedures, making the process simpler. Therefore, quality and content of the social ties matter when evaluating the workload associated with accessing news from human sources.

Another characteristic that emerges from the reconstruction interviews is the invisibility of contributions that reach the journalists via multiplex social ties, when it comes to both the process and the final (un)attribution to the source in the news content.

While access via single social ties is often documented, the transfer of information via multiplex social ties, is most commonly not. This is partly because some of the transfer might occur via spontaneous conversations or in unrelated social contexts. Another reason for keeping the interaction via the multiplex social ties discrete is that the sources who contributed to the news discovery would most likely not have had an official mandate to speak to the media if they had been accessed via single social ties, whether due to their title (diplomats, middle-rank politicians or officers who have access to information) or timing (the information should not be shared to the media just yet). Journalists needed pre-established relationships to contact such sources directly, while sources needed the relationships to be aware that a journalist might be potentially interested in the topic. The multiplexity of the ties allowed discrete interaction, which was a competitive advantage for both the journalists and the sources. This was especially clear for sources who used their ties to mediatize developing topics. The most common way to transfer undocumented information was to send a text message from a meeting, since this allowed the source to keep the contact hidden from other meeting participants.

> The source texted me from the meeting behind closed doors, and I got to know in advance what the decision was going to be, which allowed me to prepare and ask sharp, accurate questions when I met the Minister. (Swedish journalist 11)

The practice of attributing to the sources in the content also differs when comparing single-tie and multiplex-tie news discoveries. The quote above indicates, that information

supplied via multiplex social ties by an unattributed source sets a context to which an attributed source (the Minister) will have to react.

Generally, journalists were more likely to avoid attributing to the discovery sources in the stories found via multiplex social ties than in the stories coming from single social ties or public information (Table 3). While invisibility was due to source protection in a majority of cases, it was also sometimes due to the journalists' unwillingness to reveal that their social network might act as a shortcut in both topic and subsequent source selection. This unwillingness could be comparable even to the unwillingness to be transparent about traditional news subsidies or specific input by PR sources (Arceneaux, Borden, and Golan 2019; Lewis, Williams, and Franklin 2008) from single-ties.

> This (colleague from another newsroom) and I often discuss ideas. He is a better expert in the area and helps me out. However, I later look up (single-tie) sources who could be quoted on the subject. (Swedish journalist 16)

Finally, news discoveries using multiplex social ties was ethically more complicated than information acquisition through more formal channels (single social ties). The journalists acquired some of the information from family or private relationships, and initially this information was not meant to be related to work. However, the journalists in some cases had to switch from being a private friend to an interested reporter, which meant that potential misunderstandings in how the information would be used could impact both the friendship and the professional tie:

> The source should not have shared the information, but I heard it in a private context, and therefore it would be extremely unethical to reveal where the information came from, because the person could lose their job. (Swedish journalist 1)

Therefore, while the transfer of information through single social ties is defined by rules and procedures in the source's organizational communication policies and journalistic ethical rules, multiplex roles require more reflection on how a specific news discovery event might influence the future of the relationship between the journalist and the source. The journalists, by trying to find a balance between accessing important discovery sources and treating the information objectively, face some dilemmas:

> (Publishing this article meant that) my relationship (with the source) can be affected (negatively). It is just a feeling I have, not based on their feedback, but the person who gave me the information expected a different type of coverage. At the same time, even if the news comes this way (via the friendship ties), I have to seek to remain critical. (Swedish journalist 10)

In that sense, formal news discovery that is accessible without any extra social ties means that there are fewer strings attached. Multiplex social ties required journalists to spend some time reflecting on how the future relationship could be affected, therefore indicating a perceived or self-imposed pressure.

Content Discovered via Multiplex Social Ties

Since different types of ties carry different type of information (Granovetter 1973), we look at whether the multiplex social ties introduce the "topics, speakers or angles" (Jungherr, Possega, and An 2019) that are unlikely to be accessed via single social ties.

> RQ 3. What type of stories are discovered via single social ties and multiplex social ties?

In the interviews, the journalists could not reveal what specific story they were reconstructing (in order to protect the anonymity of the sources), but they elaborated on the circumstances leading to the story and in their own words describe the story type (stories on the government agenda or not related to it, stories on planned or unplanned events, etc.).

Single social ties, where a significant part of the discovery sources consisted of press advisors, lead to coverage of events on the government's or Parliament's agenda and related press conferences. Multiplex social ties lead mostly to topics outside this official agenda or the introduction of agenda topics earlier than the formal, single social ties would allow. Mediatizing a negotiation in progress before the parties reach official agreement is one example.

> I knew (the negotiating eight political parties) would issue a document. I made at least ten phone calls—to both contacts I knew and didn't know. Everyone referred me to the press conference after the negotiations were finished. But, finally, one person helped and leaked the document. I guess the person believed it was good that the issue got publicity. I love to 'crack' the investigations before they are public." (Swedish journalist 1)

Publishing the story before the official information was available might have attracted more audience attention to the issue (amplify it), which in this case served the source's interest. At the same time, the journalist was motivated to be the first to report it, to bring in an exclusive story and win an unofficial battle with another newsroom(s).

Another type of news accessed via multiplex social ties was news regarding internal or external political competition.

> Before visiting a party congress, I always make a lot of calls to the people I know better in that party in order to find out what is going on, what candidates can be expected as new leaders, what are the opinion-divides within the party, etc. If I did not have these contacts, acquiring this type of information would be very difficult, if not impossible. (Swedish journalist 12)

Journalists were well aware that many of the stories served the interests of the source, whether due to their topics (for example, mediatization of an internal fight) or suggested angles. By following up on the story, they were able to keep the relationship active and thus expect to receive exclusive stories in the future.

Finally, interaction within certain networks can influence the news selection since the actors acquire similar states (in this case interpretational frames) as the other members of those networks (McClurg, Klofstad, and Sokhey 2017; Krüger 2015).

> The party was fighting internally; Something was 'in the air. (…) Without the relationship (with a source), I also would have never thought about the topic. (Swedish journalist 5)

The last statement "I would have never thought about the topic" is a telling example of how the social network sets a journalist's agenda because it illustrates how socialization and awareness of what is going on via established social ties with certain sources made the journalist perceive the topic "in the air" as newsworthy, which indicates' the discursive power of the source in the situation. Therefore, the topic turned into the news not only due to the accessing information via the multiplex social ties. It also means that multiplex social ties influence the news selection and perception of what topics

potentially are important. A journalist lacking equally strong social contacts with a source within a particular political party not only would have smaller chances to access the information, but also would differently interpret its' newsworthiness. Therefore different source networks that journalists can access shapes what news they can potentially discover and select.

Discussion and Conclusions

This article analyzed news discovery as a deliberative practice that emerges through single and multiplex social ties between journalists and their sources. It looked at how different social ties connecting journalists and their sources impact the possibility of gaining discursive power in terms of what topics, speakers or angles turn into news. The results of this study show that even though formal discovery sources (with a single social tie) slightly dominate, a significant part of the news discovery in both Lithuania and Sweden comes from the network of sources connected to the journalists through multiple social ties, where friendship and professional contexts are intertwined. Multiplexity of social ties matters for news discovery, both when it comes to the process (how news is discovered) and the outcome of the news discovery (what news gets discovered and why it is selected as newsworthy). Without awareness of the sources' social relationship with the journalist, some of the sources would hardly be anticipated to be powerful agenda builders. Their input to news discovery was made possible not so much due to purposeful effort or tangible assets, which are usually discussed in the agenda-building literature, but instead from regular socialization, sometimes within unrelated contexts. Since sourcing the news is primarily a social practice, it is important to measure and understand the prevalence of different social ties between journalists and their sources as an indicator of the journalist-source proximity and the practices deriving from this proximity.

Networks and multiplexity of the social ties within the networks that journalists and sources establish are conditioned by the norms and organizational routines of the professional context. In that sense, it can be concluded that multiplexity of ties is a dependent variable when analyzing *how* journalists discover their news and *whose news* potentially can be accessed (as described in the field of potential news discovery) by individual journalists, by newsrooms or, as in this study, within a certain news beat in two different countries. Therefore it is possible to expect multiplex social ties between journalists and their sources to be more common in some journalistic cultures than in others, or in some journalistic beats than in others. The question to consider here is what are the implications for journalistic practice, and later on for content, of networks between journalists and sources being too intertwined or, on the contrary, too distant. This study showed that the prevalence of multiplex social ties, and the way journalists and the sources apply them in news discovery situations, shapes the outcome of the news discovery – *what* content reaches the media, *why* it gets selected and even *how* it is reported due to the ethical and practical considerations journalists factor in when discovering the news via single or multiplex social ties.

Despite the contextual differences, multiplex social ties played a similar role in the news discovery in Lithuania and Sweden, even though this does not rule out that more contrasting contexts would provide different results. It indicates that access via multiplex

social ties is an important professional tool, both for journalists and sources. Generally, multiplex social ties can be a shortcut in the news discovery process. They reduce the number of steps journalists must take to access the information. At the same time, this access comes at a price: transferring information from an informal context to a formal context requires a subtle adaptation to unwritten, or self-imposed, rules on how the information can be used and how it will influence the relationship in the future. News accessed in one social context (for example via an informal and casual conversation with a friend) is transferred to a professional context (where a journalist decides to use the information for work), blurring the boundaries between information that is shared informally to a friend and professionally to a journalist. In such a case, cooperation through the multiplex ties also means multiple risks for the future relationships actors have at play: both professional and friendship ties can be affected. It made the sources behind the multiplex ties more likely to stay invisible in the news content. This allowed them to participate in the agenda building, including suggesting frames and subsequent speakers for the stories and thus having a discursive power while staying in the background.

The idea that different social ties transfer different types of information was also confirmed by this research; content accessed via multiplex social ties would most likely not be accessible via single social ties, or the access would have taken more time and resources. However, while informal access, implied invisibility and source protection at least theoretically could strengthen whistleblower or investigative reporting, in day-to-day practice, of which this study provided a snapshot, these characteristics instead led more to mediatization of internal fights or leaked details from ongoing negotiations. Media's thirst for exclusive stories and its need to update the news flow 24/7, when combined with access to stories via the multiplex social ties established by the long-term socialization between beat reporters and their sources, can also blow up scandals in daily political life. Close socialization between journalists and sources can also mean that journalists become too native and start adopting the source's frames for the news selection. Actors related to the journalists by multiplex relational ties access the journalists earlier in the news process, interact with the journalists more regularly, and, due to the multiplexity of the social ties, are able to present their views to the journalists in a more compelling manner. Better access to some groups of sources than others matters when trying to understand why certain topics or angles get discovered and turn into news while others stay underreported. Even if intuitively expected, this imbalance is an invisible part of the news production. First, this is because news discovery often stays in the background of the journalistic routines. Second, the journalistic format generally means presenting different views and opposing voices. However, the journalists preparing the content, due to the different types of access to the sources, face a much less balanced picture of reality. This can result in closed-circle reporting, when journalists also take the role of the political actors, for example by reporting on the details of the micro-political processes. Journalists then become participants in the backstage negotiation with the internal circles of the sources, colleagues or competitors, but their reporting does not increase the quality of the informed political decisions in wider society. Could it be, for example, the scandalization of politics is not only a trap of shallow journalism but also a side effect of journalist-source networks and beat reporting being too intertwined?

This work can be a step toward further studies into the proximity between journalists and their sources, whether at the individual level (different journalists building different

social ties and access to different, likely, not perfectly balanced networks), at the group level (accumulated ties within an organization), or in the professional culture (to what degree multiplexity of the social ties is common in the professional practice). Understanding these relational ties, the constellations behind them, and the role they play in the professional practice should be an important part of the analysis of journalistic process.

While admitting that both multiplex and single social ties are a natural part of any professional practice between human actors and a result of repetitive interactions, this research does not offer a normative suggestion of what would be an ideal balance of the news found through multiplex social ties vs. single ties. Research questions to be addressed in the future could include how certain contextual features encourage or delimit proximity between journalists and sources. Also, the data about the most common news discovery practices in a certain context could be analyzed in relation to the news content. In the context of the political news, for example, it could mean analysis of the balance between formal reporting on the government agenda and investigative journalism, news on micro-events or scandals of the political life. This would reveal what gains and sacrifices the multiplexity of social ties would imply.

When it comes to the practical implications of this study, it is important to be aware that the social networks between human actors are rarely ideally balanced, and some groups always are better accessed than the others. While making journalists rotate between different journalistic beats could be one way to reduce the risk for bias caused by social ties that are too close, it would also mean losing access to some of the important informants as well as contextual knowledge that journalists have gained from years of experience. The normative goal would be a conscious effort for diversity in the newsroom, which would increase the chance that journalists access different groups of sources and are exposed to various interpretational frames. The discussion regarding the natural biases that each individual has due to their social relationships, and the ethical and practical benefits or challenges these ties imply on the individual practice, should start together with the professional education of the journalists (and, for that matter, the future communicators). While being an unavoidable part of any social practice, the balance between single and multiplex social ties should ideally ensure connection to the networks from as diverse walks of life as possible, including contacts who hold different political preferences, interests and professions than those of the journalists. It would strengthen the journalists' professional profile and allow them to sensitively grasp the topics or potential news that derives from the different groups in society. In the long run, this work could be a useful step toward redefining the profession's credibility in the eyes of the audience.

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