Chapter 7

Social media in political communication
A substitute for conventional media?

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Abstract

Technological development has led to the emergence of newer media channels, and traditional media logic has been amplified with network and social media logic. These changes have influenced political communication, not the least by producing a shift from top-down communication patterns toward horizontal and interactive ones. This chapter looks at models of government communication on Facebook and Twitter in Finland, Poland, and Sweden. The results show that ministers in the three countries of the study use Facebook and Twitter differently, but that some general trends are similar across national contexts. The public pages of Facebook serve as top-down channels for personal branding and bypassing conventional media, while Twitter provides informational exchange with professional elites. In general, the model of government communication combines features of traditional and new media practices and follows a *mixed logic*: media logic and network/social media logics. According to the results, press secretaries and press assistants could play the role of gatekeeper in this communication.

Keywords: strategies of communication, government communication, political communication, social media, government ministers

Introduction

Since the beginning of the 1990s, communicational processes have undergone significant transformation. Rapid technological development has drastically changed the media world and brought communicative technologies into a new, digital era. After World War II, the main channel for political communication was the press, and television served as the prime medium for a long time, up until the digital revolution. Both the press and TV represented a top-down model of communication, where journalists played the role of mediators between political sources and the audience and controlled or at least influenced the process of communication. In the past two decades, so-called "new media" has become widespread across the globe, replacing the old order and introducing a more horizontal model of communication. The transformation has implications for political communication, specifically by resulting in disintermediation

Figure 7.1 Models of mediated communication
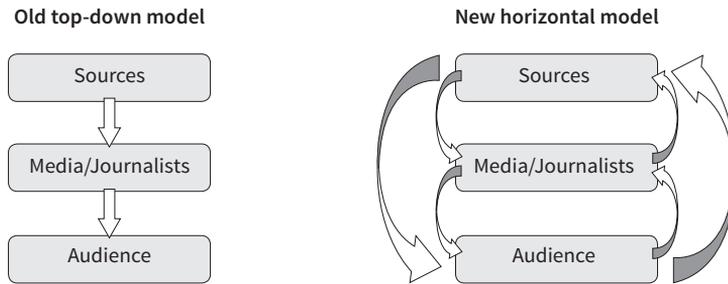
– a reduction of the role of journalism in mediating the relationship between citizens and politicians (McQuail, 2010). Figure 7.1 depicts these two contrasting models of mediated communication.

The transformed nature of communication has reshaped the media system as well. As new media forms and channels of communication have arisen, their popularity has increased and they have become an equal and important element in the media system. At the same time, older or traditional media develop their channels of delivery and hone their practices to hold onto audiences. Chadwick (2013: 4) suggests the concept of a modern *hybrid media system* to describe this development, implying that new (or perhaps more appropriately, newer) and old (older) media forms and logics interact, compete, and mingle with each other, resulting in a process of simultaneous integration and fragmentation. This hybridisation shapes power relations among actors and ultimately affects the flows and meanings of news (Chadwick, 2013: 63).

Political and government communication is generally understood as a set of activities directed to the public that fulfil political and civil purposes. This type of communication is usually realised by executive politicians and officials in a *managed way* to provide information, explain and promote public policy, build a reputation, maintain social links, and so on.

One of the most prominent trends in political and government communication in recent decades is increased professionalisation. In the context of political, and more specifically, government communication, professionalisation can be understood as the creation of more relevant organisational structures and practices to use media skilfully, apply campaigning techniques more effectively, provide better management in media-politics relations, and increase centralisation in the coordination of publicity measures (Negrine et al., 2007: 11). Political professionalism suggests an employment of technical experts who sell their services in the open market (Mancini, 1999: 243).

Under conditions of permanent media tumult, increased Internet connectivity, transparency, and interactivity, continuous control of communications channels has become a key element in governance. As a result, Marland and colleagues (2017: 125, 130) point to an increasing centralisation of government communication in the age

of social media. For example, political elites use a specific branding strategy in their media coverage and messengers, enforcing "conformity within the organization and projecting a cohesive outward-facing image" (Marland et al., 2017: 126). According to the authors, the strategy is characterised by central control, a marketing ethos, a master brand, communications cohesiveness, and message simplicity.

In sum, newer media forms presuppose interactive and personal models of communication. It is not necessary anymore to be engaged with traditional media or organise face-to-face meetings to reach the public. This advantage provides plenty of opportunities to produce one's own media content and bypass conventional media, but it is also a challenge because it requires certain skills, both technical and other. The government elites try to elaborate specific communicative strategies in the social media. They are adopting traditional media practices (*normalisation*) but are at the same time looking for new modified media practices. The professionalisation of political communication and centralisation of government communication give press officers an increasingly important role in the relationships among politicians, journalists, and the public and in social media.

Facebook vs. Twitter?

A number of studies on social media in political communication focus on election campaigning. Studies of political actors' social media practices in general are rarer, particularly ones taking a comparative perspective. This is surprising as the country-specific aspects of the political system, sociocultural traditions, and general social media adoptive patterns are likely to play a significant role in social media use (Keller & Kleinen-von Königslöw, 2018).

Similarly, a comparably small amount of research has focused on the role of press staffers in online political communication despite the fact that political communication in the digital age appears to be increasingly strategic and professionalised. One example is Johansson and Nożewski (2018) examining journalist-political source relations in Swedish and Polish Twitter networks and the role of press secretaries in this communication. According to the findings, Swedish stakeholders are better interconnected in Twitter; there are more ties between them and more opportunities to spread information through the platform. Swedish press secretaries form two clear network communities: one with ministers and one with journalists. Polish press secretaries, on the other hand, with the exception of the state minister's press secretary, are marginalised and much closer to the ministers than to journalists. As a result, Swedish journalists and Polish political sources possess more "communicative capability" or "accumulated communicative resources" than Polish press secretaries and have greater chances to act as gatekeepers in Twitter networks.

Another limitation in the existing literature is that researchers often concentrate on a single, isolated social media platform and try to infer their findings from one

platform (overwhelmingly Twitter, rarely Facebook) to social media as a whole. However, Twitter and Facebook have different audiences and different styles of interaction: Facebook interactions are passive, less frequent, longer, and not as time-sensitive as Twitter tweets. Twitter is more dynamic and mobile, with interactions "centered on topics in the here and now" (Quinlan et al., 2017).

Before 2007, the "personal profiles" format was dominant on Facebook. Personal profiles can be *open* (where all users despite their relationship with the profile owner are able to access all information and also comment on status updates) as well as *closed* (restricted or unavailable for non-friends) or *semi-open* (non-friends can see but not comment on status updates). The restricted data access this entails makes both communication and research difficult. This is one of the main reasons why researchers have mainly preferred Twitter. As a platform, Twitter is open by default; it only has personal profiles and its networks do not require reciprocity.

However, in 2007, Facebook launched the format "public profile" or "public pages". The main advantage of these is that the number of followers, or users, who are subscribed to the page, and fans, users who *like* the page, is unlimited (personal profiles may have an unlimited number of followers, but only 5,000 friends). In addition, connections with followers via personal profiles are one-directional – only friends can have a reciprocal connection. In contrast, the information on public pages is open for all users, and everybody can engage in a conversation with the page creator by posting comments to status updates. The public pages format on Facebook offers new possibilities. Originally intended for businesses and advertising, the format quickly obtained popularity among celebrities, public figures, politicians, and professionals.

This study addresses the gaps in the knowledge regarding the usage of Facebook public pages and Twitter personal profiles, making a clear distinction between the platforms. The research questions seek to understand how Polish, Finnish, and Swedish political executives shape their communication on Facebook and Twitter between elections. The questions read as follows:

RQ1: Do Polish, Finnish, and Swedish political executives communicate in similar ways on social media platforms Facebook and Twitter or not, and are there country-specific differences?

RQ2: What role does press staff play in this communication?

Through quantitative and qualitative approaches, this study will contribute with insights into how ministers exercise externally directed communication in the digital media environment. This issue is especially interesting with regard to the non-election working routine, as the majority of studies in this area are devoted to social media activities during election campaigns (Stier et al., 2018).

New media – New model of communication

New forms of communication, organised around the Internet and horizontal digital communication networks, are defined by Castells (2011: 779) as *mass self-communication,* connoting a self-generated, self-directed, and self-selected communication model positioned in between interpersonal and traditional mass communication. One of the key distinctive characteristics is new forms of interactivity. Traditionally, interaction in the communicative process took one of three forms: *face-to-face interaction*, *mediated interaction,* and *mediated quasi-interaction* (Thompson, 1995: 82). This list has now been updated to include *computer-mediated human interaction*, a form that prolongs "interaction between two or more people through the channel of a computer network" (Stromer-Galley, 2000: 117). According to this approach, communication can be interactive if it has a high degree of responsiveness and reflexivity. Jensen (1998: 201) defines interactivity as "a measure of a media's potential ability to let the user exert an influence on the content and/or form of the mediated communication".

Based on McQuail's classical model of communication, Jensen (1998) distinguishes between one-way communication modes – *transmissional* and *consultational* – and two-way communication modes – *registrational* and *conversational*. Adding to this understanding, McMillan (2002) suggests a model of *cyber-interactivity*. Cyber-interactivity has two forms of one-way communication – monologue and feedback – and two forms of two-way communication – responsive dialogue and mutual discourse.

Communication in social media can take a number of different modes. Larsson (2015: 1) categorises the various forms of communication as *broadcasting, redistributing, interacting,* and *acknowledging.* Facebook and Twitter differ in their technical infrastructure, terminology, appearance, and end-user details. However, the users of Facebook and Twitter face similar options for usage and similarities in the modes of communication. Because social media platforms are constantly evolving and new func-

Figure 7.2 Modes of communication on Facebook and Twitter and interactivity patterns

	Twitter	Facebook	Cyber-interactivity patterns
Broadcasting	Tweet	Post	One-way communication (monologue and feedback)
Redistributing	Retweet	Share	
Interacting	Mentions, @reply (Direct message)	Comment (Chat (in Messenger*) Reply*	Two-way communication (responsive dialogue and mutual discourse)
Acknowledging	Favourite Like *	Like React*	Two-way communication (but neither responsive dialogue nor mutual discourse)

Source: Based on McMillan (2002) and Larsson (2015) (*extended by author).

tions frequently appear, I suggest developing Larsson's approach. This is done in Figure 7.2. By applying McMillan's approach to Larsson's concept we see the various combinations of communication patterns available on social media platforms. *Broadcasting* and *redistributing* are mostly associated with one-way communication patterns, while *interacting* is rather related to two-way communication. *Acknowledging* could formally refer to the two-way pattern, but this type of interaction does not necessarily mean a dialogue or a mutual discourse.

New media – New logics
Mass media logic

Mass media logic is one of the most prominent concepts in political communication, usually related to the production of media content and the field of media effects. The starting point in the definition of media logic is the formats in which the media produces content and constructs messages (Altheide & Snow, 1979), referring to rules and methods for defining, selecting, and presenting media content. Broadly used, especially in the context of mediatisation (e.g., Asp 1990; Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999; Strömbäck, 2008), however, this concept is often criticised for abstractedness, lack of analyticity, confluence with more established journalistic practices and, finally, its inability to be applied in conditions of new media reality where journalists failed in their traditional monopoly of the selection, production, and definition of news (Brants & Van Praag, 2015. See also Figure 7.1).

Social media logic

The Internet is unique in that it embraces many different media formats and producers of media content, including non-professional ones. As a result, the internet is not guided by any one logic but includes many, competing logics (Chadwick, 2013). To capture this, Van Dijck and Poell (2013: 5) suggest using the concept *social media logic* connoting a set of processes, principles, and practices through which new media platforms "process information, news, and communication, and more generally, how they channel social traffic". Social media logic and mass media logic are hence two distinct sets of strategies and tactics that have different technological and economic origins. These two logics, however, coexist and mix with each other in modern communication processes.

According to Van Dijck and Poell (2013), social media logic includes four basic elements: *popularity*, *connectivity*, *datafication*, and *programmability*. *Popularity* is rooted in the mass media logic mechanism for pushing "likeable" people to become media personalities. Online *popularity* is based on "most likeable" content. *Connectivity* is linked to the mutual shaping of users, platforms, and advertisers and is related to the formation of groups and communities. *Datafication* refers to the ability of networked platforms to render information into quantified data, for example customers' demographic or profiling data, GPS-inferred locations, *likes*, *shares*, and so on that can be

"datafied" via social media. Finally, *programmability* refers to a process when users "post content and steer information streams, while the sites' owners may tweak their platforms' algorithms and interfaces to influence data traffic" (Van Dijck & Poell, 2013: 22). This factor can significantly influence the ability to provide a network gatekeeping function. Elements of the social media logic are inherent to communication and information processes in modern social life and play a crucial role in the shaping of social traffic, public opinion, and political communication.

Network media logic

Klinger and Svensson (2016) introduce the concept of *network media logic*. This concept is based on a comparison of mass media logic and network media logic within three dimensions: *production*, *distribution,* and *media use*. Each dimension is considered through three perspectives: *ideal*, *commercial imperatives*, and *technology*. To some extent, Klinger and Svensson's approach overlaps and extends the concept of social media logic suggested by Van Dijck and Poell (2013).

Figure 7.3 Dimensions of media logics

	Mass media logic	Network media logic
Production		
Ideal	Traditional journalism: autonomous, following ideals of news values in the service of what is referred to as public interest	User-generated content: based on ideas of produsage, reflexivity, and personalisation
Commercial imperatives	High organisational costs for business models related to infotainment	Low organisational costs for business models related to personal relationships
Technology	Affordance for a single public sphere	Affordance for a fragmented public
Distribution		
Ideal	Mass dissemination to subscribers	Viral distribution to like-minded
Commercial imperatives	Business models depend on centralised distribution by professional journalists	Business models depend on principles of connectivity and popularity
Technology	Affordance for broadcasting	Affordance for updating in peer networks
Media use		
Ideal	Consumption of professionally selected and framed information	Sharing reflexive and personal information among peers and like-minded
Commercial imperatives	Business models depend on advertisements and subscriptions	Business models depend on data mining, targeted advertising, and surveillance
Technology	Affordance for passive use along geographical boundaries	Affordance for interactive use in peer and online networks

Source: Based on Klinger & Svensson, 2016.

When political actors use Facebook and Twitter, they need feedback, such as *reactions*, *likes,* or *comments*. Such feedback increases their visibility, including in traditional media, and may engage more followers and fans.

Previous research

The development of online media has led to a division of views on the role of social media in political communication: *Internet optimism* and *Internet pessimism*. Existing research about the adoption of social media by politicians has primarily been viewed through the *normalisation–equalisation* prism. The *equalisation hypothesis* supposes that social media will foster a new online politics that could be revolutionary and revitalise citizenship and democracy. The *normalisation argument* assumes that the Internet simply mirrors and reinforces behavioural patterns in the real (offline) world (no-change scenario). Thus, these sceptical cyber-realists assert that a new politics online will "have been shattered by ordinary politics and commercial activity, which have invaded and captured cyberspace" (Deželan & Vobič, 2016).

Most empirical findings seem to support the concept of "politics as usual", suggested by Margolis and Resnick (2000). Dissemination of information in a Web 1.0 style over Web 2.0 platforms has been labelled in "Web 1.5" style (Jackson & Lilleker, 2009). Oelsner and Heimrich (2015) suppose that politicians adhere to offline strategies "due to the fear of losing control". Some research findings support combined *equalisation* and *normalisation* (Van Aelst et al., 2017). An alternative approach proposes a position between the positive and the negative paradigms, suggesting to go beyond the dichotomy of the role of social media to fully understand its adoption by politicians (Karlsson & Åström 2018; Larsson & Svensson, 2014; Quinlan et al., 2017; Wright Scott, 2012).

Whether following *normalisation* patterns or not, politicians around the globe use social media differently, for different purposes, to gain different benefits. In addition, they have different abilities to do so. Social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter enable politicians to directly reach out to voters and mobilise supporters (e.g., Grzywinska, 2013; Laaksonen et al., 2017; Stetka et al., 2014); to convey information quickly and create "a buzz" (e.g., Bruns & Stieglitz 2014; Di Fraia & Missaglia 2014; Grusell & Nord, 2012; Krzatala-Jaworska, 2013); to influence the public agenda, e.g. bypassing conventional media channels (e.g., Skovsgaard & Van Dalen, 2013); for branding (e.g. Borah, 2014; Ceccobelli, 2016; Ekman & Widholm, 2014; Espino Sánchez, 2013); or simply to join a "fashion trend" or a "bandwagon" (Larsson, 2013).

Following gratifications theory Hoffmann and colleagues (2016) assert that all purposes for social media usage can be grouped around three salient motives: *promotion*, *information-seeking*, and *entertainment*. *Self-promotion* appears to be the most important motive. Making connections does not emerge as a distinct motive. Indeed, communication on social media platforms is less interactive than it could

be (Jungherr, 2016; Khaldarova et al., 2012; Nożewski, 2017; Stepinska, 2017). Most politicians use monologic (one-way) forms of communication and avoid dialogic forms of interactivity (Grusell & Nord, 2012; Grzywinska, 2013; Herkman, 2011; Oelsner & Heimrich, 2015). Stromer-Galley (2000) points to the three main reasons for such behaviour by candidates in election campaigns: the burden that interaction places on the campaign, the risk of losing control of the communication environment, and an inability to provide an ambitious discourse. In sum, most politicians simply do not appreciate social media's interactive potential.

According to Keller and Kleinen-von Königslöw (2018), digital debates do not play a significant role in successful communication. Instead, successful social media communication depends on a number of other factors: personal background, such as age, gender, and education; political activity; and media coverage; and structural characteristics such as key position, vote percentage, and financial power. The authors further argue that the success of political actors' communication on social media plat-forms should be defined "by the size of their followership (e.g., fans and followers) and the number of reactions their social media actions receive (e.g., likes and retweets)". Thus, the authors relate politicians' success on social media primarily to their ability to build a large digital followership and trigger as many *reactions* from their followers as possible. The desired outcomes of this large digital fellowship are visibility (with more media coverage), organisation (citizens are invited to participate in politics on social media platforms), micro-donations (money, time, or ideas), mobilisation, and feedback.

So far, most studies around social media in political communication focus on one isolated platform, usually Twitter (Jungherr, 2016) and rarely Facebook (e.g., Espino Sánchez, 2013; Larsson & Kalsnes, 2014). As mentioned, users' accounts on Twitter are usually publicly visible and accessible, while Facebook personal profiles (in particular before 2007) more often are private and require reciprocal friendship ties for use. In the Scandinavian countries, Finland, Switzerland, and some other countries, Twitter has obtained a reputation as an urban, elite social media platform involving journalists, politicians, and other professional groups (Keller & Kleinen-von Königslöw, 2018; Khaldarova, Laaksonen & Matikainen, 2012; Larsson & Moe, 2011).

Several cross-media studies show several relevant differences in the political communication on different social media platforms, i.e., that politicians adapt their messages to different audiences and tailor their communication to the socio-technical environments of platforms (Stier et al., 2018). Keller and Kleinen-von Königslöw (2018) indicate that politicians effectively reach other political actors and journalists via Twitter but prefer using Facebook to better address the general public. Popularity on Facebook is related to a larger vote share: politicians attract more fans on Facebook than on Twitter, and the large digital followership provides active reactions to their posts and future mobilisation at the next election.

Quinlan and colleagues (2017) assert that the adoption of Facebook and Twitter is driven by primarily two factors: money and party. In impact, however, these factors

play out slightly differently for Facebook and Twitter: "While the influence of money is homogenous with the more resources candidates have, the more likely they are to adopt, and the effect is stronger for Facebook. Conversely, the impact of party on adoption is heterogeneous across channels, a pattern we suggest is driven by the different audiences each medium attracts". Larsson and Skogerbø (2018) provide evidence from Norway and find that Facebook is the most popular social medium for local politicians, females in particular, while national politicians seem to prefer Twitter.

Methods and sampling

The chapter analyses the use of Facebook and Twitter in government communication in Sweden, Finland, and Poland. Facebook was the most popular social media platform in Sweden in 2016; 71 per cent of Swedes used this platform every day. Instagram was next; 26 per cent used it daily. Twitter came third, with only 18 per cent preferring this service for everyday communication (Davidsson & Finndahl, 2016). In Poland, Youtube and Facebook were the most popular social networking services in 2016; 64 per cent and 62 per cent of population, respectively, had active accounts with these platforms. Twitter lagged behind, with 24 per cent of the Polish people using the microblog (Statista – The portal for statistics, Poland). In Finland, 60 per cent used Facebook daily in 2016. Fifty per cent used Whatsapp, and Youtube and Instagram were third, with roughly the same frequency (26 per cent and 25 per cent, respectively). Twitter only engaged 10 per cent of users (Statista – The portal for statistics, Finland).

Sampling

For this study, two sample groups were selected in each country: ministers and their press staffers. The data were gathered from publicly available government websites.[1] Some individuals were identified on Facebook and Twitter (see Table 7.1). The data sample from Facebook public pages consisted of all posts written by ministers in 2017. The data from Twitter consisted of all the *tweets/retweets* during 2017 for both sample groups.

Data

The study is based on two data sets: 1) data from the ministers' Facebook pages and Twitter personal profiles; 2) interviews with ministers, press staffers, and political journalists.

- Data from public profiles on Facebook (pages) and personal profiles on Twitter, provide the basis for the quantitative analysis. These Facebook pages and Twitter personal profiles were analysed in terms of their modes of communication (as shown in Figure 7.2), and the interactive and dialogical potential of communication was estimated.

Statistical data, such as social media messages posted and shared by ministers as well as the comments to their posts and the ministers' replies, were collected by the free Facebook application Netvizz and the free online service Inteltechniques[2] for Twitter during the research period.

- Interviews conducted under the condition of anonymity during 2016-2017. Interviewees were asked to answer questions regarding the purposes of social media usage and communication with journalists, ministers, and press staff via social media. The following groups in each country were interviewed:
  - In Finland: 12 journalists, 4 political press advisors, and 5 civil servants;
  - In Poland: 4 press secretaries, 5 ministers, and 4 journalists;
  - In Sweden: 11 press advisors and press secretaries and 11 journalists.

Limitations

This study has some limitations. First of all, it embraces data collected only for specific governments over a specific period of time. Second, it only evaluates ministers' intended communication; we do not know how that communication really works because received networks are changing over time. We can talk hence only about probabilities and opportunities based on the capacities of the selected social media platforms. At a minimum, it is necessary to conduct a content analysis of social media messages to fully understand the communication between political executives and other users on Facebook and Twitter.

Findings
1. Quantitative analysis of Facebook pages and Twitter profiles

The ministers in all sample groups were mainly represented on Facebook public profiles (pages). Many of them also have personal profiles, but these profiles were often *closed* and *semi-closed* and/or abandoned (as shown in Table 7.1). This is probably an indication that ministers wish to keep public and personal matters separate in cyberspace and protect their personal lives. Almost all of the ministers' public pages have a similar mode and identical design and are related to professional activity, in particular to the building of a personal brand. Press staffers mainly have personal profiles on Facebook, often *closed* or *semi-closed*. The majority of ministers and press staffers in all of the countries in the study also have active personal profiles on Twitter. In all the three countries studied, ministers updated Twitter almost twice as often as they updated Facebook. The ministers' Twitter networks were bigger than their Facebook networks in all three countries, indicating that Twitter attracts a broader audience than does Facebook. Table 7.1 summarises the results from the quantitative analysis of how Twitter and Facebook are used in political communication.

**Table 7.1** Network characteristics: Facebook and Twitter, 2017

Country	Number	Sample group	FB					Twitter			
			Personal profiles		Public pages	Frequency (posts/day), mean	Fans, mean	Personal profiles		Frequency (tweets/day), mean	Followers, mean
			All	Accessible				All	Active		
Finland	17	Ministers	11	6	14	0.4	7,610	13	13	0.9	20,241
Finland	13	Press assistants	11	4	2			12	12 (1)*	1.4	
Poland	22	Ministers	10	5	21	0.7	18,431	14	14 (1)*	1.2	56,074
Poland	18	Press secretaries	10	4	3			10	10	4.5	
Sweden	23	Ministers	14	9	22	0.7	15,802	20	16 (3)*	2.3	32,251
Sweden	42	Press secretaries/ assistants	39	21	2			37	34 (9)*	1.1	

( )* – inactive last 6 months

1a. Modes of communication on Facebook

Data collected from Facebook depict the ministers' preferred modes of communication: they are more active in posting than replying. The correlation between ministers' posts and their replies is presented in Figure 7.4. In other words, their communication is not very dialogical. Only two Polish and three Finnish ministers actively reply to the other users' comments; the others prefer to only convey information in the top-down manner.

Figure 7.4 Comparison of number of ministers' posts and replies (mean, 2017)
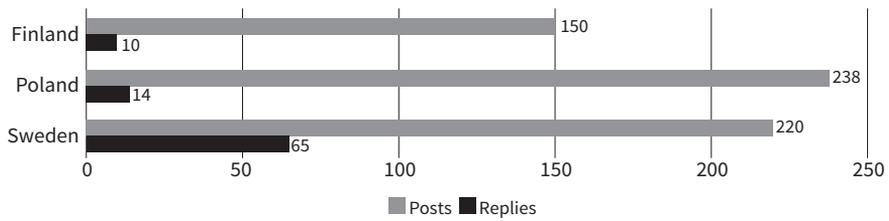
In comparison, Swedish ministers are most active on Facebook and have more conversations with followers. One possible explanation for this phenomenon could be that the Swedish government has a higher number of press officers employed than do the Finnish and Polish governments (see Table 7.1). These professional staff members might help their bosses to communicate on Facebook.

At the same time, as shown in Figure 7.5, the Swedish case also displays meaningful and significant feedback from followers. However, in all three cases, feedback takes the form of *reactions* and *likes* rather than *comments* and *shares*. This means that the emotional component of the interaction on Facebook pages is more significant than the discursive component. A large share of *likes* reveals plenty of supporters among ministers' followers.

Figure 7.5 Followers' feedback compared to number of ministers' posts and replies (mean, 2017)
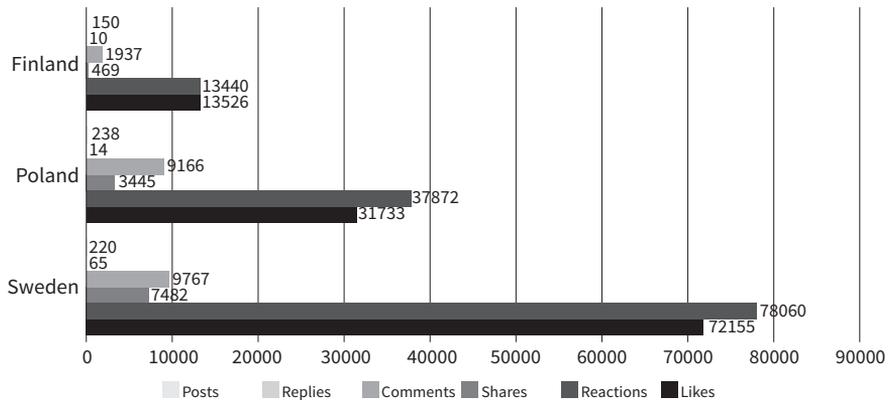
1b. Modes of communication on Twitter

Interaction on Twitter appears to be more dialogical than on Facebook, mostly because of the platform's technical specificity: short messages; more interactive tools, dynamics, and mobility. The dialogical component (*replies*) is quite insignificant in comparison to produced and redistributed content (*tweets* and *retweets*). However, *mentions* can compensate for the lack of this exchange. However, ministers' dialogues on Twitter mostly target limited groups of people and not average users.

Figure 7.6 shows the results of the analysis of Twitter data. As on Facebook, ministers do not reply very frequently to followers' comments on Twitter. However, the use of *mentions* in tweets indicates that the dialogical component is more significant on Twitter than on Facebook. Swedish ministers come out on top when it comes to the number of replies as well as *mentions*.

Figure 7.6 Modes of ministers' communication on Twitter (mean, 2017)
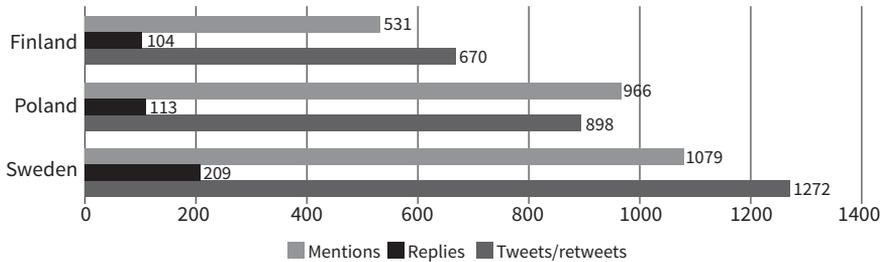
The online service Inteltechniques does not provide full data regarding followers' feedback, with the exception of redistribution (*retweets*). Followers in Finland, Poland, and Sweden retweet ministers' content to varying degrees, and the Swedish followers are the most active (on average 477,936 retweets), while Finnish followers are less interested in redistribution (on average 14,502 retweets). Polish users are in the middle: 51,997 retweets (on average).

2. Interviews[3]

After the emergence of social media around 2005, the media in general changed. As one Swedish press secretary said, it was "an explosion" and "a revolution". Political communication fundamentally changed; it lost its hierarchical nature, its tempo increased significantly, and conditions on the media market became harder. This means that the requirements on public persons are higher, too. As one Polish minister said, social media is a "mine of information" that reflects the general public mood and shows how different political issues are discussed and understood by the public.

According to the Polish journalists, social media negatively influenced their relationships with sources. Politicians, on the other hand, thought that journalists would

use everything the politicians write in social media so they don't want to say anything: "It is enough to post a tweet and it sets the ball rolling – a new subject appears". Some journalists dislike when politicians refer to their official statements on Facebook and Twitter without additional comments. The next sections discuss the results from the interviews regarding the use of social media in political communication.

2a. Purposes for using social media

The interviewed Polish and Swedish ministers and press secretaries said that they usually start the day by checking social media feeds and the websites of the most influential media outlets. As the Polish ministers said, social media is a "kind of informational database which we can use in many ways", and that it is "a huge and very rich source of information". According to a Finnish press assistant, social media is helpful in creating "our own picture" of the world, through opinions or social moods. Press assistants also noted that social media is a good way to communicate because "you can get news directly without any manipulation by journalists".

On the other hand, social media is also a channel for conveying information, for example information published on the government's website. According to the Polish journalists, spokespersons more frequently announce information first on social media, then on websites and later still through traditional channels.

Nonetheless, journalists and their political sources in all three countries still prefer traditional ways of communication. Both sides usually contact one another using telephone, email, and face-to-face meetings, as described in the quote below:

> When it comes to communication with voters or more broadly receivers of our messages – farmers – we obviously use social media. When it comes to cooperation with journalists, this mechanism is rarely used. I rather try to talk with them directly – interpersonal form – and in this way have the possibility to deliver more information and explain more things to them in more detail. On the one hand, information disseminated through social media is characterised by dynamics – news reaches a large number of receivers immediately; personally, I have a solid 5,000 receivers in social media. On the other hand, when I speak with journalists who have an objective to create and shape public awareness, I rather prefer more personal and direct contacts or conversations. (Polish press secretary 5)

The Finnish press assistants confirm that *tête-a-tête* contacts with journalists are more effective. The journalists agree with the politicians regarding the higher value of face-to-face meetings or phone conversations. Such direct contacts provide a chance to avoid misunderstandings but also to obtain exclusive information. The Polish journalists mentioned that politicians usually use social media to build an image, and that journalists do not want to take part in that image-creating process. They need information, and preferably exclusive information, that can be interesting for readers. As one Polish journalist said, "I don't practice herd journalism – I am against it ... I don't ask questions on Twitter – I don't want my colleagues–journalists to know what I'm working on."

However, the importance of social media in communication is apparent. Twitter is the primary tool, but social media in general is used as an additional channel of communication for both parties. As one Polish minister said, "When a journalist writes a private message to me on Twitter to quickly get some information, it is not a problem for me." And indeed, journalists in all three countries use social media, such as direct messages on Twitter, to contact politicians if the politicians do not answer phone calls. Finnish journalists, however, noted that some groups of sources are easier to contact on social media while email or SMS work best for others. In general, the journalists prefer to contact their sources by email, SMS, phone calls, and in some cases via press assistants.

According to Finnish journalists, news from social media fits better into "yellow press" than it does into quality media like the public service broadcaster Yle or the daily newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat*. One Finnish journalist stated that social media is not so important for news because "no politician will post something in social media that has news value". Social media is rather for the understanding of "an atmosphere prompting decision making". Journalists and political sources in Poland and Sweden agreed, saying that social media is a very important tool for monitoring "the general mood of different social groups and trade unions", "to stay up to date" on the latest events, and for tracing "who says what":

> It can be used for building relationships, for example with journalists and others. But this is not enough. I think this is a bit overestimated ... now, I follow cultural journalists more often than before ... [in] social media you can hear a conversation you probably could never hear some other way. In particular from cultural journalists. But on the other hand, it would be wrong to think that this is a public debate. This is only a small part of the public discussion. (Swedish press assistant 8)

Social media, particularly Twitter, emerged as an additional channel to reach political goals. A Swedish journalist described it as a crucial place for "opinion making", and a Finnish civil servant said that "You can effectively spread your own ideas using Twitter". Polish journalists mentioned that political parties pay more and more attention to social media, especially right-wing parties compared to liberal parties, because "if you don't comment on an issue, your comment simply doesn't exist in the public sphere". In Sweden, journalists related that politicians and political officers are highly active on Twitter, and continue to tweet and attempt to influence public opinion via different organisations also after leaving a political party.

2b. Social media strategies

The data show that ministers use social media platforms differently. First, their choice is driven as a consequence of personal preferences: some prefer only Twitter, others like Facebook or Instagram, while some ministers want to be present everywhere or use alternative platforms, such as Snapchat. For example, the Finnish press staff actively use Flickr as a photo bank to share pictures on other social media platforms.

According to one interviewed officer, they shared about 1,000 photos in 2017, and the Finnish media used all of them.

Social media is an important tool for communication with different target groups. The respondents described how the specificity of every platform defines the *modus operandi* of each:

> It is like building a house ... you can't use a hammer for everything. You should change the tool depending on what the question is ... we use social media as a part of this strategy ... when we want to get a certain question ... we use Twitter and Facebook, especially Facebook ... Then it should be possible to follow his [the minister's] entire day or even week to depict more clearly who he is, what he does, where he goes, what problems he solves ... simply talking, all the events in the minister's life ... essentially, we use this to build his personality ... (Swedish press assistant 10)

Swedish respondents identified Twitter as more "elitist". To some extent, Finnish journalists agreed, saying that Twitter is a platform for informational exchange of financial, economic, and media elites. Swedish press staffers said that for Swedish politicians, Facebook is a place for political partisans while Instagram attracts younger people – (potential) voters and people who have an interest in politics. Yet another example is how Polish ministers try to engage a younger public through Youtube, as described in the following quote:

> We used social media very intensely when we ran a campaign to promote vocational education. We had invited Rezi to work with us. He is one of the most popular YouTubers in Poland. [...] It was amazing because it was the first time my own children became interested in my press conference. They were angry with me – how could I not have told them that I knew Rezi. I also met junior high school students who told me, "...you are very lucky because you know Rezi". Adults had no idea that such a person existed and was so important. After we uploaded a video to the website of the Ministry of National Education, it had 100 hits one hour later. We all cheered. I made a short video with a famous youtuber in which we said hello to the internet users, and after one hour we got 30,000 likes. It is a totally different world – impossible to overestimate. (Polish press secretary 3)

Social media is also significant in the building of the personal brand. Press staffers realise that politicians can be recognisable only if they are mentioned in the traditional media. One way to make that happen is to be visible in social networking sites, because newspapers, radio, and TV channels often refer to user-generated content in their coverage.

> We had a situation where our response was needed immediately, and when I was watching TV I realised that our Twitter was the most quoted. This medium reaches journalists really quickly. It is the fastest way for a simple and quick statement to get the journalists' attention. Almost all journalists working in newsrooms have their own information channels – Twitter, Facebook, email, and website. If we

want to boast about something – to draw attention to an event we organised, we use Facebook. Thanks to this medium you can add a photo album, write a longer text, or make some strategic projections come true. As a ministry, we arranged an event called Tweetup – a meeting where they could meet the scientific community. (Polish press secretary 4)

One of the main challenges for modern politicians and other public figures is to control the information flow, and they always risk being taken by surprise. The quote below illustrates how press secretaries and ministers have to be particularly careful and circumspect.

Since social media emerged, everything changed, especially for politicians and other public figures, because everybody has a camera all the time. But ... this is completely different ... If you tell a message wrong, you will be punished. You will get three Youtube videos about you, they became viral, and finally it will be a page in the tabloid. (Swedish press assistant 1)

According to an interviewed Swedish press secretary, it is necessary to have "a unique angle" to be popular. At the same time, one also has to remember that "if anybody writes something on Twitter it can immediately be in the news". A Polish minister demonstrated exactly such an awareness when saying that the message in social media "needs to be well-thought-out and relevant" as well as "short, concise, and witty and appeal to receivers' sensitivity". When communicating on social media, it is important to be transparent. At the same time, quality control is difficult, as described by a press secretary below.

Social media often tends to repeat information found on the Internet without verifying it. It is quite dangerous if you don't react in time. Most of all because of the cascade of information from social media, which leads to situations in which it is extremely difficult to take things back. That's why I pay attention to these types of services, but I don't like it – even though it is a sign of the times, that, for example, in the USA the most important decisions are sometimes announced via Twitter. Personally, even though I use different social media, I think that there are decisions that should have some significance attached to them and they shouldn't be as impersonal as they happen to be on social media. (Polish press secretary 4)

A Swedish press secretary mentioned that social media may be used strategically to take control of informational flows. She said she was lucky when she was able "to kill a question before it would pose a big problem" on Twitter and prevent an "embarrassing" issue from becoming news. The Polish press secretaries followed a similar strategy, writing statements on Facebook or Twitter if they wanted "to make some information immediately available to journalists, broadly, or to the public" or "to confirm or deny something".

The results also show that both politicians and staffers participate in content production on social media. According to one Swedish press secretary, ministers personally write on social media when they want to express their views, but also often ask

their staffers to manage their profiles and pages. Another press secretary confirmed that the ministers' Facebook pages are usually updated by staffers; sometimes they also write on Twitter on behalf of the ministers. One Polish minister said that he/she "needs people to help me control social media and contact and consult other people through this media". This was also acknowledged by Polish journalists, saying that "Each politician is only a human being and I don't think any of them would manage to deal with everything on their own".

As recognised by one Swedish press secretary, not all ministers are open to new communication technologies, especially not in the older generation. However, politicians want to be present in social media to gain more symbolic capital. Thus, press secretaries often update their ministers' profiles simply because they are more technically versed. Finnish press staffers mentioned that Finnish ministers should be more active in social media and noted that "social media [use] is not so interactive". According to them, their bosses followed social media but were not very active in discussions, leaving room for improvement.

According to one Swedish press secretary, some social media material is prepared by the staff members, for example content related to reforms, the budget, and the [global] climate, and there is an internal document on social media policy of the government. In Poland, the government information centre is responsible for social media in the case of the prime minister's office. In addition, each ministry has its own website containing a link to the ministry's profile in social media. These profiles are used to post announcements for journalists and very often become an element of narration to the media and journalists. As one Polish press secretary said, social media is "one of the main tools in the communication department". Ministers' use of Instagram seems more personal; for example, some ministers prefer to take selfies themselves. This varied between countries, as according to a Polish press secretary, Polish ministers rarely use Instagram and prefer Twitter and Facebook.

Twitter is more used in government communication than Facebook in all three countries in the study. However, this demands a lot of time and a non-stop presence. As one Finnish civil servant said, "We always have some piquant news ... but we are just lazy in this sense. We already have a lot of work and to write [in social media, author] is not for us ..." This is why some ministers avoid this service.

> You can spend all day on social media but fortunately you don't have time for this [...] I suppose that Finland is so small, it is like Twitter itself and everybody knows everyone else's points of views and origin, so you don't need to change people's opinions. We are not "a great nation". But it [social media, author] works conveniently as a means of communication. (Finnish press assistant 2)

During the interviews, some journalists expressed that they are sceptical about Twitter. A Swedish journalist said that it is a "playground for idiots"; another mentioned that people often write foolishness or attack each other, making the exchange meaningless. An interviewed Swedish press secretary called Twitter a "duck pond"

because the same people are always there; another said that it is a "mix of trolls and serious people".

A final point of comparison concerns the social media use of press staffers. Swedish press secretaries reported using their own social media profiles mostly for private purposes, while some Polish press secretaries said that they use Twitter mostly for work. The Finnish press staffers also mentioned using social media platforms more actively on a private basis than for official work.

Conclusions and discussion

This study shows the communicative patterns of political executives on social media in Finland, Poland, and Sweden. Using two complementary data sets, it enhances the understanding of the varying practices of political executives on Twitter and Facebook.

These two social media platforms differ in terms of their aims, communication processes, audiences, and generated networks. They also represent various communication modes. The findings presented above indicate that political executives in the three countries of the study therefore use Facebook in different ways and for different purposes than Twitter. However, independent of national context, ministers follow similar communication practices on each of the platforms.

Politicians began to use Facebook effectively in 2007, when Facebook public profiles/pages were introduced. It became a new professional tool, utilised primarily for personal branding of public figures. The personal profiles that were previously used then became a zone mostly for personal use or were abandoned. According to the data, ministers' Facebook pages appear to be new channels for top-down communication, with limited discursive and dialogical components but a developed segment of emotional followers' feedback (see Figure 7.5). In the terms of Jensen (1998), this communication is representing a *transmissional*, top-down model of interactivity. In other words, it predominantly uses a one-way pattern of *cyber-interactivity*, such as monologue and feedback (McMillan, 2002).

In all three countries, ministers' public profiles/pages on Facebook usually have similar installation-specific settings and identical design. According to some interviews, Facebook public profiles/pages are often maintained by the press staffers. This indicates that staffers might play a role as gatekeepers on Facebook, challenging the thesis about the trend toward disintermediation of social media (McQuail, 2010). On social media, intermediation might be provided through press staffers, similar to how journalists perform this role in traditional media. Thus, to some extent Facebook public profiles/pages may provide a professionally driven substitute for conventional media in online political communication.

The results further show that Twitter is considered an online venue for professional elites, namely politicians and journalists. On Twitter, ministers' communication with other users appears to be more *conversational* (Jensen, 1998), *dialogical,* or/and *discur-*

sive or two-way directed (McMillan, 2002) than on Facebook. However, this difference depends on the technological characteristics of the platform; Twitter provides more mobile tools for a topic starter's own feedback (for example, *mentions*). In addition, this reciprocal communication is directed mostly to a limited group of users. According to the interviewees, it is the role of the press staff to monitor the field on Twitter. Figure 7.7 summarises the chapter conclusion

Figure 7.7 General models of political executives' communications emerging on Facebook and Twitter
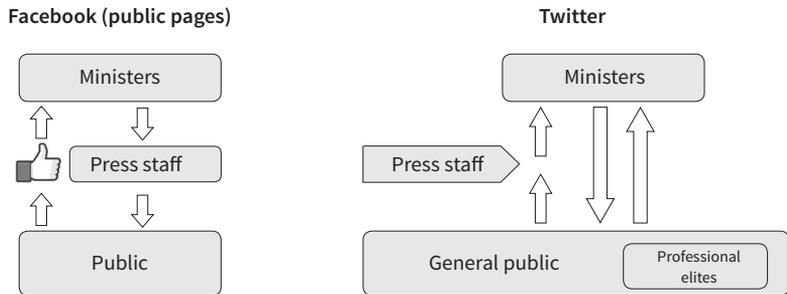
It would be appropriate to mention that social media have a significant potential to polarize people because they offer "readily available" information to groups of like-minded individuals. Within such structures, users can easily abandon or avoid contrary information flows. This generates various communities in different informational networks, which become isolated cultural and ideological groups or "bubbles" (Gainous & Wagner, 2014: 14). This is a subject matter for a new case study analysing content. However, the results in this chapter show that at least structurally, ministers' communication on Twitter takes place within a "bubble" of professional elites.

The results demonstrate that political executives mix different logics in social media communication. On the one hand, in accordance with the network and social media logics, ministers publish user-generated content based on ideas of produsage, reflexivity, and personalisation. This content is viral and distributed to like-minded individuals (Klinger & Svensson, 2016) or corresponds to the principle of popularity (Van Dijck & Poell, 2013). On the other hand, affordable broadcasting and the consumption of professionally selected and framed information are used according to assumptions about traditional media logic (Klinger & Svensson, 2016).

Political communication is shaped differently on different social media platforms. Political executives in the three countries pursue different objectives when it comes to using Facebook, Twitter, and probably other social media platforms as well. This is probably related to the distinct target audiences provided by these social media platforms and the varying "sociotechnical affordances" (Stier et al., 2018) of each platform. This choice is strategic; political executives are not able to engage on every

social media platform and sometimes are not sufficiently skilled to operate in this resource-intensive environment.

In conclusion, the communication strategy of political executives in social media appears to be hybrid. It is based on a synergy of top-down and horizontal models of communication, mass media, and social media/network media logics, resulting in a mix of *normalisation* and *equalisation* effects of social media. The participation of skilled staff is an important part of communication strategies and might be an increasingly important influence in the reciprocal informational exchange. The fact that the larger number of employed press staffers in Sweden correlates with higher frequency of feedback on Facebook (Figure 7.5) indicates that this might be the case. However, it is unclear whether the dialogue with the public corresponds to an actual need or is simply a way to engage more followers.

Last but not least, the results add a new meaning and scope to the famous McLuhan quotation that "the medium is the message". Usually this phrase is understood to mean that the form for media communication is more important than the information itself – that the effects of technology are so significant because "it is the medium that shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action" (McLuhan, 1994). Talking about online media, Castells questions this thesis by stating that "The message is the medium". The meaning here is that the content of the message organises the process of communication (Rantanen, 2005). Indeed, McLuhan's point was more relevant to the pre-digital era. However, it obtains a new meaning in the context of social media as the socio-technical characteristics of a platform can influence and define the specificity of transmitted "information". When analysing ministers' communication on Facebook and Twitter, we can see some supportive evidence that in a hybrid, media-saturated environment both approaches are able to coexist and develop simultaneously.

Notes

1. Finnish government website http://valtioneuvosto.fi/en/sipila/ministers. Polish government website https://www.premier.gov.pl. Swedish government website http://www.regeringen.se/sb/d/385.
2. https://inteltechniques.com
3. Interviews for this chapter were conducted by Milda Malling, Karl Magnus Johansson, Risto Niemikari and Jacek Nożewski.

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