

# Marketplace of Ideas and Marketplace of Money

*A Study of Commercialism  
and the Swedish Election News Coverage in 1998 and 2002*

JESPER STRÖMBÄCK

## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study is to investigate whether commercialization can explain the extent to which the Swedish news media during the 1998 and 2002 national elections framed politics as a game, followed an interpretive journalistic style and allowed politicians to speak for themselves. Six hypotheses were derived from the claim by Patterson (2000) that commercialism is the driving force behind the framing of politics as a game and, by implication, the increasing use of an interpretive journalistic style and shrinking sound- or inkbites.

Taken together, the results show only mixed support for the hypotheses. The results thus indicate that perceiving commercialism as *the* crucial independent variable is too simplified. Moreover, it must certainly not be a *universal* truth that commercialism is driving the changes of election news coverage, or that there is always a contradiction between the media functioning in the marketplace of ideas and the marketplace of money.

**Key Words:** election news coverage, commercialism, framing, interpretive journalism

## **Introduction**

Democracy as a political system for self-government requires a media system that provides the information people need to be free and self-governing, forums for public discussions and that functions as a watchdog against abuse of power. Through this, the media system and its constituent parts can contribute to an enlightened understanding among the citizens in a democracy.

This is no less true during the heated months and weeks preceding an election, when political parties and candidates campaign and people make up their minds regarding which party or candidates to vote for. The media, however, is not only in the business of providing information, but also in the business of making money. Media companies are, with a few exceptions, essentially commercial companies. Thus, the media is part of the marketplace of money as well as the marketplace of ideas.

### Three Consequences of Commercialism

The fact that media companies are, in general, commercial companies might have fundamental consequences for the news coverage in general as well as for the news coverage of elections (Hamilton, 2004; Allern, 2001; Picard, 2005). Moreover, these consequences might, according to several observers, have detrimental effects on the media as part of the marketplace of ideas (Åsard & Bennett, 1997; McManus, 1994; Croteau & Hoynes, 2001).

One such consequence, of particular importance regarding election news coverage, is the tendency to frame politics as a strategic game, rather than as issues. As noted by Patterson (2000, p. 253-254, 255-256):

Of the many effects of commercialism on news content, none is more consequential than the media's tendency to report politics not as an issue but as a game in which individual politicians vie for power. [...] The news media's tendency to frame politics in gamelike terms serves to depoliticize issues, presenting them more as political tokens in the struggle for power than as objects of serious debate.

What is important to note here is that Patterson is stating the relationship between commercialism and the framing of politics in universal terms.

Another effect of commercialism, to some extent independent and to some extent part of the tendency to frame politics as a strategic game, is that the journalistic style has become more interpretive and less descriptive: "Today, facts and interpretation are freely intermixed in election reporting. Interpretation provides the theme, and the facts illustrate it. The theme is primary; the facts are secondary. Since the themes are usually constructed from the game schema, it pervades election news" (Patterson, 1993, p. 67).

A third effect of commercialism is the shrinking soundbite (Patterson, 1993, 2000), or "inkbite", which measures the number of words candidates are allowed to speak for themselves in newspaper articles. Regarding soundbites on television network news in the U.S., research has shown that on average it had shrunk to less than ten seconds in the late 1980s and 90s, down from over 40 seconds in 1968 (Hallin, 1992; Lowry & Shidler, 1998). As for inkbites, the trend is not as clear, but as shown by Just and colleagues, in the 1992 U.S. presidential election, "newspapers [were] even less likely to let candidates speak for themselves than television news" (Just *et al.* 1999, p. 29).

These three tendencies in contemporary political journalism and election news coverage have been found in several other postmodern democracies apart from the United States. (Franklin, 1997; Norris *et al.*, 1999; Strömbäck, 2004; Waldahl & Narud, 2004; van der Eijk, 2000; Petersson *et al.* 2006). However, the research results are difficult to compare, due to different operationalizations and definitions of crucial concepts.

What is more important in this context, however, is that it is yet unclear as to whether or not these tendencies should actually be viewed as effects of commercialism. *If* Patterson is correct when stating in *universal terms* that commercialism is the driving force behind the tendency to frame politics as a game, then this particular framing should be more common the more commercially oriented a particular media outlet is and more common the more commercially oriented a particular media system is. Furthermore, *if* the interpretive journalistic style and the shrinking sound- or inkbites are indeed linked to the framing of politics as a game, then the interpretive journalistic style should be more common and the sound- or inkbites shorter the more commercially oriented a particular media outlet or media system is.

Stated differently, the degree of commercialism would be the crucial independent variable not only in the United States, the prototype of a country with a "liberal model" of media and political systems, but also in a country such as Sweden, the prototype of a "democratic corporatist model" of media and political systems (Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

### **Setting the Stage: Background and Hypotheses**

Against this background, the purpose of this article is to study whether or not commercialism can explain the extent to which the Swedish news media during the 1998 and 2002 national elections framed politics as a game rather than as issues, followed an interpretive rather than a descriptive journalistic style, and, finally, how many sentences politicians were allowed to speak for themselves.

Admittedly, studying only two elections is not sufficient to reach any final answers with regards to the effects of commercialism. This particular study should therefore be perceived only as a first step in a series of studies following future Swedish elections.

Since the late 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, the Swedish media landscape has been radically transformed (Petersson et al, 2005; Hadenius & Weibull, 2003). Historically, the Swedish broadcast media have been financed and produced through the public service companies Sveriges Television and Sveriges Radio. No private and commercial channels were allowed to broadcast. In 1987, however, the monopoly started to break down as a Swedish cable channel, TV3, started to broadcast to a Swedish audience but from London, thus circumventing the Swedish legislation in this area. In 1991, the first terrestrial and commercial television channel, TV4, was allowed to broadcast in Sweden. The monopoly was broken (Hadenius, 1998; Djerf-Pierre & Weibull, 2001), and in 1993, private radio was allowed to broadcast at a local level.

Whereas Sweden had two television channels and four radio channels in the mid 1980s, all of which were public service channels, Sweden now has more than thirty terrestrial, cable- and digital television channels, the majority of which are private and commercial (Jönsson & Strömbäck, 2007). Regarding TV4, however, it is important to note that even though it is a privately owned and commercially driven media company, TV4 is obliged by the conditions of its license to, among other things, broadcast news that provide "the information citizens need to be informed and form opinions in matters of societal relevance" (Translated by author).

Thus, with regards to the broadcast media, during the last twenty years Sweden has witnessed increased competition for audiences, investors, advertisers and also sources (cf. McManus, 1994). The same is true for the newspapers, partly because of the competition with the broadcast media, and partly because of falling advertising revenues and an economic recession during the 1990s. Another major change is that Swedish newspapers, which have always been owned by private enterprises or foundations, have become increasingly independent of the political system and the political parties since the 1960s. The party-press model, which used to be very strong in Sweden, has more or less disappeared when it comes to the news coverage (Asp, 2003; Petersson *et al.* 2005).

Thus, political parallelism has weakened (Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Hadenius & Weibull, 2003). Commercial incentives have become more important whereas political incentives have become more or less irrelevant for the owners and editors of Swedish newspapers. Several Swedish scholars and observers have also noted that the Swedish media system has become more commercialized, and that it is an on-going process (Hultén, 1999; Hvitfelt, 1996; Petersson *et al.* 2005).

Even though the Swedish media landscape has generally become more commercialized than previously, there are still differences between different media outlets. One obvious difference is that two of the three major television channels (SVT1 and SVT2) are still run as public service channels, and in 2004, 50% of the Swedish population still watched the news on one of the two public service channels at least five days a week, whereas the corresponding share for the commercial channel TV4 was 32% (Holmberg & Weibull, 2005, p. 28). Sweden, however, is a rather newspaper-centric society when it comes to consumption of news: in 2003, 72% read their morning newspaper at least five days a week, and the newspaper sales per 1000 adult population was 541,1 in 2000 (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 23. Approximately 70% of all households subscribe to a newspaper (Andersson, 2005, p. 305).

At the national level, there are four major national newspapers which have some power to set the national political agenda and the agenda for other media (Nord & Strömbäck, 2003). *Dagens Nyheter* and *Svenska Dagbladet* are broadsheet papers, in style if no longer in form, whereas the other two, *Expressen* and *Aftonbladet*, as categorized by Sparks (2000, p. 14-15) can be described as either "serious-popular" or "news stand" tabloids. *Dagens Nyheter* and *Svenska Dagbladet* are mainly subscription based, whereas *Expressen* and *Aftonbladet* are sold at news stands. There are also differences in the means that their operations are financed. Whereas the broadsheets obtain about two thirds of their income from advertisers, the populars only receive about 25% of their income from advertisers. Thus, the tabloids depend on their day-to-day sales to their audiences for their revenues (Gustafsson, 2005).

This means that the broadsheets are more dependent on the market for advertisers than the tabloids, whereas the tabloids are more dependent on the market for audiences. This makes the tabloids more commercialized in the sense that they must, on a daily basis, adjust to what is perceived as popular, or even dramatized, reporting, in order to sell as many copies as possible. The situation is different for the broadsheets, because they rely more on advertising for their income, because they are subscription based, and because their readers generally speaking are more politically interested and more educated than the readers of the tabloids (Nord, 2003; Andersson, 2005). Therefore, the first three hypotheses are:

H1: The framing of politics as a game will be more common in *Aftonbladet* and *Expressen* than in *Dagens Nyheter* and *Svenska Dagbladet*.

H2: The interpretive journalistic style will be more common in *Aftonbladet* and *Expressen* than in *Dagens Nyheter* and *Svenska Dagbladet*.

H3: The number of sentences politicians are allowed to speak for themselves will be lower in *Aftonbladet* and *Expressen* than in *Dagens Nyheter* and *Svenska Dagbladet*.

With regards to the television news, the news in commercial TV4 called *TV4 Nyheterna* can be categorized as more commercial than that in the public service channels SVT1 and SVT2, called *Rapport* and *Aktuellt*. Thus, the next three hypotheses are:

H4: The framing of politics as a game will be more common in *TV4 Nyheterna* than in *Rapport* and *Aktuellt*.

H5: The interpretive journalistic style will be more common in *TV4 Nyheterna* than in *Rapport* and *Aktuellt*.

H6: The number of sentences politicians are allowed to speak for themselves will be lower in *TV4 Nyheterna* than in *Rapport* and *Aktuellt*.

It is also of interest as to whether any changes can be observed between the election news coverage in 1988 and 2002, although this is obviously too brief a time period to allow any firm conclusions to be drawn with regards to changes over time. Nevertheless, this study asks the following research question: Which differences can be observed between 1998 and 2002 with regards to the framing of politics as a game, the usage of an interpretive journalistic style and the number of sentences politicians are allowed to speak for themselves?

### Methodology in Studying Election News Coverage

This study is based on a quantitative content analysis of the four main national newspapers – *Dagens Nyheter*, *Svenska Dagbladet*, *Expressen*, *Aftonbladet* – and the three main television news shows in Sweden – *Rapport*, *Aktuellt* and *TV4 Nyheterna*. In the case of the television news, the main daily news show for each channel was chosen for the study. In the case of the newspapers, supplements, editorials and content not deemed to be news journalism were excluded.

Subject to these restrictions, the content analysis included all news stories during the last three weeks before Election day in 1998 (August 31-September 20) and 2002 (August 26-September 15) making references to national politicians or national political institutions. The unit of analysis is the individual news article or news story, and the total number of news articles and news stories covered by the content analysis is 2176 (table 1).

**Table 1.** *Number of News Articles/Stories in the Content Analysis*

	Aftonbladet (T)	Expressen (T)	Dagens Nyheter (BS)	Svenska Dagbladet (BS)	TV4 Nyheterna (C)	Rapport (PS)	Aktuellt (PS)	N
1998	179	174	201	189	72	107	101	1 022
2002	170	161	325	214	73	103	108	1 154

Note: T=tabloid, BS=broadsheet, C=commercial news, PS=public service news.

The variables of interest in this study deal with the framing of politics, the dominant journalistic style and the number of sentences politicians are allowed to speak for themselves. With reference to the frames, there were five available alternatives, and the coding focused on the dominant frame in the individual news stories. The five frames were: issue frame, game frame, scandal frame, trivia, and other. This article, however, will focus on the use of issue frames, game frames and scandal frames, and treat articles with other frames as "missing". Thus, the issue frame, the game frame and the scandal frame remains.

News stories were coded as *issue framed* if they focused on political issues, social conditions requiring political action, or political discussions where the substance consisted of issues and issue-related questions. News stories were coded as *game framed* if the game of the campaigns provided the main plot of the story, if the articles focused on polls and treated politicians or parties as strategic actors mainly interested in winning and avoiding losing, if there was a centrality of performance, style and perceptions of the politicians or

the parties, and if there was a focus on campaign and/or power struggling strategies or tactics (Strömbäck, 2004; Capella & Jamieson, 1997; Patterson, 1993; Jamieson, 1992). Finally, news stories were coded as *scandal framed* if they focused on alleged scandals involving politicians or political institutions, or if they framed what politicians had said as if it were a scandal, i.e. if the articles focused on gaffes (Sabato, 1993).

The journalistic style was coded as either descriptive or interpretive. Following Patterson (1993, 2000), journalistic style was coded as descriptive, when the news stories focused on the facts of an event or social condition, and on who said what to whom and when. Journalistic style was coded as interpretive when news stories followed a theme clearly chosen by the journalists, when the facts were merely used as illustrations to the theme, when journalists were openly interpreting the words and actions of political actors, or events, their causes and/or effects, and when they made attributions that were not supported in the texts. The coding focused on the dominant style in each unit of analysis. In cases where it was not possible to determine the dominant style, those news stories are treated as ‘missing’.

Regarding the length for which politicians were allowed to speak for themselves, this study counted the actual number of sentences politicians were quoted as saying, both in newspaper stories and in broadcast news stories. Thus, instead of measuring soundbites in television news, this study used the same measure – number of sentences – in the study of both newspaper and broadcast news. It was somewhat more difficult to measure in broadcast news, since people tend not to speak in whole sentences, and sometimes leave words hanging in the air or change subject without actually completing the sentence they had started. In such cases, the end of a sentence was marked by a pause or a significant change of subject.

## Swedish Election News Coverage in 1998 and 2002

Can commercialism explain the extent to which the Swedish news media during the 1998 and 2002 national elections framed politics as a game rather than as issues, followed an interpretive rather than a descriptive journalistic style, and how many sentences politicians were allowed to speak for themselves? The first part of this question is addressed by hypothesis 1 – according to which the framing of politics as a game is expected to be more common in the tabloids *Aftonbladet* and *Expressen* than in the broadsheets *Dagens Nyheter* and *Svenska Dagbladet* – and in hypothesis 4 – according to which this particular framing is expected to be more common in the commercial *TV4 Nyheterna* than in the public service news shows *Rapport* and *Aktuellt*. Both these hypotheses are addressed in table 2 below.

**Table 2.** *The Framing of Politics as a Game in the Election Coverage 1998 and 2002 (%)*

	Aftonbladet (T)	Expressen (T)	Dagens Nyheter (BS)	Svenska Dagbladet (BS)	TV4 Nyheterna (C)	Rapport (PS)	Aktuellt (PS)	Mean
Game framed 1998	48	52	30	46	44	35	30	41
Game framed 2002	38	55	27	39	49	22	29	37
N 1998/2002	168/162	158/148	193/313	185/207	64/71	100/98	95/103	

Note: T=tabloid, BS=broadsheet, C=commercial news, PS=public service news. Percentage has been rounded off.

The results indicate that the framing of politics as a game was indeed more common in commercial *TV4 Nyheterna* than in the public service news shows in both 1998 and 2002. However, it is also interesting to note the differences between the public service news shows. In 1998, *Rapport* framed politics as a game more often than *Aktuellt*, whereas the opposite was true in 2002.

The first hypothesis, focusing on differences in the framing of politics between tabloids and broadsheets, is supported in 1988 but not in 2002. In the latter case, the framing of politics was almost as common in the broadsheet *Svenska Dagbladet* as in the tabloid *Aftonbladet*. The differences between those two newspapers were small even in 1998. Thus, comparing the four newspapers, and treating the degree to which they frame politics as a game as an indicator of the degree of commercialized journalism, it appears as if *Expressen* is the most commercialized newspaper, whereas *Dagens Nyheter* is the least commercialized newspaper, with *Aftonbladet* and *Svenska Dagbladet* falling between those endpoints. In any case, the results only give partial support to Hypothesis 1.

Addressing the question with regards to differences between 1998 and 2002, the mean indicates that at a general level, the framing of politics as a game was actually less common in 2002 than in 1998. Thus, if this particular framing is treated as an indicator of the degree of commercialism, this suggests that Swedish election news journalism was actually less commercialized in 2002 than in 1998. The alternative interpretation would of course be that it is misleading to perceive the degree to which different media frame politics as a game as an indicator of commercialism, or that other factors are more important than the degree of commercialism.

The next set of hypotheses are focused on whether the news stories are predominantly descriptive or interpretive. According to Hypotheses 2 and 5, an interpretive journalistic style is expected to be more common in *Aftonbladet*, *Expressen* and *TV4 Nyheterna* than in *Dagens Nyheter*, *Svenska Dagbladet*, *Aktuellt* and *Rapport*. The results are displayed in table 3.

**Table 3.** *Predominant Journalistic Style in Different Media in the Election Coverage 1998 and 2002 (%)*

	Aftonbladet (T)	Expressen (T)	Dagens Nyheter (BS)	Svenska Dagbladet (BS)	TV4 Nyheterna (C)	Rapport (PS)	Aktuellt (PS)	Mean
Descriptive 1998	67	70	62	66	55	52	63	61
Descriptive 2002	65	48	66	56	56	59	48	57
Interpretive 1998	33	30	38	34	45	48	37	39
Interpretive 2002	35	52	34	44	44	41	52	43
N 1998/2002	168/162	158/148	193/313	185/207	64/71	100/98	95/103	

*Note:* T=tabloid, BS=broadsheet, C=commercial news, PS=public service news. Percentage has been rounded off.

Addressing the research question first, the mean show that the interpretive journalistic style at a general level was more common in 2002 than in 1998. However, there are important differences between different media and between the two election campaigns.

Contrary to expectations, the interpretive journalistic style was not more common in commercial *TV4 Nyheterna* than in the public service news shows *Rapport* and *Aktuellt*. Instead, restricting ourselves to the broadcast news shows, the interpretive journalistic

style was most common in *Rapport* in 1998 and in *Aktuellt* in 2002, even though the difference in 1998 is very small and insignificant. Thus, Hypothesis 5 is not supported.

The same is true regarding Hypothesis 2, stating that the interpretive journalistic style would be more common in *Aftonbladet* and *Expressen* than in *Svenska Dagbladet* and *Dagens Nyheter*. The results show that even though there are differences in how common the interpretive journalistic style is, these differences cannot be explained by whether the newspapers are tabloids or broadsheets. In 1998, the interpretive journalistic style was almost as common in all papers, whereas in 2002, it was more common in *Expressen* – a tabloid – and *Svenska Dagbladet* – a broadsheet – than in *Aftonbladet* and *Dagens Nyheter*.

The last set of hypotheses are focused on the number of sentences politicians are allowed to speak for themselves. In 1998, politicians were quoted as saying 7742 sentences, compared with a total of 8295 in 2002. However, there are differences between the newspapers and the broadcast news shows as well as between different media outlets, as is shown in table 4.

**Table 4.** *Number of Sentences Politicians were Quoted in the Election News Coverage 1998 and 2002*

	Aftonbladet (T)	Expressen (T)	Dagens Nyheter (BS)	Svenska Dagbladet (BS)	TV4 Nyheterna (C)	Rapport (PS)	Aktuellt (PS)	N
1998	1 845	1 884	900	1 093	534	753	733	7 742
2002	2 133	1 213	1 700	1 547	467	551	684	8 295

The results show that politicians were quoted as saying more sentences in 2002 than in 1998 in *Aftonbladet*, *Dagens Nyheter* and *Svenska Dagbladet*, while the number decreased in *Expressen* and the broadcast news shows. The number of sentences was lower in commercial *TV4 Nyheterna* than in the public service news shows.

Regarding the newspapers, the differences in the number of sentences and between 1998 and 2002 depends to a considerable extent on the use of "issue boxes", where politicians from all parties are allowed to spell out their policy positions on questions or issues decided by the news departments. These issue boxes were first used by the tabloids, but are now also used by the broadsheets. In 1998, *Aftonbladet* published 11 issue boxes, *Expressen* 8, *Dagens Nyheter* 1 and *Svenska Dagbladet* 2. The corresponding numbers in 2002 were 13, 3, 8 and 7.

Excluding these issue boxes would yield a somewhat different result than that presented in the table above. If the issue boxes are excluded, the number of sentences politicians were allowed to speak for themselves in *Aftonbladet* drops to 766 in 1998 and 940 in 2002, in *Expressen* to 1142 in 1998 and 962 in 2002, in *Dagens Nyheter* to 866 in 1998 and 1508 in 2002, and finally, in *Svenska Dagbladet* to 976 and 1166 in 1998 and 2002 respectively.

Regarding Hypothesis 3 – stating that the number of sentences politicians are allowed to speak for themselves will be lower in *Aftonbladet* and *Expressen* than in *Dagens Nyheter* and *Svenska Dagbladet* – the evidence is mixed. Including the issue boxes, in 1998 the opposite was actually the case, whereas in 2002, the number of sentences was higher in *Dagens Nyheter* and *Svenska Dagbladet* than in *Expressen*, but *Aftonbladet* was, at the same time, the newspaper that was most likely to allow politicians to speak



for themselves. Excluding the issue boxes, the hypothesis is supported in 2002 but not in 1998, when the number of sentences politicians were allowed to speak for themselves was higher in *Expressen* than in any other medium. However, as it makes no sense to exclude the issue boxes, it is more appropriate to focus on the results which include these.

To sum up, this research shows only limited support for the hypotheses derived from the thesis that commercialism is the driving force behind the framing of politics as a game, the tendency to adopt an interpretive journalistic style, and to limit the number of sentences politicians are allowed to speak for themselves. Two hypotheses are supported, three are not supported, whereas the evidence is mixed with regards to one hypothesis.

### **Discussion: Commercialism and the Swedish Election News Coverage**

The purpose of this article has been to study whether the degree of commercialism can explain the extent to which the Swedish news media during the 1998 and 2002 national elections framed politics as a game rather than as issues, followed an interpretive rather than a descriptive journalistic style, and, finally, how many sentences politicians were allowed to speak for themselves. Six hypotheses were derived from the claim by Patterson (2000) that commercialism is the driving force behind the framing of politics as a game and, by implication, the increasing use of an interpretive journalistic style and shrinking sound- or inkbites.

Before discussing the results, it is important to recognize that this study has an obvious weakness in that the empirical data is limited to only two elections. Thus, more research is required before any definitive conclusions can be drawn with regards to the effects of commercialism on election news coverage more generally. Therefore, this study should be perceived as a *first* attempt to study the effects of commercialism on election news coverage in Sweden. My intention is also to continue studying this topic after future Swedish elections.

With this caveat in mind, the results indicate that the Swedish news media functions both as a marketplace of ideas and a marketplace of money. Two hypotheses were supported, predicting that the framing of politics as a game would be more common in *TV4 Nyheterna* than in *Aktuellt* and *Rapport*, and that the number of sentences politicians are allowed to speak for themselves would be lower in *TV4 Nyheterna* than in *Aktuellt* and *Rapport*. Three hypotheses were not supported, predicting that the interpretive journalistic style would be more common in *Aftonbladet*, *Expressen* and *TV4 Nyheterna* than in *Dagens Nyheter*, *Aktuellt* and *Rapport*, and that the number of sentences politicians are allowed to speak for themselves would be lower in the tabloids than in the broadsheets. With regards to the hypothesis predicting that the framing of politics as a game would be more common in the broadsheets than in the tabloids, it was supported in 1998 but not in 2002. Moreover, the differences between the two tabloids on the one hand and the two broadsheets on the other, appear to be at least as important as the differences between the tabloids and the broadsheets. Thus, the type of newspaper cannot explain these results.

How can these results be explained? One conclusion might be that structural factors such as ownership (private vs public service), type of media (newspapers vs TV) or type of newspaper (tabloid vs broadsheet) cannot explain the choice of frames, of journalistic style or how much space politicians are allowed to speak for themselves. This is not

to say that structural factors are unimportant, but it does indicate that there are a number of other important factors at work which at times might be of equal or greater importance than structural factors. For example, the closeness of the electoral race and the likelihood of a change in government is likely to have an impact upon the degree to which the media frame politics as a strategic game. The closer an electoral race, and the more likely a change of government, the more the news media can be expected to frame politics as a strategic game. If, on the other hand, the agenda is set by major real-world events, such as catastrophes or an economic recession, then the news media are likely to focus more on the issues.

However, it is not only the political system and the electoral context that matters. The editorial policies of and journalistic norms and values within different news departments can also be expected to influence the electoral news coverage. Considering the small number of top political journalists within most Swedish media, it is even likely that individual differences can have a significant impact upon the news coverage of election campaigns. The choice of the targeted audiences and their particular expectations of the media can also shape the election news coverage, at least to some degree.

Stated differently, structural factors matter, but the same is true with regards to contextual factors as well as semi-structural and individual factors. Structural factors might set the stage and have major indirect effects upon the election news coverage, but these are filtered and reshaped by other forces at a lower level of abstraction. This can be exemplified by the use of issue boxes. Printing these is, economically speaking, a sound decision, since it is cheap, but it also gives politicians more space to speak for themselves and citizens the opportunity to compare the policy positions of the parties. In this case, there is not even a contradiction between what is economically rational and in informing the public in a manner that benefits enlightened understanding. This also illustrates that there need not be any contradiction between the news media simultaneously functioning as a marketplace of ideas and a marketplace of money.

Thus, perceiving commercialism as *the* crucial independent variable is too simplified. Moreover, it must certainly not be a *universal* truth that commercialism is driving the changes regarding framing, journalistic style and the extent to which politicians are allowed to speak for themselves, or that there always is a contradiction between the media functioning in the marketplace of ideas and the marketplace of money.

To state that the framing of politics as a strategic game is common in contemporary political news journalism is one thing; to state in universal terms that it has become ever more common or that it is an effect of commercialism is another. The same is true with regards to the choice of journalistic style or how much politicians are allowed to speak for themselves. This research indicates that Swedish election news journalism is similar to U.S. election news journalism in the sense that the tendencies to frame politics as a game, to adopt an interpretive journalistic style and to limit the space politicians are allowed to speak for themselves are prevalent in both countries, but not that these tendencies are equally strong in both countries or that they should be perceived as an effect of commercialism in Sweden (see also Strömbäck & Dimitrova, 2006).

Thus, as scholars or readers of the research literature, we should always be careful not to overstate the generalizability of different research results. We should also strive for more comparative research. As noted by Blumler and Gurevitch (1975), comparative research is an essential antidote to naive universalism and unwitting parochialism, and that is an antidote we need in order to further our scientific understanding and to serve our communities with valid and reliable knowledge.

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