

The Story Behind the News

Informal and Invisible Interactions between Journalists and Their Sources in Two Countries

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The Story Behind the News: Informal and Invisible Interactions between Journalists and Their Sources in Two Countries

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Milda Malling

March 2022

Abstract

Journalists encounter some of their sources only episodically, while relationships with other sources involve several social contexts and roles. The political beat, where both reporters and sources have years of experience in the field and interact on regular basis, and where opinions can turn into news, is an arena where relationships and interactions play a special role.

This PhD thesis explores how formal and informal relationships between journalists and their sources are reflected in the news-making in Lithuania and Sweden. How do journalists and sources negotiate their social and professional roles in their relationships with each other?

This PhD thesis consists of an introduction and five articles. Theoretically, the study follows the process model of journalistic roles and discusses autonomy vs. adaptation between journalists and sources both when it comes to role conception and role performance. How do journalists and sources think about their relationships with each other (articles 1 and 2)? How do they use these relationships in practice (articles 3 and 4)? What motives guide the journalists' interactions with sources in different relational contexts (article 5)?

The analysis of the role conception of this study is based on 43 qualitative interviews with journalists covering the national politics in two countries: Lithuania and Sweden. The data on the role performance and motives consists of reconstruction interviews that cover 517 interactions between journalists and their sources in these countries.

The results indicate that up to half of all sources who contribute to the media content stay invisible. Also, at least one-third of sources influencing the content are connected to the journalist with closer than

purely formal social ties. Formal and informal and visible and invisible forms of interaction between journalists and sources presuppose different roles these sources get to play in the news-making process. These aspects of sourcing the news are a significant part of the journalistic routines despite the country context.

The study concludes that while distance between journalists and sources is a normative condition to achieve autonomy, social relationships come into play when navigating the competitive environment. Professional and social roles can complement, overlap or be used interchangeably in journalist-source interactions, since sourcing the news is not only a professional practice but also a social practice between human agents who adapt to each other and the expectations from the environment. Informality and formality can drive each other, as informal solutions from journalists and sources emerge as a response to the formal structural constellations that are coordinating and professionalizing the government communication. Prevalence and reliance on different social ties in a certain context, therefore, could be a variable in studies of journalism and political communication culture.

Keywords: journalist, source, relationships, process model of journalistic roles, professional role, informality, unattributed sources, news beat, politics, social tie, trust, reconstruction interview, Lithuania, Sweden.

Sammanfattning

Journalister har källor de enbart möter vid något eller några tillfällen, och andra som utvecklas till relationer som spänner över flera sociala sammanhang och roller. Den politiska nyhetsbevakningen, där både reportrar och källor har mångårig erfarenhet på sina områden och interagerar regelbundet, och där åsikter blir nyheter, är en arena där relationer och interaktion spelar en särskild roll.

Denna doktorsavhandling granskar hur formella och informella relationer mellan journalister och deras källor påverkar nyhetsbevakningen i Litauen och Sverige. Hur navigerar journalister och källor mellan sina sociala och professionella roller när de interagerar med varandra?

Teoretiskt utgår studien från processmodellen för den journalistiska yrkesrollen, och diskuterar självständighet kontra anpassning mellan journalister och källor, både vad gäller hur roller uppfattas och utförs. Hur resonerar journalister och källor om relationen dem emellan? Hur använder de relationen i praktiken? Hur motiverar journalister sina beslut när de interagerar med en formell/informell och/eller synlig/osynlig källa?

Denna doktorsavhandling består av en introduktion och fem artiklar. De första två artiklarna analyserar relationer mellan journalister och deras källor utifrån den normativa och den kognitiva rolluppfattningen. Artiklar tre och fyra testar när, på vilket sätt och varför de informella källorna bidrar till nyhetsbevakningen. Artikel fem undersöker hur journalisterna motiverar sina val och sin tillit till källorna i olika nyhets- och relationssammanhang.

Studiens analys av rolluppfattningen baseras på 43 kvalitativa intervjuer med journalister som bevakar inrikespolitik i två länder: Litauen och Sverige. Underlaget som rör genomförandet av rollerna består av rekonstruktionsintervjuer som täcker 517 interaktioner mellan journalister och källor i dessa två länder.

Resultatet visar att upp till hälften av alla källor som bidrar till medieinnehållet förblir osynliga där. Dessutom, minst en tredjedel av alla källor som bidrar till innehållet har icke-formella sociala band med journalister. Detta gäller i båda länder som undersökts. Den journalistiska yrkesrollens krav på autonomi kräver ett visst socialt avstånd mellan journalister och deras källor. Samtidigt förlitar sig både journalister och källor på varandras sociala relationer när de tar sig fram i den konkurrensutsatta omgivningen.

Formell och informell samt synlig och osynlig interaktion mellan journalister och källor förutsätter olika roller som källorna får spela i nyhetsprocessen. Källor som även interagerar informellt med en journalist är mer aktiva i att ta fram uppslag till nyheter. Denna sorts källor syns ofta inte i rapporteringen och ingen hänvisning till dem finns i artiklarna. Sist men inte minst så har journalister större tillit till en källa, och anpassar i större utsträckning sin rapportering efter den, ju starkare social koppling de har till denna källa. Därför är de sociala banden mellan journalister och källor, och hur dessa kopplingar används vid det specifika tillfället, ett taktiskt val för källor som vill sätta en agenda och kan användas som en strategisk fördel när källorna vill sätta rammar som senare dominerar i den offentliga sfären.

Studiens slutsats är att för journalister så kan den professionella och sociala rollerna komplettera, överlappa eller ta över varandra. Rollerna används växelvis i interaktionen mellan journalist och källa.

Studien visar att interaktion mellan journalister och deras källor inte bara styrs professionellt utan också socialt mellan människor som anpassar sig till varandra och omgivningens förväntningar. Informell och formell interaktion driver på varandra. Informella lösningar mellan journalister och källor uppstår för att möta ökat tryck (från politiska ledare) att koordinera och professionalisera kommunikationen. Sociala nätverk och sociala band mellan journalister och deras källor och hur de spelar in i konkreta sammanhang kan därför vara en variabel i forskningen om journalistisk kultur och politisk kommunikation.

LIST OF PAPERS

INTRODUCTION

The Story behind The News. Informal and Invisible Interactions between Journalists and Their Sources in Two Countries

ARTICLE I

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ARTICLE II

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Published in *Close and Distant, Political Executive-Media Relations in Four Countries*. K. M. Johansson and G. Nygren (eds.). Nordicom

ARTICLE III

Malling, Milda (2021) Reconstructing the Informal and Invisible: Interactions Between Journalists and Political Sources in Two Countries

Published in *Journalism Practice*

ARTICLE IV

Malling, Milda (2021) Sources that Trigger the News: Multiplexity of Social Ties in News Discovery

Published in *Journalism Studies*

ARTICLE V

Malling, Milda (under review). Trust is context dependent: reconstruction of trust dynamics between journalists and their sources

Under review for resubmission to *Journalism*

Journalists see people mainly as potential sources"

(Herbert Gans, 1979, "Deciding what's news")

1 Introduction

Sources are journalists' biggest professional asset. "Collect phone numbers for future reference. Scan the telephone books that senior colleagues have on their desks! If they do not share it – steal it!" I heard these and similar comments from my teachers at the institute of journalism as an aspiring reporter.

My first newsroom was at an analytic weekly news magazine. I observed how the senior colleagues conversed with each other: they talked about who they recently met and what they heard. "The news is what you and your friends discuss at the dinner table the night before," the editors used to say.

As a new journalist covering societal topics, I quickly realized that establishing networks with as different groups of people as possible and finding out what is important to them was my biggest asset in the editorial meetings to discuss story ideas. The more areas or angles, the better. And, since story deadlines were short, I needed to know whom to contact immediately after my topic was confirmed by the editor.

By diligently calling around, I quickly found that some sources were very useful. They did not all have to be high-ranking officers. Often, it was the mid-level specialists who would offer their direct number or pick up the phone late in the evening just to help me verify some details to finish the text before the deadline. Sometimes, they would help me figure out the statistics. Occasionally, they might even suggest topics that would be interesting to address in the future. They were the reliable sources, the sources I started trusting somewhat more than others since we had a repetitive positive experience. As time passed, we started approaching each other using a mix of formal and

informal conversation. The impact of these sources on the final copy was significant, but they were often not mentioned in the text — either due to their title or to the type of contribution they made.

This greatly expanded the definition of the human source in my eyes and showed me its multifaceted role. The sources and contributions quoted and attributed in the content were just a fraction of the source work. A lot of contributors influencing the media content remain invisible in it, despite their input being significant (Carlson 2011). Another aspect that is invisible for the audience is the social ties connecting a journalist and a source. Relationships with some sources can encompass several different contexts and last for years. Access to actors in close relationships can seem to be easier since it is more informal. At the same time, informality presupposes more flexibility in the boundaries of the professional role, adaptation, and more intuitive understanding of each other's expectations and unwritten rules that underly the cooperation (Misztal 2005; Ledeneva 2018). These relationships can be suspected or expected to influence the form, content and outcome of the cooperation in terms of media content, but they are difficult to measure or map. This realization motivated this research on the informal and invisible: the role of social relationships between journalists and their political sources.

In the newsroom, my senior colleagues would attend multi-day, semi-formal political congresses at a lake. They did not always come back with a story, but those trips enabled them to predict events and be one step ahead of their competitors when following the official political agenda. In editorial meetings, those journalists used to drop some names in such a familiar manner that it took me some time to realize that they were not referring to some common contributors to the magazine but rather their sources. They contacted those sources

early for advice on which topics were worth pursuing or at the last minute, right before submission, to fill any gaps in the text.

As a newly graduated journalist, my strongest social ties were to young professionals in other professions. I was curious to see what young diplomats, artists, doctors and teachers were talking about after work. Once, I happened to hear a story about an organization that won a public competition to host a course. The course was financed by public money, but it never took place. To be able to keep the money, the course organizers focused on the paperwork and handed out certificates to people who were never invited to attend a single lecture. I was strictly told that any leak of this information to the newsroom would end our friendship. It was a struggle between two social roles I held at the same time (Lewicki, McAllister and Bies 1998): a journalist and a friend. While my social network had given me access to some information, balancing between multiple roles and loyalties could become a puzzle.

I was able to quickly conclude that sourcing the news is primarily a social practice. It is a routine and a ritual (Westlund and Ekström 2019; Tuchman 1972) to a high degree embedded in the social norms typical for a certain context — from the national culture to the professional culture (Pfetsch 2014) and the micro-culture of a certain professional beat (Reich 2012) or even a newsroom. I also realized that even if I could have gotten the direct number to an important source from a colleague, that source would be willing to share less information with me than with my senior colleague whom he has known for many years. On the other hand, I could be more critical when judging whether the issues the source points out are indeed important and truthful — I was not attached by any social strings.

The types of relationships that connect journalists and sources affect how journalists can access, interpret and use information. Journalists and sources not only enact their professional roles but also develop social roles with one another. Therefore, relationships that are ever-present behind the content are an invisible yet crucial part of the profession. Understanding the interactions and motives that remain behind the news should shed more light on why the story looks the way it does.

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In the introductory chapter, I first look into the research on the social aspects of journalist-source relationships and the concepts of formality and informality (2). I then discuss how the relationships could be seen as a variable in the analysis of journalists' professional role by looking into the analytical levels of role orientations and role performance (Hanitzsch and Vos 2017) (2.1). This leads to the research questions (3). The concept of power, and contradictive links, between autonomy and adaptation provides the background for understanding journalist-source relationships (4). The interaction between journalists and sources is a routine that has received extensive attention from researchers, here classified into hegemonic, exchange and role relationship approaches (5). However, there are some gaps in these research approaches, which motivates the research on how the journalists' professional role is renegotiated through the social role they might hold with some of their sources (6). This section finalizes the theoretical part of this introduction and leads to the methods used in this research (7). The disposition of the results follows the normative and cognitive (articles 1 and 2), performative (articles 3 and 4), and narrative (article 5) levels of analysis (8). The introductory chapter concludes with a discussion of the results and conclusions (9).

2 Formal and informal relationships between journalists and sources as an element of the professional culture

To paraphrase Schudson (2011), the news starts not in the newsroom, but where the sources are. More specifically, it begins with the interaction between journalists and their sources where some topics are identified as potentially newsworthy. Journalists encounter some of their sources only episodically, while relationships with other sources involve several social contexts and roles. The political beat, where both reporters and sources interact on a regular basis, where the actors have years of experience in the field, and where opinions can turn into news and facts depend on interpretation (Dick 2012; Reich 2012; Arceneaux et al. 2019), is an arena where interactions play a special role. In the short term, the way journalists or sources approach each other in a given context is professional know-how, a tactical choice for how to interact to achieve the intended goals. In the long term, relationships between journalists and sources can be seen as a vital part of the strategic rituals in the news construction (Tuchman 1978), where some frames of reality become more dominant in the public sphere than others (Berkowitz 2019).

The relational perspective, including the potential of social proximity between journalists and their political sources and the role of this proximity in sourcing the news, has received more attention only recently (Baugut 2019; Baugut and Reinemann 2013; Van Aelst et al. 2010; Davis 2009). Building close social relationships with journalists as part of sources' tactics for maintaining efficient relationships with the media has been approached by Maurer and

Beiler (2018). They used surveys and qualitative interviews in Austria and found that politicians are more likely to have closer relationships with the journalists they perceive as sharing their views. Casero-Ripolles and Lopes-Rabadan (2019) find personal affinity plays a role in the cooperation quality between journalists and politicians in Spain by using in-depth interviews with journalists and political actors. Perceived homophily between journalists and their political sources makes the sources more credible in the eyes of journalists (Hellmueller 2014), which in turn might increase the regular reliance on these sources. It is possible to take from these studies that closer relationships potentially lead to types of cooperation that are not purely formal.

This thesis uses *informality* as a broad term that refers to relational ties exceeding the boundaries of the formal professional role in the cooperation (both the process and the content of interaction). In the literature, the definition of informality often derives from an opposition to formality (Ledeneva 2018). *Formality* refers to ceremonial and often codified rules and procedures created in order to reduce uncertainty (Misztal 2005). Ideally, all formal relationships should be comparable to each other in terms of the extent and content of possible exchange. In other words, a source would share the same amount of information with all of the journalists he or she knows only via formal ties. A journalist, meanwhile, would access and treat all sources known formally in the same manner and make the same ethical considerations when it comes to source protection or how the information provided by a source can be used. These decisions would be based on established and defined professional criteria rather than the motives related to the relationship with the source. Informality, meanwhile, is related to more intuitive, flexible and casual interactions that rely more on tacit

knowledge than prescribed norms (Misztal 2000). In some cases, informality is understood as less transparent and less observable than an official, formal scene (Misztal 2000). However, informality in this research does not refer to invisibility. Rather, it means the extra social quality that exceeds the formal distance that normative journalist (watchdog) vs. source (promotion of own interests and seeking a certain type of publicity for themselves or the issues they promote) roles imply. In contrast to formality, informal social ties would mean more flexibility and interpersonal adaptation between the individual actors. It is also worth noting that the definitions of formality and informality presented here should be understood as ideal, theoretical categories. In practice, most relationships land somewhere in between the two extremes.

More experienced field reporters, and those that rely more on commentary than event reporting, tend to establish stronger informal networks with sources (Lück et al. 2018). Some research also finds that sources using different forms of informality to achieve professional goals also seem to perceive this to be more important than the sources who rely purely on formal relationships (Kim and Bae 2006). A study conducted in a South Korean context showed that PR professionals and journalists have different views regarding ethics of informality in their relationships. The sources are reportedly more positive in general about different forms of informal exchange than the journalists would admit (Shin and Cameron 2003). This result can also be interpreted as the importance of being aware of the willingness to report normatively preferred behavior. Sources tend to overreport good and efficient relationships, and journalists tend to overreport autonomy from the sources.

The degree of access between journalists and their sources, as well as the norms driving their interaction, can differ from one context to another (Pfetsch 2014). While the nature of the social relationships between the human actors can be expected to be a somewhat general phenomenon (Berger 2005, Lewicki et al. 2006), the forms of informality that are practiced and accepted in a professional setting can be highly context dependent (Ledeneva 2018). Cammarano and Medrano (2014) measured the relationships and social proximity between journalists and politicians via surveys in a number of European countries, showing that tendencies of social proximity between journalists and their sources can differ in different journalism and political communication contexts. The size of the country could influence what types of relationships connect journalists and their sources and how these relationships are used. In small states, social proximity is expected to be a stronger factor (Ólafsson 2020) than in bigger states where the professional closeness is commonly explained by looking into professional interactions within institutional sites of power (Schudson and Waisbord 2003).

2.1 Journalist-source relationships as a variable in role orientations and performance

Proximity and distance between journalists and their sources can be viewed as part of a larger picture of a certain professional culture: “a particular set of ideas and practices by which journalists legitimate their role in society and render their work meaningful” (Hanitzsch 2007, p. 369). The way journalists (and sources) see their own normative and cognitive roles in the relationships guides what

relationships and exchange within those relationships they perceive as acceptable.

For this reason, journalist-source relationships can be analyzed on two levels: **role orientations** (consisting of normative and cognitive roles) and **role performance** (consisting of practiced and narrated roles), as suggested by Hanitzsch and Vos (2017). Normative roles here refer to aggregate expectations that journalists believe are desirable in a society and are essential in journalism's contract with the public. Hanitzsch and Vos (2017, p.118) point out that normative roles appear external to individual journalists and correspond to a shared picture of "what journalists *ought* to do." In the next step, individual journalists selectively internalize the normative roles into their own cognitive scripts, which then translate into their values: "what journalists *want* to do." Cognitive roles are more sensitive to the journalists' individual experience, professional environment, and expectations within that environment, and this might result in some discrepancy between normative and cognitive roles.

Empirical studies have repeatedly demonstrated that world views and a person's own perception of a role can differ from the way these roles are enacted in practice (Mellado and Mothes 2021; Schudson 2001; Hellmueller 2014), here called *role performance*. Therefore, while values guide the performance, they are enacted only to a certain extent, and disparity between values and practices can depend on both external and internal pressures, including those of political or commercial character as well as established organizational routines.

Role performance, consists according to Hanitzsch and Vos (2017) of actual practices (what journalists *do*) and narrated practices (what they *say they do*). The narrations derive on one hand from how the

actors reflect on their performance but also from how they negotiate these practices in relation to the values (how they think they *should* behave). As a result, these narrations can influence the collective normative understanding of what journalists are and should be. Therefore, normative, cognitive, practiced and narrated roles are connected to each other in a circular manner and can be viewed as a process model (Hanitzsch and Vos 2017, p. 123). First, the journalists internalize the norms into their own values (orientations). Then, they attempt to enact those values, and some of the values turn into practice more successfully than others. Narrations of the practice reflect a negotiated picture between the cognitive roles and actual behavior. Through these narrations, the roles get discursively articulated and therefore contribute to a normative perception of who a journalist should be; thus, they are a part of a journalism culture.

This research intends to capture these transitions. First, this study explores how journalists covering politics and their sources *perceive* their relationships with each other from both the normative and the cognitive perspective (role orientations). Later, by looking into the performative level, it controls how those perceptions are enacted in *practice* by looking at how journalists used their formal and informal social ties with their sources in specific news situations. Third, this study analyzes journalists' *reflections* regarding practices by analyzing the motives that made journalists trust or distrust the sources in different social and news contexts. Following the model proposed by Hanitzsch and Vos (2017), these perceptions, practices and motives, via journalists' narratives, can be viewed as an indicator of norms regarding formality and informality in journalist-source relationships and thus discussed as a component of a journalistic and political communication culture.

3 Aim

This research aims to explore how different types of social relationships between journalists and their sources are reflected in political reporters' role orientations and performance in Lithuania and Sweden.

The research questions follow the analytical levels of the process model of journalistic roles (Hanitzsch and Vos 2017): role orientations (normative and cognitive) and role performance (practice and narrations about practice).

- How do journalists and their political sources **perceive** their relationships and interactions with each other?
- How do they apply and **practice** different types of relationships and interactions in specific news situations?
- What motives and **reflections** guide the journalists' interactions with sources in different relational contexts?

First, through qualitative interviews with journalists and representatives of the political sources, this research addresses perceptions, or *internalization*, between normative and cognitive parts of the role orientation: how journalists and their sources believe they should work or how they think they work with each other. What type of social relationships are perceived as legitimate? (Articles 1, 2)

This part of the research touches on how journalists and sources see their roles in the context of professionalizing political communication, where the commercialization of the media and market-logics in politics leave their tracks (Kleis Nielsen and Kuhn 2013; Garsten et al. 2015;

Davis 2019). Relationships here are discussed as a possible advantage when navigating the maze of formalization and centralization of government communication routines, which restricted access to the media increased the number of intermediaries and resulted in more, but shallower, social ties between a journalist and the source (Davis 2010). Commercial pressures to produce more content, preferably exclusive, for more channels and with fewer resources could potentially influence the relationships with the sources (Davies 2008; Franklin 2011). On one hand, in this context, relationship-building between journalists and sources, can be an asset in terms of efficiency. At the same time, though, the same relationships might be viewed as a time-intensive luxury (McManus 1994) and an ethical dilemma.

Second, the reconstruction interviews with political beat reporters provide a picture of how these norms are *enacted* in practice. Based on the reconstruction of over 500 journalist-source interactions, this part controls how different forms of social ties and interaction come into play in specific news situations and the purposes for which they are used. (Articles 3, 4)

This part views interactional preferences as a tactical and strategical choice made by both journalists and sources to achieve professional goals (to access or share the information) (Arceneoux et al. 2019). Do informal ties mean potentially more publicity for the source or, to the contrary, do they help to build the agenda while staying in the background? Then, by reconstructing the news discovery, it looks at how the composition and presence of different types of single and multiplex social ties with the sources is reflected in what and whose news gets discovered, given that different social ties can transfer different types of knowledge (Hansen 1999). What kind of knowledge

can be transferred via different social ties and in what situations? What contributions are made via different social ties?

Third, the study addresses motives and *reflections* related to these practices. Via reconstruction interviews, the study explores how different types of relationships and interactions deriving from those relationships are part of the journalist's decision to trust the source in different contexts. What are the components of trust between journalists and their sources in situational/general and formal/informal contexts? (Article 5)

While hypothetically assuming that the closer and more informal the relationship, the more sensitive the information acquired, the more risk involved and the more trust needed (Misztal 1996), it is also possible to expect that the motives for trust (and distrust) might differ depending on the relational ties as well as the specific news context when evaluating the source's trustworthiness.

In order to avoid generalizations regarding the patterns that are common for the profession and those that are context-dependent (Esser and Hanitzsch 2012), this study explores in what way the practice of informal relationships between journalists and their sources differ in Lithuania and Sweden (more regarding the country context in the Method section).

While some studies focus particularly on the informal relationships or the sources that contribute off the record (Dindler 2015; Woodward 2005), there are good reasons to view visible and invisible and formal and informal contributions together. The interactions that lie behind the contributions different sources make to the media content and the type of relationships that lead to these interactions are always invisible

to the audience in the journalistic routines. Meanwhile, the context that is constructed via informal or invisible interactions influences the frames in which the visibly and formally contributing sources are presented. Therefore, visibility and invisibility, as well as formality and informality, are interrelated (Ledeneva 2018), and the formal structures and possible flaws in these structures influence how the informality will be practiced in society. Trying to map the informal practices on their own would provide an incomplete picture of the professional practice in journalistic/political communication culture. Likewise, focusing only on media content and the sources visible in it does not reveal what paths were taken to produce the content (in terms of background sources used, reluctant sources, the contribution by the press advisors and, of course, the relationships with all the actors that might influence their selection and contribution). In this sense, media content can be compared to the journalistic facade, the on-stage performance, which will not be complete without considering the story behind the news.

In order to understand how visible and invisible contributors rely on formal or informal interactions when accessing journalists, this thesis uses as its starting point a categorization of the social ties connecting journalists and their sources based on their content (formal and informal, depending both on the form and content of potential exchanges via the tie), and how the sources behind those ties get to contribute to the news content (by being visible — attributed by name, or invisible — unattributed or mentioned as anonymous sources in the media content; more regarding these definitions in the article 3 in this thesis) (Table 1). Later, the thesis explores the perceptions of obligations and norms regarding the contributions made/acquired via these different ties.

Source visibility	Formal relationship	Informal relationship
Visible	The relationship/interaction with a source is formal. The source is quoted in a story with their name.	The relationship/interaction with a source is informal. The source is quoted in the story with their name.
Invisible	The relationship/interaction with a source is formal. The source is not mentioned in the story.	The relationship/interaction with a source is informal. The source is not mentioned in the story.

Table 1. A model for a matrix of source visibility vs. relationship quality, divided into four types of interaction.

4 Human sources in the news construction: power, autonomy and adaptation

The definition of a *human source* applies to “any person (...) that provides information to journalists” (Lashmar 2019, p. 1467). Given that each interaction can potentially trigger a news idea or change a course in the newsgathering, the definition of the human source in this research is also broad in order to encompass all possible contributors, even when their contribution is minor or initially unintentional. It includes both attributed and unattributed actors who supply journalists with information, advise on topics, help interpret facts or statistics, or act as brokers to other sources. Even though some definitions of the human source refer only to the “representatives of agents outside journalism whom journalists seek out in order to get the information necessary to produce the news” (Örnebring and Karlsson 2022, p. 139.), it is not unusual for news or ideas on topics that could turn into the news to reach reporters from colleagues in their own or a different newsroom (Reich 2009), which was relevant for this research. Therefore, even actors within journalism can be viewed as sources.

Journalists’ frames of reality derive from their news organization and sources (Zelizer 1993). While reporters apply interpretative tools (frames) to select and turn down the events to report (Fishman 1997, originally 1982), these frames are constructed through a socialization with the other actors from the journalists’ social and professional network (McClurg et al. 2017). Some of the subjects and events can immediately meet the classical news criteria and be reported. Other topics develop over a longer period of time via repetitive encounters

with those topics in the socialization with the sources. Therefore, in order to understand one of the most central subjects in journalism research — whose frames become dominant and whose tend to fade away — it is important to analyze socialization between journalists and sources in its broadest sense.

Historically, the discussion about journalist-source relationships mainly focused on the discussion of *power*. Is it the journalists or the sources, and, more specifically, which journalists and which sources, who have the power to define the dominant frames of reality (Berger and Luckmann 1966), and how do they achieve it? The classical comparison described the journalist-source relationship as the tango and asked who is leading it (Gans 1979). This question motivated researchers to follow how this power is exercised during the different steps of the news production. They found that at the beginning of the story creation, the sources have more power to decide whether they will share or withhold information. The journalists become more powerful at the end of the process when they are gathering the subsequent information and editing it (Strömbäck and Nord 2005; Reich 2009).

Both journalists and sources are part of a broader discourse — social networks — where each connection opens access to new information and each contact can lead to new sources. The contributors in those networks, via their discursive power, can “introduce, amplify and maintain topics, frames and speakers to dominate ongoing political discourse” (Jungherr et al. 2019, p. 17). The source’s contribution can also be understood broadly: while providing quotes to the media is one of the most common examples, speaking off the record, referring to background facts, acting as a broker to other sources, and explicit refusal to take part after being contacted by a

journalist also influence the news-gathering process and therefore are considered in this study to be a contribution. All these actions influence (or exert power over) what topics are or are not discovered, what angles become dominant, what speakers appear or stay invisible, and whether the journalists will choose to return to the same topics or sources in the future. Interactions with sources provide journalists with facts or opinions and influence the media's agenda building (Tuchman 1978; Fishman 1980; Zoch and Molleda 2009; Berkowitz 2019; Arceneaux et al. 2019), or, in other words, what news reaches the media. Consequently, these interactions are reflected in the agenda setting in terms of what news gets reported and, thus, potentially influences public opinion (McCombs and Shaw 1993; Wanta et al. 2004).

Many of the sources that influence the content stay in the background of the journalistic workshop and are not visible there (Carlson 2011). The form of invisibility varies. Some of sources receive no attribution at all, while others are only partly invisible, for example, by referring to an organization they represent. There is a range of motives for invisibility. On the one hand, sources are sometimes not named in the texts due to their legal right to remain anonymous in order to report misconduct (Allern and Pollack 2019), because they are challenging their own organization's public position or integrity (Lashmar 2019), or they are tactically providing off-the-record information while staying outside of the content (Carlson 2011; Dindler 2015; Hubé 2017). On the other hand, journalists might avoid referring to sources in order to conceal the shortcuts they have taken in their work with their sources, either by using some expert knowledge as their own voice (Allern and Pollack 2019) or relying on information subsidies (Arceneaux et al. 2019). While the option for source invisibility might allow journalists to access information that

otherwise would not be available, this can be problematic since the audience cannot critically evaluate the competence or interests of the sources behind the information (Carlson 2011).

The tango metaphor, however, calls for a closer look into two other contrasting but interrelated concepts: *autonomy* and *adaptation*. Being autonomous means having the power to take independent decisions and act without external pressures to this action (Christman 2020). Adaptation, meanwhile, is a reaction to given circumstances and an integral part of any social interaction (Berger 2005). The study of journalist-source relationships calls for looking at how both parties achieve their power while balancing autonomy and adaptation in their daily decision making.

Journalist-source professional roles presuppose their autonomy from each other, even if only at a level of a theoretical ideal (Örnebring and Karlsson 2022). In reality, full autonomy is impossible due to the nature of the profession; journalists need the sources to gather the information and in that sense cannot act without cooperation from them. For this reason, the discussion about autonomy is more of a discussion of independency from some *types* of the sources, as Örnebring and Karlsson (2022) point out. A major part of the earlier research on the journalists' autonomy from sources, as well as journalistic ethical codes, tend to focus on the pressures from the political elite or restrictions or economic incentives that might strengthen some voices at the expense of others (Örnebring and Karlsson 2022). Subtler forms of social interdependencies between journalists and sources that do not belong to these elite groups are somewhat underplayed. Unlike political or monetary pressure, social pressures are frequently self-imposed and therefore are harder to identify or measure.

The definition in the natural sciences of *adaptation* as the fit between an organism and its environment (Lloyd 2021) or the “process of changing to fit some purpose or situation,”¹ is applicable even in a social context. There, adaptation refers to navigating social rules and expectations in a way that makes it possible to achieve desired goals. In the case of journalists, accessing sources and thus acquiring new information means surviving in professional competition. Sources, in turn, seek to maintain access to the media to make their voice heard when competing with the other voices in the public sphere. Indeed, the literature on journalist-source relations describes the processes of adaptation (even though it does not necessarily use the concept of adaptation) at different levels of analysis. A clear example of such adaptation at the macro level is mediatization processes (Esser and Strömbäck 2014; Asp and Bjerling 2014), where the politics adapt to the media logics, both in terms of processes and content. At the organizational level, the adaptation can be easily illustrated by observing how political sources, through investment in professional communication departments, tend to master the media logic that allows them to fulfill their goals at an optimal level (Nygren and Niemikari 2019). Information management at the organizational level means that it is often the sources who decide what information can be shared as well as when and to which media (Arceneaux et al. 2019). On the other hand, media is dependent on the sources, and on a handful of elite sources in particular, and tends to reproduce their views (Bennet 1990; Bennet, Lawrence and Livingston 2006). Newsrooms adapt their schedules and resources to the access and organizational routines of these sources. This research aims to contribute to the analysis at the interpersonal level of the adaptation between journalists

¹ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/adaptation>

and the sources by looking into both the social ties that connect them and the exchange, opportunities and obligations those social ties imply.

A *social tie* in this context refers to a connection among people used to share information and knowledge. Social ties can contain different qualities depending on the possible exchanges and interactions between the two nodes (Hennig et al. 2012; Kilduff and Tsai 2003; Scott 2013). A relationship that is strictly limited to the professional context can be described as a single-tie relationship. However, in cases where the actors know each other in several different contexts or might hold other social roles alongside the professional roles (journalist and source), for example they are former classmates, the ties are multiplex. Stronger social ties might allow the transfer of more exclusive or sensitive information (Hansen 1999), but the maintenance of such ties might also require more effort in order to maintain the relationship. The weaker the more formal ties are, the less adaptation is needed, and the more autonomy is possible. All in all, the access to any social network might mean social capital (Borgatti et al. 2013; Hennig et al. 2012) in terms of resources that can be acquired via the network, but it also might be a limitation since it presupposes certain adaptation in order to maintain access to the network. While the actors that are perceived to be powerful are expected to also be more autonomous, this autonomy is never absolute. The journalists and sources have to navigate in a competitive social and professional environment, and they are therefore more autonomous from some actors while simultaneously adapting to others. This makes it interesting to study the reasoning that encourages or delimits the social adaptation between them in their interactions with each other.

5 Research on journalist-source relationships

Sourcing the news is one of the core journalistic routines. Routines are generally associated with patterns of action — defined by structural constellations or, to the contrary, shaped via social practices. However, these two approaches do not have to exclude each other. Routines can both “precede and shape social activities,” according to Westlund and Ekström (2019). In other words, social ties that connect journalists and sources can be viewed as an outcome of the established economic, political and cultural structures. At the same time, the social ties and routines enabled by them could be a constitutive part of these structures. For example, social relationships between journalists and sources can influence how the government communication departments or newsrooms organize their work by taking into account the existence of these relationships.

The overview of the earlier research, here divided into *hegemonic*, *exchange* and *role relationship* approaches, however, shows that the research has had more of a focus on the external circumstances precluding the social relationships than on the impact these relationships could have on the structures. This could be because of limited knowledge about the social exchange between journalists and sources that takes place in parallel to the professional exchange. This research aims to address this gap.

The *hegemonic* perspective analyzes how the resourceful elite sources hold dominant power over media content (Hall et al. 1978; Bennet 1990). This research focused on how different types of sources compete with each other for the media’s (and thus the public’s) attention as well as the strategies they deploy to achieve this.

According to the hegemonic perspective, relationships between journalists and sources are dependent on structures: political and market positions and elite grouping. The visibility of certain sources in the media here was often equalized with the source's power, concluding that elite sources are more common than other types of sources in the media (Manning 2001; Owens 2008; Shoemaker and Reese 2013; Iyengar 2019; Oh et al. 2021). The sources that had more resources to supply information subsidies in the form of pre-prepared content could be stronger agenda builders than those who lack such resources (Turk 1986; Curtin 1999; Lewis, Williams and Franklin 2008). Limited resources also mean that market logic might be dominant over the journalistic logic (McManus 1994) since newsrooms often rely on news subsidies to save time and effort; this is necessary when actively gathering information from a number of different human sources.

While representatives of the hegemonic approach do not deny the role of relationships between journalists and their sources, they view individual actors as dependent on the circumstances that derive from the structures. According to this approach, the quality of the relationships, including relationships within the elite circles, is an outcome of the structural factors rather than a social practice that potentially shapes those structures.

The *exchange approach* views the journalist-source relationship as a transaction, where information is shared in exchange for publicity (Gans 1979; Sigal, 1986; Ericson et al. 1989; Blumler and Gurevitch 1995). This approach focuses on a specific type of cooperation between actors who are pursuing different professional goals. However, both sides have something to trade; while the sources hold a monopoly on information, the media is the main gatekeeper bridging the gap between politicians and their electorate.

Leaving aside that the current developments in media and politics have significantly reduced this monopoly (Davis 2019), the exchange approach seldom considers that the exchange between journalists and their sources is not limited to information in exchange for publicity. Indeed, the closer and more established the relationship between the actors, the more complex the exchange we can expect (Hansen 1999), both in terms of what knowledge can be transferred and social adaptation. Political reporters offering political business intelligence to some of their regular sources is one example (Davis 2009).

Second, focusing on the exchange in journalist-source relationships risks taking for granted that both sides have a somewhat equal interest in cooperation. This potentially ignores the fact that the exchange takes place in many cases without an immediate benefit for at least one of the sides. For example, a journalist might need information from a source who does not particularly benefit (or even is at risk) from sharing it. A source might also seek media attention for a topic that ordinary news selection mechanisms would tend to ignore. In these situations, the argument of offering publicity in exchange of information is not enough of a motivation. However, the cooperation may still take place due to the long-term relationship, social adaptation or other factors that exchange theory risks downplay. The exchange approach, therefore, is more suitable for explaining journalist-source interactions as separate events of cooperation related to a particular news item rather than analyzing long-term socialization.

The third category, the *role relationship approach*, introduces the idea that the relationship between a journalist and a source is not a singular event but a complex, ongoing social relationship where both sides adapt to each other (Blumler and Gurevitch 1981; Reich 2009). This is especially relevant for beat reporting, where journalists encounter the

same sources on a repetitive basis partly due to the limited circle of potential sources, but even more so due to the improved efficiency of relying on the same sources (Reich 2009; Reich 2012; Dick 2012; Barnoy and Reich 2020). For beat reporters in particular, some sources are more familiar than others. This study derives from the role relationship approach since it views interactions between journalists and sources as an ongoing relationship rather than an exchange event related to a specific news item.

However, all three research approaches discussed above tend to view journalists and sources as rather homogenous groups, dependent on the structural circumstances (hegemonic), in a similar position for exchange (exchange), or performing a given professional role (role relationship). This study aims to challenge this picture. The majority of the earlier studies have not sufficiently taken into account that the role conception of individual journalists, when it comes to specific interactions, is not limited to their personal characteristics, organizational realities and general structural context. Instead, interaction between a journalist and a source is by nature a social phenomenon, dependent on reciprocal perception of each other, relationship development, history and expectations for the future. In other words, interactions between journalist and sources can be analyzed as social practices – “patterns of learned behavior” that enable the actors to “create, distribute, manage, maintain or share a resource, due to mutual responsiveness to each other’s behavior and the resource in question as interpreted through meanings/shared cultural schemas” (Haslanger 2018, p. 245). In the context of journalism, “resource” refers first of all to information and knowledge. Treating journalist-source interactions as social practice would emphasize a link

between the actors' professional role and their agency to act in a certain way while being responsive to each other and the interactional context.

For journalists, interaction with sources is a vital part of the journalistic role performance. This performance is the "manifestation of professional ideals in journalistic practice (...) which can be influenced by different internal and external factors" (Mellado et al. 2020, p. 554). The role conception a journalist might hold regarding political sources can vary where the critical watchdog (scrutinizing the power) is at one end and a loyal facilitator (conveying the views of the sources) or activist (promoting these views) is at the other end. While many authors find a clear discrepancy between the role conception and role performance (Mellado and Mothes 2021; Van Dalen et al. 2012), this discrepancy usually is seen as a result of structural circumstances rather than a phenomenon that derives from the social relationships between journalists and reporters as individual agents who, via relationships, can navigate those circumstances. However, according to Raemy and Vos (2021), the actors continuously negotiate their roles and adapt them to the situation and context. This thesis proposes that journalist-source interactions can be viewed as an empirical context for such negotiation. It fills a gap by exploring whether the quality of the social relationships between journalists and their sources is reflected in the way sources contribute to the news.

Existing studies on trust between journalists and their sources indicate that the relationship between social ties and contributions sources make via those ties might exist. So-called routine sources, with whom communication is regular, are more likely to be evaluated as more credible than other sources, even though the cause-and-effect relationship is uncertain (Wintterlin 2020). Journalists tend to be less strict when verifying information from the sources they perceive as

credible (Barnoy and Reich 2020). In turn, sources seek to establish trust-based connections with journalists. In this case, journalist-source relationships can be compared to lobbying, where journalists and sources invest in building their relationships with the expectation of future benefits (Nothhaft 2017). Making a journalist receptive to the information, as well as building trust so the source is willing to share it, is an important part of the work. Despite that, we know too little how the process of this relationship building is reflected in day-to-day sourcing routines and the media content.

This study suggests that the differing quality of social ties connecting journalists and the sources might play a role in how journalists balance between normative scripts of autonomy ideals and social scripts of adaptation. This calls for analyzing news construction and news sources, alongside the professional role performance, as a social interaction. Rather than focusing on the structural or organizational factors or personal characteristics that a particular journalist or a source has, this research looks into the relationships and the qualities of the relationships they establish and how the existence of these relationships is reflected in professional practice, the opportunities they provide, and the limitations they impose.

6 The professional and the social: overlap, complement or take over

Each encounter between a journalist and a human source is not only an encounter between the professional roles, but also in parallel a social interaction. The normative and cognitive scripts for this interaction derive from the professional roles (Hanitzsch and Vos 2017). The social nature of the news construction adds a level of subjectivity that is described by the theories on interpersonal communication (Berger 2005). Some of the important aspects from these theories for this research are reciprocity, in terms of how the actors perceive each other; reflexivity, in terms of how they adapt their behavior to each other; and multiplexity, in terms of the interaction potentially including several goals and motives at the same time. This section intends to discuss these possible connections, which later on are tested empirically in the different articles of this thesis.

When it comes to the level of **role orientations**, journalists and sources assess how they can approach each other based on the “social norms, social prescriptions, individuated knowledge about the other’s behavior as well as functions or goals” (Berger 2005, p. 419). These norms are related to the norms accepted within their professional (but also social) environment and how the actors perceive their own (professional and social) role(s) in the particular context. The own role is viewed in relation to the role of the other. A journalist might reflect on whether a source lives up to their role, as this role is perceived by the journalist. A source, in turn, evaluates whether the journalist lives up to the role of a journalist.

Based on the role conceptions, a journalist should see how close their relationships with a source can be (from a watchdog, which would expect a strict social distance, to, for example, an activist regarding a particular issue, where a journalist and a source could find themselves striving for the same goal). At the same time, pre-existing social ties with some sources might make journalists renegotiate their professional roles in the context of these particular relationships. Therefore, internalization of professional norms into cognitive scripts that define journalist-source interaction is negotiated with the norms that guide the social interaction between human agents in general.

At the **performative** level, interaction presupposes reciprocal adaptation. Interpersonal adaptation theories point out that “social action is governed by the norm of reciprocity that obligates individuals engaged in social exchange to help and not harm those who help them” (Berger 2005, p. 418, referring to Gouldner 1960). The more one actor behaves as expected, the more likely the other actor will be willing to adapt and behave in the manner that they perceive is expected of them. In a journalistic context, it could be that helpful and credible sources will have a better chance of getting their message through or being contacted again (Reich 2011; Barnoy and Reich 2020). On the other hand, when the expectations are not met, the compensation mechanisms come into play, for example by adversarial formulation of the interview questions when interviewing reluctant politicians (Ekström and Tolson 2017). This research therefore looks how the elements of social norms are reflected in the interaction between journalists and sources within a professional context.

The **reflection** on practice focuses on the motives behind specific interactions, as narrated by the actors themselves. Those narrations are always subjective and include justification of the choices made based

on the actors' cognitive scripts — their values and perceptions of what behavior is appropriate (Hanitzsch and Vos 2017). The reflections on social interaction could indicate that individuals might pursue (not necessarily consciously) different goals simultaneously. The more social ties that connect the actors, the larger the number of roles they hold with each other and the more multiplex the goals can be (Berger 1997; Dillard 1997). In some cases, those goals can be contradictory. A goal related to long-term relationship building in order to maintain access to information might collide with a goal to always act as an impartial and objective journalist. Reflection regarding interactions and their outcome for future relationships is closely related to whether the actor believes they live up to others' expectations (Ferrin et al. 2007). Rejecting a story suggestion from a potentially important source (not meeting the source's expectations) might potentially worsen the relationship. By analyzing the narrations, this research explores how the actors justify their choices based on the cognitive scripts (professional and social) that preceded them.

To summarize, journalists navigate between the interaction prescribed by their professional role and the more subjective social role they construct within each relationship. The social role is always unique since it is dependent on the relationship history with a particular source. Therefore, studying the interaction between journalists and their human sources can mean studying how professional roles and social roles compete, overlap and complement each other in different contexts. To address these practices, this study looks at the interactional choices the journalists and their sources make and the perceptions and motives behind these choices.

7 Approaching the informal and invisible: Method

Researching sourcing practices and interviewing elite journalists and elite press advisors presents several methodological challenges (Meyers and Davidson 2017). These challenges become even more evident when it comes to sensitive information, and in some cases even personal information, regarding the social relationships between journalists and some of their sources. These processes are also hard to grasp or measure either by surveys or via qualitative interviews since, in their narratives, the actors can either overestimate (since a social network is social capital for both the journalist and the source) or underestimate (since, normatively, distance between journalists and “the power” is expected and desired) the importance of informal and/or invisible sources, and this overestimation or underestimation is not necessarily performed consciously. Last, but not least, the processes are difficult to observe without interrupting them. It is therefore important to find methods that are the most suitable for accessing the levels of role conception and performance.

First, in articles 1 and 2, the research approaches *the perceptions* (Table 2). Via qualitative interviews with journalists covering politics and representatives of the political sources (governmental press advisors), this study looks into how the journalists and sources perceive their roles, what norms and values guide their relationships with each other, and how they relate to the contextual pressures, for example professionalizing government communication and commercializing the media market. In other words, this method approaches the role orientation and addresses the question, *how do journalists and sources think they work?*

Process	Internalization	Enactment	Reflection
Level of analysis	Normative and cognitive	Performance	Narrated performance
Research questions	How journalists and their sources think they <i>do</i> work? How journalists think they <i>should</i> work?	How do journalists <i>work</i> in concrete situations? How do formal and informal social relationships play a role in sourcing the news?	What are the <i>motives</i> behind the actual practice?
Articles	1, 2	3, 4	3, 4, 5
Method and data	43 qualitative interviews with journalists and political source representatives in Lithuania and Sweden	33 reconstruction interviews with journalists in Lithuania and Sweden	33 reconstruction interviews with journalists in Lithuania and Sweden

Table 2. Different levels of analysis in the articles of the PhD thesis.

In order to approach *practices and performance* (articles 3 and 4) and get as realistic a picture as possible of the news-making routines without interfering with these routines due to the sensitive nature of source protection, this research required a method that would keep the journalists' narratives as close to real news production situations as possible. Reconstruction interviews (Reich 2009; Reich and Barnoy 2020), with detailed, fact-based questions about each journalist-source interaction that took place while producing specific stories, suited this purpose. The interactions of interest for this study included contact with both attributed and unattributed sources, with people who acted as brokers to the other sources, and people who were contacted by a journalist but explicitly refused to contribute, since all these interactions and relationships play a role in both the text in the final story and the construction of the journalists' frames of reality regarding the specific issues. The reconstruction of the different steps of the story production made it possible to register *how journalists worked in specific situations*.

The last research question in this research addresses is the *narrated performance*, or the question of how journalists motivate *why they chose to work in a certain way* (article 5). This part of the research looks at how and why journalists chose to trust or distrust their sources in different contexts. It combines quantitative and qualitative information acquired via the open questions in the reconstruction interviews, and the participants were asked to describe in their own words why they (dis)trusted certain sources in the reconstructed interactions and explain their own trust for those sources even at a more general level, without relating it to a specific story.

A combination of qualitative, semi-structured interviews and reconstruction interviews that included both structured and

quantifiable but also qualitative and open-ended questions provided links between the different analytical levels. The first part of the research (articles 1 and 2) covers the internalization between norms and values as perceived by journalists and their sources. The reconstruction interviews (articles 3 and 4) look into how those values are enacted in practice, in concrete news-making contexts. The qualitative parts of the reconstruction interviews (predominantly covered by article 5 but to some extent also articles 3 and 4), connect practices and narrations about these practices (motives) and illustrates the reflexive interconnectedness between the analytical categories of the process model of journalistic roles (Hanitzch and Vos 2017) (Table 2).

7.1 Invisibility and informality in a comparative context

Similarly to news content, social interactions depend on the interplay between the different levels of influences (Shoemaker and Reese 2013): societal and professional culture, including micro-culture of a specific news beat, organizational circumstances, and differences between individual reporters/sources. In order not to misjudge the role of informal or invisible contributions based on a sample taken only from one context, it was advantageous to repeat the same research steps in at least two countries with different degrees of professionalization in both journalism and the political communication; in this case, Lithuania and Sweden. While this analysis does not treat these countries as very different or very similar, the discussion of how informality/invisibility comes into play in two contexts allows for more critical reflection on what practices might be context dependent and

what practices are more universal part of journalistic profession and sourcing the news.

A brief background on the countries could help in the interpretation of the findings (more details can be found in article 3). Both Lithuania and Sweden have relatively small media and political markets. Sweden has a long tradition of free press. Its level of journalistic and political communication professionalization is advanced. In terms of journalism, this could mean more defined professional roles and thus higher autonomy as well as stronger professional organizations. In political communication, this means more coordination of the political communication and a stronger role of the intermediaries in the daily press-relations (Johansson and Nygren 2019; Johansson and Raunio 2019; Nord and Grusell 2021). These factors create an expectation of larger social distance between journalists and their sources (Davis 2010).

Meanwhile, Lithuanian journalists have been transitioning from the unusual proximity of the early 1990s (both journalists and politicians strived for the same goals: country independence and democracy) to freedom of the press and professionalization. Only in recent decades have political sources in Lithuania started to establish professional PR departments (see article 2). In comparison to Sweden, we can expect to find that the social distance between Lithuanian journalists and their political sources will not be as clear.

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

resources. Coalition governments in both countries also mean more competition (Sagarzazu and Klüver 2017). Therefore, both the media and political environments in the countries could be described as competitive and generally favorable for informal and invisible interactions between media and the sources (Baugut 2019; Van Aelst et al. 2010). An empirical question is what types of sources contribute via those interactional forms: how they do it and for what reasons, and how the journalists perceive and use these contributions in the news work.

7.2 Sampling reporters and their sources

Reporters in the sample represented the largest national media in terms of audience share and the share of the political news coverage in that media in Lithuania and Sweden. The media landscapes in the two countries were somewhat different, which was taken into account when selecting the newsrooms whose journalists would allow the most representative sample of reporters covering politics. For example, in Lithuania a large part of the population consumes news online (news websites), while paper press is more popular in Sweden. This difference is reflected in the selection of journalists for the study (for more details regarding the sample please see Appendix 1). However, where possible, an attempt was made to ensure that the media outlets corresponded between the countries and that no particular type of media was dominant.

It is difficult to determine a precise number of political reporters in each country. Therefore, the selected media outlets were monitored in each of the countries for 60 days before conducting the interviews. All stories on national politics and their bylines were registered. The

reporters who were the most active during the period of selection were asked to participate in the interviews. Depending on the newsroom size, up to three reporters were contacted from each newsroom. This created a sample of the beat or de facto beat reporters, and together they produced at least 40 percent of all the news stories in the political beat in the chosen media outlets during the monitored period, which is considered here to be representative.

Another group of respondents in the qualitative interviews in the study consisted of press advisors representing the government, a number of ministries, and the former prime minister's office (Lithuania's case also included representatives from the president's office) (Appendix 1). While professional press advisors are a special group of sources (or, instead, representatives of the sources) their views should not be considered the same as the views of the politicians or other groups of political sources, their expertise in the field allowed an insight not only in their own perceptions on practices but even on expectations by the political actors whom they represent when it comes to relationship building between journalists and their sources. Not relying solely on the journalists' perceptions, therefore, provided a more complete picture regarding the norms and expectations regarding political communication in Lithuania and Sweden.

Due to the focus on productivity during a defined period of time (for reporters), or on the professional title (for the representatives of the sources), the sampling did not have specific criteria in terms of the respondents' age or gender. These details, as well as reporters' name or media (print, online, TV or radio) will not be mentioned when presenting the results. The main reason for this is ethical — to protect the anonymity of the reporters (who come from a relatively narrow professional community) as promised in their informed consent to

participate in the research. This also means that a list of the interviewees could not be included in this thesis.

7.3 Role orientations: qualitative interviews

The analysis of role perceptions includes norms and values (articles 1 and 2) and focuses on how journalists and their sources perceive their relationships with each other.

The qualitative interviews used in this part of the study were conducted by its author² in the native languages of the respondents, recorded and transcribed. Each of the interviews was about 1–1.5 hours long.

The analysis of the qualitative interviews included both deductive and inductive elements. Some of the themes were already outlined in the qualitative interview questions in order to provide comparable material from both Lithuania and Sweden (Appendix 2). These themes included:

- the perception of their own professional role and professional history;
- routines and tasks of the everyday work, common communication channels and procedures;
- perception of the relationships between journalists and the political sources (symbiotic vs. adversarial; formal vs. informal);

² The interviews with the Swedish press advisors were conducted together with Prof. Karl Magnus Johansson as a part of a larger research project on media-political leader relationships that was funded by the Baltic Sea Foundation.

- perceived advantages and disadvantages of different types of relationships and interactions with one other; and
- developments in the relationships between journalists and the sources in the country over time and perceived changes in the profession over time.

The inductive part of the interviews was the open coding, which enabled the identification of themes regarding trust, reciprocity, exchange and expectations related to the exchange, written and unwritten rules surrounding the journalist-source communication, self-censorship, informality (of different types) and friendships in journalist-source relationships.

Later, the data was analyzed using the model of analytic spiral (Dey 1993), following the steps of thick description (Geertz 1973, as described in Hennink, Hutter and Bailey 2020), with a focus on the *acts* (working routines and information exchange), the *own motives*, and the *perception of the motives of others* (where *others* referred to journalists (for the press advisors) and sources (for the journalists)). This was followed by an intergroup and cross-group comparison (comparing cross-group narratives in each of the countries, comparing professional group narratives cross-countries and comparing the narratives within each of the professional groups/countries). The qualitative interview method fulfilled the purpose of identifying the themes and relational aspects that the respondents perceive are important in their relationships and how they believe these aspects are reflected in their professional practice.

Conceptualizing (Hennink, Hutter and Bailey 2020) was the next step of the analysis, and it resulted in viewing the process of formalization vs. deformalization of the interactions between

journalists and the sources as a part of the cyclical and reciprocal system, where steps taken towards centralizing, coordinating and professionalizing the government communication are reflected in the new motives to seek informal and alternative information sources and vice versa (see more in articles 1 and 2, and Results 8.1.).

However, the subjectivity of the qualitative interviews poses a risk for conscious or unintended self-reporting: for example, overestimating or underestimating the importance of certain types of interactions, focusing on the exclusive and unusual (usually successful) examples, and tendencies to support the normative picture of the own professional role. It leads to the next method used in this research: the reconstruction interviews (Reich 2009; Reich and Barnoy 2020).

7.4 Performance and narrations: reconstruction interviews

The reconstruction interviews addressed the performative level. First, they made it possible to gain insight into practices by following a structured questionnaire that consisted of closed and multiple-choice questions and encouraged journalists to reconstruct in detail the production process of a specific story, from the initial idea to publication (articles 3 and 4). They produced accounts of how journalists interacted with different sources while working on selected news stories. Second, via open follow-up questions about the justification behind interactional choices and trust in the relationships, the questionnaire approached the motives guiding these practices (motives, article 5); specifically, why different types of interactions were needed and how journalists justify their trust or distrust for the source in different contexts.

For the interviews, the journalists received 7–12 articles or transcribed radio or TV stories that they had produced with a by-line during the previous month. The stories were numbered. By picking a card with a number and without revealing the number to the interviewer, the journalists answered questions about their interaction with sources while producing each story. The questions followed a questionnaire (Appendix 3). Some of the questions in the questionnaire were general and applied to the entire story (for example, the timespan between the story idea and the publication and circumstances that inspired the story). Another, major part of the questionnaire invited journalists to talk about each contact they had with different sources while producing the story. All the questions were asked in the same order, reconstructing interaction with each of the sources separately, from the initiative and means of communication to the perceptions regarding the interaction and future expectations. This allowed journalists to focus on and recall the interactional steps and reflect on each of the relationships, one by one. During the interview, which lasted 1–2 hours, the journalists talked about five stories on average, which reduced the risk that the researcher would figure out which specific story the journalist was talking about. This technique was important when considering the ethically sensitive issues related to the social proximity between journalists and their sources. The reconstruction interviews resulted in a dataset that encompasses over 500 reconstructed interactions between journalists and their sources.

All the interviews were conducted face to face in the native languages of the interviewees (Lithuanian and Swedish) by the author of this study, who also filled the questionnaires, transcribed the qualitative parts and translated them to English. The interviews were conducted during non-election periods (spring of 2016 in Lithuania

and fall of 2016 in Sweden), which made it possible to acquire a picture of the relationships and interactions that were affected as little as possible by exceptional circumstances or events.

There are three main reasons why reconstruction interviews were preferred for this research. First and foremost, the method protected the anonymity of the sources while at the same time still allowing the journalists to go into detail about their interactions/relationships in specific situations, which was the focus of the research.

Second, the method avoided interrupting the social interactions, in particular sensitive, hard, and if not impossible to observe informal interactions between journalists and sources, which would have been the case if other methods had been applied that required the presence of the researcher, like ethnographic observations and interviews.

Last but not least, the method makes it possible to connect specific practices with the motives (narratives) regarding those practices. Connecting the story genealogy to the specific news material, therefore, reduces the degree of abstract guesses regarding the scope or frequency of informality between sources and journalists, and provide data that is comparable in terms of both quantity and quality. It gives an insight into the share of the total journalist-source interactions that derive from the informal relationships or stay unmentioned in the media content.

While any form of interview is still a narrated performance, it is possible to argue that reconstruction interviews, due to their fast tempo, structure and concrete questions about specific steps in the news production, come as close to the practice as possible without

interfering and leaves little room (even though it does not rule it out) for the journalists' social desirability bias.

The focus on the social sourcing nuances and small contributions that in some cases would remain unnoticed by the journalist required some adjustments to the method:

- Not restricting the number of sources in the reconstructions. Originally, the method covers the main sources in each of the stories and usually up to five (Reich 2009). The purpose of this study was to estimate even the invisible and less conventional sourcing practices, including the “smaller” interactions with sources. This includes situations where sources act as brokers to the other sources or sources that refuse to contribute. According to the journalists, such contributions could be perceived as insignificant. However, all the actors, and the relationships with the actors, mattered for this research since the content of the social ties can be either an accelerating or a delimiting factor in accessing information. It also influences what types of information can be transferred, and it can influence how the information is perceived (Granovetter 1973; Scott 2013; Zagenczyk, Purvis, and Shoss 2015; Ho and Levesque 2005). For example, in article 4, which focuses on news discovery sources, the journalists were asked to trace the moments when the initial story idea was born. Often, journalists would assign the role of the news discovery source to the most contributing source, for example a statement by a high-ranking politician. However, this research method encouraged the journalists to remember what made them attend the event where the politician was present.

All these sourcing practices, and the relationships behind them, were registered in order to understand the net of the different types of relationships and interactions that journalists experience in their daily work. Even though the media content can be similar on the surface (what sources are attributed), the path that individual journalists need to take (number of press advisors, reluctant sources, contributions by the informal sources, the newsroom or personal network) can significantly differ from one case to another, or among the two countries, and therefore is worth measuring.

- Expanding the qualitative elements of the reconstructions. The purpose of this dissertation is both to map the prevalence of informal or invisible contributions to the media content (which could be identified via quantitative elements of the reconstruction interviews) and to evaluate the motives behind why this type of interaction is needed. It will also evaluate how journalists perceive their trust for the sources in different interactional or relational contexts. This required development of the qualitative parts of the interviews by asking additional questions to the interviewees: Why was a certain type of interaction preferred? In what way was the interaction formal/informal? How closely do you know the source outside the context of this story? How could this interaction affect the relationship in the future? These answers made it possible to remain sensitive to the nuances that the structured reconstruction questionnaire would not grasp. The time restraints on the interviewees for the reconstructions required prioritization; therefore, the stories that involved the hidden or informal source interactions, or where discrepancies between situational and general trust were reported, received more

follow-up, open-ended questions than the stories that used only formal and attributed sources. While admitting the limitation, this focus allowed the development of narratives regarding the motives and mechanisms behind the eventual peculiarities of the journalist-source relationships and non-linear nature of the sourcing practices, which served well for the purposes of this study.

7.5 On generalization and replicability

The ability to generalize and replicate the results of this PhD thesis should also be discussed. Even though the data revealed that patterns in the use of informality and invisibility in journalist-source interactions are rather similar in the analyzed countries, the contextual differences between them might be too small to say that the results would be similar in a more contrasting journalistic environment (for example, in a non-European context, in a different beat than politics, or in a much larger media and political communication environment).

Also, since the sample of the reporters and their sources was limited and split between the two countries, and due to the ethical concern to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of the study participants and their sources, this research does not intend to draw any stronger conclusions when it comes to the relationships between the reporters' age, years of experience and network of sources, even though it would be possible to study such relationships in a larger sample of reporters. There are reports that political journalists of the older generation have generally closer social contacts with the sources, while their younger colleagues tend to be more detached (Kantola 2013). It leaves a knowledge gap, whether the tendencies to have closer social contacts depend on a professional culture specific to that

generation of journalists, or, vice versa, the years spent within the career presuppose closer and closer social ties with some of the sources. Another factor that this study could not take into account, was the different patterns of relationship building between male/female journalists, even though there are studies indicating that gender can play a role in journalist-source relationships (Voronova 2014).

Finally, this research addressed routine, non-election periods. It allowed insight into how relationships are maintained and used on a day-to-day basis. In the context of this research, with a focus on relationship building and bearing in mind that political communication is under “permanent campaigning,” interactions and social ties established during these periods lay the groundwork for the electoral outcome (Nord, Skogerbø and Kristensen 2021). However, it is likely that focusing on the election periods or specific cases of crisis would provide a picture of different, and most likely more active, patterns of informal or invisible interactions with the sources in the content.

8 The results

The texts in the thesis follow the steps of normative and cognitive role perceptions (articles 1 and 2), performance (3 and 4), and narrated performance (5).

8.1 Norms and values. How journalists and sources perceive informality and invisibility at work?

In the context of the PhD thesis research design, the first two texts served as a function of the exploratory phase — how the actors themselves **perceive** the relationships with one other and how they evaluate the importance of different types of modes of the interaction. This part therefore illustrates internalization of norms in professional role orientations among journalists and political source representatives in Lithuania and Sweden. Methodologically, this part also paves the path for the research questions and variables chosen in the other two parts of the thesis — the practice and the motives.

The first text, **“Power and exchange in formal and informal interaction between journalists and their sources”**³, sets out to answer a number of questions concerning the relationship between media and political executives in political communication, centering on how the exchange and power balance between journalists and their political sources differ depending on whether the interaction is formal

³ Published in: Karl Magnus Johansson and Gunnar Nygren (eds.). *Close and Distant. Political Executive–Media Relations in Four Countries*. Nordicom. 175-195.

or informal. The findings indicate that formal interaction is advantageous for professional sources in agenda-based news. In non-agenda news and in times of political conflict, journalists and some political sources prefer informal interaction.

However, it also showed that the advantages offered by various modes of interaction are not always available to all the actors. Top political leaders and their press advisors are most often isolated from informal interactions, while other political sources might gain from communicating informally since the official communication channels are not as available to them.

The results show that media–source exchange in informal relationships reaches beyond information in exchange for publicity, and informal relationships allow participants to step outside their traditional professional roles.

The second text is written together with Auksė Balčytienė and called **“Media-politics interaction shaped by benefits-oriented reasoning.”**⁴ It investigates the specifics of a single-country case, Lithuania, and includes the historical perspective and context for different types of relational ties between journalists and the political sources. Rapidly changing political and economic contexts in the country meant a flux environment for the development of the political

⁴ Published in: Karl Magnus Johansson and Gunnar Nygren (eds.). *Close and Distant. Political Executive–Media Relations in Four Countries*. Nordicom.55-74.

My co-author Prof. Auksė Balčytienė contributed with the theoretical framework, whereas my main contribution was the empirical chapters. We together worked on the analysis of the results.

communication, where flexibility and adaptation to the changing circumstances were important factors shaping the relationships between journalists and their sources. Formal contacts are quite consistent and professionalized, but they continue to work in the shadow of informal social networks, which create their own power relationships, dynamics and hierarchical structures.

This first part of the study showed that while journalists and sources see autonomy from each other as a normative value, they tend to approve the informal access on the cognitive level. This approval derives from pursuing multiple goals simultaneously (for example, seeking independence from the more influential actors and navigating the professional competition).

This qualitative part of the study (articles 1 and 2) could be summarized in a model showing the incongruous effects the professionalization and formalization of the political communication might have on demand for informality among both journalists and their political sources, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Step 1 in the model illustrates a hypothetical situation where all the political actors freely talk to the journalists without coordinating with each other. In such a system, the political conflicts are solved via the media; however, the political bodies (like the government or different political parties) might send equivocal messages, mediatize their internal conflicts or rumors, and in this sense weaken their credibility as integral, well-functioning units.

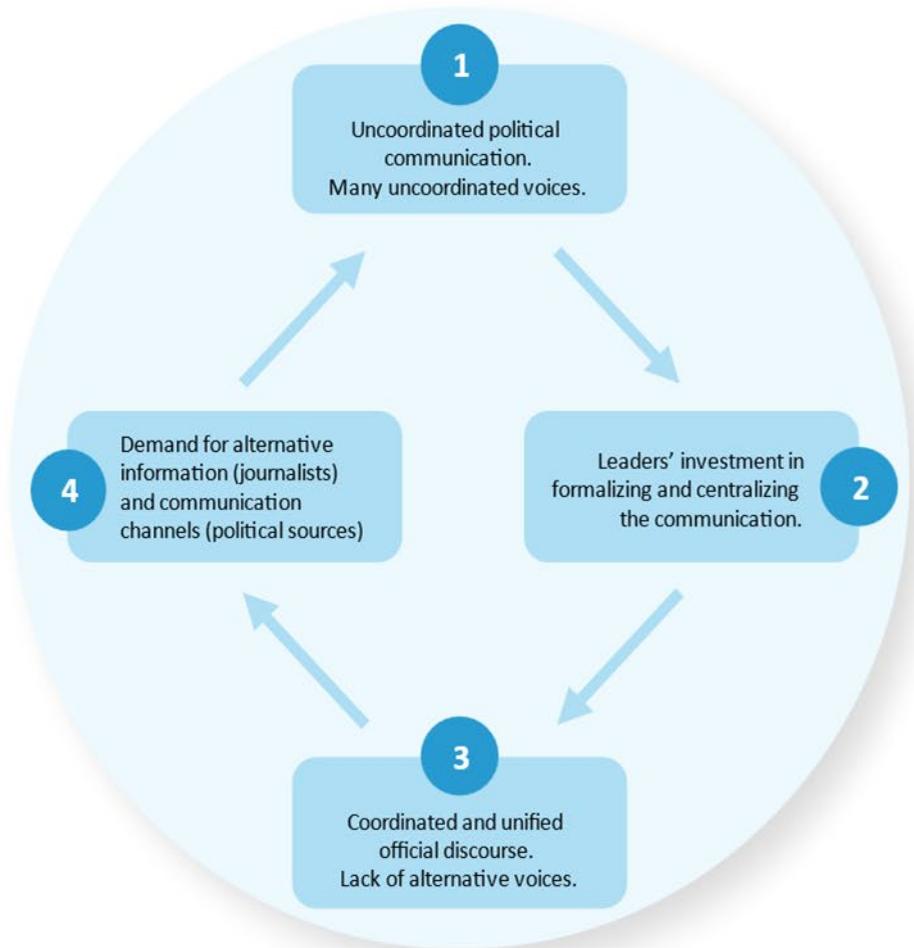


Figure 1. The spiral of (de)formalization of the political communication.

To control this, the political leaders start investing in more coordinated and integrated communication and professional press relationships (Step 2), which results in more formalized procedures of interaction between media and political sources. An example of this could be coordinated communication efforts, i.e., centralized communication, where the press departments play a more important role in providing or limiting media's access to political sources in order to ensure that the communicated messages are in compliance with the official line drawn by the hierarchically highest politicians. This stage, in its ideal execution, is beneficial for political leaders since their messages get the best communication, and coordinated communication reduces the risk that different members from the same organization will communicate different messages to the media. However, it also means a very unified official discourse (Step 3) that reaches the media, which in the long run leads to emerging demand for the alternative opinions (from the media perspective) in order not to serve as an uncritical megaphone of power (as described by Bennet 1990), but also among the (internal) political competitors, who, in order to make their voice heard, need to seek alternative communication channels in order to strengthen their voice in the public debate (Step 4). Professional media remains an important arena for such communication because the professional media can legitimize the information by using professional mechanisms to verify it. Growing demand for information alternatives also allows for off-the-record or other informal formats of sharing information while staying invisible or anonymous (under a label "sources known to the newsroom"), which is crucially important for internal competition or whistleblowing due to the legislated right to source anonymity.

Successful mediatization of internal conflicts via the informal channels again leads to Step 1 and restarts *the spiral of (de)formalization of the political communication*. Due to leaks and informal mediatization of the ongoing political processes, political leaders, via communication departments, might try to increase their efforts to achieve more control and coordination of the media relationships (Step 2), possibly by trying to formalize informality, and, for example, supply the media with the information in the off-the-record format or establish some informal relationships with selected journalists. However, after some time, this still results in more or less unified and controlled official discourse (Step 3) and demand for alternative informal communication from the sources who can provide alternative views (Step 4).

Therefore, it is possible to propose a model illustrating that the relationship between informal communication and efforts to formalize and coordinate the government communication are by nature a spiral, connecting formalization and deformalization, where steps taken toward formalization trigger adaptation and thus development of informal alternatives (Figure 1). In this way, it is possible to conclude that informal interaction comes both as a reaction and outcome of the structural constellations, but it is also a factor that shapes new structures (Westlund and Ekström 2019) in the organization of communication between journalists and their governmental sources.

8.2 Practice. How the journalists and their sources apply different types of relationships in specific situations?

The conclusions from the qualitative part of this study lead to the next two texts of the PhD thesis, which focus on how different social ties and interactional modes are used in practice – both in terms of the process but also in the content of the contributions reaching the media via different social ties (articles 3 and 4).

The third text, **“Reconstructing the Informal and Invisible: Interactions Between Journalists and Political Sources in Two Countries,”**⁵ aims to find out how different types of interactions and relationships between journalists and their sources are reflected in the roles the sources get to play in the news-making process. It shows that formality/informality and visibility/invisibility are constituent parts of the same reflexive interactional system, in this research divided into the type of interaction (formal and informal) and the visibility of that interaction (if the source is attributed or not in the media content).

Visibility/invisibility and formality/informality are tactical choices applied by journalists and sources. These choices influence agenda building in the short term and shared interpretations that dominate the public sphere in the long term (Berkowitz 2019). Article 3 maps the extent of different types of interactions and their balance in the news

⁵ Published in: *Journalism Practice* (2021). DOI: 10.1080/17512786.2021.1930571

production. It looks at when and how the informal and/or invisible interaction come into play.

The results demonstrate how different interactions presuppose different source roles in the news process. Sources approached formally and that are visible in the content are often treated as *defendants* — they provide quotes answering the context constructed by other invisible contributors. Formal invisible contributors act as *gatekeepers*, either by shortening (supplying background information and contacts) or prolonging (restricting the access to the information and the other sources) the path journalists take in their news work. Most of the story ideas derive from the invisible and informal contributors, who are therefore called the *agenda setters*. Sources who are known to some extent informally but are attributed in the media content are often used to confirm and reinforce the preferred interpretations of the stories and therefore are called an *elite bubble*.

The article concludes that the contributions made in one interactional mode are therefore reflected in how the other interactional modes are used by the journalists and their sources. Therefore, formality and informality, as well as visibility and invisibility, are two sides of the same coin, and their impact on the process of the news production, as well as on the content, is best understood when seeing them in relation to one other. Formal communication depends on the prerequisites for the informal communication in the system in question, and the reverse. Also, without considering the contributions that stay outside the media content, it would be difficult to fully understand the sourcing choices and questions asked for the sources that get attributed. Since about 40 percent of all interactions remain unattributed in the content, and about the same share of all interactions are to some degree informal,

focusing on only visible (invisible) or only formal (informal) sources would not provide an accurate picture of the news-making routines or why they look a certain way (Figure 2).

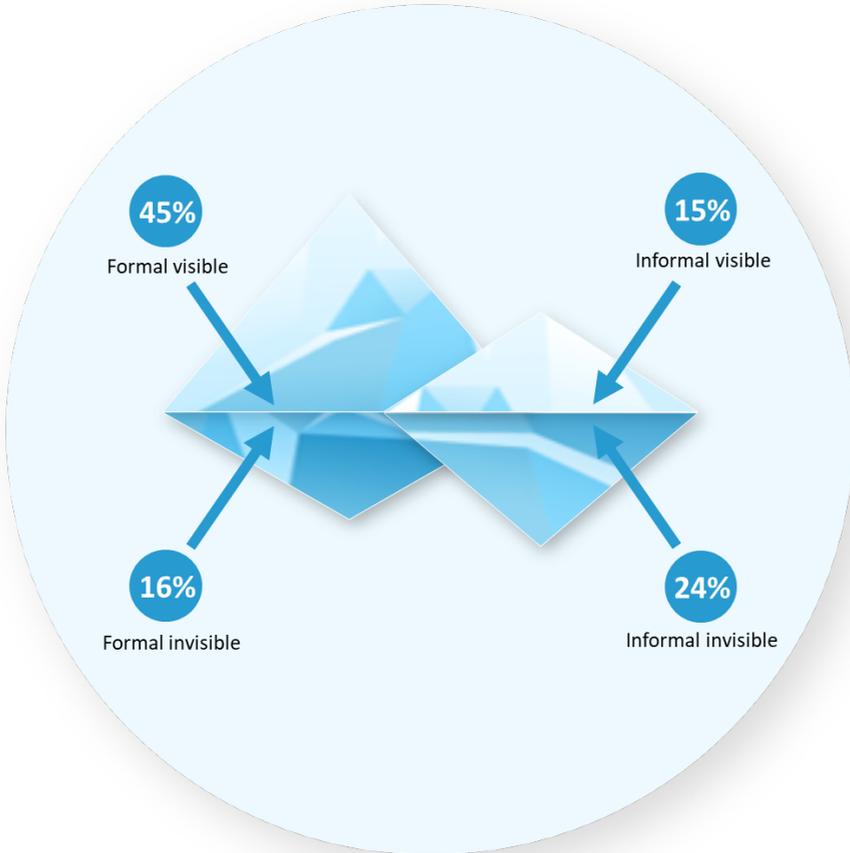


Figure 2. Balance of formal and informal, visible and invisible interactions between journalists and sources in the news production (news reconstructions in both Lithuania (240 reconstructions) and Sweden (235 reconstructions), n=475).

The finding that many story ideas derive from the sources who interact informally and later are unattributed in the media content (informal invisible sources, so-called agenda setters) provided the impetus to take a closer look at that particular moment of the news discovery and how the relationships with a journalist are reflected in what information a journalist can access.

The fourth article, “**Sources That Trigger the News: Multiplexity of Social Ties in News Discovery**,”⁶ focuses specifically on how the journalists’ network of social contacts contribute to what news is discovered. Different types of ties can transfer different types of information (Hansen 1999). Some information can be accessed only via the multiplex ties, while other information is publicly available and therefore can be accessed even via single ties. The article proposes a model of *a field of news discovery potential* and analyzes how single vs. multiplex social ties connecting journalists and their sources impact the possibility of gaining discursive power in terms of what topics, speakers or angles turn into news.

The study is organized around three research questions. First, it maps the prevalence of the multiplex social ties between journalists and their news discovery sources in the two countries and shows that more than half of all discovery sources are related to the journalist by some type of multiplex social tie. Second, it finds that the news discovery process differs when the news derives from single or multiplex social ties, where multiplexity of the ties can work as a shortcut in the news discovery. News discovery sources that are connected to journalists by multiplex social ties are more likely to show

⁶ Published in: *Journalism Studies*, 22 (10), 1298-1316. DOI: 10.1080/1461670X.2021.1951331

the initiative for the contact; however, they are more likely than the other sources to stay unattributed in the content. Third, the article explores how the information acquired via multiplex social ties contributes to the news content. The results showed that content accessed via multiplex social ties would most likely not be accessible via single social ties, or the access would have taken more time and resources. However, while informal access, implied invisibility and source protection at least theoretically could strengthen whistleblower or investigative reporting, in day-to-day practice, of which this study provided a snapshot, these characteristics instead led more to mediatization of internal fights or leaked details from ongoing negotiations. Media's thirst for exclusive stories and its need to update the news flow 24/7, when combined with access to stories via the multiplex social ties established by the long-term socialization between beat reporters and their sources, can also blow up scandals in daily political life. Close socialization between journalists and sources can also mean that journalists become too native and start adopting the source's frames for the news selection.

8.3 Narrations. How journalists' relationships with the sources are reflected in decisions to trust them?

The fifth and last article of the thesis, "**Trust is context dependent: reconstruction of trust dynamics between journalists and their sources**,"⁷ analyzes the dynamics and multidimensionality of trust between journalists and their sources by comparing their willingness to trust in situational and general contexts as well as formal and informal relationships.

The theoretical contribution of this article is the proposal to analyze trust as a *process* within an ongoing relationship between a journalist and a source, rather than as a static feature, as has been established by many of the earlier studies on source credibility. Focusing on trust as a processual phenomenon offers new dimensions of the analysis: dynamics, reciprocity and multiplexity. These dimensions derive from *the relationship between the actors* rather than their personal characteristics (e.g., titles). This means that the same source can be trusted in one relationship/interaction with a journalist and distrusted in another.

The data of the study consists of 517 reconstructed interactions between journalists covering national politics and their human sources in Lithuania and Sweden. The method makes it possible to measure the extent of trust as well as motives and reasoning behind this trust in situational and general contexts and in formal and informal relationships. The empirical examination of trust in the context of an

⁷ Under review for resubmission to *Journalism*.

ongoing relationship, and not an evaluation set at a certain point in time, is missing in most of the previous empirical studies.

Measuring journalists' trust for the same source in different contexts showed that trust, just like the relationship itself, can consist of several levels. Also, the same relationship can involve both trust and distrust at the same time.

The findings indicate that journalists consider different factors when it comes to justifying their trust for (and thus use of) the source in a specific story context and when evaluating trust for them in the overall relationship. Also, journalists trust their sources in a particular news situation more than they trust them in general. This shows that even though it is possible to measure trust in a specific context as a snapshot in time (situational trust), it is important to understand that the level of trust is under constant dynamic change, which depends on the contextual and relational circumstances.

Reciprocity, when it comes to whether journalists perceive the source in question as having a reason to trust (or distrust) them, proved to be a very important criterion for trust evaluations, especially in cases of distrust. This shows that relational history and subjective, sometimes not even articulated but assumed, perceptions that a source might have a reason not to trust a journalist are the foremost criteria for not trusting the source. In addition, sources whom journalists perceived as helpful had more power to negotiate the conditions for how their information can be used (for example, when it can be published and whether the source can be attributed). Practical implications of this finding are especially relevant from the perspective of the strategic communication and relationship management. Sources who want to be perceived as trustworthy should be aware that any

signs of distrust for the journalist automatically increases the journalists' distrust towards them.

From a theoretical perspective, this finding suggests that journalist-source relationship is not limited to their professional roles but also as a social relationship, where subjective interpersonal criteria play a role when making the decisions in the professional context.

9 Discussion

Let me return to Herbert Gans's quote presented at the beginning of this thesis: "Journalists see people mainly as potential sources" (Gans 1979, p. 117). In other words, for a journalist, any relationship can turn into a journalist-source relationship. As soon as information is shared, a person who (intentionally or not) shared it acquires a role of a potential source. At the same time, any professional interaction between human agents is also a social interaction. This means that social and professional roles overlap, complement or, depending on the situation, are interchangeable.

Journalism as a profession contains a paradox. On the one hand, a journalist should maintain social distance to their sources. This distance ensures journalists' autonomy and is a prerequisite for objective reporting. All potential sources should be treated equally in terms of verification and the conditions for how they can get their point through and contribute to the media content. On the other hand, a journalist, in order to conduct sensitive investigations and serve the public, is expected to develop a network of sources who supply information that is otherwise difficult to access. Sharing such knowledge might mean vulnerability for the source. Relying on information provided exclusively and that is sometimes difficult to verify without revealing the source also presents a risk for the journalist. Trust-based interaction between journalists and their key sources is a cornerstone for accessing such information. However, cultivating these relationships means long-term professional and social routines and balancing autonomy and adaptation.

The perspective of journalist-source relationships as relationships where the actors simultaneously have to negotiate between multiple roles that imply reciprocal professional and social adaptation often stays in the shadows, shielded from scholarly attention. It is possible that this is because the theory of journalism has been too focused on the normative ideals of the profession and the structural factors that enable or challenge implementation of those ideals in practice. However, both journalists and sources are social agents, where professional and social roles influence one other. The social ties between them can be viewed as the actors' adaptation to the structures and a way to navigate the environment. At the same time, the relational ties and interaction via those ties between the actors are a constitutive part of the structures that enable communication between the political actors, media and the audiences. Therefore, it was important to explore how relational ties between journalists and sources enable and delimit the professional practices in the beat of the political journalism. To address this gap, this research looked how different types of social ties between journalists and political sources are reflected in journalists' normative and cognitive role orientations, performance and narrations of the performance in Lithuania and Sweden.

9.1 Perceptions, performance and motives

The results of this study showed that journalists as well as their sources in both countries have similar normative *perceptions* (RQ1), where autonomy from the sources is a widely accepted value. However, as soon as this value is translated to the own cognitive scripts, the actors see close and sometimes informal relationships with each other as a necessary asset and social capital that allows them to pursue other professional goals. From a journalistic perspective,

having informal contact in the corridors of power is a sign of a reporter's diligence and experience. The discussion about what adaptations this access requires is secondary.

The pragmatic goals are related to market pressures within media but also within politics. For journalists, closer relationships to some of the sources means being competitive in terms of pace and content, finding original news topics, and delivering something extra that could increase the numbers of the paying audience. For political press advisors, informal contact with journalists is a way to increase their own credibility and increase the chances of getting their message through, especially in the case of crisis or political battles. These results confirm the studies that competition in the media and political market also increases the demand for informal interaction between journalists and sources (Baugut 2019; Van Aelst et al. 2010).

The professionalization of journalists or political communication can introduce new routines that control the access between journalists and sources. However, at the individual level, journalists and sources seek alternatives to the formalized communication. Therefore, it is possible to note that professionalization and informality can work as drivers for each other. The more coordinated and centralized the government communication, the more demand from journalists and political competitors for alternatives to that communication and the more the value of the informal contact. In this way, relationships between journalists and their sources illustrate how informality can work as a response to formal constellations (Ledeneva 2018).

The second part of this study approached *practices* (RQ 2) and measured the prevalence of interaction via formal and informal social ties between journalists and sources as a share of everyday routines. It

showed that in Lithuania 43 percent of all interactions were classified as informal to some degree. The corresponding figure in Sweden was 36 percent. In all these interactions, the journalists stated that their engagement with the source exceeded formal, presupposed professional boundaries and exchanges.

This finding shows that social ties between beat reporters and their sources that are closer than formal is a part of the sourcing routine. It calls for the demystification of informal relationships between journalists and sources in both the academic and the metaprofessional discussion. This research also shows that very close personal relationships between journalists and sources are an exception. Most of the relationships that journalists report to be informal to some degree are professional relationships that became closer due to repetitive social adaptation by both sides.

It is also not enough to look at informality through a case lens, i.e., a positive or negative phenomenon depending on whether it helps to reveal or disguise corrupt behavior by elite actors. Even though such revelations do happen, the relationships allowing these revelations have already been established. The aspects of how these relationships have been built and cultivated are therefore of interest. It is possible to argue that the impact of informality can only be seen as a long-term process, as a power achieved via routinized socialization and adaptation by the journalists and sources in order to maintain their relationships. Sources who socialize with journalists informally, as the reconstruction interviews have shown, are more active in the phases of news discovery, brokerage and supplying the background information and are not revealed in the content to the same extent as sources who do not have such ties. Also, sources behind the informal social ties can

negotiate more easily the conditions for how the information can be used and in that way shape the interpretative frames.

This thesis does not suggest the ideal balance between different types of social relationships. It is only possible to speculate what the dominance of solely formal or informal relationships in sourcing the news could mean. Interaction only via formal ties could mean that the information that the media can access is uniform and communicated under the conditions set by the source both in terms of access and the message. On the other hand, journalists would have no strings attached when reporting such information. Meanwhile, interaction mainly via informal ties would mean more adaptation, explicit or implicit agreements between journalists and sources, and more difficulties identifying when this cooperation brings more social benefits than individual benefits to particular actors. Therefore, studying informality and formality is not about a preference for one of them but about an awareness that they work in balance with one another (Misztal 2005), where formality stands for the social detachment and informality challenges the communicative monopoly of the formal power.

The third research question (RQ3) addressed journalists' motives and *reflections* on practice in different relationship contexts. Specifically, it looked at journalists' decisions to trust sources in specific interactions but also at a more general degree of trust that takes into account all previous experiences. It showed that while cognitive arguments (title and knowledge) and behavior (perceived benevolence) play a role when it comes trusting sources in a specific news context, the arguments deriving from the social relationship (earlier experiences, perception of each other, and reflexivity) contribute to the general degree of trust for that source. The more complex the

relationship, the more social contexts it includes and the more complicated the decision to trust. The reflections on the decision to trust or distrust sources in specific news situations revealed that journalists evaluate their sources on several levels at the same time. It shows that journalists and sources are connected to each other by multiplex social ties, where cognitive and social motives complement each other.

This means that trust is part of a specific relationship between the actors; it is reciprocal and under constant dynamic development. These findings suggest that analysis of trust between journalists and sources as a *process* opens new perspectives in understanding how journalists select and rely on their sources.

9.2 Empirical, methodological and theoretical suggestions

It is possible point to three main contributions of this thesis.

Empirical. Even though there have been studies discussing informal relationships between journalists and sources, or contributions by unattributed sources, this study is one of the few that maps both formal and informal interactions and visible and invisible sources. The contributions and limitations brought by informal social ties can only be understood by comparing, contrasting and evaluating them in the context of all source contributions. The role of unattributed sources, and the reasons for their invisibility, can only be evaluated when looking at what type of contributions are attributed. Approaching daily routines, rather than a specific type of relationship or event, made it possible to move on from selectively analyzing only

productive or exclusive cases of informal (formal) or invisible (visible) sourcing practices.

Methodological. The reconstruction interviews used in this study included the questions on the social relationships and interactions between journalists and their sources and linked them to the concrete news production situations. The method made it possible to take into account the social aspects of interaction that distinguished closer and more distant social relationships, motives and reflections regarding those interactions as they appeared during specific stages of the news process. This enabled closer insight into how journalists negotiate their social and professional roles upon the different social contacts they engage in at work.

Theoretical. This study suggests that interaction between journalists and sources is two tiered, with professional and social roles complementing one other. Therefore, social norms influence professional norms, and professional norms influence the norms of social adaptation. In this sense, it is not only the characteristics of the individual actors that lead to a specific type of exchange or cooperation. Neither is it the structural, organizational factors or professional role conception alone that shape that interaction. Instead, it is the relationship quality (social ties) between those actors that enable or delimit the cooperation.

The results of this research demonstrated that relational aspects play a role in *how* (channels, contexts, initiative) sources can contribute, *when* (at what stage of the news process) they contribute, with *what content* (are they attributed or not, what type of information they can supply), and what *reflections and adaptations* follow these contributions. Therefore, relational ties influence the frames, topics, angles or

speakers (Jungherr et al. 2019) that reach the media content and how this later can be reflected in the dominant frames of reality in society (Berkowitz 2019).

These findings should be discussed in the context of the earlier research. This study confirms that elite, high-ranking actors still dominate the news, or at least the visible part of the news (article 3), and in this respect confirms the conclusions of the **hegemonic** approach. However, this study also shows that a significant portion of the contributions stay in the background of the news content. Exploitation of the informal social ties while staying in the background allows actors without a formal high rank to inspire the topics and shape the frames in which the high ranked, attributed elite sources appear. This challenges the perception of the power of elite sources. While visibility in the news content can be seen an indication of such power, setting the context in which the actors will appear is at least as important.

How the actors behind the unattributed interactions exercise their power is revealed by looking into the **exchange** that is made via formal vs. informal social ties. This study demonstrated that the exchange between the actors goes beyond the exchange for publicity and includes exchange for the benefit of long-term relationship building. The more multiplex the social ties, the more adaptation the actors tend to make in a specific exchange situation, for example by offering the source confidentiality, postponing the publication date, or contacting another source. Therefore, the power of journalists and of sources should not be viewed solely in terms of their rank, but also in terms of the composition of their social network and the relationship quality within that network. The more varied and balanced the network, the

more likely an actor could be autonomous in terms of their discursive power.

Journalists and sources, at each interaction, participate not only in the exchange of content but also a social exchange, and this social exchange contributes to the knowledge proposed by the **role relationship approach**. This research tested how journalists combine the norms of autonomy with the need for access and adaptation in different social constellations. Here, it is possible to identify contradictions between the normative and social expectations with which the actors are dealing. While in the relationships with only single social ties, it is easy to rely on the normative professional role; in the multi-level relationships, the dilemma becomes harder to solve in practice. Therefore, the professional roles, just like Reamy and Vos (2021) pointed out, are under continuous renegotiation, depending on the context. The enactment of the professional roles is sensitive to the social ties within a particular relationship. Therefore, experiences and knowledge preceding the interaction, as well as expectations regarding the future relationship, influence the way journalists and sources cooperate in a given moment. This finding expands the discussion on power in journalist-source relationships and proposes to view it in a long-term relational perspective. The relational context defines what exchange is possible and what adaptations it requires. At the same time, the interactional choices the journalists and their sources make not only derive from the structural constellations, but can also reshape these constellations over a period of time.

What does the prevalence of informality between journalists and their political sources say about a given journalism or political communication culture? This research indicated more similarities than differences between the practices by Lithuanian and Swedish reporters.

The comparison in this case showed that social adaptation, or elements of it, is part of the journalist-source interaction and relationship despite the country context. Even if detachment between journalists and sources is somewhat stronger in Sweden than in Lithuania, given the differences in the countries' size, history and degree of professionalization in journalism and politics, the contrast was smaller than expected. Professionalization can be expected to be a factor that increases the social distance between journalists and sources. However, the idea of social distance is stronger on normative and cognitive levels. In practice, as the reconstructed interactions showed, some degree of informality is approved as a necessity. Returning to the idea that norms, cognitive scripts, practices and narrations are circularly connected, where the practice narrations lead to new norms as suggested by Hanitzsch and Vos (2017), poses a provocative question of whether informality should be perceived as a candidate to become a part of a normative journalist role. It is difficult to imagine this happening, particularly because it contradicts the existing norms of autonomy and detachment. While not a professional norm, informality is much closer to a social practice (and norm) that plays alongside, complements and contributes to the professional logic when solving day-to-day tasks. What should be discussed more transparently is reasonable it is to expect that professional norms can be separated in practice from interaction-based social norms in the profession and what to do when these norms contradict one another.

9.3 Directions for the future research

The current developments in the media and politics signify a time of the lost monopolies, both for the media and for elite politicians. Journalists no longer hold the role of gatekeeper when it comes to

reaching the audiences like they did a few decades ago, and politicians no longer wield the same power over information. Even though the professional media remains an important source of news for audiences, its main role now is to help the audience navigate the information surplus from a variety of different sources. Verification of the information in this context becomes an essential task for journalism profession.

In this new environment, the sources can reach a broad audience directly via social media. Reaching out here does not require strong economical means, and accessing such information barely requires strong social ties. Liquid and rapidly developing environments where relationships and interactions can be direct and less hierarchical also challenge the notion of exclusivity. How can the journalists make sure they produce valuable and exclusive content when the sources themselves act as producers, and how does this change the role of journalist-source relationships?

Various social media platforms, where the online discussions take place, change the logic of communication between the media, political sources and audiences by encouraging a mix of professional and private content and communication channels, including more dialogical interaction and coproduction. In what ways does social media facilitate relationship building, and in what ways will it complement other, more traditional contexts for journalist-source interactions? The platforms built for online interaction promote logics that mix fact and opinion, formal and informal. Both journalists and politicians can thus build relationships with their audiences at the same time as they themselves become very important parts of the audience for each other (Johansson 2019). The boundaries between the professional roles of actors interacting on social media become more

blurred. Politicians become content producers, and journalists join the political discussions (Ekman and Widholm 2016). The negotiation of the meaning becomes public and can be followed online. This includes both the discussions that might trigger the news, reactions that turn into updates for this news, and the reflections that follow the news.

Given that the content on the social media is barely exclusive, despite its personal touch, this inspires the question, then, about the part of the content that is spared for more invisible interactions and strong social ties among the leading actors in the public sphere. In future research, it would be interesting to address the changing role of the social ties between journalists and their sources. How do discussions that are invisible to the public eye, for example via instant messaging but also offline, relate to the visible parts of the meaning negotiation? And, as a result, how is the online meaning negotiation reflected in the (often invisible) news discovery and verification practices and the motives related to these practices?

9.4 Why the links between the social and the professional matter

The phenomena covered by this thesis, specifically that journalist and sources negotiate their professional and social roles in their interaction with one other, seems to exceed the boundaries of the country, the political beat, the offline or online interaction, and even journalism as an occupation. Indeed, the principles of multiple, social and professional roles, and the negotiation between those roles, is applicable to any other profession that centers around interaction between human agents.

What is important to mention, however, is what distinguishes journalism from many other professions. Why is the discussion of

social interaction especially important here? This takes us back to the core idea of news as a social construct. Unlike in many other professions, each social interaction a journalist is involved in *per se* contributes to their frames of reality; thus, each social interaction contributes to their work and the texts they produce. It is impossible to break this knowledge down into personal and professional domains because these domains are interrelated. Therefore, the discussion on socialization patterns in the profession as a premise for conducting journalistic work is crucial in journalism education, practices and research.

The diversity goals in the newsroom should go beyond looking into individual characteristics. The focus should be instead on the variation of social ties, in terms of both access and the content of these ties, that journalists in the newsroom have to different social networks. But is perfect diversity of the social ties between journalists and their sources achievable in practice?

The polarization of public trust, in both politics and (parts of) the media (Nord, Skogerbø and Kristensen 2021), indicates that this diversity is not always sufficient. The networks of journalists and sources can be blamed for being too intertwined. This results in a search for alternative facts that do not come “from the establishment,” a phrase often raised among suspicious parts of the audience with regard to the media and mainstream politicians and could be a sign of such distrust. It leads to an important question for the future: how do the trust relationships between journalists and their sources translate into trust relationships between journalists and their audiences? Because for journalists, everybody is a potential source, but the prerequisites for each contribution differ.

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Appendix I. Sample of interviewees

Lithuania	Sweden
Journalist interviewees (total sample)⁸: 18	Journalist interviewees (total sample): 18
Qualitative interviews, journalists: 13	Qualitative interviews, journalists: 10
Reconstruction interviews: 17	Reconstruction interviews: 16
Participation rate: 94 proc.	Participation rate: 84 proc.
Female journalists: 67 proc.	Female journalists: 39 proc.
Male journalists: 33 proc.	Male journalists: 61 proc.
Years of experience in the political beat:	Years of experience in the political beat:
<5 years – 17 proc.	<5 years – 11 proc.
5-10 years – 22 proc.	5-10 years – 16 proc.
10-20 years – 17 proc.	10-20 years – 17 proc.
>20 years – 44 proc.	>20 years – 56 proc.

⁸ Not all the journalists who participated in qualitative interviews were included in the reconstruction interview sample, and vice versa. This applies to both the Lithuanian and the Swedish sample. The qualitative interviews in Lithuania were conducted in the spring and autumn of 2015. The qualitative interviews in Sweden were conducted in the autumn of 2015. The reconstruction interviews in Lithuania were conducted in March 2016. The reconstruction interviews in Sweden were conducted in October and November 2016.

Qualitative interviews, political sources, Lithuania⁹: 10	Qualitative interviews, political sources, Sweden: 10
Participation rate: 94 proc.	Participation rate: 50 proc.
Female: 50 proc.	Female: 20 proc.
Male: 50 proc.	Male: 80 proc.

Appendix I. Table 1. Sample of interviewees in Lithuania and Sweden.

⁹ In Lithuania, political sources were represented by the communication advisors at the Prime Minister's office (current and former), governmental press advisors, President's press advisors, and a former Prime Minister. In Sweden, political sources were represented by the communication advisors at the Prime Minister's office (current and former) and governmental press advisors.

Types of media represented by the journalists in the interview sample

Media	Lithuania	Lithuania	Sweden	Sweden
Journalists from:	Qualitative interview	Reconstruction interview	Qualitative interview	Reconstruction interview
Public service TV	2	1	2	2
Public service radio	2	2	2	4
Daily newspaper	4	4	3	6
Tabloid newspaper	1	2	2	2
News website	4	5	N/A	N/A
News agency	2	2	1	2
News magazine	1	1	0	0
Total	16	17	10	16

Appendix I. Table 2. Types of media represented by the journalists in the interview sample.

Appendix II. Qualitative interview examples

Interview with political beat journalists

Instructions: The questions in bold are the main questions to be asked in every interview . It is important that there is time for all areas in every interview. The other questions are follow-up questions. The follow-up questions that will be used depends on who the person interviewed is and how previous questions were answered. It is also possible to ask other follow-up questions.

1. What is your beat and title?

- a) How many years have you worked as a journalist?
- b) How often do you write/report about the government/president?

2. Please describe what an ordinary working day is like for you.

- a) Where do you spend most of your time (newsroom, on-the-spot in the government, other)?
- b) From where do you get ideas for the stories related to government/president? Consider editor, editorial meeting, news agency, other news media, social media, initiative by the source, informal channels, friends...
- c) What channels of information from the PM/President office do you follow regularly (governmental communication, press conferences, social media, staff for media matters, your informal contacts in the office, etc.).

d) What channels of information do you use to get information about the other ministries/leading political actors?

3. How would you assess the importance of social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and different blogs) in your professional work?

a) How do you use social media in relation to your work and why?

b) Do you use social media for contact with your political sources and, if so, how (for example, to find information, to get in contact, and so on)?

4. How would you describe your relationship with the governmental/presidential sources in general?

a) In what situations do political sources contact you on their own initiative?

b) In what situations do you contact the governmental sources on your own/editorial initiative?

c) Are sources from the opposition more reactive or proactive compared to the governmental sources.

5. In your experience, how good is the access to the Prime Minister/President for the journalists?

a) What channels of contact do you use, and how long does it take until you get the interview or information?

b) When did you contact Prime Minister/President last, and how did it go?

c) Does access to sources change depending on the context (for example, during political conflicts)?

- d) How good is access to other ministries?
- e) What could complicate your access to the governmental sources?

6. How would you describe the role of the PM's/President's staff handling media matters?

- a) How would you describe your relationship with them?
- b) Do you contact the staff for media matters or the prime minister/president directly?
- c) How do you think they would describe their relationship with journalists?
- d) What is the role of the staff for the media matters from the other ministries?

7. How would you describe your relationships with the PM/President/other elite politicians?

- a) How do you think they would describe their relationships with you and other journalists?
- b) How do politicians and their staff for media matters view journalists?

8. Some of the relationships between journalists and their sources have or turn into a more informal character. Why is it important to have some informal contacts as well?

- a) Do you have people you personally know, i.e., informal sources, among the politicians?
- b) Among their staff for media matters?
- c) Other informal contacts from the governmental/presidential office?
- d) Please give an example from your own or observed practice about how and when these contacts can come into use in your work (they might remain anonymous)?
- e) Do you use informal relationships in order to get information?
- f) Do your journalist colleagues use informal contact with politicians?
- g) In your opinion, how can the presence of informal contact with sources affect the reporting (advantages, disadvantages).

9. What is the role of the sources from the political opposition when reporting on governmental affairs?

- a) What other alternative sources do you use – NGOs, experts, think-tanks, social media profiles, bloggers – when reporting on government? How and why do you use them?
- b) How do social media and other non-institutional actors affect your work with sources?

- 10. In what ways can political sources attempt to initiate or restrain a story (or try to influence some angles, quotes)? Please give an example.**
- a) On attempts to initiate a story/angle/quote. What happened? What did you or your colleagues do?
 - b) On attempts to restrain a story. What happened? What did you or your colleagues do?
 - c) In what cases do sources succeed to initiate or to restrain a story/parts of a story?
- 11. In your opinion, are there taboo subjects when reporting on government/president and what it could be?**
- a) Please give an example on a situation when you/some of your colleagues had a (critical) question to your governmental/other elite political source but did not ask it? What happened? Why?
 - b) How much independence do you think you have when deciding on stories or choosing political sources? What factors play a role?
- 12. In your experience, how has the relationship between journalists and elite political sources changed over time?**
- a) How emerging non-institutional media actors change the relation between journalists and politicians?
 - b) How new communication channels affect the relations between journalist and their political sources?
 - c) Consider broader changes within journalism: did they influence the relations and interactions between journalists and their sources?

Qualitative interview with a political source

1. Professional profile. What is your position (title)? Where have you worked before your current job?
2. Everyday work. Can you describe how an average day at work can look like? What are the daily routines, what are the common meetings and events? What are the working hours?
3. Frequency and nature of contact. How often are you in contact with various media representatives? What are the most common means of communication you use in your professional work (e.g., phone calls, email, press releases, press conferences, social media, etc.). What types of media actors? What journalists? Who normally initiates such contacts? [Possible follow-up questions: At what media level – editorial or journalist – does communication first take place? Are there any differences between various political issues? How do you act when you seek more publicity for a news story and, conversely, when withholding/preventing news publicity? Would you characterize these exchanges as formal or informal?]
4. Types of media/social media: How would you assess the importance of traditional media versus social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and different blogs) in your professional work? How do you use social media in relation to your work and why? For what purposes is social media used? Do you use social media for contact with journalists and, if so, how (for example, to convey information, to get comments or feedback, and so on)?
5. Decision-making and strategies, internal and external relations: How are decisions made, and by whom, concerning the ways and means of communication? Is there any longer-term strategic planning involved? What is the division of labor between PMO (Prime Minister's Office) and the individual ministries' communication/press departments? Does the PMO use outside actors in its communication efforts, such as PR companies or think-tanks? Are there any basic principles or values

- guiding PMO's communication? Are there any key documents guiding these communication efforts?
6. Relationships: How would you describe your relationships with journalists? How do you think they would describe or perceive their relationships with you and other political sources? How do you think journalists view political sources?
 7. Relationships (normatively): In your view, what should the relationship be like? What are the main challenges of the relationship?
 8. Evaluation and change: Overall, how would you evaluate the current relationship between the media and the Prime Minister's office (and the Government Offices more broadly)? In your experience, has the relationship changed over time?

Appendix III. Reconstruction interview questionnaire

Instructions before the interview (to be told to the journalist):

- It is important for my research that you share as much as possible about your daily work and about your work with your information sources in particular. However, the method is created to protect the anonymity of your source. All the information about you and the source will be used only in an anonymized manner and only within this research.
- For me, sources are also the people who gave you background information and were not quoted, or those who led you do the other sources, gave you documents or in some other way contributed to your story. If you received a document from a person, I will ask you questions about your interaction with that person.
- I am interested in formal and informal sources, formal and informal interactions. How relationships come into play, when, in what way, how.

Register:

- Reconstruction number,
- Journalist number
- Media code

Reconstruction interview questions

How long did you work on this story? From the initial idea to submitting the text/program (hours or days)

Answer: _____

Please describe the circumstances — why was this story created? For example, is it an agenda item or an unexpected event, is the story about a conflict, is it an observation of some long-lasting process or similar

Answer: _____

How many sources did you work with while preparing this story (they do not have to be quoted in the story):

Human sources (spoken or written — if more than four important human sources — please register them as well by adding extra columns in the questionnaire):

Written sources (documents, other media):

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Now I will ask you about your first source, the one that actually inspired the story. (follow the questionnaire about the discovery source)

Let's talk about the other (human) sources who contributed to this story (repeat the questions about each of the news gathering sources, one by one)

9. Source type.

Source type	Discovery	1	2	3	4
High-ranking politician					
Politician					
High-ranking official					
Public official					
Press advisor					
PR agency					
My editor or other supervisor from my newsroom					
News agency					
Other media					
Specialist or expert (specify)					
Private person					
Archive					
Other					
Myself (in exceptional cases, for ideas only)					

10. Source sector.

Source sector	Discovery	1	2	3	4
Government (Prime Minister and their environment)					
Ministries					
Organizations next to ministries					
President and their environment					
Political party (governmental)					
Political party (non-governmental)					
Local politics					
Public (NGO, unions, organizations)					
Academic					
Other media (which)					
Private sector					
Other (specify)					

11. How did you interact?

You can select more than one option in each column. Circle the selected channels and specify the number “1” next to the channel through which the contact was made (for example, “I called first”(outgoing call, 1), then they called back (incoming call, 2), then we met for an interview (face-to-face interview, 3)”).

Channel	Discovery	1	2	3	4
Outgoing call					
Incoming call					
Outgoing email					
Incoming email					
Outgoing SMS					
Incoming SMS					
Outgoing chat					
Incoming chat					
Press release					
Face-to-face interview, 1 on 1					
Informal, background conversation 1 on 1					
Formal event					
Informal event					
Internet website (which)					
Facebook					
Twitter					
Document on request by a journalist					

Document initiated by a source					
Archive					
Other					

12. How much did you trust this source in this specific situation? Why?

Evaluation	Discovery	1	2	3	4
Trusted a lot					
Trusted somewhat					
Somewhat distrusted					
Strongly distrusted					

13. How would you describe your interaction with the source in this specific situation?

Interaction type	Discovery	1	2	3	4
Formal (working situation, documented, might be visible for others, for example, recorded interview or press conference)					
Semi-formal (included some formal aspects, might be related to the formal event, but less visible for others, for example, background conversation)					
Informal, work related (in a non-working environment or context, for example, over a lunch. Language informal, mixed private and work topic)					
Personal (I know this person outside work, situation not related to work)					

14. Frequency of contact with this source.

Frequency of contact	Discovery	1	2	3	4
First time contact					
Not regular. Less than 10 times so far					
Not regular. 10 times or more					
At least once a month					
At least once a week					
Every day					

15. How would you describe your relationship with this person overall, when you think of all situations?

Relationship type	Discovery	1	2	3	4
Professional, formal (we do not know each other, cannot call each other using first name, meet only on formal occasions)					
Professional, semi-formal (I sometimes get one-on-one meetings, some exclusive info, background conversations from this person)					
Informal professional (we eat lunch together, know each other for a long time and our relation is friendly, though professional)					
Private (I know the source in contexts other than work (common organizations, personal friends, relatives)					

16. How much do you trust this person overall, when you think of all situations and your general impression? Why?

Evaluation	Discovery	1	2	3	4
Trust a lot					
Trust somewhat					
Somewhat distrust					
Strongly distrust					

17. Is the source attributed in the published item?

Source visibility in content	Discovery	1	2	3	4
Attributed by name					
Hinted ("a source from the government")					
Unattributed (why?)					

18. Out of 100 percent of data in the item, what was the divide between different sources? How did they contribute?

Discovery	1	2	3	4

19. Was this item exclusive in that it was not published elsewhere?
- Yes, marked as exclusive
 - Yes, for a while, I published first and then other journalists followed.
 - Partly. __ percentage of the item that was exclusive
 - No. It was published in other places at the same time.
20. Were you contacted by sources during the process when working of this story? Why? If yes, was your story changed after this feedback? How?
21. Did you hear feedback from sources or their representatives after the story? Which source? Was feedback communicated formally or informally?
22. Can this story affect your relationships with some of the sources in the future? Which source? How and why?
23. Did you consult editors before or during your work? Did you have disagreements? What did you consult/disagreed on? What were the outcomes?
24. (If any informal contacts are used) – why was the informal method preferred? Is this common? Was there something in the political situation that made it necessary to use informal sources?