

# SComS

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**SSCM**  
Société suisse des sciences  
de la communication  
et des médias

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Società svizzera di scienze  
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**SComS**  
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## Editorial

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Dear SComS readers,

We are happy to present you the first issue of 2019. As has happened quite regularly since the migration of SComS to the HOPE platform, also this issue features, beyond the general section, a thematic section. This time, our thematic section is devoted to crises seen from a perspective of political communication. We are happy and proud that many authors and contributors are willing to publish thematic sections with SComS, which propose cutting-edge research and open fresh perspectives on communication studies. You might consult our open calls for thematic sections on the journal webpage, [www.scoms.ch](http://www.scoms.ch).

Moving to the discussion of the contents of issue 19/1, the general section contains three articles. First, the article by Carole Probst, Alexander Buhmann, Diana Ingenhoff and Benedetto Lepori is a particularly important contribution for the Swiss Media and Communication landscape. The authors illustrate how Swiss Media and Communication Studies have developed over the last decade in terms of growths of research units, publication outputs, career paths, resources as well as research and teaching activities. The meticulous analysis of many different yet important indicators not only allows young as well as established scholars to better understand the character and the various traditions of Media and Communication Studies in the Swiss context, it also provides a historical and current account of the state of the field; from the establishment of the first research and teaching units, to a phase of rapid growth and expansion to a consolidation phase that characterized the last years. Most importantly, the article also discusses publication strategies and publication tendencies in the field that has seen a trend towards English publica-

tions in “international” journals. One of the many challenges of the field is thus a certain pressure towards homogenization, as the authors argue, which “creates tensions with respect to traditional links to Swiss society and culture(s)”. The authors underscore that these challenges will need to be managed and monitored carefully.

The second paper in the general section (“*Nested presuppositions: a manipulative form of informed presupposition*”) deals with a fine-grained analysis of a linguistic phenomenon relevant to speech communication, namely *presupposition*. Roughly speaking, what is presupposed in discourse is not said but taken for granted or considered as such by the speaker. Working at the interface between semantics and pragmatics, author Mohyi Eldeen Maziad elaborates the concept of *nested presuppositions*, referring to how different layers of contents are conveyed from speaker to hearer. In the author’s perspective, such layers of contents in nested presuppositions are always ideological and manipulative; even though they are new to the hearer, they are treated as taken for granted by the speaker. Needless to say, there is a risk associated to nested presuppositions: namely, new content is made part of the communication process without anyone really questioning its truthfulness and validity. Mohyi Eldeen Maziad provides a cognitive account of why and how nested presuppositions may work, using examples from the Arab Spring in Tunisia to explain the role this phenomenon plays in political communication.

Also concerned with political communication, “*Communicating nationalism in a changing Europe*” by Marcos Martínez Solanilla concludes the general section. This paper looks at how the conflict relative to the Catalan referendum (1 October 2017) is covered in online versions of

newspapers (mostly, tabloids) in Portugal, Switzerland, UK, Italy, Scotland and Northeast Italy. These regions and countries were chosen because they represent areas with very diverse relations to cases of requests for independence by minorities on their territory. The author claims that online coverage of nationalism allows “for different social sectors in diverse states to find out about each other, empathize with one another and feel supported”. Using methods from Critical Discourse Analysis and framing theory, Martínez Solanilla argues that the Catalan referendum is covered in ways that are extremely different, not to say conflicting, depending on “the social, political and cultural characteristics of the considered region” as well as on the newspaper’s orientation.

As the guest editors of the thematic section “*Political communication in and about crises*”, Julia Metag and Caroline Dalmus, illustrate, crises are to be found everywhere nowadays. Just think of the “refugee crisis”, the “financial crisis”, the “climate crisis” and many more current or recent crises. Crises are so ubiquitous that

they paradoxically might even become everyday routine events. It is, therefore, of utmost importance to theoretically reflect on what a crisis actually is and to empirically investigate how crises are used, maybe even instrumentalised and constructed in politics, how media report on crises, and how audiences react to them or perceive them. In other words, crises need to be examined with respect to their political dimensions. The thematic section in this issue of SComS presents an important step in this direction. It consists of three papers that offer diverse perspectives on political dimension of crises. And additional commentary that addresses further research gaps and challenges in political crisis communication concludes this thematic section. Further information on the article and the overall aim of the thematic section can be found in the guest editorial by Julia Metag and Caroline Dalmus.

It is time to leave our readers to this issue of our journal, thanking you for your interest in SComS.

Sara Greco, Katharina Lobinger

# **SComS**

## General Section

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## Evolution of a field: Swiss media and communication studies

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### Abstract

In this paper, we present the evolution of Swiss Media and Communication Studies over the last decade by summarizing the main results from a project funded by the Swiss University Conference (2008–2017). We give an overall picture of the growth in the field (in terms of student numbers, resources and activities), look at diversity in terms of topics (two clusters are identified and presented with respect to various indicators), present changes at the level of individual research units (where we find variance in terms of evolution), give insights into publication patterns (two different publication cultures are found) and describe mobility and career pathways in the field. We observe limited mobility within Switzerland, internal pathways at the level of doctoral students and post-docs, and international mobility, mainly within the same linguistic region, at the professorial level. We conclude that the field has reached a consolidation phase and achieved a rather stable situation, but faces new challenges, with digitalization and the pressure towards homogenization in publication output among the most important.

### Keywords

media studies, communication studies, Switzerland, publication cultures

## 1 Introduction

Understanding the structure and evolution over time of a scientific field is relevant for numerous actors in research policy and within the science system. Policymakers and university managers might want to better understand the scientific output of the field (Hicks, Wouters, Waltman, De Rijcke, & Rafols 2015) and the societal relevance of its research (Hessels & Freeman, 2010), helping them to target financial efforts to the most relevant domains; scholars might be more interested in understanding which research topics are emerging and are being institutionalized in order to orient their research agenda (Latour & Woolgar, 1979), while young scientists will be concerned predominantly by the changing structure of academic careers and by the opportunities available for stable jobs (Enders & Musselin, 2008).

In this article, we focus specifically on the state and development of the field of Media and Communications Studies (MCS) in Switzerland.

It is well known that there is a broad debate on the characteristics of the field, both internationally (Altmeyden, Weigel, & Gebhard, 2011; Corner, 2013) and in the Swiss context (Saxer, 2007). Regarding Switzerland, the field has also witnessed a rapid growth in terms of institutionalization, educational offers and student numbers since the mid-1990s (Meier & Blum, 2004; Gysin, Meier, Blum, Häussler, & Süss, 2004; Schade, 2005).

Our study aims to explore these developments in more depth by addressing several related questions: To what extent is this growth reflected in dimensions such as personnel, research funds and publication output? Is the overall evolution reflected in the individual research units?

Many researchers in the field might consider themselves part of a sub-community of MCS, as the field covers a wide range of topics. What differences do we observe between units in terms of topical orientation and activity profiles? To what extent does this orientation in terms of topics influence the activities and resources of individual research units?

In their daily work or when looking at colleagues, researchers in the field notice pressure for more publication in international journals. Is this a common expectation in the field of MCS, and are international journal publications really the gold standard? Also, are specific subfields more susceptible to this pressure?

Furthermore, such pressures may vary significantly for senior, mid-level, and junior researchers depending on their embedding in the career structure—specifically considering the steep hierarchies, small number of professors with stable positions at the top (often hired from abroad) and overabundance of postdoctoral researchers with insecure positions at the bottom, which is common to Swiss academia (SBFI, 2014). But, looking at MCS specifically: Are there typical career pathways that can be identified? Where do people in the field come from, and where are they going to?

These are questions we address in this article. In order to do so, we summarize the main results from two projects funded by the Swiss University Conference in the years 2008–2011 and 2013–2017 respectively, as part of a national program measuring research performance in the humanities and social sciences. Specifically, the projects aimed to map and characterize the complex, multidisciplinary field of MCS in Switzerland and to develop indicators for measuring its research output, taking into consideration the heterogeneity of topics and activities.

Our research shows that, similarly to other countries, in terms of their total activities Swiss MCS have seen a rapid development starting in the 1990s (see section 3, below). In addition, topical diversity and different sub-communities can be observed (section 4). With the results of our

studies, we are able to offer an in-depth analysis of the overall development over the last decade. We thus look at how individual units differ in terms of their activity profiles and their development over time (section 5), with a focus on publications (section 6) and on career structures (section 7).

Our analysis therefore depicts the complexity of evolution in the field, which lies at the crossroads between the pressure of global standards regarding international publication activities and careers, societal needs for education and relevance of research and, finally, the lasting cultural and disciplinary differences within the field. The complexities and struggles we describe are likely to have a deep impact on our scholarly activities in the future.

## 2 Measuring research units through their activities: Methodology and data

Our project focused on evaluating the field of communication science and media research and was developed in close collaboration with the Swiss Association of Communication and Media Research (SACMR). Our central units of analysis are research units. We define these as “organized groups of researchers that are officially recognized by the higher education institution (e.g., institutes, departments, or chairs), display some level of internal organization and are responsible for managing their own budget” (Buhmann, Ingenhoff, & Lepori, 2015, p. 271, see also Lepori et al., 2011; Larédo & Mustar, 2000).

*Indicators.* Measuring activities, such as those in research, teaching and industry transfer, in the diverse field of social sciences and humanities, requires an approach that goes beyond publication lists and funding. We therefore opted for “activity profiles”, a multi-dimensional approach respecting the multi-activity and multi-product nature of research units (Larédo & Mustar, 2000; van Vught, 2009; Schmoch, Schubert, Jansen, Heidler, & von Görtz, 2010; Braam & van den Besse-laar, 2010). In order to produce a balanced

**Table 1: Dimensions and indicators for mapping Swiss MCS**

| Dimension                         | Indicators   |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Subject topics*                   | A comprehensive list of MCS research topics derived from the topics mentioned in the so-called Swiss <i>KMW Atlas</i> , <sup>9</sup> as well as from the common divisions and working groups within the ICA and DGpuK. Heads of units were asked to indicate their importance for their unit using a three-point scale.  |
| Education and transfer activities | <i>Educational activities</i> ** : For each level (bachelor, master, and continuing education), number of hours organized, number of hours taught, number of supervised theses<br><i>Public and private sector transfer</i> * : Board memberships, research reports, presentations, funds**  |
| Scientific production             | <i>Scientific output</i> ** : Number of publications (differentiated by outlet: articles, book chapters, monographs, edited books), language of publication, number of conference presentations<br><i>Community recognition</i> * : Keynote speeches, edited special issues, executive board memberships in scholarly associations, advisory board memberships in scholarly journals, research grants from agencies supporting basic research<br><i>Research training</i> ** : Number of PhD students, organized PhD courses, finished PhD theses, number of PhD publications, conferences, and duration of PhD studies abroad |
| Resources                         | <i>Size</i> ** : Total number of full-time equivalent positions (FTE)<br><i>Composition of personnel</i> ** : External vs. internal personnel; PhDs, post-docs, professors<br><i>Acquired funding</i> ** : Total of acquired funds in Swiss Francs (CHF)   |

Source. Swiss Federal Statistical Office (data in the field «Kommunikations- und Medienwissenschaft» (universities) and «Kommunikation» (universities of applied sciences)). <https://sgkm.ch/en/about-us/kmw-atlas> (21.02.2019). \*data for 2009, \*\*data for 2009–2013.

picture of the various activities and outcomes, we derived four main dimensions and operationalized them using a wide range of indicators (see Table 1).

*Institutional units.* In general, we consider units that are institutionally recognized, but are sufficiently coherent in terms of topics, like chairs or institutes; faculties (at USI Lugano) and departments (in Zurich and Fribourg) are therefore divided into sub-units. In German-speaking universities this frequently corresponds to the chair level (professor plus research group), while in universities like USI it corresponds to the institute level (with several professors sharing topics and resources).

*Sample and timeframe.* Two data collections have been undertaken with different timeframes and slightly different samples and indicators.

Data collection 1 refers to the year 2009 (2005–2009 for scientific publications) and covers 22 research units including all units in Bern, Fribourg, Lugano, Neuchâtel and St. Gallen, as well as most of the units in Zurich; among the universities listed in the Swiss KMW Atlas<sup>1</sup>, only Basel and Geneva are missing from our sample. In contrast, the sample is far from representative for

1 <https://sgkm.ch/en/about-us/kmw-atlas> (21.02.2019)

universities of applied sciences, where only one unit among the seven listed in the SACMR KMW Atlas is included. All indicators listed in Table 1 were collected.

Data collection 2 refers to the years 2009–2013 and therefore provides a longitudinal view of the evolution of the field. The sample was composed of 22 units; compared with the first sample, only two units in Zurich are included, but the Department of Communication in Fribourg was split to provide a more precise analysis. The units' data were mostly quantitative, such as educational volume, students, degrees, staff and funding.

These data also include a detailed analysis of the careers of people working at these units for the period 2009–2013 that allows an in-depth analysis of recruitment and career paths in the field.

Finally, we turn to the Swiss Federal Statistical Office for the number of students in the field of communication and media for the whole period from 1981 to 2016, in order to provide a longer perspective on the evolution of the field.

While our main data do not go beyond 2013, we argue below that they concern a period following the big wave of expansion of the field in the late 1990s and early 2000s and, therefore, can be considered as fairly

representative of the current situation. An update to inform on more recent developments would, however, be interesting.

*Data sources.* Data were collected from a wide variety of sources: Websites, CVs, and self-maintained web profiles of researchers (published on the internet or social networks such as LinkedIn, ResearchGate and Xing), survey questionnaires (first phase only) to staff members and heads of research units, publication lists, and course books.

For more in-depth discussions and detailed information on the project and on the construction of the instrument, please refer to previous articles of the authors (Probst, Lepori, & Ingenhoff, 2010; Probst, Lepori, De Filippo, & Ingenhoff, 2011; Lepori et al., 2011; Lepori, Probst, & Ingenhoff, 2012; Buhmann et al., 2015; Wise, Lepori, Ingenhoff, & Buhmann, 2015; Lepori, Wise, Ingenhoff, & Buhmann, 2016; Buhmann, Lepori, & Ingenhoff, 2017).

### **3 The overall evolution in terms of resources and activities**

#### **3.1. The field's institutional evolution**

In Switzerland, even though the first courses in journalism were taught at the universities of Zurich and Fribourg at the beginning of the last century (Gysin et al., 2004), until the mid-1990s, the field was only weakly institutionalized and had just a few professors mainly in Fribourg and Zurich (Bonfadelli, 2007).

The development of the field started in the 1990s and involved different processes: the creation of units within departments of social sciences explicitly oriented towards communication, the creation of dedicated curricula in communication (as self-standing curricula or as a specialization within broader curricula in social sciences and humanities) and, starting around 2000, the expansion of MCS also to the newly created universities of applied sciences (Lepori, 2008).

From the mid-1990s, the educational offer in Zurich was expanded, while new curricula or institutes in communication

were opened at the universities of Basel (1995), St. Gallen (1998), Geneva (1999) and Lucerne (2002). In 1996, the Faculty of Communication Sciences at the Università della Svizzera italiana (USI) in Lugano opened its doors to the first students. By 2000, five different places already offered the possibility to study MCS (Süss, 2000). Since then, the evolution of the field has been more gradual.

The evolution of student numbers illustrates this development. Data from the Swiss Federal Statistical Office (SFSO) presented in Figure 1 need to be read with care since they include only students enrolled in curricula explicitly labelled as communication, and exclude educational offerings within other curricula, like in Bern and St. Gallen, as well as expanding offerings at the master's level and in post-graduate education; nevertheless, they provide a useful temporal picture.

We first observe that before 1996 only Fribourg offered a minor in communication. A rapid increase in the number of students started in 1996 with the new educational offerings at the University of Zurich and at USI in Lugano. The peak between 2001 and 2002 can probably be explained by the unmet demand of previous years when suitable education offers were lacking in the field. After a slight drop from this peak, from 2004 onwards student numbers steadily increased for a decade. Starting in 2014, the number of new enrolments started to decrease in all universities, possibly pointing to a loss of attractiveness of the field.

#### **3.2. A more fine-grained view for the period 2009–2013**

Our data provide a more fine-grained view of the field's activities and of their evolution, albeit for a rather short period of time.

As shown in Table 2, during the period from 2009 to 2013, which was rather stable in terms of student numbers, we see an increase in total full-time equivalent positions (FTE) of 22%, which is stronger at the professorial (+25%) and senior (+22%) levels than at the junior level (+15%). This increase can be interpreted as a sort of

Figure 1: Students starting their bachelor’s degree at Swiss Universities and Universities of Applied Sciences

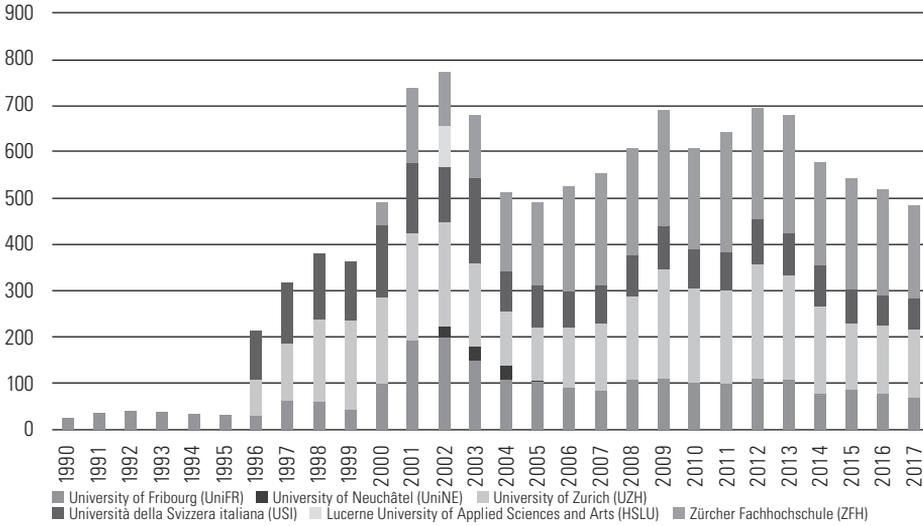


Table 2: Time evolution of selected indicators

|                      | 2009      | 2010      | 2011      | 2012      | 2013      |
|----------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Total FTE            | 113.86    | 122.94    | 127.55    | 130.75    | 138.42    |
| Professorial FTE     | 27.91     | 30.11     | 31.68     | 31.76     | 35.02     |
| Senior FTE           | 39.1      | 42.48     | 45.74     | 47.09     | 49.48     |
| Junior FTE           | 46.85     | 50.14     | 50.13     | 51.9      | 53.92     |
| Third-party funds    | 4 052 298 | 3 871 500 | 3 446 317 | 4 759 047 | 4 640 299 |
| Publications         | 231       | 161       | 151       | 182       | 215       |
| BA students enrolled | 585       | 579       | 581       | 593       | 568       |
| MA students enrolled | 381       | 413       | 420       | 385       | 387       |
| PhD students         | 62        | 67        | 80        | 76        | 84        |
| BA theses supervised | 236       | 209       | 255       | 234       | 270       |
| MA theses supervised | 84        | 116       | 120       | 139       | 162       |

Source: Wise, Lepori, Ingenhoff, and Buhmann (2015); total for 22 units.

catching up of human resources with the rapid increase of student numbers in the previous years. We discuss below, in section 5, the evolution of individual units.

In this 5-year period, the amount of third-party funds gained by these units also increased by 15%, but with variations, explained by the life cycles of larger research contracts. Here, however, a shift has taken place: While the amount of competitive research funds (mostly from the Swiss National Science Foundation – SNSF) has

increased by 73%, contract funds have decreased by 41%. This change is essentially due to two units, which were strongly oriented towards contract research and moved towards a more balanced composition of external funds. In 2009, third-party funds were equally divided between competitive and contract, while in 2013 three-quarters of funds were competitive, mostly from SNSF. This signals the establishment of MCS as a recognized academic discipline in the Swiss context, which is

confirmed by the fact that from 2012 the main SNSF decision-making body also included a representative of the discipline.

Concerning publications, the evolution in the 5-year period showed some variation, with a decrease of 35% between 2009 and 2011, followed by an increase of 42% by 2013 (see section 6 for more details).

The number of students enrolled at the bachelor's and master's level remained rather stable, as did the number of teaching hours. At the PhD level, however, the number of students (as well as graduates) increased by 35%. An important increase is visible in the number of master's theses supervised by members of the research units, which nearly doubled in the 5-year window, reflecting the establishment of the Bologna model from the mid-2000s onwards.

So overall, after an important growth period from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s, the field of MCS seems to have settled. The growth in student numbers was followed by a growth at the staff level, accompanied by a slight growth in funding and a more important growth in the number of PhD students (Wise et al., 2015). It remains to be understood what consequence the decrease in the student numbers from 2014 will have on the future evolution of the field.

#### 4 Topical diversity

The field of Media and Communication Studies (MCS) is considered to be rather young in its institutionalization (Rogers, 1994; Meyen & Löblich, 2006; Saxer, 2007), of an interdisciplinary character, influenced by a wide range of other fields (Schramm, 1983; Putnam, 2001; Wilke, 2016) and characterized by the presence of different sub-communities (O'Sullivan, 1999; Reardon & Rogers, 1988; Rice, Borgman, & Reeves, 1988; Leydesdorff & Probst, 2009; Olivesi, 2006). This leads to a certain level of diversity in the field, which is confirmed also by recent meta-discussions (Corner, 2013; Couldry, 2013; Donsbach, 2006; Gray & Lotz, 2013).

As specific studies on Switzerland have shown, the situation is similar to that discussed in the international community, with the heterogeneity even increased by the presence of three main national languages (Bonfadelli & Bollinger, 1987; Lepori et al., 2011; Lepori et al., 2012). Research profiles of universities and research units cover a wide range of topics: mass communication, interpersonal communication, media history, language/social interaction, organizational communication and political communication, to give a few examples (see Probst & Lepori, 2007). Besides topical diversity, the various units also differ regarding their mission, e.g., in teaching load or quantity of research.

The literature in sociology of science strongly suggests that cognitive and material practices of science are interrelated (Latour & Woolgar, 1979; Becher & Trowler, 2001), and that therefore differences in research topics correspond to systematic differences in the patterns of activities, outputs and resources.

To explore this relationship, we performed a cluster analysis based on the rating of the importance of different subject topics by the heads of the research units, focusing on the university sector (excluding universities of applied sciences). The analysis refers to the year 2009 for 21 units in universities.

This analysis yielded two clusters of units (see Buhmann et al., 2015). *Classical fields of media and communication research* (CMCR) is a cluster situated in the more traditional MCS topics such as mass communication, journalism studies or media audiences, reception and effects, referring to the classical theories of MCS. *Emerging fields of media and communication research* (EMCR) is a cluster of research units that are interested in more recently developed topics, such as intercultural communication, visual communication or health communication, also referring to a wide variety of concepts from other fields such as psychology, philosophy, language/rhetoric, business studies, and neurosciences. These two clusters are of rather similar size in terms of staff (67.4

FTEs in CMCR vs 62.3 FTEs in EMCR) and they consist of 10 and 11 units respectively.

To explore the relationship between different topic profiles on the one hand and resources and activities on the other, we can further compare the two clusters on a variety of variables. Units within the two clusters differ in terms of the dimensions of activities and resources. Concerning the *size in terms of staff* and measured by the median of FTE<sup>2</sup>, EMCR units are slightly larger (median of 6.6 FTE) than CMCR units (5.1), which is explained mainly by a difference at the level of PhD / assistant positions (median of 3.7 vs 2.9).

Regarding *funding*, CMCR shows a higher total amount of funds (CHF 3.17 million vs CHF 2.46 million). However, roughly three-quarters of all funds are declared by only two units, therefore third-party funds are strongly concentrated. Furthermore, CMCR has a higher share of funds from private organizations.

Concerning *publications*, the CMCR cluster is more active than the EMCR cluster, while EMCR has a larger share of English-language publications (see section 6 below).

In terms of *teaching* activities, the CMCR cluster accounts for roughly 30% more teaching hours than EMCR. In both clusters, one unit is particularly active in teaching, accounting for approximately twice as many hours as the second unit in the cluster. A closer analysis, however, shows that a large share of the “additional” hours in CMCR is taught by external teachers, meaning that the internal teaching load is similar in the two clusters. At the MA level, however, the picture changes: EMCR organizes a higher number of teaching hours than CMCR, but also includes more external lecturers. Concerning supervised

theses, CMCR show higher numbers both at bachelor’s and master’s level.

Finally, we highlight major differences in terms of institutionalization. Most EMCR units are located in Lugano and St. Gallen, more than half of the professors are from abroad and have (at the PhD level) originally trained outside the communication field. By contrast, most CMCR units are in the German-speaking region, with professors mostly from the same region and trained within the field itself.

## 5 Change at the level of individual units

In this section, we go deeper into differences in activity profiles between individual units; and further, we investigate to what extent such differences are stable over time. Data for this analysis refers to the period 2009–2013.

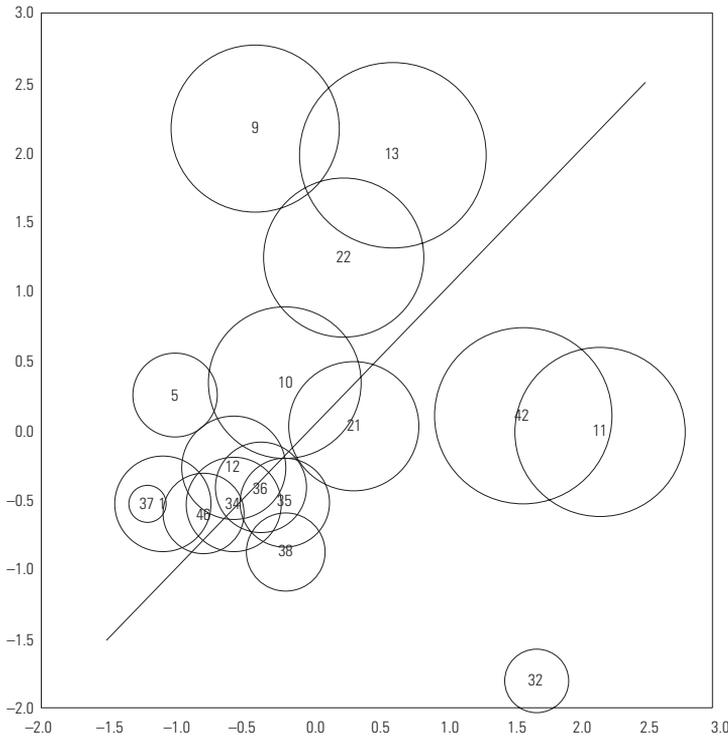
To analyze differences between units regarding their orientation to education vs research, we run a factor analysis using four indicators of educational activities (teaching hours and number of theses for both the bachelor’s and master’s level) and five measures of research activity (total publications, PhD students and graduates, funds from funding agencies and contracts; Lepori et al., 2016).

This analysis identifies two main factors, which can be interpreted as a measure of *research orientation* and a measure of *educational orientation*.

The first factor, explaining 47% of the total variance, loads on PhD students and graduates, publications, research agency funds, contract funds and teaching hours at the master’s level. The second factor (accounting for 23% of the variance) loads on teaching hours both at the bachelor’s and master’s level, on bachelor’s and master’s theses and on PhD students. Master’s and PhD students load on both factors, showing their bridging function between the two pillars of higher education, underlying the intersection of research and teaching at these educational levels – and hinting, for PhDs, at the potential “double burden”

2 Medians are preferred for unit-level comparisons given that distributions tend to be skewed and, therefore, averages might reflect the contribution of few units. Further, these differences are not statistically significant and don’t allow for implications in terms of the relationship between cognitive and material practices of science, as suggested by Latour and Woolgar (1979) and Becher and Trowler (2001).

Figure 2: Research units' educational and research orientation



*Note:* Averages of the years in which the unit existed. The two axes are normalized scores for each unit for the two factors identified, i.e. a score = 1 is equal to the average of the whole sample. Bubble size is proportional to full staff; numbers are units' IDs. Units above the diagonal line are more specialized towards research (relative to the field's average), units below the line are more specialized towards education (see Lepori, Wise, Inghoff, & Buhmann, 2016).

at this career stage (see also the discussion on careers in section 7).

As illustrated by Figure 2, most units display a weak relative specialization, i.e. their balance between research and education is similar to the field's average, hinting at an environment that does not foster specialization. Three units are oriented more strongly towards education, and three towards research. Interestingly, five out of these six specialized units are located in the same university, probably indicating an environment that allows for more differentiation.

Further, it is interesting to see whether differences between units are stable over time. Since our data only cover the period 2009–2013, this analysis is mostly illustra-

tive of a method that should be replicated over a longer time frame.

Results show a pattern differentiated by the activity considered and that changes in the overall field's activities are largely due to a few units. Regarding the number of total staff, one unit alone accounted for one-third of the total increase, while most of the total increase in professorial FTEs was concentrated in a single unit, which received four additional professors. As expected, those (larger) units that are organized as institutes (more than one professor, a larger number of total FTE) show more variation in their composition than units organized as chairs (one professor with a few junior researchers).

**Table 3: Publications, full sample, 2009–2013**

|  | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | Changes<br>2009–2013 |
|--|------|------|------|------|------|----------------------|
| Total publications                     | 231  | 161  | 151  | 182  | 215  | –7%                  |
| Journal publications                   | 101  | 75   | 73   | 94   | 80   | –21%                 |
| Books                                  | 38   | 17   | 9    | 7    | 12   | –68%                 |
| Book chapters                          | 80   | 61   | 62   | 75   | 117  | +46%                 |
| Publications in English                | 135  | 90   | 79   | 109  | 108  | –20%                 |
| Journal publications in Scimago        | 56   | 44   | 41   | 51   | 45   | –20%                 |
| Journal publications in first quartile | 19   | 10   | 18   | 34   | 29   | +53%                 |

Source: Wise, Lepori, Ingenhoff, and Buhmann (2015)

As for activities, differences between units (and absolute values) are quite stable for teaching at the bachelor’s level, while substantial variation is observed at the master’s level. Research agency and contract funds show an even higher variation; these funds are heavily concentrated in a few units and display important fluctuations between years.

This analysis therefore shows substantial differences between units within a field and differentiated patterns of evolution. Short-term variance in the units’ activities is found mainly with regards to teaching at the master’s level and project funding. Teaching at the bachelor’s level is more stable and, therefore, constitutes the basis on which the units build their other activities. Finally, our analysis emphasizes that professorial positions are the critical resource for a unit’s development and that this resource is mainly controlled by departments or faculties largely based on teaching activities (see Lepori et al., 2016).

## 6 Publication cultures

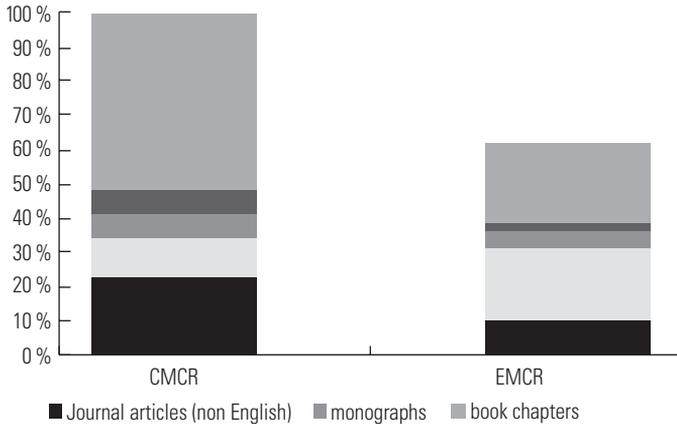
Publications represent the most tangible way in which outputs of research activities are made available to a broader audience. Beside their content, they can also be seen as giving indications on the network of the researchers, their geographical area of activity, or their type of audience.

In many fields of science, recent decades have seen a pressure towards more English language international publications (for a critical discussion in the field

of MCS, see for example, Hanitzsch, 2016). Journal publications have become the gold standard, with a particular focus on journals contained and ranked in large databases, such as Scopus or Web of Science. However, in social science and humanities different publication cultures can be identified (Hicks, 2004), including an important role of book publication and of national languages. It is largely an open question whether convergence to a model oriented towards journals can be observed and is suitable to these disciplines.

These trends can also be observed in Swiss MCS. Table 3 shows the publication activity of the units considered for the years 2009–2013, including different types and characteristics of publications. This table is based on publicly available sources. Only the publications of people with an employment of at least 20% at the research unit were included in the sample, and no fractional counting for multi-authored publications was applied. The decline after 2009 is explained by methodological reasons. While in the first phase of the project, up to the year 2009, publication lists were provided by the individuals through a survey, the second phase did not use a survey and therefore relied on public sources, university databases, Google Scholar and CVs. From 2010 on, the data show a steady increase in the number of publications in general, while the proportion of publications written in English remained stable and the share of publications covered by Scimago, an international scientific database, tended to decrease. However, these trends should not be overinterpreted giv-

Figure 3: Composition of publications by groups of units, 2009–2013



Note: Note. CMCR: Units in the cluster of Classical Media and Communication Research. EMCR: Units in the cluster of Emerging Media and Communication Research.

en the small numbers and the short time-frame considered.

The analyses show an average productivity per person at the professorial / senior level of 4 peer-reviewed journal articles, 6 book chapters, 10 conference presentations and 1 monograph in the 5-year period 2005–2009 (see Lepori et al., 2011). However, this productivity is mainly generated by a small number of individuals: Out of a group of 74 professors, senior researchers and post-docs who actively publish, 14 individuals account for more than half of the total output. The scientific production of the field is thus strongly dependent on a small number of highly productive individuals. These individuals are distributed quite evenly between the units, as only one unit includes more than one individual with more than 30 entries in its publication list for the 5-year period.

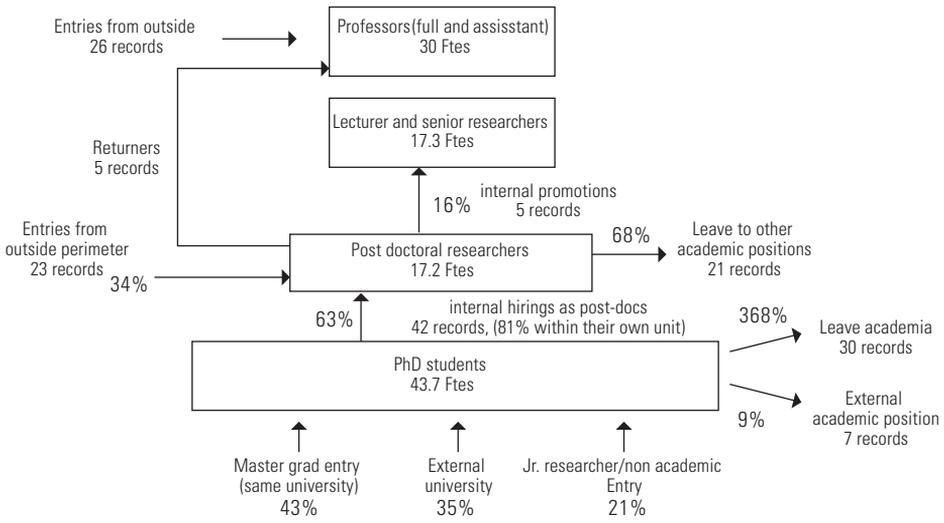
English is the most frequent language of publication for journal articles and presentations to scientific conferences, while national languages prevail for all other types of publication (see, for example, Lepori et al., 2011). Roughly 20% of monographs, edited books, and book chapters are published in Switzerland, and slightly more than 20% of all conference presentations take place in Switzerland, while more than 45% of all conference presentations are held at conferences in countries

where none of the national languages of Switzerland is a national language (see Wise et al., 2015).

Journal publications reveal a broad scope (results from data 2005–2009, see Lepori et al., 2011): 571 entries are spread among 330 different journals, reflecting the diversity of the field. Only in 76 journals were more than one article published in the 5-year period, while only 17 journals account for more than 5 articles. By far the highest number of publications in a journal is found in “Studies in Communication Sciences”, edited by the SACMR together with the University of Lugano (45 entries), followed by «Zeitschrift für Organisations-Entwicklung» (15), «Medienwissenschaft Schweiz» (12 – one of the two journals that merged into Studies in Communication Sciences in 2007), «Klartext» (10) and «Publizistik» (10). Regarding book publications, ten publishing houses published nearly half (338) of all (682) book publications, with large German publishing houses at the top (VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, UVK Verlagsgesellschaft, Herbert von Halem Verlag, Haupt Verlag, and Springer Verlag each accounting for more than 30 publications).

A closer look highlights large differences between units that are associated with their topic orientation (Figure 3). CMCR units still largely publish in national lan-

Figure 4: Mobility in Swiss MCS



guages, notably German (with only 26% of the publications in English), while EMCR units mostly publish in English (58%). For EMCR units English journal papers represent the main type of publication media, while books and book chapters are the main outlet for CMCR units (alongside non-English journal publication, mostly German communication journals; Buhmann et al., 2015). As known from previous studies of communication research, differences in publication culture correspond to different topic and geographic orientation towards the German vs. the Anglo-Saxon world (see, for example, Lauf, 2001). However, at the same time, some practices are common to the whole field, like an important share of book publications, while in the CMCR English journal papers are also gaining in importance.

The analysis of the publication output could be extended in the future in several directions. On the one hand, the analysis of co-authorship would provide important insight into the collaboration patterns of the field and its (different) geographical orientations (Glänzel & Schubert, 2005). On the other hand, co-word analysis could provide more fine-grained insights on research topics and their evolution over time (Van den Besselaar & Heimeriks, 2006).

## 7 Mobility and career pathways

In the second project phase, we have undertaken a detailed analysis of the career paths of the people in the field. This analysis is relevant for different issues: to investigate the linguistic and cultural connections to neighbours, as revealed by the flow of people, particularly at the professorial level (Probst & Lepori, 2007; Lepori & Probst, 2009); to analyze to what extent changes in the structure of academic careers revealed by international (Enders & Musselin, 2008) and Swiss (Fumasoli & Goastellec, 2015) studies have also affected the MCS field; and to provide some empirical evidence to the ongoing debate on academic careers in Switzerland and complaints about the lack of stable positions for young researchers (SBFI, 2014). For each individual, the dataset systematically records all entry and exit events to units in the field, as well as instances of vertical mobility within the same unit (for example PhD students being hired as post-docs).

More than half of the 101 individuals identified in 2009 were still in the same research unit in 2013. Some had been promoted internally (mostly from PhD student to post-doc), while others remained in the same position. None of the 44 junior

researchers remained in the same position, however, with 18 of them appointed to a new function within their unit. Changes between research units in the same university are noted in only 3 cases – one professor and two junior researchers – and changes within the perimeter of analysis (i.e., those 22 research units included in our study) are also not frequent. Only 4 junior researchers left for a unit at another university, while 15 individuals left for units outside the perimeter of analysis (2 professors, 9 seniors and 4 junior researchers), and 6 junior researchers left for a non-academic job. Additionally, 6 PhD students left before completion of their PhD. Finally, 4 professors retired.

When analysing the whole sample, and not only the 2009 cohort as above, a broader picture is possible, with the limitation that two thirds of the individuals have been members of the research units for 4 years or less. Hence, the extent of stability might be overestimated.

Among these 322 individuals, 178 remained in the same position, while 46 changed their position within the same unit. Among the others, the distribution of exit “destinations” is rather similar in the whole sample as in the 2009 cohort, with small exceptions: The share of uncompleted PhDs is 50% higher in the overall cohort (20 out of 98 individuals leaving the research unit as compared to 6 out of 45), while – as can be expected – the share of retirements is higher in the 2009 cohort than in the overall cohort (as only 1 person who started working in a research unit after 2009 had already retired by 2013).

A total of 33 individuals left their unit for another academic unit, with 9 of them remaining in Switzerland and the others leaving for the United Kingdom (7), Italy (6), Germany (5), the United States (2), Sweden (2), and other countries (2).

Overall, the sample contains 316 entry events, with more than half of them being at the junior level (169) compared to 97 at senior level and 50 at professorial level.

Of the 50 entries at the professorial level 26 are from an academic unit outside the perimeter. Only two of these individuals were working in Switzerland before,

while the others came from Germany (10), Italy (6), the US (3), the UK (2), and other countries (3), thereby showing the strong prevalence of entries from the linguistic region of the hiring university. Ten entries occurred from other research units in the perimeter (9 of them being promotions to the professorial level, as only 1 exit of a professor to another unit in the perimeter is registered). In only 5 cases did internal promotion occur, while in 8 cases the entry event could not be accounted for in the data collection.

At the senior level, a large share (43 out of 97) of all entries were internal promotions, while 4 individuals entered from another unit in the perimeter. The 30 entries from outside the perimeter of the study also show the pattern of the linguistic region: Italy (12) and Germany (7) are the most important countries of origin, while 5 entries were from within Switzerland. Furthermore, 2 entries are registered from the US and the UK respectively, and 2 from other countries. At this level, 2 entries from a non-academic position also occurred during the period of study, while in 9 cases the entry event could not be accounted for.

The picture differs strongly at the junior level. As might be expected, a large share of all entries (125 out of 169) are from the master's level. These entries usually occur from the same university (73) or from a university abroad (44), while it is clearly uncommon that a master's graduate from one Swiss university is employed at the junior level at another Swiss university (8 individuals). This might be explained by linguistic barriers, but also by a pattern where professors identify among their master's students promising PhD candidates and hire them directly without an open call. However, there are also a few entries from other academic units (6 in the same department, 2 within the perimeter, 13 outside the perimeter), changes of function within the unit (8) and 10 entries from non-academic positions. In 5 cases, no information was available.

Figure 4 summarizes the mobility patterns in Swiss MCS in the 5-year period from 2009 to 2013. It shows a clear divide

between the professorial level and that of young researchers. At the top level of the academic hierarchy, hiring is clearly international with a focus on linguistic neighbours as well as the US and UK – chances to become a professor for local people being very limited, unless they have been abroad for a period ('returners'). On the contrary, the PhD and post-doc level are characterized by a large degree of 'inbreeding' (Horta, Veloso, & Grediaga, 2010), where most PhDs are hired within the same unit for a first post-doctoral period. This is, however, a transitory situation, with most of these people moving to other academic positions or leaving academia within a 4-year period. Between the two, we could identify a small group of 'survivors' who managed to stay long-term in the same university in positions like lecturer and senior researcher, but with almost no chance to get to a professorial position (see Buhmann et al., 2017).

## 8 Conclusions

With this analysis of the overall evolution, topic diversity, publications, careers and changes at the level of individual units, we have given a broad picture of the field of MCS in Switzerland over the last decade. This picture can be helpful for established researchers to better understand their scientific environment, as well as for young researchers to learn more about the expectations towards them with respect to their career and to evaluate their own career options. The analyses show that the field as a whole has reached a consolidation phase, with rather stable personnel structures (i.e., resources) and teaching activities at the bachelor's level. Other resources, i.e., funding, show some variation, as do teaching activities at the master's level. Also, at the level of individual units, more variation throughout the years is visible. However, in the overall profiles, the units are mostly rather stable.

It can be said, therefore, that the field is currently in a rather stable, consolidated situation. This is also reflected in its resources, which are unlikely to grow expo-

entially in the coming years. This means that we can expect future job opportunities to come only from replacing the former positions of retired professors rather than from new, additional positions being created. While job descriptions in many of the classical as well as the emerging fields of communication might be aligned to the new challenges of digitalization, the total number of positions is expected to remain stable.

At the same time, however, the field also faces various challenges, with factors influencing both the academic profession and the professionals in the field of MCS studies and teaching. The most prominent factor might be digitalization, which is likely to have an impact on both areas. This can already be observed in the current discussion in the German-speaking region, where the question of the field's identity is seeing a revival (see for example Wilke, 2016; Hepp, 2016; Jarren, 2016; Theis-Berglmair, 2016), with discussions about the subject that the field is concerned with being of central importance. Communities that were formerly separated as studying mass and individual communication might find common ground, including increasingly through research funding, new teaching modules and courses in the area of digitalization. This process might produce some tension: Wilke (2016), for example, pictures the history of the field of MCS as an integrating field of science (Integrationswissenschaft) and points to the differentiation process that has taken place over recent decades. He warns that this differentiation might lead to disintegration and asks whether a common ground in the field still exists. It seems possible that this common ground is currently being reshaped.

Digitalization, however, also has its influences on academic life. The way we learn, teach, collaborate and do research is challenged; new tools might imply a new culture. For young scholars, it is essential to be familiar with new methods and approaches in order to cope with big data, datafication and automated learning tools. This might additionally promote a change in traditional separations in the

field, allowing for new collaborations, but also collaboration cultures, to emerge. It seems likely that some changes in existing structures – both in terms of organization and curricula – might occur, and that new units combining subjects that were hitherto separated might emerge.

A further challenge for the field is a certain pressure towards homogenization: international norms and values concerning the conduct of research are increasingly gaining ground, visible for example in performance agreements fixing performance measures (also described in the general trend of “new public management”), in the urgency to increase one’s publication output (see, for example, Hanitzsch, 2016), especially in the English language and in international outlets, or in the fact that international mobility is becoming more and more a precondition for an academic career. This creates tensions with respect to traditional links to Swiss society and cultures(s) that will have to be managed carefully.

Coming back to our initial RQs, our results demonstrate the growing number of English journal publications, which also mirrors the growing pressure towards more publication in international journals, especially for young tenured scholars. As a consequence, many young PhD students now aim at writing a paper dissertation, comprising 3–4 empirical journal papers and a summary article. At the same time, this tendency also raises lots of concerns and discussions within the community (see, for example, DGPK, 2017) that point at a potential future loss of theory development and deeper understanding of the overall field of communication science. However, “countermovements” become visible as well: we also observe a strong recognition of the need to evaluate the quality and not only the quantity and impact factors of journal articles. Many Swiss universities, as well as the Swiss National Foundation, have already signed the so-called DORA principles (“San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment”)<sup>3</sup>, in which comprehensive assessments away

from journal-based metrics like Journal Impact Factors are recommended, and institutions are asked to “consider the value and impact of all research outputs (including datasets and software) in addition to research publications, and consider a broad range of impact measures including qualitative indicators of research impact, such as influence on policy and practice”<sup>4</sup>. Our approach and instrument presented in this paper, encouraging the measurement of research units and researchers through their various activities like scientific production (also comprising community recognition and research training), education and transfer activities as well as resources, might be one fruitful approach to support such a comprehensive assessment.

Hence, it remains important to continue observing the field of MCS in the future. The picture we have given in our study provides useful information and important indicators for further analyses of the field.

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# Nested presuppositions: A manipulative type of informative presupposition

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## Abstract

This paper introduces the new pragmatic concept of *Nested Presuppositions (NestPs)* and develops a relevance-theoretic account that explains its cognitive dynamics and manipulative mechanisms. The first section lays necessary theoretical foundations, by defining pragmatic presupposition, compiling a taxonomy of the types of presupposition and their triggers, identifying and critiquing research gaps in eight of the most relevant studies and drawing the conclusion that none of the existing definitions or accounts of pragmatic presupposition can adequately capture the manipulative characteristics and mechanisms of the instances of informative presupposition at issue. In section two, I shall introduce the concept of *NestPs* as the filler of those gaps, grounding it in Textual Rhetoric and Relevance Theory and highlighting its defining characteristic of information structures, i.e. how the message is segmented and its degrees of prominence and suppression are assigned in order to achieve strategic goals. I further problematize the relationship between *NestPs*, on the one hand, and informativeness and manipulation, on the other, in light of Gricean and Relevance-Theoretic linguistics, establishing that *NestPs* are inherently manipulative. I finally expound the manipulative dynamics of *NestPs*, in terms of the information processing mechanisms they employ, by capitalizing on the concepts of Ostensive Stimulus, Cognitive Principle of Relevance, Principle of Optimal Relevance and Comprehension Procedure, and suggesting the two new mechanisms of *Cognitive Underpassing and Structure-Content Cognitive Conflict*.

## Keywords

nested presuppositions, pragmatic presupposition, cognitive linguistics, manipulation, relevance theory, Arab Spring speeches, ben Ali, Mubarak, cognitive pragmatics, and Critical Discourse Analysis

## 1 Introduction

This paper introduces the new pragmatic concept of *Nested Presuppositions* (henceforth *NestPs*) and develops a relevance-theoretic account that explains its cognitive dynamics and manipulative mechanisms. The first section is a literature review that outlines some competing definitions of pragmatic presupposition, compiles a taxonomy of the types of pragmatic presupposition and their triggers, discusses five of the key (problematic) properties of presupposition and establishes the need for *NestPs* by identifying and critiquing research gaps in eight of the most relevant studies in the field. In the second section, I shall introduce the new concept of *NestPs*, ground it in Textual Rhetoric and Relevance Theory, define it in terms of information structuring and packaging and elucidate my definition, with three il-

lustrative examples, two of which are put to the classical tests of pragmatic presupposition. In section three, I sketch a cognitive account that explains the manipulative dynamics and functions of *NestPs*, in terms of the four relevance-theoretic concepts of Ostensive Stimulus, Cognitive Principle of Relevance, Principle of Optimal Relevance and Comprehension Procedure, as well as the two newly suggested mechanisms of *Cognitive Underpassing* and *Structure-Content Cognitive Conflict*. I conclude with some recommendations for further research.

## 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 What is pragmatic presupposition?

Although the literature on presupposition almost exceeds that written on any other topic in Pragmatics, a great deal of

it is “obsolete and sterile” (Levinson 1983: 167), and has failed to reach a consensus on even a definition or a set of defining properties (Peccei 1999: 19). Aspects of disagreement include whether presupposition is a relation between sentences, statements or speakers and assumptions (Frege 1892; Strawson 1950; 1952); whether the locus of presupposition is speakers, sentences or both (Keenan 1971; Brown & Yule 1983; Levinson 1983; Yule 1996; Simons 2003; Richardson 2007; Stalnaker 2011); and whether presupposition refers to a specific homogeneous phenomenon or a range of heterogeneous phenomena (Levinson 1983; Green 1989; Huang 2007). These competing views have yielded many conflicting definitions of presupposition, each tackling it from a different perspective.

One of the most comprehensive definitions of presupposition is that proposed by Stalnaker (1972: 387–8) in which he argues that to “presuppose a proposition in the pragmatic sense is to take its truth for granted, and to presume that others involved in the context do the same.” He recast this definition, two years later, in the following Grice-like formula:

A proposition P is a pragmatic presupposition of a speaker in a given context just in case the speaker assumes or believes that P, assumes or believes that his addressee assumes or believes that P, and assumes or believes that his addressee recognizes that he is making these assumptions, or has these beliefs. (1974: 473)

The importance of the conditions of sincerity and cooperation, which Stalnaker foregrounded in the second definition, are also underscored by Verschueren (1999) who confirms that for an utterance to be meaningful and successful, its presupposed propositions must be shared as common knowledge by both the speaker and the hearer.

## 2.2 Types of presupposition and presuppositional triggers

In spite of their disagreement on a definition of presupposition, researchers have agreed on identifying some prototypical ex-

amples that represent the different types of presupposition and their presuppositional triggers, the latter being the linguistic “inducers” or “clues” used to communicate the meaning implied in a presupposition.

Out of the thirty-one types of presuppositional triggers “isolated” by Karttunen (1973; 1974), Levinson selected only thirteen and considered them “the core of the phenomena that are generally considered presuppositional”: definite descriptions, factive verbs, implicative verbs, change of state verbs, iterative verbs, verbs of judging, temporal clauses, cleft sentences, implicit clefts with stressed constituents, comparisons and contrasts, non-restrictive relative clauses, counterfactual conditionals, and questions (1983: 184).

There are less comprehensive classifications of presuppositional triggers: Short (1989) classified them into existential, linguistic and pragmatic; Yule (1996) categorized them into existential, factive, lexical, structural, non-factive and counter-factual and Maingueneau (1996) reduced them to two broad categories of presuppositions triggered by linguistic structures and presuppositions triggered by the relation between utterance and context.

There has not been yet an exhaustive list of all the types of presupposition and their triggers. Table 1 is a compilation of all the types and triggers provided by Levinson (1983), Yule (1996) and Huang (2007).

## 2.3 (Problematic) Properties of informative presupposition

### 2.3.1 Common ground

Common Ground refers to “what is taken by the speaker to be the common ground of the participants in the conversation, what is treated as their common knowledge or mutual knowledge” (Stalnaker 1978: 321). It is thus one of the two basic conditions required for establishing presupposition: an “utterance A pragmatically presupposes a proposition B *iff* A is *appropriate* only if B is *mutually known* by participants” (Levinson 1983: 205). Common ground is typically associated with “participant-old” information, i. e. information that belongs to the set of common beliefs, values and

Table 1: Types of presupposition and presuppositional triggers

| Type                                    | Presuppositional Trigger  | Details  | Example   |
|---|---|--|---|
| Specific existential                    | –Definite descriptions<br>–Definite noun phrases, a definite article, demonstrative, possessive pronoun or s-genitive followed by a noun phrase, or a proper noun | Presupposition of existence; speaker commits to the existence of the named entity  | John saw <i>the Unidentified Flying Object</i>                                    |
| Structural/<br>Non-specific existential | –WH-questions   | –Certain linguistic structures are regularly and conventionally analysed as presupposing that some part of the structure is already true | –When did you last <i>hit your wife</i> ?   |
|   | –Cleft, or<br>–pseudo-cleft sentences   |  | –was/wasn't John who kissed Mary.   |
|   | –Implicit clefts with stressed constituents   | –Linguistics was/wasn't invented by CHOMSKY  | –what John lost was/wasn't his wallet<br>–John did/didn't compete in the OLYMPICS |
| Factive                                 | –Factive emotive verbs<br>Example: regret, be sorry, be glad, be sad that, be proud that, be indifferent  | –The information following certain verb phrases is treated as fact.<br>–Indicates emotional attitude towards fact.                       | –I regretted telling him the name of my friend                                    |
|   | –Factive epistemic/Cognitive factive verbs, Example: realize, know, be aware of, be obvious   | –Indicates knowledge of fact   |   |
| Non-factive                             | –Non-factive verbs<br>Example: believe, suppose, pretend, imagine, dream, claim   | –The information following certain verb phrases is treated as untrue.  | –He claimed that I was driving fast   |
| Counterfactual                          | –Counterfactual conditionals  | –The information presented is presupposed to be the opposite of what is true.  | –If I had been driving fast, I might have crashed                                 |
| Lexical/Other                           | –Implicative verbs<br>Example: manage, forget to, happen, avoid, happened to  | –The use of a particular expression is taken to presuppose another unstated concept.   | –I managed to drive fast  |
|   | –Aspectual/Change-of-state verbs<br>Example: <i>stop, begin, start</i> , continue, carry on, cease, take, leave, <i>enter, come, go, arrive</i>                   |  |   |
|   | –Iteratives (adverbs and verbs) Example: again, any more, <i>return, repeat, another time, to come back, restore, for the nth time</i>                            |  |   |
|   | –Temporal clauses<br>Example: subordinate clauses beginning with <i>when, before, while, since, after</i> , during, whenever, as                                  | –Marked by stress/other prosodic means<br>–Marked by particles, e. g. too, back, in return<br>–Marked by comparative constructions       | –I stopped driving fast   |
|   | –Verbs of Judging<br>Example: accuse, criticise   | –The Proto-Harrappans, who flourished 2800–2650 B.C., were/were not great temple builders  | –When I drove fast, I skidded   |
|   | –Comparisons and contrasts  |  | –Marianne called Adolph a male chauvinist, then HE insulted HER                   |
|   | –Non-restrictive relative clauses   |  | –Carol is/isn't a better linguist than Barbara                                    |
|   |   |  |   |

knowledge shared by both interlocutors and is consistent with the “pre-constructed” propositions assumed as “context” (Stalnaker 1978; Gazdar 1979; Levinson 1983; Fairclough 1995; Chapman & Routledge 1999).

In spite of this consensus on the importance of Common Ground in pragmatic presupposition, I consider it problematic because, as I will explain in detail in section 5, *NestPs* do not always communicate common ground, participant-old knowledge.

2.3.2 *Informative presupposition and presuppositional accommodation*

This stipulation that the information carried by pragmatic presupposition has to be participant-old is challenged by the counter-argument that presuppositions have “informative” usages: when the presupposed utterance introduces participant-new information not shared by the hearer, and imposes an adjustment on their common ground (Karttunen 1974; Lewis 1979; Gauker 1997; 1998). This informative aspect of presupposition is formulated in the Accommodation Rule, according to which listeners “accommodate” the new presupposed information by fitting it into the background they share with the speaker:

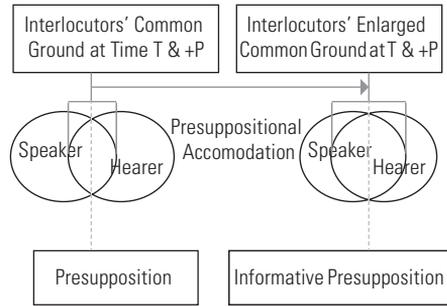
If at time *t* something is said that requires presupposition *P* to be acceptable and if *P* is not presupposed just before *t*, then – *ceteris paribus* and within certain limits – presupposition *P* comes into existence at *t*. (Lewis 1979: 340)

Accommodation Rule was criticised as being no more than a formulation of the problem, rather than an explanation of, or a solution to, it (Gauker 1997; Sbisà 1999). Figure 1 is a tentative schematic representation of presuppositional accommodation.

2.3.3 *Constancy under negation*

Constancy Under Negation is the property by which the presupposition of a statement survives negation and remains “constant” and “effective”. Although it is considered one of the defining properties of presuppo-

Figure 1: Schematic representation of presuppositional accommodation



sition (Yule 1996; Verschueren 1999; Huang 2007), some scholars contend that it “is not in fact a rich enough definition to pick out a coherent, homogeneous set of inferences” (Levinson 1983: 185) and suggest replacing it with Defeasibility as “one of the crucial properties of presuppositional behaviour and one of the touchstones against which all theories of presupposition have to be assessed” (ibid: 186).

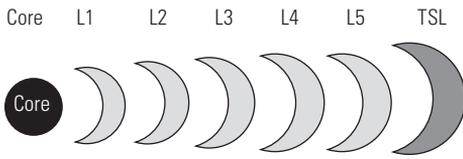
2.3.4 *Defeasibility*

Defeasibility is the “cancellation” or “evaporation” of presupposition (Levinson 1983; Huang 2007), which can arise in different scenarios and contexts, e.g. “immediate linguistic contexts” or “less immediate discourse contexts” (1983: 186). The contexts most relevant for the scope of this paper are when presuppositions contradict real-world knowledge, prevailing background assumptions, implicatures and (or) immediate inter- and (or) intra-sentential contexts.

2.3.5 *Projection*

Some linguistic expressions and environments are argued to allow presuppositions embedded in complex sentences to “pass up” or “project up” from their lower-level embedded phrase to the higher level of the whole sentence. The “complementizable predicates” that allow such a projection are called “holes”, those that block it “plugs” and the intermediate ones “filters” (Karttunen 1973: 173-8). When embedded presuppositions fail to survive at the level of the complex sentence, the Projection

Figure 2: Message segmentation in *NestPs*



Problem (PP) arises. PP was accepted by some scholars, based on the Fregian compositional view that the overall meaning of an expression is a function of the total sum meaning of its parts (Yule 1996: 30), and rejected by others because of its vagueness and inadequacy to determine “which presuppositions of component clauses will [...] be inherited by the complex whole” (Levinson 1983: 191).

**2.4 Relevant literature on informative presupposition**

This section reviews and critiques eight of the most relevant studies to informative presupposition: Sbisà (1999) which highlights the persuasive and ideological uses of informative presupposition, Simons (2003, 2004) which ground informative presupposition in the cognitive sphere of Relevance Theory, de Saussure (2012) which attempts to explain presupposition in terms of Relevance Theory, and Capone (2017a, 2017b) and Macagno and Capone (2016a, 2016b) which fine-tune and develop the concept of common ground.

First, the ideological and persuasive usages of informative presupposition are highlighted by Sbisà, who draws the conclusion that informative presupposition serves a persuasive function and acts as a convenient carrier and transmitter of ideological content “when what is presupposed has to do with values, social norms or ideals, or with perspectives on facts which are proper to a specific social agent” (1999: 492). She further contends that these ideological and persuasive uses of informative presupposition cannot be explained adequately in terms of the concept of Presuppositional Accommodation (PA) with its binary distinction between

presupposition proper and informative presupposition. The existence of many gradual and subtle distinctions between these two poles of PA, she argues, render the concept incapable of capturing the complicated processes involved in social communication. Sbisà thus suggests allowing presuppositions a “normative feature”, by treating them “not as shared assumptions, but as assumptions which ought to be shared,” because the persuasive use of presupposition is contingent upon the specific “normative or deontic features that presuppositional phenomena have” (ibid: 500).

Some questions were left unanswered by the important study of Sbisà (1999). For example, is it very practical to consider all the persuasive uses of presupposition communicative in the manner Sbisà did? When to consider informative presupposition persuasive and when to consider it manipulative? Under which of the five cases of the “supposedly shared status of presuppositions”, listed by Sbisà (p. 498), are we to subsume the case of exploiting informative presupposition strategically in order to achieve manipulative goals, i.e. when the speaker does not hold the presupposed assumption and knows that the hearer does not hold it either, because the presupposed assumption is itself not satisfied by the “objective context”; nevertheless, the speaker presupposes the assumption in order to deliberately manipulate the hearer? Finally, does not the assumption that “we should not give separate accounts of presupposition proper and informative or persuasive presupposition” (ibid: 499), upon which Sbisà bases her argument, seem not to attribute due weight to the important factor of intentionality, without which Pragmatics would not function properly?

Secondly, a quantum leap in the investigation of presupposition was made by Simons (2003; 2004) who criticised previous semantic and pragmatic accounts of presupposition as mere “descriptive characterizations” and re-oriented the topic in Relevance Theory: defining the presuppositions of an utterance as the “propositions which the addressee must accept in order for the

utterance to be relevant for her in the way intended by the speaker” (2003: 256).

Simons based her argument on Relevance theory, maintaining that the relevance of an utterance can lead to its acceptance as a presupposition. The most relevant proposition, i. e. the one inducing the principal contextual effect, is the strongest proposition that will be foregrounded in the utterance and treated as the maximal proposition. Any other propositions will be backgrounded and dealt with as secondary “non-maximal entailments”. Presuppositions arise, Simons contends, when the acceptance of the backgrounded propositions becomes a prerequisite for the acceptance of the maximal entailment. Presupposition is thus viewed as a relevance requirement and presuppositions as propositions required for establishing relevance, either by being part of the context of the hearer or by being communicated as new but non-main-point propositions that are not the principal carriers of relevance (2004: 329–55).

Simons (2003; 2004) made a contribution to the investigation of presupposition by tackling it from a cognitive perspective, but offered no explanation of the cognitive mechanisms involved in the relevance-theoretic presupposition or the manipulative potential of pragmatic presupposition.

Thirdly, the relevance-theoretic investigation of presupposition is further developed by de Saussure who defines presuppositions as “contents brought about by an utterance as pre-conditions not to meaning but to relevance” (2012: 38). He explains presupposition in terms of the “economy of information processing”: employing the “Minimax Scales”, i. e. the rules of minimising costs and maximising effects, to organize the cognitive processes involved in natural language processing (ibid: 39). De Saussure contends that since presuppositions are “incorporated in the cognitive environment of the hearer as preconditions to relevance,” they are “shallowly processed”, i. e. not subjected to discussion, critical evaluation or controls and filters of relevance (ibid: 47).

Although de Saussure (2012) develops a plausible cognitive account of presupposition, his treatment of presuppositions as “contents” seems to disregard the important role played by structure. This represents a real problem in *NestPs* which, as will be explained in detailed in the following section, are primarily manipulative because they disguise unshared, new-information “contents” and present them as presupposed, old-information contents, by carrying the former in structures typically associated with the latter and attacking the short-term and working memories of the hearer with multiple such structures. Presuppositions thus do not necessarily operate as old-information “contents” only, but also as cognitively taxing information structures.

Fourthly, the analysis of presupposition has been developed by Capone (2017a, 2017b) and Macagno and Capone (2016a, 2016b) who enriched it with new linguistic and argumentative perspectives and finetuned its central concept of common ground.

Linguistically, they grounded their approach on the theory of Polyphony (Ducrot 1984, a cited in Macagno & Capone 2016a) which distinguishes different voices, assertions, and commitments within an utterance: an utterance may deploy a polyphony of conflicting voices arranged in complex structures of direct and indirect reports whose enunciators can be distinguished distinctively and held responsible for different implicit speech acts. The analysis of Macagno and Capone (2016a) is based on the two interrelated concepts of presumptions and commitments: it maintains that pragmatic presupposition is mainly based on common ground and possible accommodation, and explains the problematic relationship between presupposition triggers and pragmatic presuppositions in terms of the presumptive and non-presumptive polyphonic articulations of an utterance and the distinct commitments that ensue for the interlocutors.

The presumptive, polyphonic interpretation of an utterance distinguishes between two or more utterers: a first utterer,

i.e. the speaker, and a voice representing a common opinion. The non-presumptive, polyphonic articulation consists of a free indirect report, in which the utterer reports the presuppositions indirectly by attributing them to a second voice that belongs to the speech community of the hearer.

When the presumed commitments deriving from the presumptive interpretation of an utterance conflict with its presumable stronger ones, the polyphony of the utterance is renegotiated, i.e. the utterance is no longer interpreted, presumptively, as expressing the point of view of the speaker, but, non-presumptively, as consisting of two or more voices: one stating the viewpoint of the speaker and the other(s) indirectly reporting another view point that the speaker does not hold as his/her commitments. That non-presumptive modification of the presumptive structure of an utterance distances the speaker from the presupposed propositions, treats them as quoted elements of discourse that do not result in any responsibility for the speaker, and hence does not hold the latter responsible for them. That polyphonic articulation of the implicit dialogical dimension of an utterance and its underlying structures can explain cases in which semantic presupposition triggers do not result in pragmatic presuppositions, i.e. the phenomena of presupposition suspension which arise when there is a discrepancy between the presumptive reading of an utterance and its non-presumptive meaning.

Capone et al. explained those phenomena of presupposition suspension as cases of non-presumptive, non-prototypical interpretation of utterances, whose presumptive, prototypical reading had failed to reconstruct the communicative intention of the speaker. Such a failure triggers a non-defaultive reading of the utterance, modifies its prototypical polyphony, allows the speaker to metalinguistically refuse the commitments resulting from the other voice(s), and initiates a non-automatic, complex mechanism of meaning explanation that aims at reconstructing the illocutionary force of the utterance,

retrieving the logical form of the proposition, and ultimately establishing the communicative intention of the speaker.

That process of reconstructing the pragmatic structure of the utterance, which Capone et al. called reasoning from best interpretation, can be considered as an abductive pattern of microargumentation based on hierarchies of presumptions, as it involves a complex type of reasoning that compares, analyses, and weights the different possible linguistic and epistemic presumptions associated with the different interpretations of the expressed meaning as well as its co-textual and contextual information, in an attempt to find the best possible explanation of the communicative intention of the speaker. That interpretive reasoning process underlies the automatic relevance-theoretic mechanism of explicature which decodes, reconstructs, and explicates the implicated pragmatic meaning into a propositional one.

Capone (2017a, 2017b) and Macagno and Capone (2016a, 2016b) therefore fertilized the analysis of presupposition argumentatively and linguistically. Argumentatively, they analysed the pragmatic concept of “taking responsibility” for an utterance in terms of the argumentative concepts of “commitments” or “dialectical obligations”, and explained some cases of presupposition suspension in terms of the two microargumentation mechanisms of presumptive reasoning and reasoning from best argumentation. Linguistically, their presumptive/non-presumptive polyphonic treatment of presupposition explained some of the phenomena of presupposition suspension in terms of the mechanism of explicature and the corresponding non-presumptive reasoning underlying it, allowed the reconstruction of the logical form of the illocutionary force of utterances, and accounted for the attribution of the commitments of the speaker and the hearer and the presumptions underlying it.

Nevertheless, that polyphonic treatment cannot account for cases of informative presupposition in which the speaker reports unsubstantiated, non-common-

ground presumptions and (or) attributes them to a second voice in order not to distance her/himself from them or to evade responsibility for them, but to commit both her/himself as well as the hearers to that presumed content, and hence manipulate the latter deliberately by passing that unsubstantiated presumed content as agreed-upon, common-ground facts, in an argumentative move similar to that implied in the Aristotelian presumptive fallacy of *petitio principii*, i.e. presupposing a conclusion of an argument as its premises or assuming premises that are not likely to be known or admitted by the addressee (Schipper & Schuh, 1960: 55–60). The polyphonic treatment of presupposition, therefore, cannot account for the manipulative instances of informative presupposition cited in the corpus of speeches at issue.

### 3 Nested presuppositions

#### 3.1 Theoretical framework

##### 3.1.1 Textual Rhetoric

The newly suggested concept of *NestPs* is inspired by Textual Rhetoric (TR): “(a) how to segment the message into units; (b) how to assign degrees of prominence or subordination; and (c) how to order the parts of the message” (Leech 1983: 64). This particular framework has been selected because it underscores the strategic role played by linguistic structures, not in their grammatical sense, but in their pragmatic force, i.e. how they are engineered to foreground, hide, frame, and (or) intermediate specific meanings.

##### 3.1.2 Relevance Theory

Relevance Theory (RT) is a cognitive, psychological, inferential theory of communication that aims at interpreting utterances, as well as any other “ostensive stimulus”, in terms of cognitive processes (Wilson 1998; Sperber & Wilson 1985, 1995, 2002; Wilson & Sperber 2004). RT is constructed upon three key concepts: The Cognitive Principle of Relevance (CGPR), the Communica-

tive Principle of Relevance (CMPR) and the presumption of Optimal Relevance (OR).

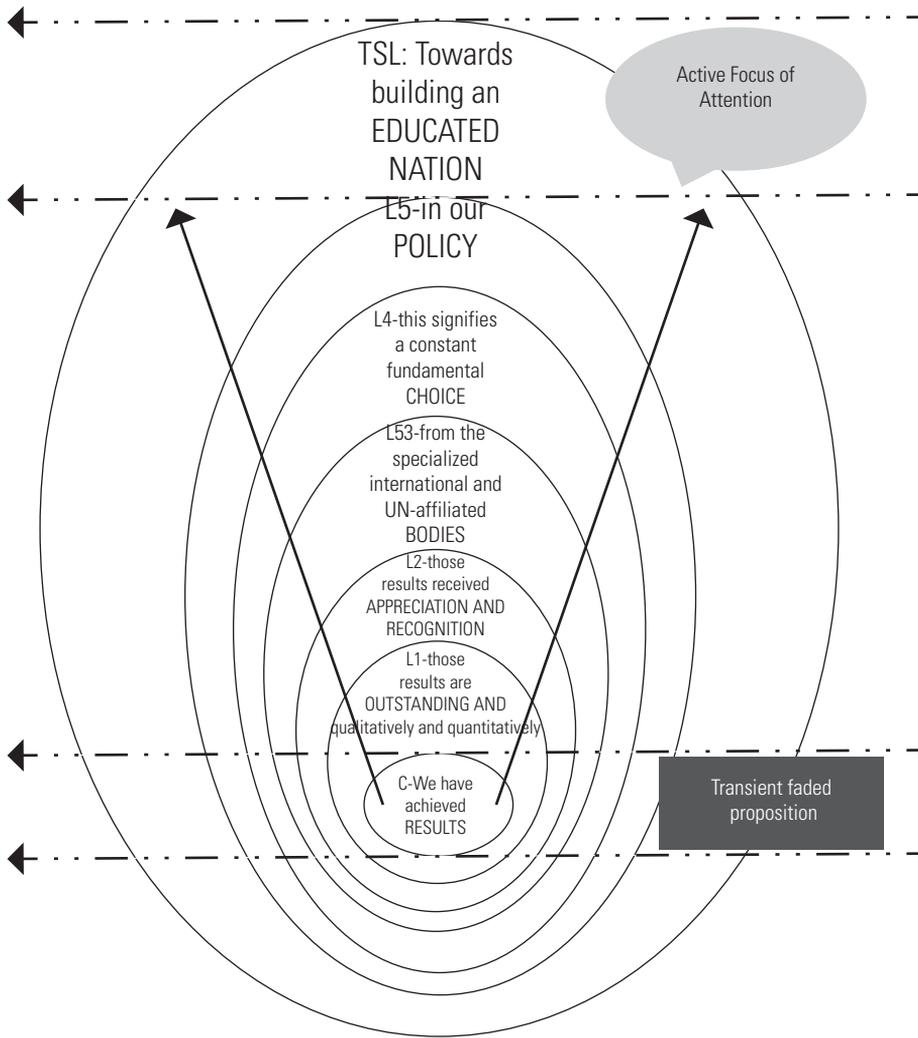
CGPR states that human cognition is “geared to the maximisation of relevance” (Wilson & Sperber 2004: 249), and CMPR assumes that every “ostensive stimulus conveys a presumption of its own optimal relevance” (ibid: 254). CMPR is thus based on the CGPR and the Gricean concept of Inferential Communication (IC) which considers communication “a process of inferential intention attribution” (ibid: 254). Wilson & Sperber added an extra layer of intention to IC and called it Ostensive Inferential Communication (OIC), contending that it involves “a. The informative intention: The intention to inform an audience of something, [and] b. The communicative intention: The intention to inform the audience of one’s informative intention” (ibid: 255). While the fulfilment of the communicative intention is a prerequisite for understanding, the fulfilment of the informative intention depends on whether the audience trusts the communicator or not, a condition not necessary for mere recognition. Every act of OIC is based on the use of an Ostensive Stimulus (OS): a stimulus intentionally designed to attract the attention of the audience and focus it on the meaning intended by the communicator; consequently, it is more capable than any other stimulus of generating “precise and predictable” anticipations of relevance (ibid: 255).

The third key concept in RT is the presumption of Optimal Relevance (OR) which regulates the effort-effect balance:

- 1) An ostensive stimulus is optimally relevant to an audience *iff*:
  - a. It is relevant enough to be worth the audience’s processing effort;
  - b. It is the most relevant one compatible with the communicator’s abilities and preferences (ibid: 256).

Finally, RT suggests a comprehension procedure for testing and constructing hypotheses about the meaning intended by the speaker, based on CGPR and OR. The inferential comprehension procedure, which applies at both the explicit and implicit levels, i.e. for the identification of explicated

Figure 3: Example of the information structures of *NestPs*



content and explicatures, and the recovery of implicatures, directs the hearer to:

- 2) a. Follow a path of least effort in computing cognitive effects: Test interpretive hypotheses (disambiguations, reference resolutions, implicatures, etc.) in order of accessibility.
- b. Stop when your expectations of relevance are satisfied (ibid: 259).

### 3.1.3 Definition of *NestPs*

*NestPs* are cognitively taxing information structures which nest several layers of participant-new-information contents

(NI) that are ideological, unshared by the hearer and not satisfied by the objective context; take their truth value for granted; build upon them; and package them in linguistic structures that are typically associated with participant-old information (OI), in order to deliberately manipulate the hearer.

In other words, *NestPs* are difficult-to-process information structures that are strategically devised to carry, flash, then hide several propositions that are neither substantiated nor shared by the hearer. Nevertheless, the speaker presents those

NI contents as true, OI, common knowledge and tactically casts them in linguistic structures associated with shared OI, in order to implicitly sell them to the hearer in a manipulative linguistic transaction. Moreover, *NestPs* are manipulative not only because they disguise NI in the form of OI by carrying the former in structures typically associated with the latter, but also because *NestPs* attack the cognitive system of the hearer with multiple such structures at the same time, which results in cramming the short-term and working memories of the hearers, dissipating their processing capacities, and preventing them from evaluating the presupposed propositions properly, as will be explained in detail in the following section.

### 3.2 Information structures (IS) and packaging in *NestPs*

The structuring of information in *NestPs* can be best illustrated through an authentic example. Following is an extract from the first speech delivered by the ousted President of Tunisia Zine El Abidine ben Ali, on 27 December 2010, in response to the Arab Spring Jasmine Revolt in Tunisia:

- › Example (1): While we have achieved outstanding results in the field of education, qualitatively and quantitatively, which received appreciation and recognition from specialized international and UN-affiliated bodies, this indeed signifies a constant, fundamental choice in our policy of building an educated nation.

In terms of message segmentation, the nuclear constituent of *NestPs* is the Core (C), which corresponds in Example (1) to the proposition “we have achieved outstanding results”. The Core is the most dubious and problematic proposition in a *NestPs* construct; it does not have a truth value, nor does it constitute a common ground. That is the reason why the speaker tactically buries the Core as deeply as possible at the bottom of *NestPs*, as visually illustrated in Figures (2) and (3). All the subsequent presumptive additions can be thought of as propositional Layers (L#) accumulated to cover the dubious Core, by pushing it

further back, far from the active processing of the Focus of Attention (FOA). Those layers also act as post-modifiers that take the truth value of the Core for granted and build upon it. In Example (1), those are L1, L2, L3, L4, and L5. The highest layer of *NestPs* is called the Top Surface Layer (TSL). Since it is the last proposition the hearer receives and hence the most active in her/his FOA, TSL needs to have unproblematic content. In Example (1), TSL corresponds to “building an educated nation”.

In terms of packaging, the two main strategies of *NestPs* for assigning degrees of prominence and (or) subordination to constituent presuppositions is foregrounding and (or) backgrounding, respectively. The core, being the most dubious proposition, is assigned the least possible degree of prominence by being buried inside multiple embedded presuppositions and consequently backgrounded and relegated to the back of attention and processing. On the other hand, the TSL which constitutes an unproblematic part of the common knowledge of the speaker and the hearer is foregrounded and fronted to attention, processing, and evaluation. As Figure (3) illustrates, gradation in colour and font refers to the different Layers of presuppositions nested deliberately to background the Core and foreground the TSL.

### 3.3 Illustrative example of *NestPs*

Following is a longer and more illustrative example of *NestPs*, extracted from the same speech of ousted President ben Ali:

- › Example (2): While the trigger of these events was one social case, whose circumstances and psychological factors we understand, we feel sorry for the damages that resulted from those events and took exaggerated dimensions, due to the political exploitation of some parties who do not want the good for their homeland, and resort to some foreign television channels that are hostile to Tunisia and broadcast lies and fallacies without scrutiny, adopting exaggeration, incitation and media defamation, all these call upon us to clari-

**Table 2: Detailed analysis of the constituent presuppositions of *NestPs* in example (2)**

|    | Utterance   | Presuppositional trigger   | Presupposition   | Type of presupposition   |
|----|---|--|--|--------------------------|
| 1  | These events  | Definite NP (Demonstrative + N)  | »There exist events;   | Specific Existential     |
| 2  | The trigger   | Definite NP (definite article + N)<br>Temporal Clause (While + NP)   | »There exists a trigger of these events;   | Specific Existential     |
| 3  | whose circumstances and psychological factors we understand                         | Possessive relative pronoun<br>“whose”   | »That trigger has circumstances and psychological factors;   | Specific Existential     |
|    |   | Factive epistemic verb<br>“understand”   | »We understand the afore-mentioned circumstances and factors;  | Factive Epistemic        |
| 4  | Feel sorry about the damages that resulted  | Factive emotive verb<br>“feel sorry”   | »The above-mentioned events resulted in damages<br>»We feel sorry for those damages  | Factive emotive          |
| 5  | and took exaggerated dimensions   | Change-of-state verb<br>“exaggerate”   | »those damages were exaggerated  | Other                    |
| 6  | due to the political exploitation   | Definite NP (definite article + NP)  | »There exists a political exploitation which caused the aforementioned exaggeration  | Specific Existential     |
| 7  | of the situation  | Definite NP (definite article + NP)  | »There exists a situation that was politically exploited   | Specific Existential     |
| 8  | by some parties   | Determiner + NP  | »There exist some parties who exploited that situation politically   | Non-Specific Existential |
| 9  | who do not want the good for their homeland   | Relative clause  | »Those parties do not want the public good of their country  | Other                    |
| 10 | some foreign television channels  | Determiner + NP  | »There exist foreign TV channels to which the above-mentioned parties resort   | Non-Specific Existential |
| 11 | which broadcast lies and fallacies  | Relative clause  | »There are lies and fallacies broadcast by those channels  | Other                    |
| 12 | Clarify some of the issues and confirm some the facts that should not be overlooked | Factive Epistemic verbs<br>“clarify & confirm”<br>Definite NP<br>“the issues & the facts”<br>Relative clause | »There exist issues<br>»There exist facts<br>»Some of those issues and facts are neither clear not confirmed<br>»Those issues and facts are overlooked | Specific Existential     |

fy some issues and confirm some facts that should not be overlooked.<sup>1</sup>

The Core of this twelve-Layer *NestPs* is the Specific Existential presupposition triggered by the definite NP (Demonstrative + N) which assumes that “there exist events”. Here, the ousted President of Tunisia is employing presupposition ideologically and manipulatively, not only to present his view as a taken-for-granted common ground, but also to build upon it. He is

reducing the Revolution of the Tunisian people to mere “events”, attributing those “events” to a single “one social case” which he considered unworthy of explication and employing the thickest type of implicature, i.e. Particularized Implicature, to implicate that “one social case” and gloss over it in a vague manner.

That “one social case” which ben Ali implicated was the 26-year-old Tunisian man Tarek al-Tayeb Muhammad Bouazizi, who was supporting his family by selling fruit and vegetables, until a policewoman confiscated his cart, slapped him in the face and beat him up when he objected. Bouazizi went to the police station and

1 The quote might sound awkward in English, because I retained the original Arabic structure of the utterance in the English translation.

the municipal council to file a complaint against the policewoman, but no official agreed to listen to him. He then doused himself in paint thinner and set himself on fire in front of the local municipal council of the town of Sidi Bouzeid (Rifai 2011; de Rosa 2011; al-Karama Forum 2011). His death gave momentum to the Tunisian revolution which ousted ben Ali twenty-eight days later and triggered the domino effect of the Arab Spring revolutions in Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain and Syria.

In the following Layers of *NestPs*, the ousted President uses the Definite NP (Definite article + N) together with the Temporal Clause (While + NP) to trigger the specific existential presupposition “There exist a trigger of those events”. This presupposition performs the function of mitigation.

Ben Ali then uses the Possessive Relative pronoun “whose” to trigger the Specific Existential presupposition “There exist circumstances and psychological factors for that trigger” and follows it with a Factive Epistemic verb to trigger the presupposition that “We understand those factors”. He also uses the Factive Emotive verb phrase “feel sorry” to trigger the presupposition that “The events resulted in damages”. The last three presuppositions of the Ousted President act as an indirect acknowledgement of the problem and perform a reconciliatory function, sending the message to the revolutionaries that he is following the situation, knows what is going on and feels remorse. He then uses the Change-of-State verb “exaggerated” to trigger the presupposition that “Those damages are exaggerated”, and the Definite NP (Definite Article + NP) to trigger the Specific Existential presupposition that “There exists a political exploitation which caused that exaggeration”.

Ben Ali, then, identifies the sphere where exploitation happened and the exploiters who did it: using the Genitive Structure (of + NP) to trigger the Specific Existential presupposition “There exists a situation that was politically exploited”, the (Determiner + NP) structure to trigger the Non-Specific Existential presupposition that “There exist some parties who

exploited the situation politically” and the non-restrictive Relative Clause structure to trigger the presupposition that “Those parties do not want the public good of their country”. The Ousted President, then, uses the (Determiner + NP) structure to trigger the Non-Specific Existential presupposition that “There exist foreign TV channels” to which the aforementioned exploiting parties resort. He describes what those channels broadcast by using the non-restrictive Relative Clause structure to trigger the presupposition that “There are lies and fallacies broadcast by those channels”. All the previous seven presuppositions perform the functions of attacking, defaming and demonizing opponents.

Finally, in the TSL, the Ousted President employs the Definite NP, the Relative Clause and the Factive Epistemic verb structures to trigger the Specific Existential presuppositions that “There exist issues and facts that are overlooked, not confirmed and not clarified”.

*NestPs* were employed in this utterance, by the ousted President, ideologically and strategically, in order to disguise unsubstantiated, unshared propositions and present them as true, common-ground, presupposed facts. *NestPs* mitigated the political situation in Tunisia, by reducing the revolution of the whole country to mere “events” that were triggered by a single “one social case”; covered the highly sensitive and mobilizing story of the self-immolation of Bouazizi, by dehumanizing him, reducing him to a “case”, further minimizing that case to a single one case, undermining the credibility of Bouazizi by depicting him as a mentally ill man; described all the revolutionaries as traitors conspiring with foreign media against their own country and legitimized the interference of ben Ali as the source of clarification.

The ousted President used all the above-mentioned presupposed propositions as taken-for-granted premises and built upon them to legitimize himself and what he was doing. *NestPs*, in this short utterance, have thus performed the multiple manipulative functions of mitigation,

Other-dehumanisation, Other-demonization and Self-legitimation.

#### 4 NestPs as a manipulative type of informative presuppositions

Based on the premise that the presuppositions assuming specific propositions which implicitly transmit value-judgemental conceptions about how the world is and how it should be are to be considered ideological (Sbisà 1999: 492), *NestPs* are ideological. The fact that not all ideological propositions are manipulative leaves *NestPs* at the crossroads of two potential paths: being classified as informative or as manipulative. This fundamental issue can be settled in light of the pragmatic definitions of informative presupposition, the Gricean Maxims and Conditions of Quantity, Quality, Manner and Sincerity and the principles of Relevance Theory.

##### 4.1 Pragmatic definitions of informative presupposition

Pragmatically speaking, Brown and Yule (1983) stipulate that presuppositions can communicate new unshared information if that information is neither “controversial” nor “asserted”. In a similar vein, Stalnaker states that the definition of presupposition, in terms of common-ground, is valid in “normal, straightforward serious conversational contexts where the overriding purpose of the conversation is to exchange information” (1974: 474). None of these three conditions is satisfied in *NestPs*: which communicate highly controversial information, in contexts that are far from being straightforward, for purposes that have nothing to do with exchanging information.

*NestPs* also violate two important conditions specified by Stalnaker as defining characteristics of informative presupposition: the speaker should not “have any particular mental attitude towards the proposition” nor should they “assume anything about the mental attitudes of others in the context” (1972: 387). The fact that the speaker employs *NestPs* in order to manipulate the cognitive processing sys-

tem of the hearer entails necessarily that the speaker does have not only a mental attitude towards his presupposed propositions, but also a deliberate intent to manipulate the mental attitudes of the hearer.

##### 4.2 Gricean maxims

In terms of Gricean pragmatics, *NestPs* violate more than one maxim at the same time. They first violate the Gricean Maxim of Quantity, by nesting many layers of presuppositions and consequently providing more information than required. *NestPs* also violate the Maxim of Quality, by presupposing unsubstantiated propositions and taking their truth for granted. Moreover, *NestPs* violate the Maxim of Manner, by being neither clear, nor brief, nor orderly. Finally, *NestPs* violate the Sincerity Condition, as the speaker knows that the content of the propositions he is assuming is unsubstantiated and unshared by the hearer; nevertheless, the former strategically presupposes the propositions, as true and shared common knowledge, in order to manipulate the latter.

The fact that *NestPs* violate the pragmatic definitions of informativeness and the Gricean maxims of communication eliminates the possibility of their being informative and renders them manipulative. The sense of manipulation meant here is that defined by Rigotti as:

A message is manipulative if it twists the vision of the world (physical as well as social – or human – actual as well as virtual) in the mind of the addressee, so that he/she is prevented from a healthy attitude towards decision. (i.e., an attitude responding to his/her very interest), and pursues the manipulator’s goal in the illusion of pursuing her/his own goal (2005: 68)

This definition is in line with the argument advanced by van Dijk that the discourse employed to reproduce power, exercised discursively in the interest of the powerful and against that of the powerless, is an ideological and manipulative discourse (2006: 360).

In *NestPs*, the speaker commits the hearers to his views, provides them with

unsubstantiated information with which they are unlikely to agree in normal circumstances and manipulates their cognitive systems in order to achieve the strategic goal of maintaining unequal relations of power. *NestPs* are thus inherently ideological and manipulative.

## 5 Manipulative information structures and cognitive mechanisms of *NestPs*

The manipulation of *NestPs* can be problematized and accounted for relevance-theoretically in terms of information structures and cognitive mechanisms.

### 5.1 Information structures

#### 5.1.1 *Ostensive Stimulus (OS)*

An OS “conveys a presumption of its own optimal relevance”, i.e. it is engineered to behave as the strongest stimulus most capable of attracting the attention of a targeted audience and focusing it on the specific meaning intended by the speaker (Wilson & Sperber 2004: 254). In *NestPs*, the TSL functions as the OS which the speaker baits in order to trigger anticipations of optimal relevance in the cognitive systems of his audience, enticing them to assume that the TSL is the strongest and most relevant stimulus, and consequently the most rewarding one to process.

The first manipulative aspect of *NestPs* thus lies in the fact that their TSL does not qualify for the position it occupies as the OS worthy of foregrounding and processing. This is because the TSL is not optimally relevant: it is not the most relevant stimulus “compatible with communicator’s abilities and preferences” (ibid: 256) and it is not the stimulus most capable of generating “precise and predictable” anticipations of relevance; consequently, it is not the strongest stimulus most worthy of processing. TSL is in fact a weak stimulus whose positive cognitive effects do not compensate for the effort required for processing it; thus, it should not have been foregrounded in the position it occupies.

#### 5.1.2 *Cognitive Principle of Relevance (CGPR)*

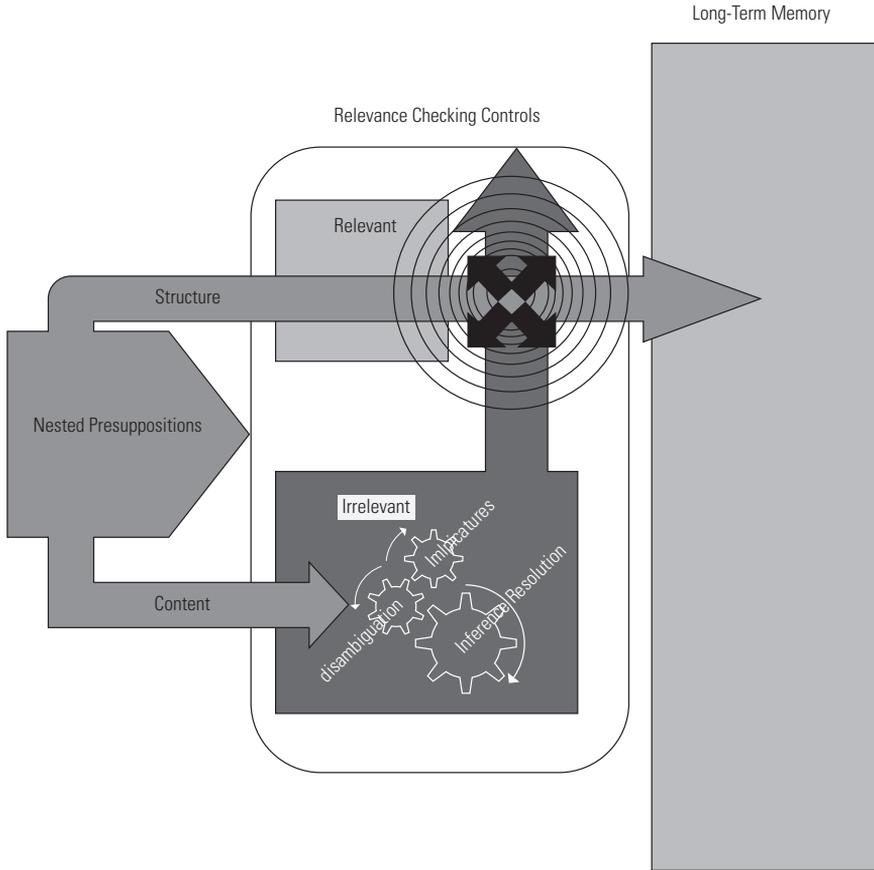
*NestPs* are also manipulative because they exploit the universal tendency towards the maximisation of relevance, as informed by the CGPR, i.e. the human tendency to select the most optimally relevant stimulus in the environment and process it (ibid: 249). This manipulative exploitation is also performed by designing the TSL to act as the salient OS, and foregrounding it in the way that most attracts the attention of the targeted audience and best prompts the retrieval of specific contextual assumptions that warrant yielding the exact conclusion intended by the speaker. *NestPs* thus do not only anticipate the cognitive behaviour of the targeted audience, but also frame, channel and direct it strategically in order to achieve specific manipulative goals.

#### 5.1.3 *Optimal Relevance (OR)*

*NestPs* are also manipulative because they violate the concept of OR, not only by their TSL, as explained above, but also by their other sub-structures. According to OR, it is in the best interest of the speaker, if they would like to communicate successfully with an audience, to formulate their message in the easiest and most cognitively accessible, economic and consequently rewarding manner to that audience. The speaker is also obliged to substantiate any claims they make with the evidence necessary to achieve the intended cognitive effects in the audience.

*NestPs* do not fulfil any of these conditions: The producer of *NestPs* tactically segments, arranges, and packages the message in a deliberately-convoluted and hard-to-process manner that backgrounds and buries the strongest proposition most worthy of processing, i.e. the Core, and foregrounds and assigns the highest degree of prominence to the weakest and least relevant stimulus, i.e. the TSL. This manipulative ordering enables the producer of *NestPs* to create a groundless, deceptive air of agreement with their audience, by hiding the most controversial proposition, flashing the shared one, and embedding, nesting, and disguising mul-

Figure 4: *Structure-content cognitive conflict in NestPs*



tiple, unsubstantiated presuppositions in between, without establishing the truth values of any of them.

## 5.2 Cognitive (Mis)Behaviour of NestPs

### 5.2.1 Structure-content cognitive conflict (SCCC)

Since pragmatic presuppositions are participant-old information shared by the interlocutors, they behave cognitively as backgrounded information that is not currently under active processing and do not go through the filters of relevance or the checks of further discussion (Simons 2004; von Stechow 2008; de Saussure 2012).

*NestPs*, on the other hand, consist mainly of participant-new active information (NI) that is twisted to act as presup-

positions by being carried in structures associated with old-information (OI). This forced imposition of NI content in OI structures is likely to cause logical and cognitive conflict in the minds of the hearers. This conflict, which can be termed *Structure-Content Cognitive Conflict (SCCC)*, results from the situation when the old-information structures of *NestPs* are readily classified as relevant and prepared to be admitted into the long-term memory, while their new-information contents are still being processed, i.e. classified as new, disambiguated, explicated, inferentially resolved, checked for reconciliation against their old-information structures, etc., and ultimately classified as irrelevant. Figure (4) attempts to depict this *SCCC* visually.

Resolving this *SCCC* is cognitively taxing, in terms of the processing efforts it consumes at the expense of the overall processing capacity. *SCCC* thus causes a deficiency in the cognitive processing capacity of the hearer, which in turn incapacitates their cognitive checks, filters and controls allowing the unsubstantiated propositions and implausible arguments carried by *NestPs* to bypass those checks and filters and be admitted into the long-term memory.

### 5.2.2 *Minimum effort path (MEP)*

According to clause (b) of the definition of OR in [1], the speaker is expected to formulate their message in the easiest way their audience can understand. On the other end of the OIC situation, the hearer is entitled to follow a path of minimum effort and to stop processing upon reaching the first plausible interpretation that satisfies their expectations of relevance, as suggested by clauses (a) and (b) of the comprehension procedure in [2] (Wilson & Sperber 2004: 256–259). Moreover, given the inverse relationship between relevance and effort in RT, the first and most easily constructed interpretation is most likely to enjoy the status of optimal relevance, because the speaker is expected to have cooperated and formulated his utterance in such an easy way that the first interpretation to strike the cognitive effort-effect balance, in the hearer, is to be deemed the one intended by the supposedly cooperative speaker.

In violation of clause (b) of the definition of OR in [1], the producer of *NestPs* tactically formulates their message in a complex and difficult-to-process manner: embedding many presuppositions in a large, deep nest; disguising and wrapping NI in the structures of OI; reversing the order of accessibility by backgrounding the strong stimulus, foregrounding the weak ones, and forcing the latter to function as an OS; and taking the truth value of many unsubstantiated propositions for granted and building upon them. On the other hand, the hearer of *NestPs* innocently follows the *minimum effort path* (MEP), by testing interpretive hypotheses in their

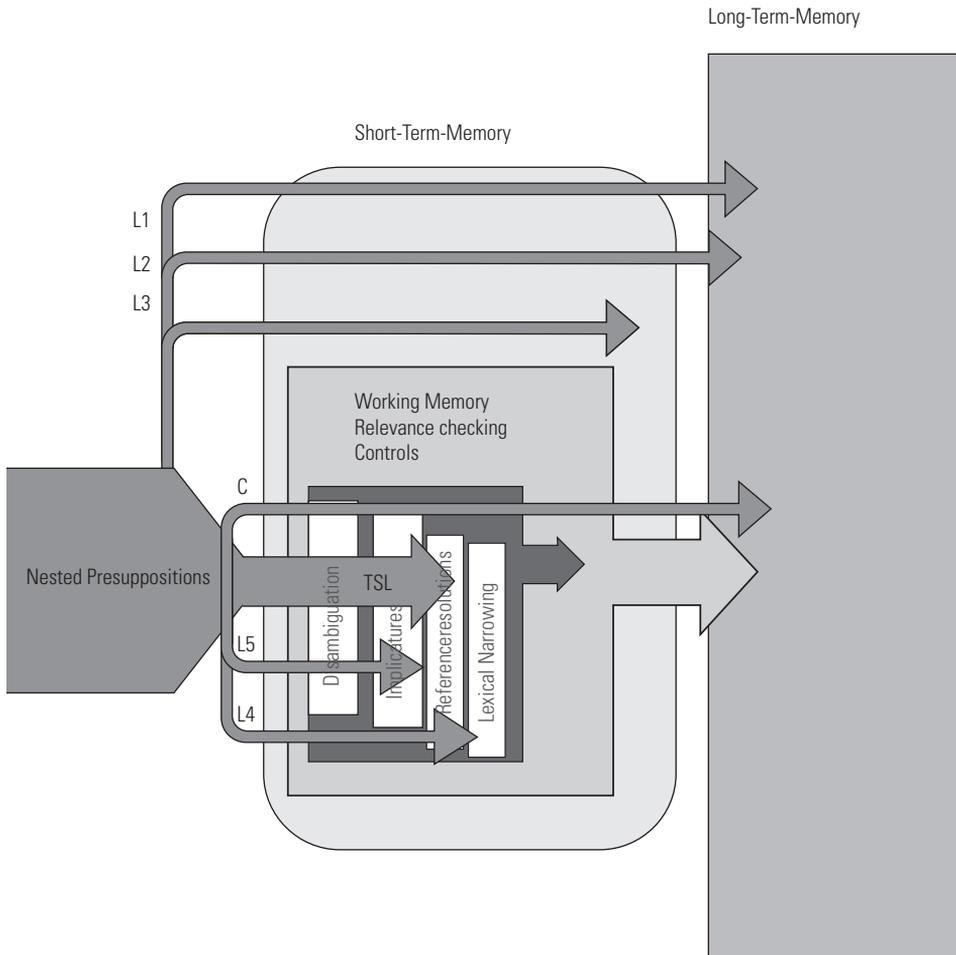
order of accessibility and stopping when his expectations of relevance are satisfied, driven by good faith in the expectation that the speaker had observed clause (b) of OR and formulated his message in the easiest and most accessible way.

As a result of these cooperatively and sincerely incompatible approaches adopted by the producer and the consumer of *NestPs*, the comprehension procedure in *NestPs* does not proceed as smoothly as informed and anticipated by RT. MEP fails to lead the hearer to construct relevant, anticipatory interpretive hypotheses that satisfy the expectations of relevance raised by the utterance itself, which imposes an extra processing load on the already strained cognitive processing system, that has been making hard attempts to solve the *SCCC*, and consequently dissipating more processing efforts and resources of the overall processing capacity of the hearer. This MEP failure, exacerbated by the waste of processing capacity caused by the *SCCC*, renders the cognitive system of the hearer vulnerable to what I call the process of *Cognitive Underpassing*.

### 5.2.3 *Cognitive Underpassing (CU)*

*Cognitive Underpassing (CU)* can be thought of as the total sum result of many factors that have joined forces to hamper the proper cognitive processing of the hearer: foregrounding the weak and non-optimally relevant TSL and backgrounding the strong and optimally relevant C; creating a cognitive conflict by casting NI propositional content in OI structures; accumulating many layers of finer nested presuppositions the testing and construction of whose interpretive hypotheses require complex, cognitively taxing processing; taking the truth value of those nested presuppositions for granted and building upon them without substantiation; attacking the cognitive system of the hearer with a large number of those presuppositions; manipulating the OR effort-effect formula by reversing the order of accessibility to the nested propositions; failing to establish relevance through the MEP; and wasting many processing efforts in resolving the *SCCC*. All these factors

Figure 5: *Cognitive underpassing in NestPs*



combined together can result in a processing overload which strains the cognitive processing capacity of the hearer, renders it incapable of performing any further proper processing, and allows unsubstantiated claims and propositions to bypass Relevance Checking Controls and filters and to be accepted as relevant.

In other words, this *Cognitive Underpassing* process takes place when the processing capacity of the hearer fails to handle the cognitive processing load caused by (1) the information structures, (2) the fallacious contents, and (3) the cognitive behaviour of *NestPs*, as visually illustrated in Figure (5). As a result, the Short-Term Memory and the Working Memory get

gradually crammed and overstrained, until no processing capacity is left to check or verify incoming presuppositions. It is at that point that the Layers of *NestPs* take advantage of their structure, as already-relevant, low-cost, effect-producing, old-information, in order to bypass the truth/falsity and relevance-checking controls of the hearer and get admitted into their Long-Term Memory, as presupposed, checked, relevant propositions, with substantiated truth value.

To sum up, and based on the definition developed by Leech (1983: 60) that a “textually ‘well-behaved’ utterance being one which anticipate and facilitate H’s [the hearer’s] task in decoding, or making sense

of, the text”, *NestPs* are linguistically, pragmatically, and cognitively misbehaved utterances: they are strategically engineered to manipulate the cognitive processing systems of the hearers. Manipulation is therefore an inherent characteristic of the propositional content, information structures, cognitive behaviour, and pragmatic functions of *NestPs*. It can be thus confidently concluded that *NestPs* are a manipulative form of informative presupposition.

## 6 Conclusion

This paper has introduced the new pragmatic concept of *NestPs* and sketched a relevance-theoretic account that explains its manipulative character and dynamics, in terms of its information structures, contents and cognitive processing mechanisms.

The paper began by laying some necessary theoretical foundations: exploring different approaches to pragmatic presupposition, compiling a taxonomy of the types of presupposition and their triggers, discussing some of the most problematic properties of pragmatic presupposition and situating the proposed concept of *NestPs* in the wider context of current pragmatic theory, by identifying and critiquing research gaps in four of the most relevant studies in the field. A conclusion was drawn that none of the existing definitions of pragmatic presupposition can adequately capture the manipulative characteristics and mechanisms of *NestPs*. The two theoretical frameworks of Textual Rhetoric and Relevance Theory, within which the new concept is immediately embedded, were also briefly discussed and followed by a definition of *NestPs*, illustrated with four authentic examples.

The relationship between *NestPs*, on the one hand, and informativeness and manipulation, on the other, was problematized, on pragmatic, Gricean and relevance-theoretic grounds, leading to the conclusion that *NestPs* are inherently manipulative. A cognitive account was developed to explain the manipulative charac-

ter and behaviour of *NestPs*, in terms of the relevance-theoretic concepts of Ostensive Stimulus, Cognitive Principle of Relevance, Optimal Relevance, Comprehension Procedure, in addition to the newly suggested cognitive mechanisms of *Cognitive Underpassing* and *Structure-Content Cognitive Conflict*.

The manipulative character and function of *NestPs* were therefore established in terms of propositional content, information structures, packaging, cognitive mechanisms, and logical fallaciousness: *NestPs* carry new unsubstantiated propositional content, strategically arranged in a complex and convoluted order and cast in structures typically associated with the opposite kind of content, in order to deliberately hamper the proper cognitive processing of the hearer.

In conclusion, I borrow what Wilson and Sperber said about their well-developed theory: “Relevance Theory does not provide an absolute measure of mental effort or cognitive effect, and it does not assume that such a measure is available to the spontaneous workings of the mind” (2004: 278). The same can be very humbly argued about *NestPs*. The research I attempted and discussed in this paper is certainly limited in scope and depth, and requires deeper and wider empirical and theoretical investigation, in order to solidify the new concept of *NestPs*. A good starting point could be running empirical experiments to measure the speed of processing a single pragmatic presupposition and comparing it to that of processing *NestPs*. Finally, presupposition “remains [...] still only partially understood, and an important ground for the study of how semantics and pragmatics interact” (Levinson 1983: 225).

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## Communicating nationalism in a changing Europe: The media coverage of Catalan's attempt at independence

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### Abstract

Since 2008, Europe is immersed in a situation of political and social upheaval marked by, among other processes – such as the Brexit, the Scottish referendum on independence or the growth of new populist parties –, the strengthening of nationalism in Catalonia. In this context, the role of the media is crucial, since they are the main transmitters of what occurs abroad and, depending on how they present the information, a spread of pro-independence trends in regions with a historically strong nationalist sentiment throughout the continent can be more or less likely. In order to know the differences regarding the coverage of nationalism, this study applies a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to the text present in the main article on the Catalan referendum of October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017 published online by the most-read newspapers in Portugal, Switzerland, UK, Italy, Scotland and Northeast Italy. The analysis concludes that the media not only report differently depending on the characteristics of the territory where they operate, but also that some of them use the information as a tool to indoctrinate society.

### Keywords

Catalonia, Europe, nationalism, referendum, online newspapers, independence

## 1 Introduction

While the European Union continues its process of supranational integration, some of its oldest states – especially Spain, the United Kingdom and Belgium – face political challenges that could end with the independence of one of its regions, understanding as such the administrative and territorial divisions within a country regardless if they constitute nations.

The social, political and economic crisis of 2008 gave rise to a new period marked by the “social action cycles” (Tarrow, 2011, p. 342) – movements such as *5 Stelle* [Five Stars] (Italy) or *The Outraged* (Greece) – and nationalism – defined as “the ideology that proclaims the distinctiveness of a particular people and their right to self-rule in their homeland” (Esman, 1994, p. 28) –, which has proliferated in the last decade as a response to the deterioration of welfare states and both the state and global austerity policies, finding one of its maximum manifestations in the independence process of Catalonia (Spain).

These “cycles” have arisen in a world that is globalized and highly interconnected thanks to technological development, which allows both the new (mobile media, Internet, social media networks, etc.) and traditional media (television, printed media, radio, etc.) to receive and publish information at any time. However, the high competitiveness that communication companies experience and the economic decline they have suffered since the appearance of the Internet means that, sometimes, their goal is “to get their product to the largest number of consumers” (Morley & Robins, 1995, p. 11) without attending to the criteria of informative quality.

Starting from the basis that sustainable global communication is necessary to achieve social sustainability (Orgad, 2012), it could be argued that the lack of journalistic impartiality when covering pro-independence issues, together with the actual panorama of social discontent in many states, could cause the beginning or the strengthening of similar processes in other territories. This is a real possibil-

ity considering the emergence, since the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, of the regionalist parties, which have a strong nationalist component (Türsan, 1998) since they undertake self-government and territorial claims within established states by appealing to the distinctiveness of a collective identity in terms of language, religion, economy, geography and/or history (Keating, 2013). Concretely, these parties – which reach to demand, in extreme cases, the independence of the region that they represent (Dandoy, 2010) – have doubled in Europe in the last 50 years; a data whose relevance is reinforced by the fact that eight of the 28 European Union's member states have one or more regions with a historically strong nationalist sentiment (Jolly, 2015).

Knowing the informative approaches on nationalism carried out by news media outlets from different geographical areas is essential to understand the evolution and the future situation of European societies. The present study takes this into account and deals with the way in which the online version of the best-selling newspapers in certain Western European countries and regions – Portugal, Switzerland, United Kingdom, Italy, Scotland (UK) and North-east Italy (Italy) – with different political, social and economic realities covered one of the key moments in the process of Catalonia's independence: October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017, when the Catalan referendum was held on a turbulent day marked by clashes between voters and police officers who had a court order to close polling stations.

## 2 The rise of nationalism in Europe

The European continent has experienced a paradoxical process since the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. On the one hand, the different countries of the continent have been immersed in a process of unprecedented political, economic and social integration through their accession to the European Union. However, the number of nationalist movements has increased exponentially in the same period; a tendency that can be observed in the

percentage of regionalist parties that have participated in the general elections of European countries since the 50's: in 1950, these parties accounted for 9.4% of the total; in 1960, 7.8%; in 1970, 10.9%; in 1980, 15.5%; in 1990, 15.4%, and in 2000, 20.2% (Jolly, 2015, p. 72).

As Walker Connor (1989, p. 124) explains, citizens of ethnic minorities in modern democratic states tend not to desire independence even if they do not renounce a certain ethnocentric articulation. This is due both to the progressive loss of identifying attraction on the part of the state and to the fact that economic interrelations slow these tendencies. It seems, however, that integration in global political groupings serves these parties as a guarantee of success in the case that they achieve their objectives. In this way, deeper European integration “will be associated with greater electoral support for regionalist parties” (Jolly, 2015, p. 82) since the electorate perceives in a more positive way both the economic consequences of independence and the bargaining leverage of these parties (Fearon & van Houten, 2002; Garrett & Rodden, 2003).

A number of authors, such as Brubaker and Smith, have remarked the importance of politics in the resurgence of contemporary nationalism. Brubaker (1996, p. 17) maintains that nationalism “is produced – or better, it is induced – by political fields of particular kinds” and, in the same line, Smith (1995, p. 68) considers crucial the “politicization of culture” as a previous step to the regeneration of the nation-state.

Both agree that nationalism – which has the capacity “to overcome internal ideological and political divisions” since “it does not determine which political doctrine its adherents should support” (Guibernau, 1998, p. 86) – tends to find a greater electoral support in times of social discontent frequently related to the bad course of the economy, what could explain “the major revival of nationalist rhetoric in most European countries” (Brubaker, 1996, p. 2) during the last decades and, specially, since the start of the crisis in 2008.

Through this rhetoric, regionalist parties use to create a political symbolism (Smith, 1995; Armstrong, 2000) by highlighting identity elements that are exclusive of the region where they operate – related with art and history, among other areas –, in a bid “to demonstrate the possession of a unique, authentic and adequate cultural heritage and ethnic past” (Smith, 1995, p. 67).

### 2.1 Scotland, Flanders and Catalonia

Among the current European nationalist movements, those present in Scotland, Flanders and Catalonia are the ones that have experienced the strongest activity, especially since the economic crisis of 2008. The first European country that would suffer a strong debate on the incompatibility of one or more of its regions in recent years was Belgium, where, in June 2010 general elections, the pro-independence *Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie* (New Flemish Alliance, or N-VA) won the plurality of votes, “triggering a record-setting political stalemate that left Belgium without a functioning national government for over 530 days” (Connolly, 2013, p. 52).

Shortly after, in May 2011, “the Scottish National Party (SNP) won a majority of seats in the Scottish Parliament and immediately announced plans to hold a referendum on severing Scotland’s centuries-old union with England” (Connolly, 2013, p. 52). Only one year later, the Catalan parliament approved the future holding of an independence referendum and called for early elections in November 2012 with the aim of forming a majority nationalist government, aware of its probable success due to the general discontent of the Catalan population with the Spanish government.

Since 2010 the number of Catalans wanting independence has increased from approximately 20% to 45–47%, depending upon the poll consulted. During this period the desire for independence has gone from a minority, mostly privately held belief to being expressed publicly. (King, 2014, p. 480)

### 3 The role of international media in nationalism

Although the international community has tried to resolve the spread of nationalism “by effectively eliminating the circumstances in which the right to self-determination equates with a right to secession and independence” (Borgen, 2007, p. 53), there has been a huge rise in nationalist movements which eventually culminated in a failed referendum in Scotland in 2014, and another in 2017 in Catalonia; a region that, still in 2019, is immersed in a struggle for independence from the rest of Spain.

Such a trend demonstrates the decrease of political influence on societal culture. This could be the result of society being immersed in a continuous flow of information through the Internet. As Kavoori and Chadha (2009, p. 340) state, the Web “has emerged as the vehicle through which issues of identity politics are played out on a global stage”, a consequence of which could be the re-articulation of a consumerist nationalism.

For the most part, this consumption is via digital versions of traditional newspapers, which is generating a “new mode of mass mediated intimacy and the formation of a new kind of collective space” (Hayes, 2000, p. 23) at local, state and international levels. At the same time, the free and easy access to these global online media outlets has boosted their growth and, as Flew (2007, p. 178) affirms, has provoked “a move in demand away from the cultural forms underwritten by the nation-state through cultural policy towards global cultural commodities”.

In essence, it could be said that the media have somehow enhanced – and adapted to – the process of globalisation, which “crosses the ideological spectrum and engages social movements and politics at all levels” (Nederveen, 2015, p. 7). In this context, technological advances “have been rapidly removing geographical boundaries” (Lee, 2003, p. 3), meaning that state borders become somewhat blurred whenever a significant event concerns a particular country, so that the possibility of what is happening abroad having reper-

cussions in one's own territory increases both the public interest in this information and its coverage by the media.

It is logical, therefore, that independence processes occupy a large space in the agenda-setting of the national media – understanding as such those that operate throughout the geography of a state – due to the political instability that currently exists among the European Union's member states. For this reason, it could be argued that the almost simultaneous resurgence and rise of nationalist sentiment in Spain, Belgium and United Kingdom within the 21<sup>st</sup> century – more specifically since 2007, when the Scottish National Party (SNP) rose to power in the Scottish Parliament, although as a minority government – would not have been possible without the extensive coverage in online newspapers, which allowed for different social sectors in diverse states to find out about each other, empathize with one another and feel supported.

This increasing social influence of the mass media at a global level shows the important role that traditional newspapers, particularly digital versions, have in shaping modern nation-states. In this regard, Hayes (2000, p. 13) details that these “would be inconceivable without mass communication technologies that extend cultural practices, symbols, and narratives to millions of people simultaneously across great distances”. This media power through the Internet is the reason why intentional and subjective information coverage about the nationalist issues, such as the Catalan referendum, could jeopardise the state unity, since “interpretations are open to any number of interventions or interferences along the way and these include everything from the cultural symbols associated with the individual or group to the context of that communication” (Patel, Li & Sooknanan, 2011, p. 17).

A clear example in this regard is the coverage that Catalan and Spanish TV channels and newspapers did on the independence referendum held in Scotland in 2014. Castelló, León-Solís and O'Donell (2016) studied how certain Barcelona and Madrid based media informed about this

political moment and concluded that both invested “significant resources in ‘mapping’ Scotland for their readers” (ibid, p. 160). In this way, while the Spanish media included in the analysis (the public television channel *La1*, which belongs to *TVE*; and the dailies *El País* and *El Mundo*) characterized the Scottish referendum as, for example, an “adventure” or a “bourgeois nonsense”, the Catalan (*TV3* and the newspapers *La Vanguardia* and *Ara*) framed most of their publications in favor of the Scottish independence even identifying as “the hero of the Catalans” to the then Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, David Cameron, for allowing the referendum.

However, despite carrying out an information coverage far superior to any other state, Spain was not the only country where the media covered the facts according to certain social objectives. The main newspapers of the United Kingdom, for example, informed about the independence process as if it were happening far away in another country and left the front pages to other issues even on the day of the referendum (Williamson and Golding, 2016), trying to reduce, in this way, the social impact of the events. A similar dynamic followed the French media, which, according to Revest (2016), also narrated the facts as if they were taking place in a distant universe and, in addition, their information often highlighted the inviolability of nation-states in an attempt to maintain the *statu quo* both in France and the European Union.

In contrast, and as expected, the Scottish media carried out a broad coverage of the process and, although their information on the referendum was fairly balanced, some dailies included frames mainly related to identity – which alluded to the distinctiveness of Scottish citizens or the common characteristics and history that the Scots share with the rest of the UK – and to self-determination, both for and against independence (Dekavalla, 2016).

Together with the impartiality that the cultural context can provoke in the media, it is necessary to point out that the quality

of information expressed in the communication industry today is in jeopardy since, as Morley and Robins (1995, p. 11) affirm, “driven now by the logic of profit and competition, the overriding objective of the new media corporations is to get their product to the largest number of consumers”.

Thus, it could be said that the contribution to sustainable information on such sensitive issues as nationalism is in danger today. An incorrect contextualization of this type of conflicts could lead to similar outcomes in many other European territories where there is also a nationalist sentiment: In the European Union, there are eight countries with one or more regions in which part of the population wants independence (Spain, Italy, UK, France, Finland, Belgium, Denmark, Germany) and, in five of them, there are regionalist parties that participate in the general elections (Spain, UK, Italy, Finland and Belgium) (Jolly, 2015, p. 26–28).

#### 4 Methodological and theoretical framework

This piece of research applies the framing theory and the principles of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to the linguistic content present in the main article related to the Catalan referendum published online by the best-seller newspapers in the previously mentioned European countries and regions.

##### 4.1 Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Van Dijk (1995, p. 17) states that the practice of CDA as a method of research can be defined as “the general label for a special approach to the study of text and talk, emerging from critical linguistics, critical semiotics and in general from a socio-politically conscious and oppositional way of investigating language, discourse and communication”.

For the Critical Discourse Analysis, discourse is the means by which ideologies and belief systems find their way in people’s consciousness (Hodge & Kress, 1988, p. 119). In this way, the study of

the journalistic texts through this method allows the researcher to discover how “speakers and authors use language and grammatical features to create meaning, to persuade people to think about events in a particular way, sometimes even to seek to manipulate them while at the same time concealing their communicative intentions” (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 1).

In the present study, this method is applied following the CDA approach formulated by Fairclough, who assumes the notion of the multifunctionality of language in texts (Titscher, Meyer, Wodak, & Vetter, 2000) understanding that discourses and texts are socially constitutive: “Language use is always simultaneously constitutive of (i) social identities, (ii) social relations and (iii) systems of knowledge and beliefs” (Fairclough, 1993, p. 134). Concretely, the following CDA tools are used:

- 1 Over-lexicalization: with this tool it is possible to analyze if there exists in the text “an abundance of particular words and their synonyms or where there is evidence of over-description” (Hansen & Machin, 2013, p. 123), which could imply the use of framing to highlight certain ideas in the news articles.
- 2 The use of pronouns: pronouns like “us”, “we”, and “them” create social differentiation. “Knowledge about the other is fundamental for realizing and articulating one’s self-identity. To understand and define ourselves, the individuals and groups (communities, nations-states, etc.), we need an other to relate to, and to distinguish ourselves from” (Orgad, 2012, p. 111).
- 3 Quoting verbs: whether they are metalinguistic, descriptive, transcriptive, metapropositional or neutral. According to Machin and Mayr (2012), the use of one verb or another influences in the mind of the reader the character of the individuals that the readers are being informed about.
- 4 Lexical choices: they allow knowing what the journalist’s intention is when selecting a specific word and not one of its synonyms.

## 4.2 Framing theory

Several authors have studied the framing theory, such as Entman (1993), McCombs (2014), and De Vreese (2005). According to Entman (1993, p. 52), “to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation”.

McCombs maintains that the term framing consists of analyzing “how objects of attention in messages – issues, political figures, or other topics – are presented” (2014, p. 59). Moreover, the author assures that, through the frames, the media “influences our attitudes and opinions and even our behavior” (2014, p. 59). De Vreese (2005, p. 51) agrees with McCombs and states that through framing “the media may shape public opinion [...] in particular ways”.

It could be said that framing theory serves to discover in what way the media contributes to cultural hegemony, which occurs when the different frames of journalistic messages are so dominant that the recipients accept them without hesitation. The concept of “cultural hegemony” was developed by Antonio Gramsci (2011) in his attempt to analyze the social classes and the superstructure and, with this term, the author makes reference to the power that dominant classes perform over society, which is culturally diverse.

Taking into account this theory during the content analysis is fundamental, since the detection of the frames will allow discovering which ideas each newspaper tries to transmit to its readers and what is the cultural hegemony to which they aspire through these articles.

## 4.3 Sample selection and research questions

The research focuses on the main news articles related to the Catalan referendum published online on October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017 by four national newspapers – *Correio da Manhã* [Morning Mail] (Portugal), *The Sun* (United Kingdom), *Corriere della Sera* [The Afternoon Mail] (Italy), and *20 Minuten*

(Switzerland) – and two regional ones: *The Daily Record* (Scotland, UK) and *Il Gazzettino* [The Gazette] (Northeast Italy, Italy). In this study, only their online versions are considered, since this type of publication can be easily read from anywhere in the world and, therefore, can have a greater social impact than printed newspapers on the global scale (Peña-Fernández, Lazkano-Arrillaga, & García-González, 2016; Thadashwar & Joglekar, 2016).

These specific media outlets were selected for this study because, during 2017, they were the best-selling newspapers in the territories in which they operate – with the exception of *20 Minuten*, that is for free but also the most-read Swiss daily –, so their analysis would serve as a representative sample of the information received by the population in each area (Correia & Martins, 2018; Meier, 2018; Firmstone, 2018; Mancini & Gerli, 2018). Therefore, the selection of these specific media outlets allows the possibility to learn about the informative treatment that Catalan nationalism had in the national media of countries that do not have internal political problems related to independence movements (Portugal and Switzerland), in national media of countries that have this type of conflict (UK and Italy), as well as in the media that operate, exclusively, in regions with high independence feeling (Scotland and Northeast Italy).

In this sense, it is necessary to clarify that all the newspapers included in the analysis – except the *Corriere della Sera*, which presents a Berliner format – are tabloids and, therefore, “are aimed at common people” in terms of content and style (Johannson, 2007, p. 16). The selection of popular/tabloid dailies over quality/broadsheet newspapers is something to keep in mind when analysing the articles due to the potential implication that this supposes in relation to the use of language and the framing of the Catalan referendum.

Most of these newspapers published several news articles related both directly and indirectly to the events that took place in Catalonia on October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017. However, in order to carry out a deeper analysis of

the information, this study focuses only on one article per newspaper, which corresponds to the main information about the Catalan referendum that each daily published during the day when it was held. The rest of the publications, in general, reported isolated data about the conflict or showed realities indirectly related to it, such as the reaction of the Barcelona football club players or the European Union's response to these altercations.

Once the analysis is finished, the research questions that this study aims to answer are the following:

- › RQ1: How did the analyzed newspapers cover the attempt of independence in Catalonia?
- › RQ2: What are, if any, the differences between them?
- › RQ3: Is the representation they carry out related to the socio-political reality of the territory where they are situated?

## 5 Results

The conducted analysis allows answering the three research questions and shows that the six newspapers covered the events that occurred during the Catalan referendum, held on October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017, in different ways and with different intentions, although some of them share similarities.

### 5.1 *The Sun* and *Corriere della Sera*

The best-selling national newspapers in the United Kingdom and Italy (*The Sun* and *Corriere della Sera*, respectively) – countries where there are one or more regions with pro-independence aspirations – show in the main online article dedicated to these events a protective position of the state unity in the territories where they operate, while they are simultaneously aware of the social repercussion that the independence of Catalonia could have in both countries. However, each uses different informative approaches.

The information published by *The Sun* (Sandeman, 2017) highlights three frames through the over-lexicalization, the lexical choices and the quoting verbs: 1) the ag-

gressiveness of Spanish agents against the voters, 2) the suffering of citizens and 3) the “chaos” Catalonia is immersed in.

The article makes a reiterative use of two concepts: “violence”, a word included 11 times, and “independence”, a term that appears on eight occasions, which makes the reader correlate the attempt of independence with the violence used by the Spanish Government in response to this situation. Furthermore, the term “violence” is often replaced by synonyms full of sensationalist connotations, such as “pain”, “chaos”, “human rights violations”, “brutality”, “repression”, “force” and “hostility”, so that police actions are highlighted. However, Catalan voters are victimized through the use of qualifying adjectives, such as “peaceful protesters”, “unarmed civilians” or “defenceless population”, as well as through the use of certain verbs that emphasize the sense of violence on the part of the authorities of Madrid: “Hundreds *were hurt* as riot police *attacked* peaceful protesters and unarmed civilians”/ “[Puigdemont] *was forced* to vote elsewhere following the police raid”.

These ideas are also reflected in the quoting verbs present in the article: Although many of them are neutral – those that “introduce saying without evaluating it explicitly” (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 59) – and transcriptive – those that “mark the development of the discourse” (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 60) – , the author also makes use of metapositional verbs – defined as the ones that “mark the author’s interpretation of a speaker” (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 60) – which connote that the Spanish government leaders are authoritative and the Catalans are defenseless: “The leader of Catalonia *has claimed* the region has ‘won the right’ to independence”/ “[The deputy prime minister of Spain] *accused* the Catalan administration of irresponsibility”/ “Brit minister Liam Fox *condemned* ‘the violence’ meted out to Catalan voters”.

The exaltation of the violence in this information already appears in the antetitle “The pain in Spain”, and the frames of the text are evidenced in the article’s subtitle, that, far from contextualizing the

facts, just includes a statement made by the then president of Catalonia (“Catalan president says cop violence ‘will shame the Spanish state forever’”), and affirms that 840 people were injured by the police officers without mentioning the number of wounded policemen that the Ministry of the Interior announced on the same day: 39 officers, a number that rose after the total count the following day to 431 (Jiménez, 2017).

On the other hand, the text includes declarations of both British and Scottish politicians who condemn the police actions and make a repeated use of the pronoun “we”: “[Brit minister Liam Fox] said: ‘I think *we* must regret violence that *we* have seen. *We* can all condemn the violence’”/ “[SNP leader Nicola Sturgeon] saying: ‘Regardless of views on Independence, *we* should all condemn the scenes being witnessed’”. Thus, the daily does an explicit differentiation between the “I” and “the other”; between the Spaniards, represented as aggressive, and the British, presented as democratic. The contrast between both countries is also implicitly reinforced, since the inclusion of these two specific actors in the article – Liam Fox and Nicola Sturgeon embodying the UK and Scotland, respectively – reminds the reader of the role that the state and regional governments played in the peaceful development of Scotland’s referendum on independence.

Consequently, the text seems to serve as a warning to the national population of the repercussions that the independence movement has had in Spain, and, through the use of the pronoun “we”, tries to indoctrinate, differentiating the country where it operates from the “anti-example” (Spain). This attempt to soften any social repercussion that the Catalan referendum could have in the United Kingdom reflects the center-right political stance of *The Sun* and its current support for the Conservative and Unionist Party.

The information published by the *Corriere della Sera* (Cazzullo, 2017), whose title “Referendum in Catalonia, the chain of errors” uses a much less shocking language than the British, shows a critical stance to-

wards all the actors in the conflict. In this way, the subtitle – in which it is said that “the governments of Madrid and Barcelona have launched against each other as two daredevils” – suggests that neither the Spanish or Catalan governments acted appropriately; a balanced stance that can be related to the newspaper’s centrist political position. However, although the author uses certain lexical choices to condemn the violence of the Spanish government – which is said to be “very weak” and that, with the actions taken during the referendum, has shown its “ferocious face” – the ideas that the Catalans are extremists and responsible for the situation are the most repeated and highlighted ones in the text through the over-lexicalization, the lexical choices and the quoting verbs.

Thus, the supporters of an independent Catalonia are mentioned in the text as “separatists”, “Catalan extremists”, “noisy minority” and “uncertain majority”, while the independence process itself is defined as a “hasty and failed secession”. Furthermore, the author uses certain verbs that enhance his criticism towards the independence movement in general: “Public opinion *strongly opposes* secession, except from the Basque Country to Galicia, where the separatist movements *have raised* their heads, *ready to complete* the disintegration of Spain”/ “[The Barcelona football club] *has contributed to exasperate* the minds, *promoting* the separatist cause (...)”. Nevertheless, in regard to the quoting verbs, the information only includes two neutral verbs (“to express” and “to say”), since it does not present textual quotes from the actors involved in the events or make reference to them in the third person.

The criticism of the Catalan independence movement is also evident in the second paragraph of the text, which the author uses to highlight the idea that the autonomous community of Catalonia would not be what it is today without the rest of Spain: “Catalonia is not a land oppressed by a conqueror. It is the richest region of Spain, something that has achieved thanks also to the sweat and, sometimes, the blood of the Andalusian workers, the masons of Extremadura, the workers of La

Mancha or the workers from the poorest regions”. This criticism is also observed later on, when the journalist says that the Barcelona football club, “more than a football team”, is “a constituent element of the Catalan identity and its international brand” due to the active role of its players in the Catalan independence campaign.

In this way, the information highlights two ideas in an attempt to create “cultural hegemony” (Gramsci, 2011) in Italy: 1) The pro-independence Catalans are extremists, and 2) the pro-independence Catalans are mainly responsible for the situation. With this framing, the newspaper makes Italians to relate independence with extremism, preventing the possibility that a independence conflict starts in some of its regions.

Ultimately, the reading of this information gives the impression that the newspaper urges to resolve the conflict as soon as possible, perhaps, for fear that something similar may occur in regions with a certain independence feeling in northern Italy. This desire seems evident at the end of the text, in which the author comes to propose a solution to the Catalan conflict: “Today [the king] Felipe is called to save the unity of the nation [nation-state]. And the only way he can do this is to favor the opening of a constituent process, promoting the election by universal suffrage of an assembly that drafts a new federalist pact”.

## 5.2 *The Daily Record and Il Gazzettino*

As for the best-selling newspapers of Scotland (*The Daily Record*) and Northeast Italy (*Il Gazzettino*) – regions with a high nationalist sentiment – both take advantage of this information in their digital versions to enhance to the reader the rejection to the state repression of Catalonia and the empathy towards the Catalans; ideas that constitute the frames of both texts.

The only information published by the Scottish newspaper (Colley, 2017) focuses on the violent acts that took place in Catalonia during the referendum and, through the over-lexicalization, the lexical choices and the quoting verbs, frames two main ideas: 1) The Catalan citizenship suf-

fers aggression for wanting to vote, and 2) the Spanish government is authoritarian.

Some lexical choices reveal a certain dramatization of the facts in order to generate impact on the readers: the author writes the word “riot” twice to represent the general situation of Catalonia on that day; “fears of bloodshed” to explain what Catalans were worried about before voting; and, when it comes to the explanation of what happened between the police and voters, the journalist uses nouns such as “repression” or others accompanied by qualifying adjectives, such as “shocking scenes”, “shocking images” or “chaotic scenes”. These words are already present in the first line of the article. In fact, the term “riot” is included at the beginning of the news headline (“Catalonia riot cops storm polling stations and ‘fire rubber bullets at voters’ in bid to stop banned Independence referendum”), and the subtitle begins with the words “shocking scenes” (“Shocking scenes have unfolded across the Spanish region and 38 people have so far been treated by emergency services”). In this way, the newspaper tries, with both these lexical choices and the over-lexicalization, to get a shocking and emotional text from its beginning to influence the Scottish public opinion to be more critical in relation to the Spanish governmental actions carried out in Catalonia; a purpose that is easily attainable since the impartial information in a territory that shares certain similarities with Catalonia due to its recent history can make people find their own interests and their own situation, which creates empathy.

In regard to the quoting verbs, most of those used in the text are neutral, though there are three cases in which metapropositional verbs are used and, with them, the author portrays the Spanish Government as more authoritative and powerful than the Catalan: “In June this year, the new Catalan president, Carles Puigdemont, *announced* plans for this Sunday’s referendum”/ “[...] Madrid *refused* to accept the result of what the government *claims* is ‘illegal’ referendum”. On the other hand, the text does not include pronouns such as “we”, “them” or “us”, so that a social dif-

ferentiation between the Scottish and the Catalan societies is not established. In this way, the author eliminates barriers between both populations and enhances the feeling of empathy towards the Catalans.

However, despite highlighting the suffering of the Catalans throughout the article, the lack of allusions to the legality of the referendum, together with the explicit mention of its illegality when the Spanish government's stance is reflected, could be interpreted as a rejection to the Catalan independence on the part of the tabloid. Instead, it seems to support rather a political devolution process in Catalonia, understanding as such "the creation or strengthening -financially or legally- of subnational units of government" (Rondinelli, Nellis, & Cheema, 1984). This interpretation is feasible if it's considered that *The Daily Record* is strongly pro-Labour and critical with both the Scottish National Party (SNP) and the independence of Scotland, and that it was supportive of the Scottish devolution referendum held in 1997 (Hutchison, 2002).

Finally, it is necessary to point out that this text does not carry out a correct contextualization of the events that occurred during the referendum and, furthermore, some of the data that the text provides about the history of Catalonia are not correct: Catalonia is referred as an independent country and it is said that it was a Kingdom until 1715, but, actually, Catalonia is an autonomous community and the Kingdom that is spoken about in this article was the Crown of Aragon, of which Catalonia was a part. This misinformation, which aims to support the creation of the Catalan state, can lead to serious social consequences because it implies the radicalization of opinions, the disappearance of empathy by other points of view and, consequently, the difficulty of reaching consensus. "(...) divisions may be deepened and exacerbated if minority media function as self-enclosed ghettos" (Mihelj, 2011, p. 9).

The main article published by the right-wing tabloid *Il Gazzettino* on the Catalan referendum (Evangelisti, 2017) shows a position favorable to Catalonia

in detriment of the Spanish Government and frames two main ideas: 1) The Catalans have gone from being free to being attacked and, now, they live in an occupied territory, and 2) the Spanish government is aggressive and has shown, with its actions, that it is finished.

The author makes use of the over-lexicalization in the text with the aim of highlighting both frames, which is carried out by including different words and adjectives with a similar meaning. In this way, through the lexical choices, the journalist remarks the high participation rate in the referendum: "a full Plaza de Cataluña [Square of Catalonia]", "day of great mobilization"; the pacifism of Catalan citizens, who are referred as "normal people", "unarmed people" and "ordinary non-extremist citizens", and are said to have defended themselves from the police in a "passive" way; the suffering of the voters: "confiscated ballot boxes", "cruel and disturbing [situation]", "occupied schools", "bloody faces", "broken arms", "screams", "fear"; the violence used by the state security forces and the situation that this provokes: "excesses of the police", "very tough police actions", "very strong reaction", "chaos", "day of madness", "very dangerous conflict"; and the condemnation of the action carried out by the central government: "great defeat of the Spanish government", "international media disaster", "communicative suicide".

These ideas are summarized in the title of the article: "Catalonia, tear in chaos. On Tuesday the general strike", in which the autonomous community is referred as a victim immersed in a fatal situation caused by Spain, and the reader is warned that despite this, the Catalan population will continue its fight for independence the day after the events by going on a general strike.

In regard to the quoting verbs, all of them present neutral structures formed with the verb "to say", except two that are metapositional: the author uses the verb "to consider" to question the decision of the Spanish government to declare the referendum as illegal ("The referendum on Catalan independence that the Span-

ish Supreme Court *considered* illegal“), and the verb “to explain“ to introduce the words that the then president of Catalonia addressed to the citizens on the referendum’s night from the building of the regional government; a verb that conveys the idea of proximity and dialogue between the political leader and the population.

In this sense, it is necessary to point out that the journalist uses a series of verbs that connote something more than what they denote and with which the frames of the text are reinforced. Thus, the inclusion of certain verbs extols the bad performance of the central government: “[The Spanish prime minister] said he *was still* ready for dialogue“; the success of Catalan citizens: “People line up in front of schools to avoid it [the requisition of the ballot boxes] and, in Diputació street, they *succeed*“; and both the violence of the Spanish police and the suffering of the voters: “(...) the police and the Civil Guard *beat* women and the elderly. In some cases, they *are thrown down* the stairs; in others, they *are kicked*. They [the policemen] even *charged against* the firemen in a small town and *fired* rubber bullets while the citizens of Barcelona *shout* ‘we will vote’”. In addition, on one occasion, the newspaper shows its support for the words expressed by the spokesman of the Catalan community, Jordi Turull, who is said to “*be in his right to speak* of ‘international scandal’”.

The support for Catalan independence is also clear if it is taken into account that the text includes three statements made by pro-independence actors – the then president of the autonomy, the spokesman of the Catalan community, and a voter – while it only reflects a brief statement from the opposite side made by the then Spanish Prime Minister, in which the firmness of the government’s position is highlighted: “A clear statement by Rajoy at the end of the afternoon: ‘The rule of law continues being strong’”. In the same line, the text only provides the data of voters injured during the referendum, without mentioning the number of police officers assaulted, which shows a selection of reality in favor of Catalonia. In addition, far from offering a contextualization of the conflict

so that the reader can interpret the facts, the author makes subjective descriptions in which the positive side of Catalonia and the negative side of the Spanish government are exalted: “Barcelona, the city of freedom, really offers scenes of a country that is occupied“. Thus, it can be observed how the newspaper selects a part of reality and exposes it as truth; something that is aggravated by the absence of contextualization, which prevents the reader from understanding the facts more broadly.

Ultimately, it’s necessary to highlight the correlation between the newspaper’s support for Catalan independence and its sympathy towards the Lega Nord [North League], that originally was a right-wing regionalist political party that sought to achieve the independence of the fictional Padanian state – which would include, approximately, the northern half of Italy – in a bid to get separated from “a South decried as attended, corrupt and mafia“ (Pouthier, 2010, p. 583).

### 5.3 *Correio da Manhã* and *20 Minuten*

The information carried out online by the leading newspapers in Portugal (*Correio da Manhã*) and Switzerland (*20 Minuten*) – countries without independence conflicts – show great differences.

The main information about the Catalan referendum published by the Portuguese newspaper (Correia & Figueiredo, 2017) offers a general map of the facts in which both positions of the conflict are represented through the statements of different actors, as well as the data related to the facts. However, there are certain nuances that connote a position that justifies the actions of the Spanish government.

The text presents a certain over-lexicalization related to the idea that the voting carried out in Catalonia was not legal, so that the adjectives “illegal” and “prohibited” appear constantly throughout the article as qualifiers of the word “referendum”. As for the lexical choices, most of them show that the facts are narrated in a neutral way, which becomes evident, for example, when talking about police actions against the Catalan population: “The images show violence”/“The Spanish

police fired rubber bullets on protesters in Barcelona”. In this sense, the newspaper generally does not dramatize what happened and just transmits the facts as they have occurred, but there is a case in which the lexical choices used highlight the aggressive behavior of the demonstrators (“The police officers were forced to run and enter their cars to protect themselves from the rain of stones thrown at them by the Catalans”), which can be interpreted as a justification for police actions against voters.

The heading (“The yes to independence wins with 90% of the votes in Catalonia”) highlights that 90 percent of Catalans voted in favor of independence; a fact that serves to attract the reader’s attention, but which is immediately questioned in the subtitle (“The illegal referendum degenerates into violence, 844 people and 33 police officers have been injured”), since it is reported that the referendum was illegal. In addition, the title does not mention the police actions in Catalonia and, in the subtitle, it is said that both Catalan voters and police officers were injured.

*Correio da Manhã* stands out for the inclusion of a high number of statements made by actors involved in the conflict – the then president of Catalonia, the Spanish prime minister and a Portuguese politician, among others – who are for and against the independence of Catalonia, what can be interpreted as another feature of impartiality.

Most of these statements are introduced by neutral (“to say” and “to ask”) and transcriptive (“to add”) quoting verbs. However, it is necessary to point out the use of metrapositional verbs when referring to the statements of the then Spanish prime minister and Catalan president: the first is frequently introduced by the verbs “to affirm” and “to declare”, that connote a firm and solid position; the second, on the other hand, is only introduced once by the verb “to declare”, with this verb replaced by others such as “to announce” and “to criticize”, which reflect a more abstract, defensive and non-argumentative stance. In addition, the statements made by the Portuguese political party *Bloco de*

*Esquerda* [Left Block] about the violent actions carried out by the Spanish police are introduced by the verb “to condemn”, which conveys the idea that Portugal rejects the aggressiveness experienced in Catalonia, despite the fact that the text does not include pronouns like “we” or “them” in order to create social differentiation explicitly.

The text does not just provide numerical data but contextualizes them, allowing the readers to draw their own conclusions. For example, the author speaks about the number of people injured by Spanish police officers but also adds that, of them, only one is in a serious condition and details the number of wounded policemen.

The little sympathy for Catalan independence becomes evident in the final part of the text, where the newspaper includes a section entitled “The Spanish Media Association classifies the referendum as a ‘threat’”. It is composed of numerous statements of this organization through which it is highlighted that the Constitution of 1978 brought to Spain a period of peace and that journalists who assume the sovereignty discourse are suffering pressures in Catalonia. In this way, this media outlet shows the negative side of Catalonia, which is presented as a repressor of those who do not share the independence ideals and is shown to be primarily responsible for the end of the peace initiated in Spain with the Constitution.

Ultimately, it could be understood that, unlike the newspapers analyzed so far, the more relaxed social and political situation of Portugal in terms of independence issues allows the newspaper to deal with the events that occurred in Catalonia according exclusively to its traditional centre-right stance, supporting in a more balanced way unity rather than territorial division.

In contrast to the Portuguese daily, the main information published by the free Swiss newspaper *20 Minuten* (Knüsel, 2017) focuses exclusively on the violent events that took place in Catalonia during the referendum and highlights two frames through the over-lexicalization, the lexical choices and the quoting verbs: 1) the vio-

lent character of the Spanish agents and 2) the suffering of the Catalan citizens.

Some of the lexical choices show a certain dramatization of the facts, what can be interpreted as an attempt to generate impact on the reader and attract its attention: instead of other more neutral nouns, the text includes the word “brutality” twice to refer to the police action and “riots” to express the general situation lived in Catalonia on that day. Furthermore, the article presents a number of qualifying adjectives that highlight the violent nature of the agents: “massive force”, “massive police violence”, “aggressive [policemen]”; the suffering of the Catalans: “affected people”, “afraid [citizens]”; and the seriousness of the conflict: “terrible [facts]”, “unreal [situation]”, “sad conclusion”.

In the same line, a series of verbs with specific connotations reinforce these frames by extolling the pacifism of the Catalan side: “She *queued* for four hours *to express her opinion*” / “The Catalan regional police] *have behaved* calmly”; and both the police violence and the victimization of the voters: “[The police] *even beat* old people” / “(...) the police *would confiscate* the urns” / “(...) between ten and twenty officers of the Civil Guard *appeared*” / “[The citizens] *were attacked and beaten* by the police” / “He *couldn't vote*” / “(...) the Spanish police *attacked* Catalans who *wanted to vote*”.

The newspaper's stance towards the events is already visible at the beginning of the article: the news headline (“Nobody expected such brutality”) highlights the police violence and predisposes the reader to interpret the information according to this idea. This perception of aggressiveness is increased by the fact that the title consists of a personal statement apparently provided by someone involved in the conflict, what humanizes the text and generates in the reader both a feeling of informative proximity and sympathy towards the Catalans. Immediately after, the subtitle offers a simplified description of the facts that completes the meaning of the article's heading: “With massive force, the Spanish police attacked Catalans who wanted to vote in the referendum”.

As for the quoting verbs, all of them are neutral (“to say”, “to ask”, “to speak”, “to tell”) except the metapositional “to complain”, through which the only declaration of the Spanish government included in the text is introduced in the third person: “The Spanish police also has victims *to complain*: as the Ministry of the Interior tells on *Twitter*, eleven officials have been injured”. It can be interpreted that the inclusion of this phrase in the last paragraph, after remarking the ‘brutality’ of the Spanish side throughout this piece of news, attributes to the quoting verb an ironic connotation in a bid to criticize any Spanish government's attempt to indirectly justify the use of force.

On the other hand, the information – which does not include pronouns like “we” or “them”, so that a social differentiation between the Swiss and the Spanish states is not established – is almost entirely based on the statements provided by two Catalan voters who explain the violence that they witnessed. This means that the journalist selects a part of the reality in favor of Catalonia and shows it as the total truth, which leads to misinformation. In addition, the text lacks of any type of contextualization, what makes readers more likely to accept the daily's stance as valid since they do not have the possibility to understand clearly the reasons for this conflict.

Thus, the particular characteristics of this article – the use of sensational words; the absence of contextualization; the almost exclusive inclusion of statements just from one of the two sides involved in the facts; the focus on the violent scenes; and the brevity of the text, which consists only of five paragraphs – together with the apolitical nature of the free press in Switzerland (fög, 2012) give the impression of a text that has been written in a fast way and whose main objective is, rather than inculcating a concrete position on the issue to the reader, achieving impact and audience.

The free [Swiss] media have turned tabloid-style journalism from a rather circumscribed and limited phenomenon into the journalistic mainstream. And this mainstream

is neither left nor right-leaning; it mainly consists of episodic journalism and soft news and favours coverage of those actors who fit this profile. (fög, 2012, p. 2)

## 6 Conclusions

The informative coverage of the Catalan referendum shows great differences depending on the social, political and cultural reality of the territories in which the analysed media outlets operate, as well as on the editorial line of each newspaper. The diversity of points of view when addressing the data related to nationalism can be considered logical, since, as McQuail (1984, p. 108) states, journalistic objectivity “is both necessary and impossible” and the reading of different sources of information with different perspectives can help the reader to form a personal and solid opinion. The problem is that many individuals consume only the information close to their own thoughts (Happer & Philo, 2013) and tend to reject everything the media says that goes against their opinions, which results in the formation of an uncritical and vulnerable society.

The danger that this type of information consumption poses to the population is evident taking into account that most of the newspapers analysed in this study manipulated the information, so that their points of view could gain social support, and showed only a part of reality as absolute truth, using lexical tools that reinforce a favorable stance towards the Spanish or Catalan sides, inculcating ideas into society and even teaching them models of behaviour.

This piece of research shows that the editorial line of all the analysed newspapers transcends their digital versions and that those located in countries with pro-independence tensions (*The Sun*, UK; *The Daily Record*, Scotland; *Corriere della Sera*, Italy, and *Il Gazzettino*, North-east Italy) are more likely to inculcate their concrete stance in a way that often infringes the journalistic ethics.

The latter frame – through the lexical choices, the over-lexicalization and the

quoting verbs – certain ideas that indicate a position favorable to the Catalan independence (*Il Gazzettino*), to a process of pro-devolution in the region (*The Daily Record*) or to the state unity (*The Sun* and *Corriere della Sera*). However, it is necessary to specify that these four newspapers – although, to a greater extent, those which operate in concrete regions with a strong nationalist sentiment – make a frequent use of other communication strategies that strengthen their positions and imply a lack of informative accuracy. In this way, some frames are reinforced by the total absence of contextualization (*Il Gazzettino*); a misleading historical contextualization (*The Daily Record*); the contribution of data related just to one of the two sides of the conflict, as well as the unequal reflection of each side's stance (*The Sun*, *The Daily Record*, *Il Gazzettino*); the intended inclusion (*The Sun*) or exclusion (*Il Gazzettino*, *The Daily Record*) of pronouns like “we” or “them”, with which the newspapers seek to increase or reduce the impression of informative proximity; or the explicit manifestation of the journalist's opinion in the text (*Corriere della Sera*).

For its part, the Portuguese *Correio da Manhã* also makes use of certain lexical choices, over-lexicalization and quoting verbs that reflect a position favorable to the unity of Spain, what coincides with the newspaper's centre-right political stance. However, besides using a more balanced and informative language than the previous dailies, it also offers an adequate social and political contextualization of the facts and includes numerous declarations made by different actors from the Catalan and Spanish sides, which could be due to the more favorable situation of Portugal in terms of independence issues.

Special mention deserves the information published by *20 Minuten*. The informative coverage carried out by the free Swiss newspaper keeps certain similarities with that of *Il Gazzettino* and *The Daily Record* in terms of language, lack of contextualization and bias. However, the apolitical nature of the free press in Switzerland, together with the briefness of the content published on these facts by the

tabloid, suggests that the rather sensationalist and short treatment done by *20 Minutos* simply attends to the search for impact and audience. Under this interpretation, the social and political influence of the newspaper's article – that exaggerates both the suffering of the voters and the police violence, making readers more likely to support the independence of Catalonia – could be understood as unintended, what leads to question the potential consequences that the information published by the free media can cause on society.

Ultimately, this information treatment presents risks for social stability in Europe, since the representation of different realities carried out by the main media outlets can generate individualism and also radicalization in certain regions of the European continent; a geographical area that, especially as a result of the economic crisis in 2008, has experienced a resurgence of nationalism, so that the lack of objectivity about the political problems abroad could initiate a contagion or domino effect.

However, it is necessary to point out that the conclusions presented in this study are the result of a limited analysis, since only the online version of the best-selling newspapers in six different territories is considered, using Critical Discourse as a research method, which involves a certain degree of subjectivity. Thus, this piece of research aims to serve as a small contribution in the coverage of nationalism in Europe and is open to be further developed in future research. It is a broad topic that needs to be studied more thoroughly through the analysis of more types of media outlets and more publications related to both the Catalan conflict and other social and political facts related to this issue.

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# **SComS**

## Thematic Section

Thematic Section:  
Political communication in  
and about crises

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## Political communication in and about crises – Introduction to the Thematic Section

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The financial crisis in Europe and the United States, the war in Syria, the refugee crisis, and terrorist attacks – crises seem to permeate everyday life and make headlines. Crisis as a central, persistent element of modern life has been the subject of scholarly discussions in various disciplines. Political communication research approaches crisis from two different angles. First, political crisis communication research deals with communication about political crises, such as political upheavals, protests, and subversions of governments and presidents. One of the most recent examples of a political crisis comes from Venezuela, where political changes and problems, such as corruption and undemocratic governance, have brought about economic problems (hyperinflation), a rising crime rate, hunger, and disease. Second, many other types of crises involve political communication because they also lead to policy reactions or at least discussion on their political aspects. For example, natural disasters typically provoke public discussion on the roles of political organizations and actors before, during, and after these disasters and the consequences for policy.

In communication science, organizational communication has so far most intensively dealt with crises as communicative events. Indeed, “currently, crisis communication is more of a subdiscipline in public relations and corporate communication” (Coombs & Holladay, 2010, p. xxvi). However, recognition that every crisis has a political dimension makes exploring political communication perspectives on crises all the more relevant. The concept of crisis lies at the core of political

crisis communication research. What is a crisis, and what constitutes it?

Common criteria emerge from definitions of crisis, most rooted in organizational communication research. A crisis usually is a specific event “that is unexpected, negative, and overwhelming” (Barton, 2001, p. 2) or a “turning point for better or worse” (Fink, 1986, p. 15). Thus, a crisis is commonly perceived as an event that has a clear beginning and end; that is, it is temporally limited. A crisis is also unexpected and unpredictable and interrupts routine, everyday practices (Coombs, 2010a). Moreover, crises are social constructs; events are not inherently crises but are crises because they are perceived and treated by people as such (Coombs, 2010b). The same event can be constructed as a crisis at one moment in time but not be perceived as such in other circumstances.

Crises can threaten the reputations of organizations, so crisis communication is aimed at preventing negative reputational effects. Crisis communication is quite simply defined as “the collection, processing, and dissemination of information required to address a crisis situation” (Coombs, 2010a, p. 20). Building on these characteristics, crisis communication research has identified four distinct phases at the core of the crisis management process: (1) prevention; (2) preparation; (3) response; and (4) learning (Coombs, 2005; Schwarz & Löffelholz, 2014). In the prevention phase, the organization collects information about potential crises or factors that could precipitate crises in order to prevent them. In the preparation phase, the organization develops a plan establishing behavior and responsibilities

during crises. The response phase is the most crucial phase of crisis management and encompasses the organization's reactions to the crisis, which can range from denying it and making excuses to dealing with it. In the final phase, the organization gathers information about the crisis it has endured to learn from it and be better prepared for future crises.

Within this context, several challenges to political communication research on crises can be identified. As mentioned, the concept of crisis so far has been primarily addressed by organizational communication research and has not yet been at the core of political communication research. As Udris argues in his commentary in this thematic section, political communication research has not developed crisis into a meaningful concept. The first challenge then is to provide such a concept and to construct a theoretical framework describing crisis from a political communication research perspective. The challenge can be seen by considering the characteristics of crisis mentioned. Not all events and phenomena called crises in political communication research have these characteristics. For example, many phenomena named crises do not have a clear beginning or end. Take, for example, the notion of the crisis of democracy. Neither are all crises completely unexpected. For instance, the refugee crisis from the war in Syria could have been expected. Moreover, long, ongoing crises are not necessarily exceptional anymore and, to a certain extent, have become routine. Consequently, political communication researchers sometimes seem to have difficulty differentiating between crisis and non-crisis situations.

Second, crisis communication research has been criticized for lacking theory, and only a very few theories (e. g., image repair theory and situational crisis communication theory) dominate the field (Diers-Lawson, 2017). This situation poses another challenge for political crisis communication research. These dominant theories have rarely been used in political communication research, and whether they are suitable for the field needs to be discussed. The challenge thus is to build

a theoretical framework to analyze political crises, perhaps integrating theories from crisis communication into political communication or developing distinct theoretical approaches for political crises. The usefulness of political communication theories for crisis communication research should be examined.

Third, an unexpected crisis leads to reactive research (see Udris' commentary) because political communication scholars can only study crises that are underway or over. Thus, conducting proactive political crisis communication research presents another challenge. Fourth, defining crisis and conducting proactive research pose methodological challenges. Which methods are useful for analyzing the specific character of political communication during and about crises? Consider, for example, the role of social media in crisis communication research. Despite a large body of work on the uses of social media in crisis communication (e. g., Choi, 2012; Schultz & Utz, 2013), deep investigations of proactive uses of digital methods are scarce in political crisis communication research. Newer methods are able to address the dynamic processes of unfolding crises (e. g., social network analysis), but they need to be implemented more when researching political crises. Fifth, as reviews of the existing literature have shown, crisis communication research generally is Western centric (Diers-Lawson, 2017). However, many forms of political crises also occur in Global South countries with less stable political systems. A stronger focus on these regions would benefit political crisis communication research.

Although unable to tackle all these challenges, the papers in this thematic section deal with political crisis communication in various ways and focus on different actors in the process of crisis communication, including political actors, the media, and the public. Political actors can be defined as those held responsible for or in charge of handling crises, whereas the media has the role of making crises visible, guiding the societal discourse, and offering information and perspectives to the public affected by crises. Wirz, Wettstein, Schulz,

Ernst, Schemer, and Wirth focus on populist actors' use of crises to achieve political goals and the effectiveness of such behavior. They offer a relevant perspective on the topic because they do not focus on how actors try to handle crises but, rather, on how actors may strategically use crises to their own advantage. Especially for populist actors, crises pose opportunities because they facilitate selling politics. Through the use of specific styles such as dramatization and emotionalization, populists may even intensify the feeling of a crisis while acting as competent problem-solvers. Using content analysis and survey data, the authors show that such populist crisis rhetoric in the media does, in fact, affect citizens' attitudes. Regarding the issue of immigration, Wirz et al. demonstrate that in Switzerland, populist right-wing communication tends to mobilize those who feel attached to populist ideology.

Nitsch and Lichtenstein focus more heavily on media reporting on crises. Instead of analyzing everyday news coverage, they investigate a rarely researched genre in crisis communication: political satire. After discussing the shortcomings of regular news coverage on crises, the authors analyze to what extent German satire shows may compensate for such deficits. Their study covers the Ukraine crisis, Greek debt crisis, and migration crisis. While political satire does not add much new information to discussions – most likely because those shows use news media as their main sources of information – it enriches debates by offering counter-narratives and critical orientation. By commenting and criticizing, political satire can make debates originating from crises more multifaceted.

Finally, the general public is the primary subject of the paper by Kösters, Obert, Begenat, and Jandura. Focusing on the refugee crisis as a shared public issue in Germany, the authors investigate whether such a shared issue facilitates integration. They show that issue interpretations differ depending on the specific population group. Living environments shape perceptions of shared issues, resulting in varying evaluations of the crisis and

thus different opportunities for successful immigration. In milieus characterized by extreme positions, the refugee crisis leads to polarization rather than integration, whereas milieus with political heterogeneity and diverse perspectives have potential for integration.

These three papers offer diverse perspectives on political crisis communication and illustrate the range of the issue. However, there remain many important, unanswered questions about political actors' decision making and responsibility, media crisis coverage, public perceptions of crisis, and their effects on the public. In the commentary concluding this thematic section, Udris highlights the strong fragmentation of the research field – despite growing interest in the topic in political communication research – and the need for a clear concept to enable researchers to identify crises, their causes, and their dynamics. Future researchers, therefore, can ask: In what circumstances can certain parties profit from crises, and when do crises endanger their reputations? To what extent does issue ownership give an advantage to political actors during crises? How do different media outlets deal with the dynamic development of crises in new information environments, and how does this affect the general public? Regarding the crisis communication process, from prevention to learning, more research is needed on how political actors and the media prepare for crises and what they learn from these situations for future crises. The papers in this thematic section present a starting point to answer such questions and offer promising outlooks for future research.

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## How populist crisis rhetoric affects voters in Switzerland

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### Abstract

Right-wing populism has a long tradition in Switzerland. Nevertheless, only little is known about how populist messages in the media contribute to the success of the Swiss People's Party (SVP) and to the acceptance of the party's anti-immigration policies. In this study, we combine data from a large media content analysis (including newspapers and TV news shows) with data from a panel-survey in order to address this research gap. Thereby we differentiate between effects driven by the content and the form of right-wing populist communication. While right-wing populist content depicts immigrants and the political elite as a threat to the Swiss people, populist style evokes the sense of a crisis by emotionalizing and dramatizing the message. Populist style is therefore assumed to increase the persuasiveness of populist claims. The results of this study suggest that this is the case only for some voters, while it backfires for others.

### Keywords

Populism, crisis, anti-immigrant, linkage analysis, media effects

The term *crisis* has a high popularity in recent politics, be it with regard to refugees, the media, or democracy. It seems that especially populist actors profit from this state. The proclamation of a crisis helps them to put forward their drastic policies and is considered as a key element of populist politics (Moffitt, 2015). Populist actors like to portray themselves as unpolitical persons, who are urged to take action in light of the desperate situation (Mudde, 2004; Taggart, 2000). They turn politics into a campaign to save the country (Canovan, 1999).

In order to evoke a sense of a crisis, populist actors rely on communication styles such as dramatization, emotionalization, and absolutism (e.g., Betz, 1993; Bos & Brants, 2014; Bracciale & Martella, 2017). These style elements are often considered as a key feature of populist

communication. Compared to substantial populist statements, which reflect the key ideas of the populist ideology, such style elements are not populist per se (Wirth et al., 2016). Nevertheless, they help populist actors to gain attention and spread their messages (e.g., Mazzoleni, Stewart, & Horsfield, 2003).

Little is known about the effects of the populist crisis rhetoric in the media on citizens' attitudes. Is a populist message more persuasive when it is emotionalized or dramatized? And are all voters equally susceptible to the populist crisis rhetoric? Previous research suggests that populist style elements may increase the persuasiveness of a populist message for certain voter segments (Bos, van der Brug, & de Vreese, 2013; Hameleers, Bos, & de Vreese, 2017b). As experimental studies only show short-term effects in response to a single

media stimulus, more research is needed to answer these questions. A recent field study (Wirz et al., 2018) did not find any additional effects of populist styles over the effects of populist and anti-immigrant statements on emotions and cognitions toward immigrants. However, this study did not differentiate between different groups of participants, as the experimental studies did. It therefore remains an open question if populist styles can increase the persuasiveness of right-wing populist messages for certain voters.

The present study aims to address this research gap using data from Switzerland. The Swiss People's Party (SVP) is often considered as a textbook example of a right-wing populist party (e.g., Albertazzi, 2008). Under the former leader Christoph Blocher, the party has almost doubled its vote share and became the largest party of the country. Some of the SVP's poster campaigns in referenda gained international attention due to their provocative nature<sup>1</sup>. In the Swiss media, the party has taken a dominant position (Udris, 2012). Nevertheless, there is so far no systematic analysis of the effects of right-wing populist communication in the media on citizens' attitudes.

With the present study, we thus aim to make a twofold contribution. By combining data from a content analysis of the immigration debate in Swiss newspapers and TV news shows with data from a panel-survey, we analyze the effects of right-wing populist communication (i.e., the combination of right-wing and populist statements as well as populist style) on citizens' attitudes towards immigrants, their support for anti-immigration policies, and their vote probability for the SVP. On the one hand, this improves the understanding of how the populist crisis rhetoric may increase the persuasiveness of right-wing populist messages in a real-world setting, and on the other hand, it investigates the effect of right-wing populist communica-

tion in the media on Swiss citizens' preferences for the SVP and its policies.

The results of our study show that right-wing populist communication may affect attitudes toward immigrants, the support for anti-immigration policies, as well as the vote probability for the SVP. However, not all effects are evidence of persuasion. While individuals who are supportive of the populist ideology can be convinced by the combination of anti-immigrant statements and populist style, we find a reversed effect for individuals who reject the populist ideology. The findings of this study thus suggest that populist crisis rhetoric in the media may mobilize voters who are inclined towards the populist ideology, and that it may contribute to a polarization of the Swiss electorate.

## 1 Literature Review

### 1.1 Right-wing Populism in Switzerland

The Swiss political system provides ideal opportunity structures for the emergence of populist communication. Indeed, right-wing populism has a strong tradition since the Swiss People's Party (SVP)'s uprising in the 1990s (Ernst, Engesser, & Esser, 2017b). The SVP is the largest right-wing populist party in Western Europe and can count as a textbook example for populist parties. Under its former leader Christoph Blocher, the party has almost doubled its vote share; in 2003 it became Switzerland's largest party. Much of this success is attributed to the charismatic appeal of Blocher and to the radicalized rhetoric against immigration and EU integration that he introduced (Albertazzi, 2008; Skenderovic, 2007).

### 1.2 Right-wing populist communication

The communication of right-wing populist parties reflects their political ideas (Aalberg, Esser, Reinemann, Stromback, & Vreese, 2016), which are influenced by the populist ideology on the one hand, and by a right-wing political orientation on the other hand. Populism as a thin-centered ideology describes a struggle over the structure of power in society; the pure and virtuous people feel deprived of

1 See, for example, this article in the Huffington Post: [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/global-risk-insights/switzerland-trump-christoph-blocher-\\_b\\_9517190.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/global-risk-insights/switzerland-trump-christoph-blocher-_b_9517190.html) (last visited on June 4, 2018).

their rights and values by the corrupt and self-serving elite (Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008) and want their will to be the ultimate say in politics (Mudde, 2004). On a communicative level, these ideas are expressed by praising the people, blaming the elite, and demanding more sovereignty for the people (Wirth et al., 2016). We refer to such expressions as populist statements. As populism is a thin-centered ideology (Kaltwasser, 2011; Mudde, 2004), it can be combined with other ideologies. Right-wing populism combines populism with nativism (Mudde, 2007). Nativism is the idea that a nation state should only be inhabited by locals and that people or ideas from outside present a threat to the state (Mudde, 2007, 2010). On a communicative level, nativism is reflected by statements that blame or discredit immigrants and exclude them from the people (Wirth et al., 2016). We refer to such expressions as anti-immigrant statements.

Right-wing populist communication can thus be understood as a combination of populist statements and anti-immigrant statements. The pure people are vertically distinguished from a corrupt elite, and horizontally distinguished from others who threaten their values and wellbeing. As right-wing populism combines an anti-elitist and an exclusionist perspective, it can also be referred to as complete populism (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Reinemann, Aalberg, Esser, Strömbäck, & de Vreese, 2016). This communicative repertoire can be enriched by populist communication styles.

Several scholars have measured manifestations of (right-wing) populist communication in traditional or new media (Akkerman, 2011; Cranmer, 2011; Engesser, Ernst, Esser, & Büchel, 2017; Hameleers, Bos, & de Vreese, 2017; Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Rooduijn, 2013). The focus, thereby, has mostly been on identifying populist statements and anti-immigrant statements in order to classify actors as more or less (right-wing) populist. Less attention has been devoted to the identification of populist style elements (see Bos & Brants, 2014; Bracciale & Martella, 2017 for exceptions). Although commu-

nication styles such as emotionalization, dramatization, absolutism and colloquial language are often associated with populism (Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008; Betz, 1993; Canovan, 1999; Hawkins, 2009; Mazzoleni et al., 2003; Taggart, 2000), they are not direct expressions of the populist ideology and may have other causes, for example media logic. Their use does thus not classify actors as more or less populist. Nevertheless, a recent study by Wettstein et al. (2018) demonstrates that populist style elements are most likely to occur in newspaper articles when populist actors are a speaker. We therefore consider such style elements to be an element of right-wing populist communication and refer to them as populist styles (see Table 1). It is the purpose of this study to investigate if the combination of substantial right-wing populist statements (populist statements or anti-immigrant statements) with populist styles increases the persuasiveness of the former.

In Switzerland, especially the SVP is known to make use of populist communication, as empirical studies show. A recent study by Bernhard (2017) has analysed the use of populist statements by Swiss political parties in their newspapers. The results suggest that the SVP, together with the more regionally focused parties Ticino League (Lega) and Geneva Citizens Movement (MCG), make more populist statements than established parties (the Social Democrats, Liberals, Christian Democrats and Greens). Similarly, Ernst, Engesser, and Esser (2017a) found that the SVP makes more populist statements on Facebook and Twitter than the established parties (see also Ernst, Engesser, Büchel, Blassnig, & Esser, 2017). These findings are consistent with results of an earlier study by Cranmer (2011), who found that in a media context, the SVP employed more populist statements and anti-immigrant statements than any other party in Switzerland. Of the nation-wide relevant parties in Switzerland, the SVP is thus the one that is most inclined to use right-wing populist communication.

**Table 1: Populist Key Messages and Populist Styles**

| Populist Key Messages |   |
|-----------------------|---|
| Anti-Elitism          | The elite in general or specific elites are described with negative attributes (e. g., corrupt, incompetent), as a threat or burden to the people, as responsible for problems, as not belonging to/ caring for the people. |
| People Centrist       | The people are described with positive attributes (e. g., competent, virtuous), as responsible for a good development, as monolithic. The speaker describes himself as part of the people/caring for the people.            |
| Restoring Sovereignty | It is argued in favor of more power to the people or less power to the elites.  |
| Populist Styles       |   |
| Emotionalization      | Use of emotional language, references to feelings   |
| Dramatization         | Using exaggerations, war rhetoric, describing the situation as an emergency, declaring a scandal  |
| Absolutism            | Presenting something as the only conceivable option   |
| Colloquial Language   | Use of vulgar or slang language, sarcasm, nicknames   |

**1.3 Effects of right-wing populist content and style**

Several studies demonstrate that anti-immigrant statements and populist statements increase negative attitudes toward immigrants (Arendt, Marquart, & Matthes, 2015; Matthes & Schmuck, 2017; Schemer, 2012; Schmuck & Matthes, 2017; Sheets, Bos, & Boomgaarden, 2015). Much less is known about the effects of populist styles. However, two studies suggest that the persuasiveness of populist and anti-immigrant statements increases when they are combined with an emotionalized style (Hameleers, Bos, & de Vreese, 2017a; Matthes & Marquart, 2013). More generally, research on the formal presentation of news has shown that although style elements such as emotionalization and dramatization negatively influence the perceived quality of news (Kleemans, Vettehen, Beentjes, & Eisinga, 2017), they positively affect arousal and attention (Grabe, Zhou, Lang, & Bolls, 2000), and may also increase memory for some news stories (Grabe, Lang, & Zhao, 2003). The use of populist style elements may thus increase the attention to anti-immigrant

and populist statements in a news item as well as the perceived relevance of the news. We can therefore assume that the exposure to anti-immigrant and populist statements in news coverage on the issue of migration increases negative attitudes toward immigrants, and that this effect will be even larger when such statements are combined with populist style.

- › H1a: The more often individuals are exposed to right-wing populist content (i. e., anti-immigrant and/or populist statements) in their media diets, the more negative will their attitudes toward immigrants become.
- › H2a: The more often individuals are exposed to a combination of populist and anti-immigrant statements with populist style in their media diets, the more negative will their attitudes toward immigrants become.

The operationalization of negative attitudes toward immigrants varies considerably between and within studies. While some studies aim to depict what people think or feel about immigrants (e. g., Wirz et al., 2018), others also include support for immigration policies (e. g., Matthes & Schmuck, 2017). In the Swiss context, where people can vote for immigration policies in referenda, it is very useful to distinguish between attitudes toward immigrants (consisting of cognitions and emotions toward immigrants, see Schemer, 2009), and support for immigration policies. As the extant literature did not fully distinguish between the two concepts so far, we can assume that the assumptions we made for anti-immigrant attitudes are also valid for the support of anti-immigrant policies.

- › H1b: The more often individuals are exposed to right-wing populist content (i. e., anti-immigrant and/or populist statements) in their media diets, the stronger will their support for anti-immigrant policies become.
- › H2b: The more often individuals are exposed to a combination of populist and anti-immigrant statements with

populist style in their media diets, the stronger will their support for anti-immigrant policies become.

Some studies also demonstrate effects of right-wing populist communication on voting intentions for right-wing populist parties (Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2007; Hameleers, Bos, & de Vreese, 2018; Sheets et al., 2016). These authors argue that anti-immigrant statements highlight the salience of immigration as a problem and lead to more support for parties that are perceived as providing solutions for this problem. Further, populist statements may increase political discontent and lead to more support for parties that are perceived as an alternative to the political establishment. We can thus assume that the exposure to right-wing populist content in the media does increase the support for right-wing populist parties in general, and in the Swiss context for the SVP in particular. Although the previous literature makes no assumption about the effects of populist style on voting intentions, we assume that the underlying process is the same as described for effects on anti-immigrant attitudes; the use of populist style elements in combination with anti-immigrant or populist statements will increase the relevance of the message, which leads to a higher salience of the issue and thus may increase the preference for a party that promises a solution. Therefore, we postulate that a combination of populist content with populist style will increase the vote probability for the SVP.

- › H1c: The more often individuals are exposed to right-wing populist content (i.e., anti-immigrant and/or populist statements) in their media diets, the higher will their vote probability for the SVP become.
- › H2c: The more often individuals are exposed to a combination of populist and anti-immigrant statements with populist style in their media diets, the higher will their vote probability for the SVP become.

Most studies on the effects of right-wing populist communication did not find effects across the board, but rather for specific voter segments. It seems that individuals with lower education (e.g. Matthes & Marquart, 2013; Matthes & Schmuck, 2017), lower issue-specific knowledge (Schemer, 2012), lower identification with those who are blamed (Hameleers et al., 2017b), higher identification with populist actors (Hameleers & Schmuck, 2017), and higher political cynicism (Bos et al., 2013) are more susceptible to right-wing populist appeals. Most of these characteristics seem to reflect individuals' support of populist ideas. A study by Müller et al. (2017) has shown that previous levels of support for the populist ideology determine individuals' responses to populist media content: individuals who support the populist ideology develop higher levels of support in response to populist statements in the news, while individuals who oppose the populist ideology develop lower levels of support in response to populist statements. Taken together, previous research seems to suggest that populist communication is more persuasive for individuals with an affinity to populism, and that it may even have reversed effects for individuals with low populist attitudes. We therefore postulate that the effects that we assumed in H1 and H2 will depend on individuals' populist attitudes.

- › H3: Persuasive effects of anti-immigrant statements, populist statements, and populist styles can only be expected for individuals with strong populist attitudes, while no persuasive (or even reversed) effects can be expected for individuals with low populist attitudes.

## 2 Methods

To test our hypotheses, we combined data from a content analysis and a two-wave panel-survey in a linkage-analysis (de Vreese et al., 2017; Scharnow & Bachl, 2017). Based on the self-reported media use of the survey participants, we assigned individual scores of media content vari-

ables, reflecting the content participants were most likely exposed to. This method allows us to investigate the effects of media exposure on changes in attitudes toward immigrants, support of anti-immigration policies, and vote probability for the SVP.

In order to detect media effects, it is important that the media selection for the content analysis reflects the media repertoires of the survey participants as good as possible. Therefore, we decided to focus our analysis on the metropolitan region of Zurich, consisting of the city of Zurich and the encompassing canton of Zurich. This focus allows us to include news outlets of national as well as regional scope. Further, the sample of survey participants still represents a diverse population, living in urban as well as rural areas and with diverse political views. Although the sample may not be fully representative of Switzerland, the results of recent referenda suggest the divide between urban and rural areas becomes more prominent, while regional differences have decreased<sup>2</sup>.

## 2.1 Content Analysis

The content analysis includes a wide selection of news media with a high share in the region of Zurich. We included the print editions of the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* and *Tages-Anzeiger* (quality media), *Blick* and *20 Minuten* (tabloid media), *Winterthurer Zeitung* and *Zürcher Oberländer* (regional news), *Weltwoche* and *WOZ* (weeklies). As there is usually a very high consonance of print and online edition of newspapers (Ghersetti, 2014), we considered the print versions also as proxies for the online content of those news outlets. Further, we included the two most viewed TV news shows in Switzerland, the *Tagesschau* and *10 vor 10* (both SRF 1).

We analyzed all those news outlets during a period of 59 days in February and March 2015 to include the last 30 days of news coverage before the second survey for each participant. Using a list of 20 keywords related to migration, we retrieved

2487 articles, 1894 of which referred to migration politics. From these texts, a sample of 965 was drawn for detailed analysis. For TV shows, we used artificial weeks and manual scanning to identify 34 news stories on migration. All variables were coded on statement levels by a team of 39 trained coders and then aggregated on the news item. Reliability was assessed between coders and between each coder and a gold standard provided by the project leaders for a subsample of the news items in the analysis (Mean agreement: 93.2%; B&P Kappa=0.90).

### 2.1.2 Measures

For the present study, we measured three relevant variables in the media content. First, we measured *anti-immigrant statements*. For each statement about immigrants, coders decided if the valence was positive or negative, or if promoted policies were in favor or in opposition of restrictions on immigration. We aggregated this measure on the news item creating a bias variable which indicates if the news item in total is more favorable or unfavorable toward immigrants. Positive values on this variable indicate an anti-immigrant bias. Second, we assessed the dominance of *populist statements* over anti-populist statements in a similar procedure. Statements were coded as populist when they reflect one of the populist key messages displayed in Table 1, and as anti-populist, when they reflect the opposite of these ideas (i. e., an elitist or pluralist view). Positive values on the bias variable indicate that the news item contains more populist than anti-populist statements. And third, we measured the number of *populist style* elements and aggregated them as a sum for each news item. We considered emotionalization, dramatization, absolutism and the use of colloquial language as populist communication styles (compare Table 1). As this count variable is heavily skewed (most articles contain no or few style elements), it was transformed before the statistical analysis by calculating its natural logarithm.

In order to assess if the combination of substantial right-wing populist content

2 As suggested by a data analysis at the EPFL Lausanne: <https://actu.epfl.ch/news/swiss-politics-is-increasingly-dominated-by-anurb/> (last visited on June 6, 2018).

with populist style elements increases the persuasiveness of populist communication, we computed two dummy variables from these measures: a first one indicating the co-occurrence of anti-immigrant statements and populist style in a news item, and a second one indicating the co-occurrence of populist statements and populist style. Both of these variables have the value 1 when a news item has a positive value on the bias variable and contains at least one style element, and the value 0 if these conditions are not met<sup>3</sup>.

## 2.2 Panel Survey

The panel survey was conducted online in April 2014 and March 2015. Participants were recruited by a professional market research company from their online access panel using a quota procedure for age and gender. 2000 persons participated in the first panel wave. Due to the long time span between the two waves, about one third of the sample dropped out. Further, participants in the survey who indicated that they do neither read one of the newspapers (print or online edition) nor watch one of the TV news shows in the analysis had to be excluded for the purpose of this study ( $n=88$ ). The final sample consisted of 1172 participants, 46 percent were female and the age ranged from 19 to 74 years with a mean of 52 years. Most participants had a medium (51 percent) or high (46 percent) education level, while the other participants had only mandatory education (2 percent) or did not indicate their education level (1 percent).

### 2.2.1 Measures

The panel survey measured the dependent and moderator variables of interest for this study, as well as the participants' me-

dia diets. First, *anti-immigrant attitudes* were measured as a latent construct with six items representing negative cognitions (e.g., “foreigners are criminals”) or negative emotions (i.e., “When I think of foreigners, I feel fear.”) toward immigrants in a procedure adapted from Crites, Fabrigar, and Petty (1994). Second, the *support for anti-immigration policies* was measured as a latent construct with four items (e.g., “People from Switzerland should always be offered jobs before migrants.”). Scalar measurement invariance over time was established for both latent constructs. Third, the *vote probability for the Swiss People's Party* was assessed with a single item (How likely would you vote for the SVP if elections were today?). All three dependent variables are significantly and positively correlated ( $p<0.001$ ); anti-immigrant attitudes and the support for anti-immigrant policies have a strong correlation ( $r=0.86$ ), and both latent constructs are moderately correlated with vote probability for the SVP ( $r=0.34$  and  $r=0.38$ ). Populist attitudes, which served as a moderator in this study's analysis and represent the degree of support for the populist ideology, were measured with a scale by Schulz et al. (2018). This measure consists of 12 items (e.g., “MPs in Parliament very quickly lose touch with ordinary people.”), that we combined in a mean index (Cronbach's Alpha=0.88) and split at the median in order to obtain a dichotomous moderator. All items were measured with 5-point Likert-type scales in both panel waves.

Participants' *media use* was measured in a three step procedure using the list frequency technique (Andersen, de Vreese, & Albæk, 2016). First, participants indicated which channels (print, TV, online) they used to get political information. Then, for each selected channel, a list of news media outlets was presented, from which respondents could select the ones they used at least sometimes. In the last step, they were presented all selected outlets and asked about the frequency of use during a week (1 to 7 days).

3 We prefer this dummy coding over an interaction term due to the nature of the bias variables: We are interested in the effects of populist and anti-immigrant statements combined with populist styles compared to such statements that are not combined with style elements, but we make no assumptions about the effects of anti-populist and pro-immigrant statements with style elements.

**Table 2: Regression coefficients of the multi-group structural equation model**

| Populist Attitudes                                      | <i>all</i> |          | <i>low</i> |          | <i>high</i> |          |
|---|------------|----------|------------|----------|-------------|----------|
|   | $\beta$    | <i>p</i> | $\beta$    | <i>p</i> | $\beta$     | <i>p</i> |
| Latent variable: Anti-immigrant attitudes t2            |            |          |            |          |             |          |
| Anti-immigrant attitudes t1                             | 0.805      | .000     | 0.777      | .000     | 0.774       | .000     |
| Anti-immigration statements (bias)                      | -0.027     | .519     | -0.046     | .403     | 0.001       | .998     |
| Populist statements (bias)                              | 0.049      | .353     | 0.135*     | .051*    | -0.030*     | .753*    |
| Populist style  | -0.055     | .070     | -0.029     | .475     | -0.071      | .169     |
| Anti-immigrant bias with populist style                 | -0.060     | .334     | -0.131     | .100     | 0.002       | .983     |
| Populist bias with populist style                       | 0.084      | .029     | 0.040*     | .428*    | 0.132*      | .035*    |
| Latent variable: Support for anti-immigrant policies t2 |            |          |            |          |             |          |
| Support for anti-immigrant policies t1                  | 0.969      | .000     | 0.959      | .000     | 0.957       | .000     |
| Anti-immigration statements (bias)                      | 0.022      | .598     | 0.018      | .790     | 0.035       | .619     |
| Populist statements (bias)                              | -0.072     | .200     | -0.031     | .713     | -0.155      | .085     |
| Populist style  | 0.006      | .845     | -0.012     | .785     | 0.041       | .408     |
| Anti-immigrant bias with populist style                 | 0.128      | .037     | 0.144      | .119     | 0.150       | .154     |
| Populist bias with populist style                       | -0.097     | .005     | -0.159*    | .004*    | -0.057*     | .309*    |
| Latent variable: Support for anti-immigrant policies t2 |            |          |            |          |             |          |
| Vote probability SVP t1                                 | 0.844      | .000     | 0.848      | .000     | 0.802       | .000     |
| Anti-immigration statements (bias)                      | 0.021      | .525     | 0.002      | .936     | 0.043       | .395     |
| Populist statements (bias)                              | 0.037      | .363     | 0.007      | .899     | 0.079       | .243     |
| Populist style  | -0.013     | .566     | -0.009     | .781     | -0.013      | .711     |
| Anti-immigrant bias with populist style                 | 0.004      | .926     | 0.071      | .307     | -0.069      | .387     |
| Populist bias with populist style                       | -0.050     | .050     | -0.074     | .030     | -0.033      | .430     |

Note. Significant effects are highlighted with gray areas, effects that differ significantly between groups are marked with an asterisk.

**2.3 Linkage Procedure**

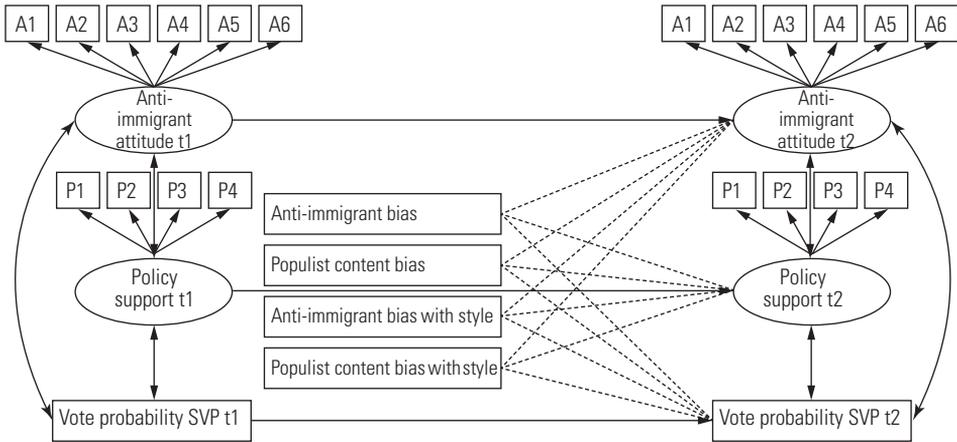
Based on these self-reported media diets, participants were allocated the media content they were most likely exposed to. For each variable in the content analysis, we created an additive score for all articles within one medium per day. Participants were then allocated a mean score of all daily values for each media outlet they indicated to use. Outlets that were used 1–3 days a week were weighted 0.5 and outlets used 4–7 days a week were weighted 1 for the calculation of the total daily score for each participant. As a result of this procedure, each participant was allocated an individual score of the overall anti-immigrant bias, populist bias,

number of style elements, and number of articles with a combination of populist or anti-immigrant statements with populist style. Each of these scores represents the individual average exposure per day.

**3 Results**

First, we report descriptive results for the media content that individuals were exposed to. The average news consumer was exposed to a very balanced portrayal of immigrants, with a bias score close to zero ( $M = -0.09$ ,  $SD = 0.54$ ). Populist statements were slightly dominant over anti-populist statements ( $M = 0.16$ ,  $SD = 0.54$ ); and close

Figure 1: Theoretical model depicting the assumed media effects



Note: Correlations between anti-immigrant attitudes, support for anti-immigration policies and SVP vote probability across time are not displayed for a better readability.

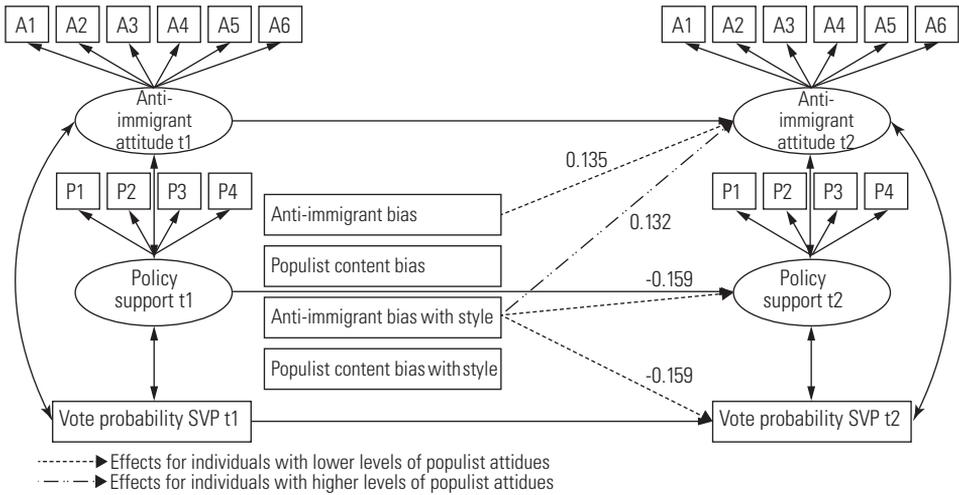
to five style elements were present in a daily media diet ( $M=4.13$ ,  $SD=2.29$ ). Further, the average news consumer was exposed to a combination of anti-immigrant statements and style elements nearly every second day ( $M=0.48$ ,  $SD=0.22$ ); and similarly often to a combination of populist statements and style elements ( $M=0.57$ ,  $SD=0.31$ ).

In order to test our hypotheses, we first estimated a Structural Equation Model (SEM) for all participants with the R package lavaan (Rosseel, 2011). The theoretical model is displayed in Figure 1. It assumes that anti-immigrant attitudes, the support for anti-immigration policies, and the vote probability for the SVP at the time of the second panel wave are predicted by an auto-regressive effect (i. e., the measure of the same construct at the time of the first panel wave) and by the media content individuals were exposed to in the 30 days prior to the second panel wave. Further, it assumes that anti-immigrant attitudes, the support for anti-immigrant policies, and the vote probability for the SVP are correlated, both within and across time points. The model has an acceptable to good fit to the data ( $Chi^2=801.36$ ,  $df=284$ , CFI: 0.96, TLI: 0.95, RMSEA: 0.04, SRMR: 0.06), according to the limits defined by Hu & Bentler (1999).

As we assumed differential effects for individuals with lower and higher populist attitudes, we also estimated the model as a Multi-Group SEM. Also this model has an acceptable to good fit to the data ( $Chi^2=1086.64$ ,  $df=568$ , CFI: 0.95, TLI: 0.94, RMSEA: 0.04, SRMR: 0.05). In order to determine if the differences between the two groups are statistically significant, we used a manifest modelling approach, that is a path model in which we included an interaction term for each media content variable with the measure of populist attitudes. The regression coefficients for the overall and multi-group estimation are both displayed in Table 2. Effects that can be considered to be statistically different between groups (as there was a significant interaction in the path model) are marked with an asterisk.

In a first step, we test H1 and H2 for the overall sample. Hypothesis 1 predicted that the exposure to right-wing populist content would lead to a) more negative attitudes toward immigrants, b) higher support of anti-immigration policies, and c) increase the vote probability of the SVP. There is no evidence for any of these effects. H1 a-c thus have to be rejected. Hypothesis 2 predicted that populist style elements would increase the persuasiveness of right-wing populist content. We found mixed evidence

Figure 2: Overview of results



Note: Correlations between anti-immigrant attitudes, support for anti-immigration policies and SVP vote probability across time are not displayed for a better readability.

for this assumption. Combining populist statements with populist styles increased negative attitudes toward immigrants, but decreased the support for anti-immigrant policies and the vote probability for the SVP. Anti-immigrant statements combined with populist style increased the support for anti-immigrant policies but had no effect on anti-immigrant attitudes and vote probability for the SVP.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that persuasive effects of right-wing populist communication would only occur for individuals with high levels of populist attitudes. Although there are some significant effects for the overall sample, a look at the multi-group model suggests that there are indeed differential effects depending on the level of populist attitudes. First of all, the negative effects of populist statements combined with populist style can only be found for individuals with low populist attitudes. For this group, the combination of populist statements with style elements led to less support for anti-immigrant policies and a lower vote probability for the SVP. This is consistent with the expectations in H3. Second, the positive effect of populist statements with style elements can only be found for individuals with high populist attitudes. For this group, the combination

of populist statements with populist style led to more negative attitudes toward immigrants. This is also consistent with H3. The mixed effects that we found for H2 can thus largely be explained by participants' populist attitudes.

Surprisingly, the overall effect of anti-immigrant statements combined with populist style is not significant in any of the two groups by themselves. On the other hand, there is an additional effect of populist statements (without style) for individuals with low populist attitudes. The more populist statements individuals in this group received in their media diet, the more negative did their attitudes toward immigrants become. This finding supports H1a, but contradicts H3, as we did not expect persuasive effects for individuals with low populist attitudes.

All in all, we can conclude that mainly the combination of anti-immigrant statements with populist style elements had an influence on Swiss citizens' attitudes. As expected, this influence was positive for individuals who support the populist ideology, and negative for those who oppose it. Further, also populist statements had an influence on attitudes toward immigrants, however unexpectedly only for individuals

with low levels of populist attitudes. All significant effects are displayed in Figure 2.

#### 4 Discussion

Although the Swiss People's Party has become the largest party in Switzerland, there has so far been no systematic analysis of how right-wing populist communication influences Swiss citizens' preferences for the SVP and its policies. One important feature of populist communication is the depiction of the situation as a crisis (Moffitt, 2015). It was therefore the aim of this study to investigate how the exposure to populist crisis rhetoric in the news influences citizens' attitudes toward immigrants, anti-immigration policies, and the probability to vote for the SVP. The results of this study suggest that the combination of substantial populist content with populist style elements, such as emotionalization or dramatization, does indeed have an impact. In line with previous research, for example by Müller et al. (2017), we found that individuals who support the populist ideology are persuaded by the combination of anti-immigrant statements with populist style, while individuals who oppose the populist ideology show reversed tendencies.

Interestingly, we only found effects for the combination of anti-immigrant content with populist style, but not for populist content with populist style. It might be that this is related to the concepts we investigated – it seems reasonable that anti-immigrant statements more than populist statements influence what people think about immigrants and immigration policies. As immigration is also the main issue of the SVP (Dalmus, Hänggli, & Bernhard, 2016), it may be that reasons to vote or not vote for this party are dominated by considerations about the party's position on this issue. Further, one has to keep in mind that the effects reflect *changes* in attitudes or vote probability during one year. In this context, it is noteworthy that the combination of anti-immigrant statements with populist style affected attitudes toward immigrants, but not toward immigration pol-

icies or the vote probability for the SVP for individuals with higher populist attitudes, while it was just the other way around for individuals with lower levels of populist attitudes. This might indicate that the proclamation of an immigration crisis is perceived as an over-dramatization by individuals who are not inclined toward the populist ideology; it has no effect on their attitudes toward immigrants and leads to a rejection of the SVP and its policies. For individuals who support the populist ideology on the other hand, the proclamation of such a crisis is persuasive, however they might support (or not support) the SVP and its policies for other reasons.

A surprising result of this study is that the exposure to populist statements led to more negative attitudes toward immigrants for individuals with low populist attitudes. The depiction of a conflict between the people and the elite in the context of immigration might have increased the perception of immigration as a problem for this group, even or probably because they usually do not feel betrayed by the political elite. It might be that as this group rejects a tough anti-immigrant rhetoric, other and more subtle arguments against immigration are more persuasive for them. The effect may also have methodological reasons: Individuals with low populist attitudes had significantly less negative attitudes toward immigrants than individuals with high populist attitudes at the first panel wave; considering what is known as regression to the mean (Barnett, van der Pols, & Dobson, 2005), it might be that individuals in this group just reported less extreme attitudes at the time of the second panel wave (while however individuals with high populist attitudes stayed as extreme as they were).

The present research of course has its limitations. The linkage analysis is based on the assumption that individuals were exposed to all articles on the issue of migration in the media outlets that they use. This is a very idealistic assumption. The measurement error is further increased by the self-report of media use, and by the fact that we only analyzed a random sample of the media content. This might have

led to an underestimation of media effects (Scharnow & Bachl, 2017). It is therefore noteworthy to mention that we did find some media effects, despite the potential inaccuracy in the assignment of media content. The media effects we found are only small, which is however not surprising as we investigate attitude change in a panel design. Future research could address the problem of measurement error by using tracking data for media use, or by considering the placement of news items (e.g., front page versus other pages) in order to estimate the probability that survey participants were exposed to a particular news story.

Another limitation is the focus on some selected news sources, which of course do not reflect the complete media repertoire of the population. We analyzed TV news and print newspapers, and considered the latter also as proxies for the online outlets. As digital-born news media still play a minor role in Switzerland (Newman, Fletcher, Levy, & Nielsen, 2016), this selection reflects the main mass media news sources of the Swiss population. However, especially on social media, individuals are not only exposed to news from established Swiss media, but also to messages from foreign media, alternative news sources, and messages from peers. As this exposure is very individual, it will be a big challenge for future research to better acknowledge such sources.

The present study focused on the effects of right-wing populist communication in the metropolitan region of Zurich and its impact on the support of the SVP and its policies. Although the SVP is characterized as a textbook example for a right-wing populist party, right-wing populist communication in the news is not limited to this party, and may also affect the vote probability for other Swiss parties. It would thus be desirable for future research to enhance the scope of analysis. Further, in order to enhance the generalizability of our findings with regard to populist parties, similar analyses could also be conducted in the area of Geneva with the Geneva Citizens Movement (MCG), or in Ticino with the Ticino League (Lega).

Despite its limitations, the present study provides some valuable contributions. First, with a more general scope, this research has shown that populist crisis rhetoric, that is, the combination of substantial (right-wing) populist content with a populist style, is persuasive for some voter segments, but does backfire for others. The combination of populist messages with an arousing style is thus not such a powerful persuasion tool as some might have hoped or feared. However, the results of our analysis suggest that also voters who rather oppose the populist ideology may be persuaded by populist communication, although they react to different cues than individuals who support the populist ideology.

Second, with a more specific focus on Switzerland, the study at hand is the first analysis of the effects of right-wing populist communication in the news on Swiss citizens' attitudes. It shows that dramatization in the context of anti-immigrant rhetoric had a negative impact on vote probability for the SVP and on support of anti-immigration policies for voters with lower levels of populist attitudes. This is noteworthy, as the first panel wave of this study took place in 2015, just after the Swiss electorate accepted the «Masseneinwanderungsinitiative», a referendum launched by the SVP which demanded the limitation of immigration to Switzerland through contingents, while the second panel wave took place a year later. At the moment of writing, the Masseneinwanderungsinitiative was the last success of the SVP on the immigration issue. In 2016, the Swiss electorate voted against the «Durchsetzungsinitiative», which wanted to establish stricter rules for the deportation of foreign criminals. The results of our study, which depict the change in attitudes toward immigrants and immigration policies between 2015 and 2016, might provide some explanation for the diverging outcomes of these two referenda.

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## Satirizing international crises. The depiction of the Ukraine, Greek debt, and migration crises in political satire

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### Abstract

In international crises, the media's information and orientation function is particularly important in the public sphere. While the news media's crisis coverage has been well researched and often criticized, very little is known about the depiction of crises in political satire. This study examines how German satirical shows ( $n = 154$  episodes, 2014–2016) covered the Ukraine, Greek debt, and migration crises and whether or not these depictions corresponded to news media logic. In its attention to the crises, satire follows news media's conflict orientation. Parallels with news media logic also relate to the information function because the predominant frame elements in satirical shows mirror governmental positions. This is different regarding the orientation function. In their evaluation of the frame elements, satirical shows' criticism of governmental positions and their support for minority positions create a counter-narrative for the crises. Thus, satirical shows provide added value for public discourse.

### Keywords

political satire, international crises, Ukraine crisis, Greek debt crisis, migration crisis, crisis coverage, content analysis, media functions

Satire has a firm place in today's media landscape. Especially in times of crisis, satirical approaches to the current political, social, and economic situation proliferate (Boland, 2012; Griffin, 1994; Lewis, 2006; McClennen & Maisel, 2014). This is not only because bad news invites mockery and crises challenge social norms (Lewis, 2006), but also because the news media extensively cover crisis events. Thus, the audience already has basic information about a crisis, which is a necessary precondition for understanding jokes (Wyer & Collins, 1992).

From a social perspective, a crisis can be defined as a process (McNair, 2016) within which situations or disruptive events are perceived as a "serious threat to the basic structures or fundamental values and norms of a system" (Rosenthal, Hart, & Charles, 1989, p. 10). Crises can arise from external attacks, inter- or inner-state conflicts, or from natural or man-made catastrophes. They affect large numbers of people and are related to a

high degree of uncertainty, instability, emotional stress, and fear (Perse & Lambe, 2017). This makes them situations "for which people/publics seek causes and make attributions" (Coombs & Holladay, 2004, p. 97).

In our globalized and highly mediated world with international political and economic networks, crises frequently extend beyond national borders and achieve an international dimension (Cottle, 2009; Schwarz, Seeger, & Auer, 2017). Being a central source of information and interpretation, the media are highly influential in the public perception of a crisis (Perse & Lambe, 2017). In national as well as transnational contexts, media coverage influences public and political responses to crisis news, challenges political authority, and pressures politics for action (Gilboa, 2005; Miller, 2007).

Research typically concentrates on the news media's coverage of crises (Entman, 2004; Kampf & Liebes, 2013; Nohrstedt & Ottosen, 2014; for an overview see

Schwarz et al., 2017). The content of other media formats such as YouTube-channels, weblogs, left- and right-wing magazines, satire, and comedy has received very little academic attention so far (Atton & Hamilton, 2008; Bessant, 2017; Fuchs, 2010; Harrington, 2011). Our contribution focuses on the coverage of international crises in satirical shows. Satirical shows such as late night formats or fake news shows have spread around the world in recent years (Baym & Jones, 2012) and are controversially discussed regarding their consequences for society and individuals (Hart & Hartelius, 2007; Holbert, 2013; McClennen & Maisel, 2014).

Satire is typically associated with aggression, judgement, mockery, play, laughter, and references to societal norms (Behrman, 2002; Brummack, 1971; Day, 2011; Test, 1991). When it addresses political issues, satire attacks power structures. It provides social commentary and criticism, which can add to controversial societal debates and even influence public discourse.<sup>1</sup> Satire can thus be considered “a particularly potent form of political communication” (Gray, Jones, & Thompson, 2009, p. 12; see also Caufield, 2008) that frequently challenges established perspectives on events with a counter-narrative (Hill, 2013). Despite their focus on entertainment, satirical shows can contribute to communicative functions in the political public sphere that are typically attributed to journalism and the news media (Baym, 2005; Bessant, 2017; McClennen & Maisel, 2014; Michael, 2017). Against this background, it is scarcely surprising that satirical shows facilitate political learning (Baek & Wojcieszak, 2009; Kim & Vishak, 2008).

Studies on political satire predominantly concentrate on the effects of these shows (e.g., Boukes, Boomgaarden, Moorman, & de Vreese, 2015; Landreville, Holbert, & LaMarre, 2010; Lee, 2012; Matthes & Rauchfleisch, 2013). Much less is

known about the actual content of political satire. The few existing studies usually provide an overview of the variety of issues and political actors that are addressed in the shows (e.g., Fox, Koloen, & Sahin, 2007; Lichtenstein & Nitsch, 2018; Lichter, Baumgartner, & Morris, 2015; ; Nitsch & Lichtenstein, 2013). Issue-specific studies (e.g., Feldman, 2013) that allow for deeper insights into the coverage of satirical shows are rare.

This contribution addresses the research gap in issue-specific studies by focusing on the coverage of international crises in satirical television shows. In relation to media’s communicative functions in the political public sphere, we discuss the deficiencies of news media’s crisis coverage and how satire might provide additional value for public discourse. Conducting a systematic content analysis, we then examine how satirical shows in Germany covered three international crises in recent years; namely, the Ukraine, Greek debt, and migration crises. We discuss parallels with and differences from news media logic and point out which functions satire fulfills in mediated crisis communication.

## 1 Crisis coverage in news media and satirical shows

### 1.1 Functions and deficiencies of crisis coverage

The media’s communicative functions in the public sphere have been discussed since the beginning of mass communication theory (e.g., Lasswell, 1948; Merton, 1949; Wright, 1986). According to McQuail (2010) the media should 1) inform the public and indicate power relationships, 2) provide orientation, interpretation, and explanation, 3) promote continuity and commonality of values, 4) entertain the audience and enable relaxation and stress-reduction, and 5) mobilize the public towards societal objectives. For political communication in the public sphere (and thus also for crisis coverage), information and orientation are especially relevant (Perse & Lambe, 2017). This is because

<sup>1</sup> A recent example is the “Varoufake-Video” by German satirist Jan Böhmermann. The satirical video questions both news media’s coverage on the Greek debt crisis and the position of the German government (Bessant, 2017).

citizens of democracies are expected to acquire knowledge and form considered opinions about political issues (Habermas, 2006). While information includes presenting backgrounds and different perspectives on crisis events, orientation is provided when the media comment on events and take a position (for example, regarding questions of responsibility and solutions for a crisis). Both functions are typically associated with normative expectations of the work of news media journalists as the main communicators in a mediated public sphere (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995; Christians, Glasser, McQuail, Nordenstreng, & White, 2009; Patterson, 2013).

The media not only reports crisis events but has a “more active performative involvement and *constitutive* role” (Cottle, 2006, p. 9, emphasis in original). They pick up conflict events and situations and incorporate them into a specific media logic. In this mediatization of crises, the media constructs crisis narratives that serve as a basis for interactions with other societal actors and have real consequences (Hjarvard, Mortensen, & Eskjaer, 2015; Walby, 2015). News media’s performance in crisis contexts, however, has frequently been the subject of intense criticism (e.g., Entman, 2004; Hamelink, 2011; Lynch & Galtung, 2010; Nohrstedt & Ottosen, 2014). Criticism is directed at the short attention span of news media. It is argued that news media’s attention concentrates on highly conflict ridden situations, provides little background information on a crisis, or information about the later reconciliation processes (Lynch & Galtung, 2010; Nohrstedt & Ottosen, 2014). During the media’s attention span, so-called “disaster marathons” (Katz & Liebes, 2007; Liebes, 1998) leave little room for critical reflection and verification checks, and are highly prone to spreading misinformation. Instead of serving individuals and societies with “true” and unbiased information, the dramatized and unfiltered coverage can mobilize fears and cause overreactions (Altheide, 2016; Hamelink, 2011; Patterson, 2013). In addition, news media tend to domesticate international issues by stressing the relevance of events for the home

country and by focusing on national actors while neglecting other countries’ perspectives (Cottle, 2009; Eide & Ytterstad, 2011). Domestication creates the impression that the home country is affected by the crisis. It is often accompanied by blaming external actors (e.g., other countries), thereby contributing to the escalation of conflicts (Hamelink, 2011).

Information and orientation functions are further compromised when news media follow political propaganda. In times of crisis, media’s dependence on official information is especially strong because the events involve a high degree of uncertainty and surprise (Cook, 2006; Olsson, Nord, & Falkheimer, 2015). Thus, news media often resort to information from their own country’s government and military. This so-called indexing (Bennett, 1990) of official positions by the media leads to a one-sided coverage, especially when officials present a unified front and the government’s position is not challenged by opposition politicians or representatives from other institutions (Groshek, 2008; Roman, Wanta, & Bunika, 2017). With regard to U.S. media coverage of the war in Iraq in 2003, and the economic crisis of 2008, Jones and Baym (2010, p. 281) assert that whilst the public “deeply needed critical information and reasoned debate, the most influential sources of television news instead provided a steady and often debilitating diet of distraction, distortion, spectacle, and spin”. A less critical stance towards the government and a high focus on solidarity-building during a crisis can contribute to a ‘rally around the flag’ effect (Mueller, 1973). The term refers to expressions of patriotism and support for the home country government when a crisis is perceived as a threat to that society (Chowanietz, 2011; Kam & Ramos, 2008). In the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, for example, U.S. news media became reluctant to criticize official language and policies, and finally failed to hold the government responsible in the lead-up to the Iraq War (Day, 2011). While patriotism became lucrative for the media, “neutrality was often suspected as disloyal” (Wong, 2006, pp. 123–124).

Both indexing and the rally effect enable politicians to engage in crisis exploitation by presenting themselves as credible crisis managers. They can use blaming strategies that point at other countries and highlight causes for the crisis that are outside their own responsibility. Moreover, when the media refrain from critically scrutinizing political crisis reactions, politicians can strategically use the crisis to push their own political agenda (Boin, t'Hart, & McConnell, 2009; Olsson et al., 2015).

## 1.2 Crisis coverage in political satire

International crises such as wars, terrorism, and economic downturns are not only covered by the news media. They are also popular issues in political satirical shows (Lichter et al., 2015). Satirical shows are characterized by a strong focus on political personalities (Matthes & Rauchfleisch, 2013; Morris, 2009; Niven & Lichter, 2003). One can therefore assume that the shows mock political leaders for their performance in the crisis. In a normative view, however, satire's contribution to communicative functions in the public sphere evolves from content related criticism on political and societal discourses (McClennen & Maisel, 2014).

With their emphasis on opinions and criticism and the linking of entertainment and politics, satirical shows significantly diverge from news media's routines and principles of depiction (Caufield, 2008; Day, 2011; Gray et al., 2009). Even though the news media's agenda serves as the central point of reference for the selection of issues, the show's editorial teams mostly have journalistic experience that enables professional reflection and further investigation (Krauss, 2017; Michael, 2017). In their coverage of international crises, satirical shows can offer perspectives that are neglected in news media coverage (or relate to minority positions) and provide additional contextual information (Baym, 2005; Baym & Jones, 2012). They might thus complement deficiencies resulting from news media logic. Against this background it can be argued that satirical shows can offer added value regarding the

information and orientation function in the public sphere (see also Lichtenstein & Nitsch, 2018).

Regarding the information function, Fox et al. (2007) reveal that satire (*The Daily Show*) contains the same amount of substantial information as broadcast news. Satirical shows also convey additional information, that is, information that is not to be found in news media coverage. Unlike news media, *The Daily Show* did not reduce the Occupy movement to the issue of violence, but reflected on the broader context and on messages of the movement (Young, 2013). The German satirical show *Die Anstalt* provided important background information to the Ukraine crisis: Drawing on Krüger's (2013) analysis of networks between journalists and politics, the show highlighted the membership of prominent journalists in pro-NATO elitist circles and critically discussed journalists' role conflicts when covering NATO issues and events in the Ukraine crisis (*Die Anstalt*, April 29, 2014). As political satire is less concerned with the norm of balanced coverage, the depiction of certain issues significantly diverges from the news media. In her issue-specific study on the depiction of global warming in two satirical shows, Feldman (2013) showed that coverage of *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* is mainly concerned with scientific facts. In American news media, however, the principle of balanced coverage results in a rather high amount of climate-skeptical voices (Boykoff & Boykoff, 2004). Satire serves the orientation function by taking a stance in debates and criticizing arguments and political actions. Satire can therefore be understood as a faithful watchdog (McClennen & Maisel, 2014), "challenging authority figures and disassembling their rhetoric far better than those who actually claim to operate as the fourth estate" (Harrington, 2011, p. 39). Since satire questions taken-for-granted assumptions, it can function as a revelation, exposing "flaws in rhetoric, logical fallacies, and rhetorical spin" (McClennen & Maisel, 2014, p. 165). Besides criticism, satire offers orientation by providing counter-narratives for events and process-

es (Hill, 2013). In doing so, satire can suggest solutions for a crisis (Lewis, 2006; McClennen & Maisel, 2014; Peterson, 2008).

When satire diverges from news media logic and provides an alternative account of events, it can either help or hurt the communicative function in the political public sphere (Hart & Hartelius, 2007; Holbert, 2013). The desire to present different or additional information carries the risk of relying on wrong information and spreading conspiracy theories and fake news. Furthermore, the 9/11 attacks demonstrated that satire can fail to take a critical position towards authority and join in a rally-effect instead (McClennen & Maisel, 2014). Whereas jokes about foreign enemies are “safe targets” in times of crisis and conflict (Lichter et al., 2015, p. 137), criticizing the home nation is a taboo subject. This clearly shows in Bill Mahler’s comparison of the 9/11 terrorists’ actions and the U.S.’ use of cruise missiles in his late night show *Political Incorrect*. The ensuing national uproar was followed by the withdrawal of advertising and ultimately the cancellation of the show.

## 2 Recent international crises

In recent years, three international crises have dominated EU and German politics: the Ukraine, Greek debt, and migration crises. While both the Ukraine and Greek debt crises had their epicenters outside of Germany, the migration crisis directly affected Germany. However, in each crisis, Germany played a significant role in international negotiations and crisis management. Even though the three crises varied greatly with respect to perception of the threat, all three of them received a high level of attention in the German news media.

In Germany, the Ukraine crisis was perceived as a threat to international security and was associated with the danger of war. With Ukraine and Russia being the two key countries, the crisis resembled an intense confrontation along the lines of the old East and West divide (for an overview, see Petro, 2017; Roman et al., 2017).

The crisis started in November 2013 with demonstrations in Independence Square (Maidan) in Kiev. Protests were directed against the government that had rejected an economic agreement with the EU due to pressure from Russia. The crisis escalated when Russia annexed Crimea in March 2014. The annexation was denounced as a violation of international law and both the EU and the US imposed travel bans and economic sanctions on Russia. The sanctions were accompanied by open dispute between Russia’s President Putin and Germany’s Chancellor Merkel (who had a leading position in the EU’s negotiations with Russia).

The Greek debt crisis centered on fears of financial instability and economic losses. It had its roots in the earlier Euro crisis (2010–2012) when Greece had to be stabilized by guarantees, ‘rescue parachutes’ loans, and a radical austerity policy. Poverty, unemployment, and distrust in established political circles characterized the situation in Greece when the left-wing party Syriza came into power in early 2015. Its strong ambitions to end austerity measures led to repeated threats of a ‘Grexit’ by Germany and other EU countries, and to an escalation of the conflict in summer 2015. Against EU-wide protests, Prime Minister Tsipras conducted a referendum in which the Greeks rejected proposals for new economic measures. After weeks of tension, Greece finally came to an agreement with the EU that kept the country inside the Eurozone (for an overview see Papaconstantinou, 2016; Tsatsanis & Tseprouglou, 2016).

During the migration crisis, the perception of threat was related to issues of security and social conflict. The migration crisis refers to the dramatic increase of refugees from African and Arab countries since 2014. The large number of asylum seekers placed enormous pressure on the EU’s external borders and led to heated debates within the EU (for an overview see Barlai, Fähnrich, Griessler, & Rhomberg, 2017). Given the tense humanitarian situation, Chancellor Merkel allowed refugees free access to Germany in September 2015. The crisis split political parties as

well as German society – to the benefit of the right-wing party AfD and the populist movement ‘Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the Occident’ (PEGIDA). At the beginning of the crisis, Merkel was praised for her decision to keep the borders open; but, over time, criticism became more vocal.

Empirical studies reveal that the news media have constructed their coverage of the Ukraine, Greek debt, and migration crises according to principles of media logic. This has resulted in the above-mentioned normative deficiencies concerning their information and orientation functions. German news media tended to domesticate the three crises by directing their attention, for instance, to national affectedness and national politicians (Fengler et al., 2018; Lichtenstein, Ritter, & Fähnrich, 2017; Nienstedt, Kepplinger, & Quiring, 2015). With regard to the information function in the public sphere, and in line with the indexing thesis, studies point to strong parallels between news media coverage and the official position of the German government. Since news media also supported the government’s position in their evaluation, parallels can also be seen regarding the orientation function. In their depiction of the Ukraine crisis, for instance, German news media followed the government lead in blaming Russia for the crisis and supporting economic sanctions (Szostok, Gluszek-Szafraniec, & Guzek, 2016). The migration crisis was first depicted as a humanitarian catastrophe that required immediate action. Later on, threats to security and cultural homogeneity in Germany became more prominent in the news media and restrictive measures were supported (Hemmelmann & Wegner, 2016; Lichtenstein et al., 2017). We are not aware of any analyses of the depiction of the 2015 Greek debt crisis in German news media, but studies of the earlier and similar Euro crisis revealed that news media tended to blame Greece and supported austerity measures (Galpin, 2017; Nienstedt et al., 2015).

### 3 Research questions

While crisis coverage in the news media is well researched, the depiction of crises in satire has not yet been analyzed. Based on theoretical considerations, our interest lies in how satirical shows in Germany cover international crises and whether their coverage differs from news media logic. We focus on the Ukraine, Greek debt, and migration crises, which have received a high level of media attention in recent years. During crises, a strong alignment between conflict events and media attention is common, and empirical studies of the three crises have found further deficiencies in news media coverage. The media domesticated the three crises and showed strong parallels with government communication with regard to the inclusion and evaluation of perspectives (frames), for example, the attribution of blame to Russia in the Ukraine crisis and to Greece in the Greek debt crisis.

Our first research question refers to satire’s general attention towards the three crises (1a) and to links between the level of attention and the principles of media logic (1b). Given that news media are criticized for their focus on highly conflict-ridden crisis situations and for their tendency to domesticate crises, satirical shows can provide added value (and thus “help” democracy) by concentrating on other aspects (e.g., highlighting the effect on other countries and reflecting on events before and after the conflict).

- › RQ1a: How much attention do satirical shows pay to the Ukraine, Greek debt, and migration crises?
- › RQ1b: How pronounced are conflict orientation and domestication in satirical shows’ coverage of the three crises?

Added value regarding the information function can be provided if satirical shows offer a different frame of the crisis than news media does. This can be done by either introducing a new frame or using a frame that is underrepresented in news media. Frames selectively emphasize certain aspects of an issue and consist of el-

ements that define, explain, and evaluate relevant problems and offer treatment recommendations (Entman, 1993). The news media have frequently been criticized for solely mirroring the spectrum of official political frames (indexing) and adopting the government's crisis frames. Given the characteristics of satire, the indexing thesis should not apply to satirical shows and the addressed frames should diverge from, rather than parallel, official political frames. Our second research question therefore refers to the spectrum of crisis frames in satirical shows.

- › RQ2: Which frames are addressed in satirical shows' crisis coverage, and do they parallel official political crisis frames or differ from them?

Regarding the orientation function of satire, added value can be generated through the evaluation of frames. The indexing thesis implies that official political frames are presented in an affirmative way and it is known that news media occasionally join in a 'rally-around-the-flag' with strong support for the governments' position. News media's coverage of the analyzed three crises also points to support for governmental position. Satirical shows follow a similar logic as news media if they approve official government crisis frames. Conversely, rejection of frames that are in line with the government position, as well as approval of frames that are not in line, indicate a divergence from news media logic and add value regarding orientation. In the first case, satire provides *critical orientation*; in the second case, it provides orientation by constructing a *counter-narrative* of the crisis. Therefore, our third research question focuses on the positions towards the frames.

- › RQ3: Which frames are approved and which are rejected in satirical shows' crisis coverage and do satirical shows offer counter-narratives to official political crisis frames?

## 4 Method

### 4.1 Analyzed satirical shows

We conducted a systematic content analysis that considers three German satirical shows: *heute show*, *Neo Magazin Royale* and *Die Anstalt*. The shows are broadcast by the public service channel ZDF and cover the spectrum of political satire on German television. *Heute show* is a fake news show hosted by satirist and sports journalist Oliver Welke. It has been broadcast weekly since 2009 (Friday nights, air time: 30–45 minutes). The name refers to the channel's own news show *heute* and the show concentrates on satirizing the week's political issues.

*Neo Magazin Royale* is a late night show that started in 2013 on the special interest channel ZDFneo. It airs weekly (Thursday nights, air time: 30-45 minutes) and is hosted by satirist Jan Böhmermann. Since 2015 it has been repeated on Friday nights in ZDF. *Neo Magazin Royale* is primarily popular for its stories on social media but has lately attracted a great deal of political attention when Böhmermann tested the limits of freedom of speech in Germany by explicitly insulting Turkish President Erdogan.

The third show under study, *Die Anstalt*, follows the tradition of cabaret theatre and is hosted by cabaret artists Max Uthoff and Claus von Wagner, who are accompanied by different guests. It airs only eight times a year (on Tuesday nights) but has the longest air time of the three shows (50 to 60 minutes). As opposed to the other shows, *Die Anstalt* concentrates on one topic per show and is broadcast live.

With regard to their market shares, *Die Anstalt* (12.4%; Sallhof, 2015) and *heute show* (14.4%, Sanchez, 2016) differ only slightly. *Neo Magazin Royale* reaches a very small audience via TV (1%, Kyburz, 2015) but is well received via the ZDF online mediathek (Zubayr & Gerhard, 2017).

### 4.2 Analysis and Measures

The analysis includes all episodes of the three shows (n=154) that were broadcast between January 2014 and April 2016. In the 154 episodes (*heute show*: n=.75, *Neo*

*Magazin Royale*: n=61, *Die Anstalt*: n=18), we identified 584 crisis-relevant segments (*heute show*: n=340, *Neo Magazin Royale*: n=96, *Die Anstalt*: n=148). These segments focus on either the Ukraine, Greek debt, or migration crises. Since the shows often cover crisis issues for long stretches of an episode, we distinguished consecutive segments from each other. This was done by applying formal criteria (changes in the setting; e.g., from a single moderation to an interview) as well as content-related criteria (changes in the crisis-relevant sub-topic; e.g., from causes of migration to accommodation of refugees).

For the 584 crisis segments, we coded indicators for domestication and for the framing of the crises. Domestication was coded, when the crisis segment mainly relates to Germany (e.g., by highlighting German politicians, the German government's position in a crisis, or consequences of the crisis for Germany).

For the framing of the crises, we draw on Entman's (1993, p. 52) suggestion that a frame consists of four frame elements: "a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation". We follow a slight variation of the four frame elements that was put forward specifically for the analysis of crisis frames (Lichtenstein, Esau, Pavlova, Osipov, & Argylov, 2019). Accordingly, a frame entails 1) a problem definition, 2) a causal interpretation, 3) an attribution of blame, and 4) a treatment recommendation. We coded up to three problem definitions, causal interpretations, attributions of blame, and treatment recommendations per crisis segment. The frame elements were derived from previous studies on news media coverage of the three crises (Lichtenstein et al., 2019; Nienstedt et al., 2015), and validated with a selection of the material.

In addition, we coded the shows' position towards the addressed frame elements. The position was coded as either approval or rejection of a particular frame element. Approval was coded when a frame element is used as factual, truthful information; rejection when it is criticized (either implicitly, e.g., by stultifying or ex-

aggerating a given problem definition, or explicitly by providing contradicting information or allegations).

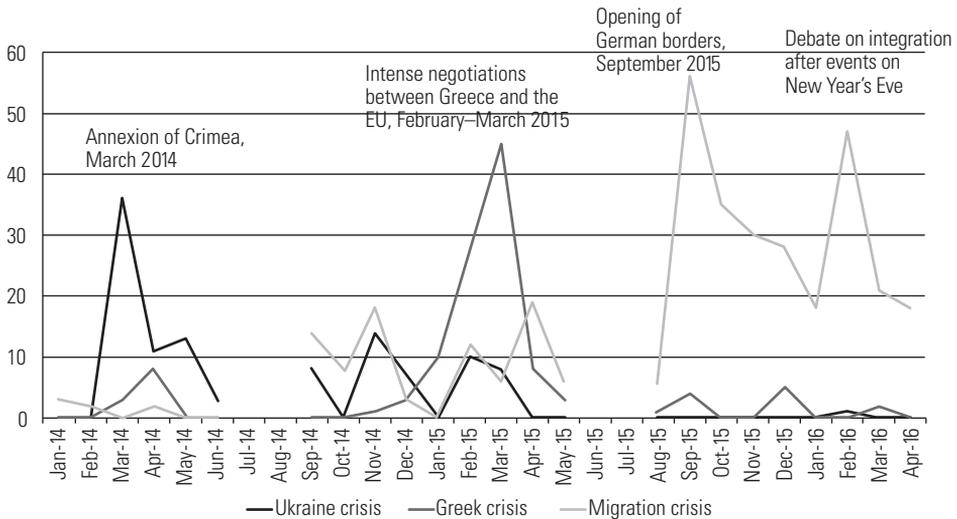
In the coding process, the authors were assisted by 16 students. All coders were trained for four weeks, partly in class and partly in teams of three. During the coder training, 15 episodes (about ten percent of the material) and selected sections from 20 more episodes were analyzed. The students were involved in the first step of coding – the identification of crisis-relevant segments in the 154 episodes (intercoder-reliability=.75, Krippendorff's alpha). In the second step, the frame elements and positions towards the elements were coded by the two authors (frame elements=.71, position towards the frame elements=.89).

## 5 Results

Findings on satirical shows' depiction of the Ukraine, Greek debt, and migration crises are presented in a combined view on the three analyzed shows (*Neo Magazin Royale*, *Die Anstalt*, and *heute-show*). Differences in coverage between the shows are mentioned if they have some evidential value. Our first research question refers to the attention that is paid to the three crises (RQ1a), and to the extent of domestication and conflict events in satire's crisis coverage (RQ1b).

Overall, satirical shows' attention to the three crises varies considerably. 60.3 percent of the 584 crisis segments refer to the migration crisis, 20.7 percent to the Greek debt crisis, and 19.0 percent to the Ukraine crisis. The different degrees of attention can be attributed to the degree to which Germany was affected by the crises. In the Ukraine and Greek debt crises, Germany was merely engaged in international crisis management. The sharp increase in migration and the resulting political and social problems during the migration crisis affected the country to a much greater extent. This is paralleled by the fact that the migration crisis had the greatest coverage in all three shows. However, the shows differ in terms of their relative level

Figure 1: Crisis segments in the satire shows over time (absolute numbers)



Note: Ukraine crisis (N= 111), Greek debt crisis (N= 121), migration crisis (N=352). *Neo Magazin Royale* and *Die Anstalt* were not broadcast in January 2014, 2015, and 2016. In July and August 2014 and in June and July 2015 the three shows were in summer hiatus.

of attention to the migration crisis. While it accounts for 75.0% in *Neo Magazin Royale*, it features significantly less in *Die Anstalt* (61.0%) and *heute show* (55.6%).<sup>2</sup>

In depicting the crises, a tendency to domestication only shows for the migration crisis. Given that 81.8 percent of the crisis segments refer to events and processes in Germany, satirical shows clearly increase the impression of German affect- edness by the migration crisis. Segments with a focus on Germany are much lower for the Greek debt (28.9%) and Ukraine (15.3%) crises.

The shows start covering the crises only after they began to escalate. Previous problems in Ukraine, the tense social situation in Greece (that eventually led to the election of the left-wing party Syriza), and the influx of refugees from African and Arab countries are largely neglected. Over time, coverage of each of the three crises shows a number of peaks that are clearly related to highly conflict-ridden crisis events (see figure 1). Satirical atten-

tion to the Ukraine crisis starts and peaks in March 2014 with the Russian annexion of Crimea. This is when the long-running, smoldering conflict in Ukraine turned into an overt confrontation between Russia and the West, and the crisis gained international importance. In the following months, attention towards the crisis drops significantly. Smaller peaks appear during times of international disputes (e.g., during the peace negotiations in Minsk in September 2014 and February 2015) or during the elections in Eastern Ukraine in November 2014. Afterwards, the crisis disappears completely from the satirical shows' agenda. Attention to the Greek crisis peaks with the conflicts between Greece and the EU in which Germany had a central role. Disputes about Greek debts intensified in February and March 2015 after the election of the left-wing Syriza party and the coming into office of Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras.<sup>3</sup> From spring 2015 onwards, the Greek debt crisis was no longer a subject in the satirical shows. The migration crisis receives attention following maritime disasters with high numbers of casualties

2 Attention for the Greek debt crisis ranges between 13.5% (*Neo Magazin Royale*) and 27.0% (*Die Anstalt*) and for the Ukraine crisis between 11.5% (both *Die Anstalt* and *Neo Magazin Royale*) and 24.4% (*heute show*).

3 At the time of the highly conflictual 2015 Greek referendum, all three shows were in summer hiatus.

Table 1: Average number of frame elements per crisis segment

|                          | Ukraine crisis<br>(n=111) | Greek debt crisis<br>(n=121) | Migration crisis<br>(n=352) | Total<br>(n=584) |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------|
| Problem definition       | 1.48                      | 1.49                         | 1.35                        | 1.40             |
| Causal interpretation    | 0.59                      | 0.70                         | 0.61                        | 0.62             |
| Attribution of blame     | 1.22                      | 1.15                         | 0.98                        | 1.06             |
| Treatment recommendation | 0.35                      | 0.70                         | 0.52                        | 0.53             |

Note. Coding of up to three problem definitions, causal interpretations, attributions of blame and treatment recommendations per crisis segment.

(e. g., in April 2015) and incidents concerning the PEGIDA movement (for example, its formation in October 2014). From September 2015 onwards, the crisis features prominently in the shows. The highest peaks relate to the opening of German borders and the events of New Year’s Eve 2015 when Germany was confronted with mass sexual assaults committed by men of Arab and North African descent. Due to the shows’ Christmas break, the sexual assaults are presented with a slight time lag (with a peak in February 2016).

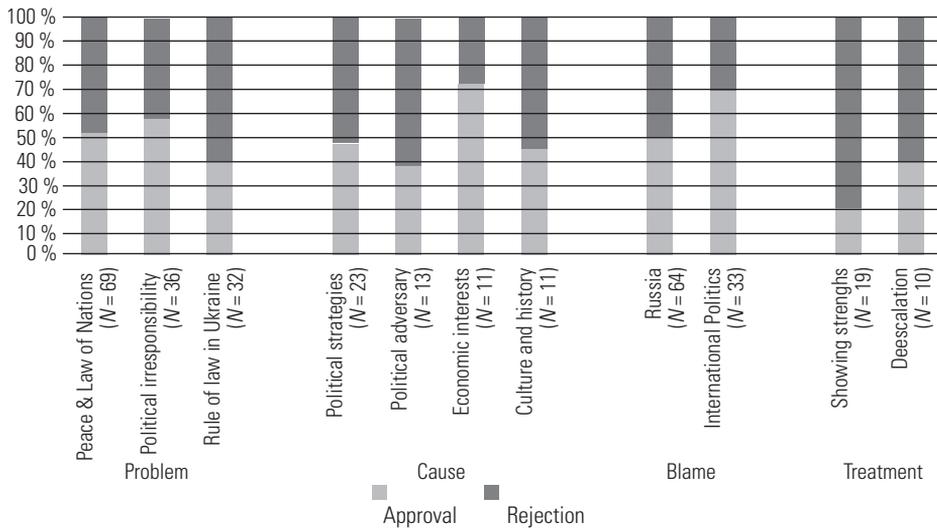
In summary, findings regarding satirical shows’ attention to the crises indicate that the shows provide a similar account of the crises as news media did. Satirical shows focus strongly on highly conflict-ridden events and ignore the pre- and post-conflict events. Their orientation towards national affectedness and the domestication of the migration crisis further indicate that satirical shows follow a similar logic to news media.

Whether or not the content-related depiction of the crises serves the information and orientation function of communication in the public sphere was determined by analyzing crisis frames. Findings reveal that satirical shows mainly focus on problem definitions and attributions of blame, whereas causes and treatment recommendations for a crisis are much less addressed (see table 1). Just as for satire’s and news media’s attention structures, the different emphases on the four frame elements correspond with the conflict orientation of the media and its little focus on contexts and crisis solutions. In both satire and news media, the strong focus on blame can lead to black-and-white-pictures of the conflict parties.

For each of the three crises, we analyzed the addressed frame elements (indicator for information function, RQ2) and the shows’ positions towards the frame elements (indicator for orientation function, RQ3). We argued that, in opposition to news media logic, the indexing thesis does not apply to satirical shows. Consequently, the shows should neither parallel nor approve official political frames, but rather criticize and challenge them with counter-narratives of the crises. During the validation of the research instrument, it became apparent that satirical shows tend to criticize frames by focusing on single frame elements. We therefore decided to present results for the single frame elements instead of identifying whole frames.

In the depiction of the Ukraine crisis, the dominant frame elements are in line with the position of the German government and the majority of parliamentary parties. The most commonly addressed problem definition is that of ‘threats to peace and the law of nations’ due to Russia’s annexation of Crimea (see figure 2). As causal interpretations, political strategies and conflicts are primarily mentioned. Almost every second attribution of blame concerns Russia. This is paralleled by Russia being openly accused by the German government of causing the crisis. Possible solutions include recommendations that the West should show strength against Russia, and that Germany should try to de-escalate the crisis. Both recommendations, although contradictory at first glance, follow the government’s approach. On the one hand, Germany conducted lengthy negotiations with Russia and opposed the delivery of arms to Ukraine, but on the other hand, the German gov-

Figure 2: Addressed frame elements and their evaluation in the Ukraine crisis



Note: All frame elements with a share of 10% and more (total N: problem = 164, cause = 65, blame = 135, treatment = 39)

ernment supported economic sanctions against Russia.

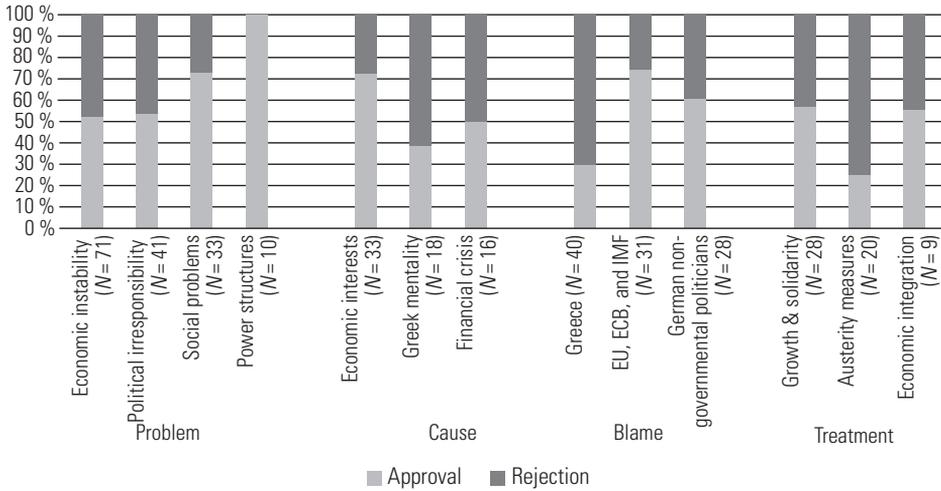
However, differences to the official government communication become obvious when satirical shows position themselves. Most of the frame elements that parallel government communication are addressed with a considerable degree of criticism. The fact that satirical shows reject both options for the solution of the crisis (showing strength against Russia as well as attempting to deescalate the situation) illustrates that the shows question the government’s competence as a responsible crisis manager.

Despite the large share of frame elements that mirror the government’s perspective on the crisis, the shows also include frame elements that provide an alternative view: The shows address the political irresponsibility of Russia and the West alike as the main problem in the crisis. They also attribute blame to international politics including institutions such as NATO and the EU. This is especially true for *Die Anstalt* that unequivocally rejects the blaming of Russia for the crisis. Regarding causal interpretations for the crisis, the shows highlight the economic

interests of both the EU and the U.S. in the former Soviet territory. These alternative frame elements resemble minority positions in the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Left Party and mainly receive approval in the satirical shows. Hence, satire provides a counter-narrative for the Ukraine crisis that is in sharp contrast to the criticized position of the government. The counter-narrative, however, does not offer a problem treatment, and thus provides no orientation for solving the crisis.

Regarding the Greek debt crisis, satirical shows address several aspects of well-known German government communication. They refer to Greece’s economic instability and political irresponsibility as the main problem definitions, along with attribution of blame to Greece and the treatment recommendation to introduce austerity measures (see figure 3). As a causal interpretation, the shows address the stereotype of the lazy Greek, which parallels both government communication and populist positions in the political discourse. However, the shows do not approve of the government crisis frames, but instead criticize them. They wholeheartedly reject the blaming of Greece,

Figure 3: Addressed frame elements and their evaluation in the Greek debt crisis



Note: All frame elements with a share of 10% and more (total N: problem = 180, cause = 85, blame = 139, treatment = 85)

the treatment recommendation of austerity measures, and the populist argument that the Greek mentality has caused the crisis. By contrast, the shows address and approve attribution of blame to German government critics, who are in favour of a “Gexit” and criticise the Greeks’ laziness (most extensively in *Die Anstalt* with 100%, n=12). This relates particularly to politicians of the right-wing party AfD but also to minority voices from the conservative parties CDU and CSU.

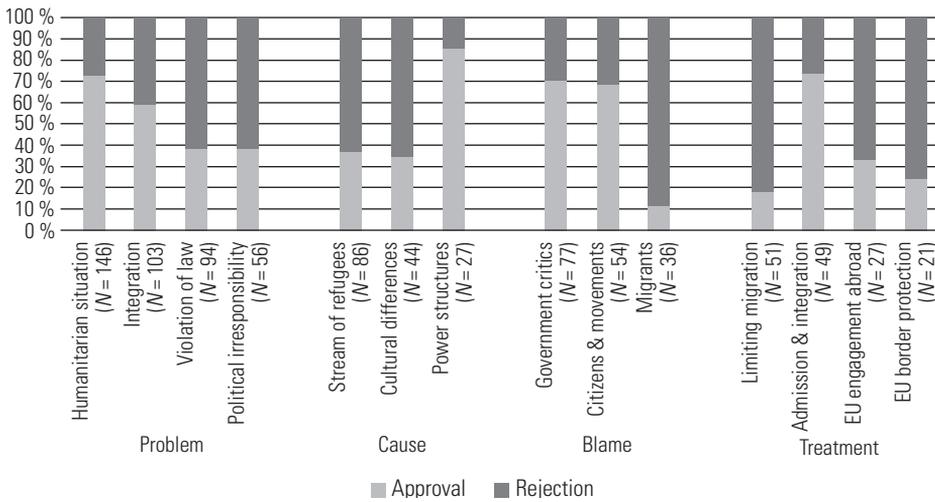
In addition, the shows introduce and approve frame elements that provide a counter-narrative to the Greek debt crisis. They resemble the positions of the Left party and minority positions in the SPD and highlight social problems in Greece as well as addressing power structures in the EU. This results in recommended solutions of 1) showing solidarity by investing in economic growth in Greece and 2) fostering stronger economic integration within the Eurozone, including the idea of Eurobonds. As possible causes for the crisis, the shows point to the economic interests of Germany and other big players in the EU as well as to the 2008 banking crisis. Attributions of blame are directed at inter-

national institutions such as the EU, the European Central Bank (ECB), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which administered and monitored the austerity program for Greece. This narrative tends to describe Greece as the victim of the crisis and attributes responsibility to German and EU crisis management.

The depiction of the migration crisis (see figure 4) shows strong parallels to the government position in Germany. The shows identify the humanitarian situation as the problem and recommend the ‘admission and integration of refugees’ as a solution for the crisis. The government’s more restrictive position in the months after the opening of German borders is addressed by the problem definition of integration, the blaming of both right-wing movements and migrants (if unwilling to integrate), and the treatment recommendation to limit the influx of refugees.

In their evaluation of these frame elements, the shows demonstrate strong approval for the government’s initial position. The later and more restrictive position is barely supported by the shows. While the shows acknowledge integration problems and support the attribution of

Figure 4: Addressed frame elements and their evaluation in the migration crisis



Note: All frame elements with a share of 10% and more (total N: problem=476, cause=213, blame=346, treatment=183)

blame to movements such as PEGIDA, they clearly reject the blaming of refugees and the limiting of the number of incoming migrants as a solution to the crisis.

Furthermore, the shows address and predominantly reject frame elements that are common in populist communication. They position themselves in opposition to the problem definition that the admission of refugees and the suspension of the Schengen and Dublin agreements would violate national and European law. The shows also criticize the populist approach that identifies the stream of refugees and cultural differences as causes for the crisis. In addition, they clearly reject strict EU border protection and EU engagement abroad (e.g., by establishing transit areas in Libya) as a treatment recommendation. In line with this criticism, the shows clearly approve of blaming government critics from AfD and CSU who are (similar to the PEGIDA movement) known for their populist criticism of migration policies.

Overall, satirical shows support an integrative migration policy that mirrors the initial governmental position. They take a firm stand against restrictive migration policies as advocated by populists, conser-

vative politicians, and (in the later course of the crisis) also by the government. In doing so, the satirical show’s initial support for the government position evolves into a counter-narrative in the later stages of the migration crisis.

## 6 Discussion

Given that news media’s crisis coverage has often been criticized (Entman, 2004; Hamelink, 2011; Lynch & Galtung, 2010; Nohrstedt & Ottosen, 2014), our study focused on whether satirical shows diverge from news media logic. Drawing on the Ukraine, Greek debt, and migration crises, we analyzed satirical shows’ coverage of the crises and their contribution to the information and orientation function of communication in the public sphere.

Concerning the general attention towards crises, satirical shows hardly differ from what is known from news media coverage. In line with news media logic, satire’s coverage of the Ukraine, Greek debt, and migration crises is characterized by a high degree of conflict orientation. The highly conflict-ridden picture of the cri-

ses is furthered by satire's focus on problem definitions and attributions of blame (whilst neglecting causal interpretations and treatment recommendations). The shows' emphasis on blame can be explained by satire's opinionated character, but easily results in a black-and-white picture that news media is also frequently accused of promoting (Hamelink, 2011; Lynch & Galtung, 2010). In addition, satire's attention towards the three crises varies according to the extent of German affectedness. However, except for the migration crisis and opposed to previous findings on news media coverage (Fengler et al., 2018; Nienstedt, Kepplinger, & Quiring, 2015), national affectedness is not stressed by a domestication of the crises. Overall, the quantity as well as the quality of satirical shows' attention to the three crises are basically aligned with principles of news media coverage.

Regarding the information function, the satirical shows also tend to follow news media logic. As the indicator for this function served the frame elements that were addressed by the satirical shows. In their depiction of the crises, the shows primarily address frame elements that are in line with the German government's position. This supports the indexing thesis and refers, for instance, to the blaming of Greece and Russia in the Greek and Ukraine crises respectively. Alternative frames that contradict the government's position are included to a lesser extent. They usually relate to the minority positions of individual politicians or opposition parties. Different perspectives on the crises, therefore, stem from political discourse; satirical shows do not present alternative frames for the crises. Thus, the indexing thesis applies to news media and satire alike and satirical shows do not compensate for news media's shortcomings concerning the information function.

Additional value for public discourse, however, arises regarding the orientation function. Even though satire primarily uses frame elements that are in line with government positions, it mainly *rejects* these positions (thus challenging the indexing thesis). In doing so, the shows pro-

vide critical orientation. This is especially true for satire's coverage of the Greek debt crisis, but also for the profound skepticism about the government's approach to solving the Ukraine crisis. The shows thus refrain from joining in a rally-around-the-flag stance that news media are repeatedly criticized for. In the Greek debt and the migration crises, the shows extent their criticism to populist frames that highlight, for instance, the stereotype of Greek laziness in the Greek debt crisis or insurmountable cultural differences in the migration crisis. It can thus be concluded that satire's contribution to communicative functions in the public sphere lies in attacking existing positions (by addressing and rejecting them), rather than in providing completely new frame elements. This finding is well in line with satire's critical stance on politics.

Besides critical orientation, the shows also offer a more productive form of orientation by providing counter-narratives for the crises. In the Ukraine and Greek debt crises this occurs by approving minority positions held by the left political spectrum. By contrast, in the migration crisis, the shows approve the initial government position. This position, however, serves as a counter-narrative in the later stages of the crisis when the government had shifted towards a more restrictive position.

Despite format differences, the depiction of the crises in *heute show*, *Neo Magazin Royale* and *Die Anstalt* differs only slightly. Although the extent of crisis coverage varies between the shows, they are quite similar regarding their degree of conflict-orientation and domestication, as well as their use and evaluation of frame elements.

In conclusion, political satirical shows differ from news media not so much in *what is presented* about a crisis, but in *how it is evaluated*. The small amount of additional value concerning the information function can be explained by news media being the central source for satire's crisis coverage. However, given that satire is a particularly opinionated genre, the shows present manifold evaluations regarding crisis aspects. These evaluations clearly go beyond a simple mirroring of political

power relations. Satirical shows offer a different perspective on the crises and prove to be a beneficial addition to news media. Their coverage might motivate the audience to reflect critically on the government's crisis management and to question the dominant frames of the news media.

The limitations of our study are mainly due to its restriction to crisis coverage in satirical shows. It lacks a systematic comparison with news media coverage and with political positions. Our comparison relies on general knowledge of media performance in international crises and the few empirical studies on German media coverage of these three crises. Also, a thorough analysis of indexing would require the coding of frame sponsors in the satirical shows. Future studies should consider this in order to provide insights into whether approval and rejection of a frame element are linked with specific actors (e.g., journalists, politicians or civil-society actors).

Despite these limitations, our results facilitate interesting insights into satire's crisis coverage and satire's relationship to news media. Firstly, satire is dependent on news media. They serve not only as the most important source of information for satirical shows but also prepare the ground for satire's critical jokes. This is because news media provide the audience with the information on issues and positions, which is a crucial precondition for understanding the jokes. Secondly, satire can compensate for shortcomings of the news media and confront them with their own weaknesses. Satire might even inspire journalists to consider alternative story lines for a crisis rather than relying on governmental frames. In summary, it is reasonable to assume a reciprocal relationship between journalism and satire. Future studies might want to analyze this relationship and the interactions between satire and news media in more detail. In this context, it would be interesting to explore whether or not differences in the depiction of political issues can be traced back to different role concepts of journalists and satirists.

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## In der Krise vereint? Milieuspezifische Perspektiven auf die Flüchtlingskrise

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### Abstract

Kommunikationswissenschaftliche Forschung zur Fragmentierung konzentriert sich auf die Identifikation gesellschaftsweit geteilter Themen. Im vorliegenden Beitrag wird mit der sogenannten Flüchtlingskrise bewusst ein Thema als empirischer Fall gewählt, das als Krise bevölkerungsübergreifend als relevant wahrgenommen wird. Zur Klärung der Frage, ob die Auseinandersetzung über ein gemeinsames Thema zur Integration beiträgt, werden gruppenspezifische Deutungen der Flüchtlingskrise in unterschiedlichen politisch-kommunikativen Milieus untersucht. Auf der Basis einer im Mai 2016 durchgeführten repräsentativen Online-Befragung ( $n=1488$ ) wurden mittels einer Clusteranalyse zwölf Milieus identifiziert, die sich hinsichtlich ihrer politischen Wertorientierungen sowie ihrer Nähe bzw. Distanz zur Politik unterscheiden. Die Themendeutungen, die über offene Assoziationstests erhoben wurden, lassen sich anhand einer Hauptkomponentenanalyse zu milieuspezifischen Perspektiven verdichten. Befunde zu Milieus mit extremen Grundhaltungen sprechen – trotz des geteilten Themas – gegen eine integrative Wirkung der Auseinandersetzung. Für gemässigte Milieus, die zwar ebenfalls spezifische Deutungen aufweisen, in denen aber auch Perspektiven anderer Bevölkerungsgruppen präsent sind, lässt sich ein integratives Potenzial erkennen.

### Keywords

Öffentlichkeit, Integration, Milieus, Flüchtlingskrise, Deutungsanalyse

## 1 Einleitung

In der Kommunikationswissenschaft wird aus der Perspektive funktionaler Wirkungstheorien sowie einem öffentlichkeitstheoretischen Blickwinkel nach den Gelingenbedingungen einer kommunikativen Integration in zunehmend heterogenen Gesellschaften gefragt. Gleiche Themenagenden verschiedener Bevölkerungsgruppen in einer segmentär und stratifikatorisch ausdifferenzierten Gesellschaft fungieren dabei als Indikator für eine funktionierende Synchronisation über gemeinsame Themen, die überwiegend durch journalistische Angebote bereitgestellt werden (Jarren, 2000; Vlašić, 2004). Ein gemeinsames Themenrepertoire gilt als eine Grundvoraussetzung für den Austausch zwischen den Bürgern und die Wahrneh-

mung von unterschiedlichen Perspektiven auf die Themen sowie für die Verortung des einzelnen Bürgers im öffentlichen Raum (Imhof, 2013). Zu diskutieren ist hierbei, ob das gemeinsame Themenrepertoire als *Indikator* für den Austausch bereits ausreicht, oder ob das Integrationspotenzial erst über die tatsächliche Kenntnis verschiedener Perspektiven beurteilt werden kann.

Mit der zunehmenden Angebotsfragmentierung (Napoli, 2014) und vor allem durch die steigende Bedeutung der politischen Online-Kommunikation (Vowe, 2017) wird aufgrund individualisierter Mediennutzung eine zunehmende Heterogenisierung der Bevölkerungsagenden befürchtet. Eine solche Differenzierung wird als dysfunktional für das demokratische System erachtet, da die eben genannten Funktionen nicht mehr erfüllt werden

können (Eilders, 2013; Gerhards, 1998). Dies gilt sowohl für Normalzeiten des politischen Betriebs, die als Routinephasen definiert werden, als auch gerade für sogenannte Spezialzeiten (Wolling, 2005), die vom Bürger eine erhöhte Aufmerksamkeit gegenüber dem politischen Prozess verlangen. Hierzu zählen einerseits Wahlkämpfe, da in ihnen die Verteilung politischer Macht auch kommunikativ ausgehandelt wird und andererseits politische und gesellschaftliche Krisen, in denen Handeln und Entscheidungen der politischen Elite auf Widerspruch in relevanten Teilen der Bevölkerung stösst oder an einem sozialen Brennglasthema die heterogen verteilten Positionen in der Bevölkerung mehr als sonst deutlich zum Vorschein und in Konflikt zueinander treten (Imhof, 2011; Zaller, 2003).

Die so genannte Flüchtlingskrise wird im öffentlichen Diskurs als ein solches Brennglasthema angesehen (z. B. Gabriel, 2016). Spätestens seitdem im September 2015 eine grosse Zahl Flüchtlinge über Ungarn und Österreich nach Deutschland einreiste, wurde dieses Thema wie kaum ein anderes quer durch Parteien, Massenmedien, Online-Angebote und Gesellschaftsbereiche kontrovers diskutiert und erreichte eine hohe gesellschaftsweite Aufmerksamkeit (z. B. infratest dimap, 2015). Die kontroversen Diskussionen führen zur Befürchtung, dass sich an diesem Thema das zuvor «zur Ruhe gekommene Land» (Petersen & Mayer, 2017) politisch spalte, was u. a. an der Partei «Alternative für Deutschland» (AfD) als neue politische Kraft festgemacht wird, die das Thema Migration stark bedient (Häusler, 2016).

An dieser Stelle wird eine zu untersuchende Leerstelle zwischen den Annahmen gegenüber der schwindenden Integrationskraft der Medien und der sozialen Realität während der Flüchtlingskrise deutlich. Folgt man der Literatur, so wird allgemein eine schwindende Integrationskraft durch eine Zersplitterung des Medienpublikums und damit einhergehend durch eine Zersplitterung der Bevölkerungssagenden ausgelöst. Es gebe keine gemeinsamen Themen mehr, die eine Grundlage für soziale Kohäsion bil-

den können. Weniger gemeinsam erlebte Erfahrungen mögen zu weniger Anknüpfungspunkten für Gespräche und weniger Kontakten mit Andersdenkenden führen. Es könnte sich aufgrund fehlender gesellschaftsweiter Aushandlungsprozesse in der Folge weniger Verständnis für andere Positionen und Problemdefinitionen entwickeln (Übergang einer grundsätzlichen Fragmentierung hin zu einer Polarisierung). Einzelne Bürger sowie soziale Gruppen entfernen und entfremden sich voneinander (im Überblick: Stark, 2013; van Aelst et al., 2017). Für das Thema Flüchtlingskrise ist jedoch empirisch keine Zersplitterung der Agenda verschiedener Bevölkerungsgruppen erkennbar (Kösters & Jandura, 2018) und dennoch wird eine fehlende Integration bis hin zu einer politischen Spaltung des Landes debattiert (z. B. Arlt & Wolling, 2017; Köcher, 2016; Vowe, 2016).

Diese Leerstelle ist zunächst aus einem methodisch-konzeptionellen Blickwinkel zu erklären, wenn man die Erhebung der Themenagenden der Bevölkerung genauer betrachtet. Diese wird zumeist über die offene “most important problem”-Frage (Stark, 2014) oder über eine Bedeutungseinschätzung relevanter Themen auf einer Rang- oder einer Likertskala erfasst (z. B. Haas & Brosius, 2013). Implizit wird davon ausgegangen, dass sich hinter den Themennennungen oder Relevanzbewertungen ein zumindest ähnliches Themenverständnis bzw. eine ähnliche Themenbedeutung steht. Argumente gegen diese Annahme lassen sich aus zwei theoretischen Perspektiven heraus formulieren. Die erste Perspektive nimmt die massenmediale Berichterstattung als Ausgangspunkt: Hier geht es um Studien, die in die Forschungstradition des Second Level-Agenda-Settings (López-Escobar et al., 1998) oder des Attribute-Agenda-Settings (Besova & Cooley, 2009) einzuordnen sind. In dieser Weiterentwicklung der Agenda-Setting-These wird davon ausgegangen, dass die Medienberichterstattung nicht nur die Salienz und Aufmerksamkeit gegenüber Themen beeinflusst, sondern über die Attribute in der Berichterstattung zu einem Thema auch die Perspektiven der

Wahrnehmung beeinflusst (McCombs & Shaw, 1993). Als Attribute werden dabei alle Merkmale definiert, die ein Objekt, also eine Person oder ein Thema in der Berichterstattung charakterisieren (McCombs, 2004). Empirische Studien können auf der Makro-Ebene den Zusammenhang zwischen der medialen Attribuierung von Themen und den Einstellungen der Bevölkerung zu diesen Themen zeigen (Bessova & Cooley, 2009, S. 224 f.). Dies leitet über zur zweiten Perspektive – die der Medienrezipienten: Der lebensweltliche Kontext von Bevölkerungsgruppen und ihre politischen Prädispositionen haben einen hohen Einfluss auf die Auswahl von Medienangeboten sowie auf die Rezeption und Verarbeitung ihrer (politikbezogenen) Inhalte (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2014; Begenat, 2016). Nimmt man diese beiden theoretischen Zugänge zusammen ist prinzipiell davon auszugehen, dass sich hinter scheinbar geteilten Themen ganz unterschiedliche Deutungen verbergen. Die vorliegende Studie möchte einen Beitrag zu dieser zweiten Perspektive leisten.

Der Gedanke der Erfassung der Attribute zu einem Thema lässt sich mit der Frage nach dem Stand der gesellschaftlichen Integration verbinden. Während die Fragmentierungsforschung sich bislang auf die Identifikation von gemeinsamen Themen konzentriert hat (u. a. Haas & Brosius, 2013; Stark, 2014), möchte die vorliegende Studie einen Schritt weitergehen. Der Beitrag *fragt* explorativ danach, ob sich hinter dem bevölkerungsübergreifend gemeinsam als wichtig wahrgenommenen Thema je nach Bevölkerungsgruppe gleiche oder unterschiedliche Beurteilungskriterien wiederfinden, die einer gesamtgesellschaftlichen Integration zuträglich sind oder eben nicht. Zur Klärung dieser Frage greifen wir auf einen Ansatz auf der Meso-Ebene zurück und untersuchen die Homogenität bzw. Heterogenität der gruppenspezifischen Deutungen der Flüchtlingskrise in verschiedenen politisch-kommunikativen Milieus (Mahrt & Begenat, 2013; Weiß, 2009, 2013).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Die Autoren bedanken sich bei Yannik Maihoff sowie Benedikt Mensing für die Unterstützung bei der Auswertung.

## 2 Theorie

### 2.1 Politische Heterogenität als Herausforderung einer integrierten Öffentlichkeit

Die Frage, was eine demokratische und pluralistische Gesellschaft zusammenhält, wird in verschiedenen Disziplinen für jeweils unterschiedliche Sphären, wie etwa die Rechtsordnung, diskutiert (für einen Überblick siehe Vlašić, 2004, S. 16 ff.). Die Kommunikationswissenschaft betrachtet die Integrationsfunktion, die die Öffentlichkeit für eine sozial und politisch heterogen ausgeformte Gesellschaft leisten kann. Mediale Angebote können dabei integrierend wirken, in dem sie erkennbar machen, welche Themen und Problemsichten «sozial virulent sind und welche Problemlösungen aus welchen Gründen bei wem auf hinreichende Akzeptanz stoßen – und welche nicht» (Neidhardt, 1994, S. 26). Vorausgesetzt wird dabei, dass relevante politische Angelegenheiten «im Horizont aller Bürger» (Gerhards, 1998, S. 40) erscheinen und dass die verschiedenen sozialen Gruppen, die am meinungs- und willensbildenden Streit um das Gemeinwohl teilnehmen, die Bereitschaft zeigen, auch Problemsichten und Lösungsvorschläge anderer Teilgruppen zu respektieren und in ihrer eigenen Meinungsbildung zu berücksichtigen (Imhof, 2011).

Die erste Voraussetzung betrifft dabei den Kern der Fragmentierungsdebatte, die zweite stellt zur Diskussion, inwiefern gruppenspezifische Medienrepertoires und eine gruppenspezifische Verarbeitung von Themen, neben der gesellschaftsweiten Wahrnehmung auch die wechselseitige Kenntnissnahme politischer Positionen anderer Bevölkerungsgruppen einschränken. Das öffentlichkeitstheoretische Idealbild verlangt in diesem Zusammenhang keinesfalls, eine gesellschaftsweite Meinungskonsonanz herzustellen. Vielmehr geht es darum, dass in gruppenspezifischen Teilöffentlichkeiten bzw. Medienarenen (Ferree et al., 2002) durch eine an Pluralität und Diskursivität orientierte Berichterstattung die verschiedenen Positionen zu politischen Themen prinzipiell anerkannt und für alle einsehbar abgebildet

det werden. Diese Idee einer «Integration durch Konfliktkommunikation» kann letztlich die Orientierungsfunktion stärken, die wechselseitige Toleranz divergierender Problemsichten auf Seiten der Bevölkerung und insgesamt die Vernetzung heterogener Gesellschaften begünstigen (Vlašić, 2004; Wessler, 2002a, 2002b).

Dass die sogenannte «Flüchtlingskrise» als empirisch zu untersuchendes Thema gesellschaftsübergreifend wahrgenommen wird, verschiebt den Fokus des vorliegenden Beitrags auf die Untersuchung der gruppen- bzw. milieuspezifischen Verarbeitung. Durch die besondere Charakteristik des Krisenthemas, ist die Frage, ob die öffentliche Auseinandersetzung darüber im Horizont aller Bürger erscheint, bereits beantwortet. Ob die milieudifferente Verarbeitung und Deutung des gemeinsamen, gesellschaftsweit geteilten Themas allerdings integrierend wirkt, bleibt zu klären.

Dass sich unterschiedliche Teilgruppen der Bevölkerung Themen auf ihre eigene Art und Weise aneignen und diese – unterlegt durch ihre eigenen politischen Prädispositionen – verarbeiten, ist in der in der kommunikationswissenschaftlichen Forschung unumstritten. Prominent ist hierbei der Verweis auf von Bennett und Iyengar (2008) als «stratamentation» bezeichnete Tendenzen. Diese umfassen zum einen vertikale Stratifikationsprozesse, nach denen sich Teile der Bevölkerung aus der politisch-kommunikativen Teilhabe gänzlich ausklinken, andere Bevölkerungsgruppen hingegen besonders stark involviert sind. Teilgruppen der Gesellschaft wenden sich demnach sehr häufig politischen Informationsangeboten zu und setzen sich vertieft mit deren Inhalten auseinander, andere Gruppen tun dies wiederum nur sporadisch und beiläufig oder gar überhaupt nicht. Ausgehend davon basiert die politische Meinungsbildung je nach Bevölkerungsgruppe auf ganz unterschiedlichen Voraussetzungen (Schneider & Eisenegger, 2016). Insbesondere unter den Hochinvolvierten können zudem horizontale Segmentierungsprozesse entlang von politischen Grundorientierungen identifiziert werden, die in

weltanschaulicher Hinsicht die Medien-selektion, Rezeption und Verarbeitung von Sachverhalten beeinflussen (Begenat, 2016; Knobloch-Westerwick, 2014; Yeo et al., 2015).

Verbindet man diese beiden Tendenzen mit der Entwicklung hin zu einem immer ausdifferenzierteren und an spezifischen (politischen) Zielgruppen orientierten Medienangebot, so besteht die Gefahr der Ausbildung von inhaltlich homogenen, politischen Teilöffentlichkeiten (u. a. Hall Jamieson & Cappella, 2008; Stroud, 2011). Diese stellen den Gegensatz einer integrierten politischen Öffentlichkeit dar, weil das Einfinden in diesen als «Echokammern» bezeichneten Teilöffentlichkeiten die politische Abschottung von gesellschaftlichen Gruppen begünstigen kann. Innerhalb dieser politisch-medialen «Enklaven» scheinen, so die Argumentation, die Themen und Problemhaltungen anderer Bevölkerungsgruppen kaum wahrgenommen zu werden und falls doch, dann in abwertender Art und Weise. Ferner wird angenommen, dass kaum direkter kommunikativer Austausch über die Grenzen dieser Teilöffentlichkeiten hinaus stattfindet. Darin liegt eine Gefahr für das integrierende Element von Öffentlichkeit, weil mit einer permanenten Bestätigung bestehender Meinungen die Polarisierung von Problemhaltungen sowie eine abnehmende Bereitschaft zum offenen Diskurs verbunden sein kann (Prior, 2013; Sunstein, 2007). Der vorliegende Beitrag macht es sich nun aber nicht – wie zahlreiche Fragmentierungsstudien – zur Aufgabe, auf der Ebene der Medienrepertoires oder der Themen nach Überschneidungen und Gemeinsamkeiten zu suchen. Indem wir durch die betrachtete Krise ein Thema für die empirische Analyse wählen, das alle Bevölkerungsgruppen als virulent wahrnehmen und das – in der Umkehrung der Fragmentierungsthese – integrativ wirken könnte, ist es für uns möglich, die Analyse auf die Ebene der Themendeutungen zu erweitern und damit zu schärfen. Hierfür ist es zunächst notwendig, verschiedene Bevölkerungsgruppen zu identifizieren.

## 2.2 Der Milieu-Ansatz zur empirischen Erfassung von Tendenzen der «stratamentation»

Wie kann die politische Heterogenität moderner Gesellschaften beschrieben werden bzw. in welchen Gruppen sollte überhaupt nach der Wahrnehmung von Themen und deren Deutungen gesucht werden? Wir orientieren uns zur Beschreibung der gesellschaftlichen Heterogenität am Konzept politisch-kommunikativer Milieus nach Weiß (2009, 2013). Dieses baut auf Erkenntnissen aus dem Bereich der (politischen) Soziologie (u. a. Hradil, 2006, Neugebauer, 2007) auf und unterstreicht die Nützlichkeit eines milieutheoretischen Zugangs für Fragestellungen der politischen Kommunikationsforschung. Politisch-kommunikative Milieus sind definiert als gesellschaftliche Teilgruppen, in denen politische Wertorientierungen und Einstellungen, Sozialisationserfahrungen, Partizipationsmuster, aber auch Informationsrepertoires sowie Modi politischer Kommunikation (z. B. unterschiedliche Routinen der Informationsverarbeitung sowie Differenzen in der Auseinandersetzung mit politischen Inhalten in der interpersonalen Kommunikation, siehe oben) systematisch miteinander verbunden sind. Die einzelnen Faktoren des Eigenschaftsprofils von Milieus (sozialer Ort, politische Grundorientierungen, Kommunikations- und Partizipationspraktiken) bilden insgesamt ein aufeinander abgestimmtes Gesamtbild. Milieus bezeichnen Gruppen Gleichgesinnter, «die die gesellschaftlichen Verhältnisse und die politische Welt ähnlich interpretieren und gestalten wollen – und sich darin von den Angehörigen anderer Milieus unterscheiden» (Weiß, 2013, S. 208). Die Einbindung des lebensweltlichen Kontextes und von handlungsleitenden Wertorientierungen in milieutheoretischen Analysen gewährt einen vertieften Einblick in subjektive Prinzipien der Verarbeitung von (medialen) Informationen zu politischen Sachverhalten. Es ist davon auszugehen, dass einerseits die milieuspezifischen Grundhaltungen gegenüber der Politik sowie andererseits weltanschaulich moderierte Formen der Mediennutzung und die

Rezeption entsprechender Inhalte die gruppenspezifischen Deutungen von politischen Themen in besonderem Maße prägen (Weiß, 2000).

Entlang der Grundorientierungen der Milieus offenbaren sich erhebliche Unterschiede, welche Anliegen Personen dauerhaft umtreiben und beschäftigen. Eben solche bedeutsamen Problemdefinitionen und die damit verwobenen milieuspezifischen Perspektiven werden dabei zu vorrangigen Beurteilungskriterien. Neben die Differenzierung der Themenrelevanzen tritt die Frage, *was* die Relevanz eines Themas ausmacht (Weiß 2013, S. 209; Weiß & Jandura, 2017, S. 18). Milieus, die eine starke wirtschaftsliberale Grundhaltung einnehmen, machen etwa Kosten-Nutzen-Abwägungen und das Leistungsprinzip zum Massstab ihrer Bewertungen während andere Milieus Themen primär vor dem Hintergrund der Frage bewerten, was die sozial gerechteste Lösung sei (Begenat, 2017, S. 199). Ferner sind Unterschiede hinsichtlich der Offenheit gegenüber konträren Haltungen und damit Grenzen eines vernetzenden Austausches durch milieuübergreifende Kommunikation trotz teilweise übereinstimmender Themenhorizonte zu erwarten (Begenat, 2016, 2017).

Das medienseitige Pendant zu den beschriebenen individuellen oder gruppenspezifischen Grundhaltungen wird von der Forschung als Value-Frame bezeichnet. Solche wertbezogenen Deutungsmuster liegen in der Berichterstattung vor, «wenn Werte, die in der politischen Kultur sedimentiert sind, als übergeordnete Bezugsrahmen für Sachverhalte, Vorgänge oder Akteure fungieren» (Scheufele et al. 2012, 432; siehe u. a. auch Eilders 2004; Scheufele & Engelmann 2014). Laut Schermer et al. (2012, S. 338; siehe auch Ball-Rokeach & Loges 1996; Lee et al. 2008) ist es charakteristisch für die journalistische Arbeit, politische Auseinandersetzungen entlang von in Konflikt stehenden, wertbezogenen Grundorientierungen zu organisieren. Es ist vor diesem Hintergrund davon auszugehen, dass wertbezogene Grundorientierungen der politischen Informationsnutzung nicht nur als Einflussfaktor (etwa bei der Medienselektion und

Verarbeitung medialer Inhalte) vorausgehen, sondern dass Medieninhalte ebenso einen Anteil an der Sozialisation und Aktualisierung von politischen Grundhaltungen haben (Rippl, 2008).

Zur Charakterisierung von Milieus und deren Lebenswelten wählt man üblicherweise im ersten Schritt eine typologisierende Herangehensweise, um im zweiten Schritt die Eigenschaften der identifizierten Typen in den sonstigen relevanten Beschreibungsdimensionen (u. a. Kommunikationspraxis, soziale Verortung, Themenagenden) näher zu betrachten. Der Fokus im Rahmen der Typologisierung liegt auf zwei Elementen, (a) handlungsleitenden Weltanschauungen sowie (b) der grundsätzlichen Zuwendung oder Abkehr von der politischen Sphäre, das heisst auf den Dimensionen der Segmentierung und der Stratifikation, die der Begriff der «stratamentation» zusammenfassend kennzeichnet (Mahrt & Begeat, 2013). Weltanschauungen können über die individuelle bzw. gruppenspezifische Positionierung hinsichtlich relevanter Wertekonflikte einer politischen Kultur bestimmt werden. Die hier betrachtete deutsche Gesellschaft ist primär durch zwei Konfliktlinien und davon abgeleitete Orientierungen geprägt: Auf der ersten Konfliktlinie steht eine marktliberale bzw. auf den individuellen Nutzen ausgerichtete Orientierung einer sozialstaatlichen-egalitären Orientierung gegenüber (sozioökonomische Konfliktlinie); auf der zweiten Konfliktlinie bildet eine gesellschaftspolitisch libertäre und partizipative Orientierung den Gegenpol einer autoritären, auf die Durchsetzung von Recht und Ordnung ausgerichteten Orientierung (politisch-kulturelle Konfliktlinie) (für eine Übersicht zu relevanten Konfliktlinien siehe etwa Niedermayer, 2009). Das zweite für ein Milieu konstitutive Element kann durch die mehr oder weniger grosse Nähe oder Distanz zur Politik auf Seiten von einzelnen Individuen bzw. Gruppen beschrieben werden. Beide typenbildenden Elemente bestimmen zusammengenommen die grundsätzliche, milieuspezifische Haltung gegenüber dem politischen System und politischen Sachverhalten.

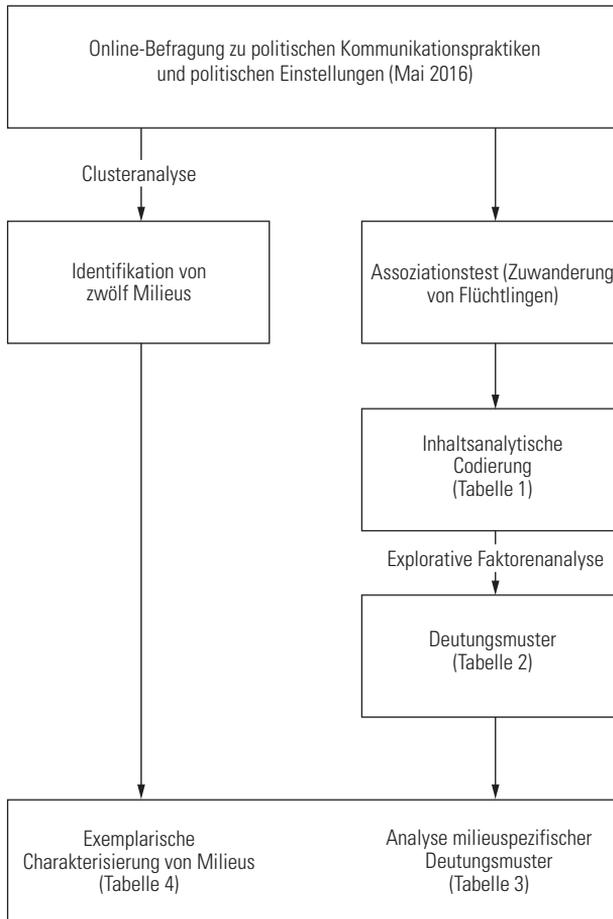
Vor dem dargestellten theoretischen Hintergrund geht der vorliegende Beitrag explorativ vor und beantwortet die folgenden drei Forschungsfragen (FF):

- › FF1: Welche Deutungsmuster zur «Flüchtlingskrise» lassen sich auf Seiten der Bevölkerung identifizieren?
- › FF2: Welche Deutungsmuster zur «Flüchtlingskrise» sind in welchen Milieus dominant?
- › FF3: Wie können Deutungsmuster vor dem Hintergrund der milieuspezifischen Lebenswelt interpretiert werden?

### 3 Methodisches Vorgehen

Das methodische Vorgehen unserer Untersuchung umfasst verschiedene Komponenten, die schematisch in Abbildung 1 dargestellt sind. Zur Untersuchung der Kommunikationspraktiken politischer Milieus in Deutschland, wurde zunächst mithilfe des Access-Panels eines Marktforschungsunternehmens im Mai 2016 (Feldzeit: 23. bis 30.05.2016) eine Online-Befragung (n=1488, quotierte und bereinigte Stichprobe nach Alter, Geschlecht, Bildung, Region, Berufstätigkeit, gewichtet nach Bildung und Alter) unter der wahlberechtigten Bevölkerung zwischen 18 und 69 Jahren durchgeführt. Der Repräsentationsschluss der Studie gilt demnach nicht für die Gesamtbevölkerung. Ein Abdeckungsfehler ergibt sich für Nicht-Onlineer sowie Personen über 70 Jahre. Gegenstand der Erhebung waren dabei sowohl politische Grundhaltungen und die Eigenpositionierung auf der politisch-kulturellen und sozioökonomischen Dimension, als auch eine umfassende Erfassung des Mediengebrauchs und des interpersonalen Kommunikationsverhaltens der Befragten. Die Ausgestaltung des Fragebogens orientiert sich dabei an etablierten Ansätzen aus dem Bereich der politischen Soziologie und Kommunikationsforschung. Bei der Typologisierung politisch-kommunikativer Milieus wird zwischen zwei Dimensionen unterschieden: der vertikal-stratifikatorischen Ebene auf der einen und der horizontal-segmen-

Abbildung 1: Übersicht zu den methodischen Komponenten der Studie



tierenden Ebene auf der anderen Seite. Bevor diese beiden Analyseebenen herangezogen werden, um Ähnlichkeitsgruppen mittels einer Clusteranalyse zu bestimmen, die weiterführend als politisch-kommunikative Milieus interpretiert werden, sollen zunächst konzeptuelle Kategorien und empirische Variablen zur Analyse der entsprechenden Gruppenunterschiede beschrieben werden.

Auf der vertikal-stratifikatorischen Ebene wird zur Beschreibung der staatsbürgerlichen Rolle die konzeptuelle Dimension der Nähe/Distanz zur politischen Sphäre herangezogen. Im Vordergrund steht dabei vor allem die Erfassung der individuellen politischen Kompetenz- und

der Einflussüberzeugungen (political efficacy). Hierbei geht es um die Einschätzung der Bürger hinsichtlich ihrer Fähigkeit «politische Vorgänge verstehen und durch individuelles politisches Engagement beeinflussen zu können» (Vetter, 1997, S. 53). Für die Differenzierung der Milieus auf der stratifikatorischen Dimension werden sowohl die individuelle Kompetenzeinschätzung, dass der eigenen Person Fähigkeiten zur Verfügung stehen, politische Sachverhalte zu verstehen und sich wirksam beteiligen zu können (internal efficacy), als auch das Responsivitätsvertrauen gegenüber politischen Eliten erhoben (external efficacy). Die Messung beider Aspekte des Konstrukts der wahrgenommenen politi-

schen Selbstwirksamkeit ermöglicht die Political Efficacy Kurzskaala (PEKS) (Beierlein, Kemper, Kovaleva & Rammstedt, 2014) mit jeweils zwei Items.<sup>2</sup> In den erhobenen Daten lässt sich für die Konsistenz der internen Dimension ein Cronbachs Alpha-Wert von 0,78 und für die externe Dimension von 0,76 feststellen. Im Vergleich zur häufigen Operationalisierung über das politische Interesse (z. B. Mahrt & Begenat, 2013; Weiß, 2013) erachten wir das zweidimensionale Konzept der politischen Selbstwirksamkeit für die stratifikatorische Differenzierung als besser geeignet, weil es bedeutsame Unterschiede zwischen gesellschaftlichen Gruppen erkennbar macht. Durch die alleinige Erfassung einer allgemeinen Kategorie wie dem politischen Interesse könnten nämlich für einzelne Gruppen charakteristische Kombinationen, z. B. von einem hohen politischen Engagement und einer gleichzeitig hoch ausgeprägten Distanz gegenüber der etablierten Politik, nicht identifiziert werden. Des Weiteren ist die Frage nach dem politischen Interesse aus methodischer Perspektive anfälliger für ein sozial erwünschtes Antwortverhalten.

Die horizontal-segmentierende Ebene erfasst im Rahmen der Differenzierung politisch-kommunikativer Milieus solche Einstellungen der Befragten, die sich jeweils als Wertepositionierungen auf der sozioökonomischen und politisch-kulturellen Dimension konzeptualisieren lassen. Im Vordergrund steht dabei insbesondere die Erfassung der individuellen Präferenzen in Form von Zustimmung oder Ablehnung bestimmter wertgeladener Positionen. Die abgefragten Items wurden auf Basis vorliegender Literatur und Befragungen zur Erfassung von politischen Wertorientierungen ausgewählt

2 Items der Skala der Internal Political Efficacy der PEKS waren: «Wichtige politische Fragen kann ich gut verstehen und einschätzen» und «Ich traue mir zu, mich an einem Gespräch über politische Fragen aktiv zu beteiligen.» Items der External Political Efficacy waren: «Die Politiker kümmern sich darum, was einfache Leute denken» und «Die Politiker bemühen sich um einen engen Kontakt zur Bevölkerung».

(z. B. Neugebauer, 2007; World Values Survey, 2013) und im Rahmen einer Vorstudie (n=165, Studierendensample) auf Validität und Reliabilität hin überprüft. Beide Konfliktdimensionen werden mit jeweils drei Items erhoben und Befragte wurden auf einer 6er-Skala gebeten, ihre Zustimmung oder Ablehnung anzugeben.<sup>3</sup> Die theoretisch und konzeptuell formulierte Erwartung bezüglich der Zuordnung der dargestellten Items zu den zwei Konfliktdimensionen wurde mithilfe einer Hauptkomponentenanalyse (KMO=0,57, 44% erklärte Varianz, Varimax-Rotation) überprüft. Dabei zeigt sich, dass die sechs Items tatsächlich sinnvollerweise auf zwei zugrundeliegende Faktoren reduziert werden können, die mit den beiden beschriebenen Dimensionen der Wertekonflikte korrespondieren. Für die weiterführende Analyse werden diese Items zu zwei Indizes zusammengefasst, die auszählen, bei wie vielen der drei Items für jede Konfliktdimension welche richtungspolitische Position eingenommen wurde.

3 Items zur sozioökonomischen Dimension umfassen: «Der Staat sollte mehr Verantwortung dafür übernehmen, dass jeder Bürger abgesichert ist.» vs. «Jeder einzelne sollte mehr Verantwortung für sich selbst übernehmen.»; «Zur Sicherung sozialstaatlicher Leistungen sollte die Politik Steuern und Abgaben erhöhen.» vs. «Die Politik sollte Steuern und Abgaben senken, auch wenn das weniger sozialstaatliche Leistungen bedeutet.»; «Der Staat sollte der Wirtschaft Vorgaben machen und auf deren Einhaltung drängen.» vs. «Die Wirtschaft soll sich ohne staatliche Eingriffe möglichst drei entfalten können.» Items zur politisch-kulturellen Dimension sind: «Die Freiheit der Bürger muss vor Eingriffen des Staates geschützt werden, selbst wenn dadurch der Schutz vor Kriminalität zurückstehen muss.» vs. «Um die Bürger vor Kriminalität zu schützen, hat der Staat das Recht, die Freiheit der Bürger einzuschränken.»; «Es ist wichtig, eine offene und tolerante Gesellschaft zu stärken.» vs. «Es ist wichtig, unsere eigene deutsche Kultur und Tradition zu pflegen.»; «Demokratische Beteiligung der Bürger ist immer wichtiger als eine starke politische Führung.» vs. «Um unsere Probleme im Land zu lösen, ist eine starke politische Führung wichtiger als demokratische Beteiligung der Bürger.»

Die beschriebenen Variablen der segmentierenden und stratifikatorischen Ebene wurden in einem dritten Schritt einer hierarchischen Clusteranalyse unterzogen. Die Distanz zwischen den Clustern wurde auf Basis der quadrierten euklidischen Distanz berechnet und die Cluster mit Hilfe des Ward-Verfahrens aggregiert. Als Entscheidungskriterien über die Anzahl der Cluster dienten vor allem der sprunghafte Anstieg der Clusterheterogenität (Dendrogramm) sowie die Koeffizienten der F-Werte der jeweiligen Cluster die kleiner als 1 waren. Die Befunde wurden zusätzlich durch eine multiple Diskriminanzanalyse validiert. Diese hat gezeigt, dass eine Zwölf-Cluster-Lösung (siehe Abbildung 2) auf Basis statistischer Kriterien die existierende «stratamentation» der deutschen Bevölkerung am besten repräsentiert.

Darüber hinaus wurde in die standardisierte Befragung eine offene Frage in Form eines *Assoziationstests* integriert. Dabei wurden die Befragten in Anlehnung an die in der Sozialpsychologie angewandte «thought-listing technique» (Cacioppo et al., 1981) gebeten, die Frage zu beantworten: «Können Sie bitte in das offene Feld eingeben, woran Sie spontan denken, wenn über die Zuwanderung von Flüchtlingen nach Deutschland diskutiert wird?» Von dieser Frageformulierung erhofften wir uns einen Blick auf die Bandbreite der Assoziationen, die die Befragten mit dem Thema der Flüchtlingskrise verbinden. Über die Homogenität bzw. Heterogenität dieser Angaben lassen sich sowohl milieuspezifische Sichtweisen als auch Aussagen zur Offenheit gegenüber Deutungen anderer und damit zum *integrierenden Potenzial* des Themas ableiten. Für die Codierung der Antworten der Befragten wurde auf Basis themenbezogener Vorarbeiten zum Migrationsdiskurs (u. a. Helbling, 2014; Roggeband & Vliegenthart, 2007) sowie Probecodierungen eigens ein Kategoriensystem entwickelt. Dieses differenziert zwischen einfachen, schlagwortartigen Antworten der Befragten auf der einen Seite und komplexeren, seitens der Befragten ausformulierten Deutungsmustern auf der anderen. Um auf Basis dieser Frage

Tabelle 1: Übersicht der Kategorien im Codierschema

|  |
|--|
| Antworttyp I – Schlagworte, ergänzte Schlagworte sowie einfache Aussagen             |
| Positionierungen   |
| –Positive Betrachtung (Zustimmung)   |
| –Neutrale Betrachtung  |
| –Negative Betrachtung (Ablehnung)  |
| –Sonderform: Begrenzung der Zuwanderung  |
| Kulturelle Dimension   |
| –Multikulturalismus  |
| –Empathie für Flüchtlinge  |
| –Nationalismus/Autoritarismus (schwache vs. starke Ausprägung)                       |
| –Autoritarismus: Sicherheit und Kriminalität   |
| –Autoritarismus: Terrorismus   |
| Sozioökonomische Dimension, d.h. Bewertung unter sozioökonomischen Gesichtspunkten   |
| –Positiv   |
| –Neutral   |
| –Negativ   |
| Medienkritik   |
| –Allgemeine Elitenkritik   |
| –Kritik an einzelnen Politikerinnen und Politikern                                   |
| Befürchtete gesellschaftliche Konsequenzen   |
| –Zunehmender Erfolg von Rechtspopulismus, Rechtsextremismus und Fremdenfeindlichkeit |
| –Gefährdung des gesellschaftlichen Zusammenhalts                                     |
| Politische Regulierung   |
| –u. a. Verweise auf Integrationspolitik, Asylrecht, Verteilung von Flüchtlingen usw. |

spezifische Deutungsmuster zu ermitteln, werden im Folgenden nur die Aussagen der Befragten, die dem ersten Antworttyp zugeordnet werden können (einfache Aussagen und Schlagworte), näher betrachtet. Insbesondere aus empirischer Sicht lässt sich feststellen, dass etwa 80% der Aussagen auf diesen Antworttyp entfallen.<sup>4</sup> Im

4 Der zweite Antworttyp wird aufgrund der für eine differenzierte Auswertung nach Milieus zu geringen Fallzahl von n=224 nicht weiter betrachtet. Zur Codierung dieses Antworttyps waren die folgenden Ausprägungen möglich, die jeweils Deutungen umfassen, die für bestimmte Wertekonfliktpositionen stehen: Multikulturalismus und Humanität (libertärer Wertepol), Assimilation/Anpassung, Kulturelle Differenzen, Sicherheit/Kriminalität/Terrorismus (jeweils autoritärer Wertepol), Zuwanderung von Flüchtlingen als ökonomische Chance (marktliberale Konfliktpol), Belastung des Sozialstaats und Sozialchauvinismus (sozialstaatlich-autoritäre Wertesynthese), Differenzierung von nützlichen und weniger nützlichen Zuwanderern (marktliberal-autoritäre Wertesyn-

Rahmen der Codierung wurden die themenbezogenen Assoziationen der Befragten dichotom auf das Vorkommen bzw. Nicht-Vorkommen inhaltlich-thematischer Schwerpunkte bewertet (siehe auch Tabelle 1). Sowohl die Intra-Coder-Reliabilität (Krippendorffs Alpha: 0,8), als auch die Forscher-Codierer-Reliabilität (Krippendorffs Alpha: 0,7) liefern dabei mit Blick auf die hohe Komplexität der Codierung einen zufriedenstellenden Wert.

Das zentrale Ziel der Analyse der Antworten der Befragten aus dem Assoziationstest ist es Aussagen darüber zu generieren, inwiefern sich die häufig grundverschiedenen Antworten mithilfe von komplexitätsreduzierenden Verfahren zu themenbezogenen Deutungen verdichten lassen. Zu diesem Zweck wird eine Hauptkomponentenanalyse auf Basis einer tetrachorischen Korrelationsmatrix der zuvor dargestellten nominalskalierten dichotomen Variablen des ersten Antworttyps durchgeführt (siehe Tabelle 1). Die Ergebnisse der Analyse zeigen, dass sich insgesamt sieben Faktoren bzw. Deutungsmuster identifizieren lassen, wobei diese sich voneinander im Hinblick auf deren empirische Relevanz bisweilen sehr stark unterscheiden.<sup>5</sup> Aus diesem Grund nehmen wir auf Basis des Varianzaufklärungs-

potenzials der identifizierten Faktoren eine Differenzierung zwischen primären und sekundären Deutungsmustern vor. Als *primäre* Deutungsmuster bzw. Hauptperspektiven können die empathisch-offene Perspektive und die nationalistisch-ausgrenzende Perspektive gelten. Diese umfassen zusammengenommen knapp mehr als 50% der im Assoziationstest getätigten Aussagen. Sowohl die Häufigkeit des Vorkommens (hier mit Ausnahme der medialen Repräsentations-Perspektive, die hinsichtlich der Häufigkeit noch knapp vor der nationalistisch-ausgrenzenden Perspektive rangiert) als auch das Varianzaufklärungspotenzial der *sekundären* Deutungsmuster (im Wertebereich zwischen 5,7 und 10,9%) sind deutlich geringer. Es lässt sich deshalb schlussfolgern, dass es sich hierbei – im direkten Vergleich mit den primären Deutungsmustern – um selten getätigte Aussagen handelt. Diese umfassen Perspektivierungen der Elitenkritik, der wahrgenommenen Chancen und negativen Folgen der Zuwanderung, Kritik der medialen Berichterstattung sowie eine (gemässigte) rechtspopulistische Perspektive (siehe Tabelle 2 sowie Tabelle 3).

## 4 Ergebnisse

### 4.1 Typologie politisch-kommunikativer Milieus

In unserer Untersuchung werden die unterschiedlichen Deutungen der Bevölkerung auf die Zuwanderung von Flüchtlingen entlang von politisch-kommunikativen Milieus differenziert. Ausgangspunkt dafür ist eine empirisch fundierte Milieu-Typologie, die im Folgenden kurz erläutert wird. Als Ergebnis der Clusteranalyse konnten wir zwölf Milieus identifizieren, die sich auf Grundlage ihrer Positionierung bei gesellschaftlich relevanten Wertekonflikten sowie ihrer Nähe bzw. Distanz zur Politik in einem zweidimensionalen Raster der «stratamentation» verorten lassen (siehe Abbildung 2). Abhängig von der pro Milieu jeweils spezifischen Kombination aus interner und externer politischer Selbstwirksamkeit können die einzelnen identifizierten Ge-

these) sowie libertär-solidarische bzw. autoritäre Elitenkritik. Eine Antwort dieses Typs, die beispielsweise mit der Ausprägung «Multikulturalismus & Humanität» verschlüsselt wurde, lautet: «Ich bin für die Zuwanderung von Flüchtlingen, da wir unglaublich viel von ihnen lernen können. Wir stärken dadurch unsere Gemeinschaft und entdecken neue Möglichkeiten. Dafür muss den Flüchtlingen aber auch eine Chance gegeben werden.».

5 Die im Rahmen der Analyse ermittelten Faktorladungen der jeweiligen Items können dabei in Abhängigkeit von ihrem Wertebereich und Vorzeichen als zwei Pole einer inhaltlichen Dimension (hier als Deutungsmuster bezeichnet) interpretiert werden. Für die substantielle Interpretation der Deutungsmuster bedeutet dies, dass Äusserungen, die dem positiven Pol zugeordnet werden können, häufiger vorkommen und Äusserungen, die dem negativen Pol zugeordnet werden können, tendenziell weniger häufig vorkommen (siehe Tabelle 6 im Anhang).

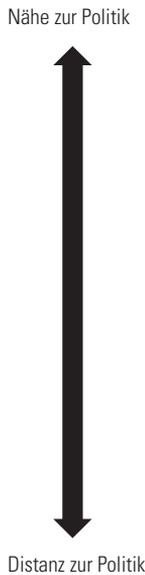
**Tabelle 2: Übersicht der Hauptkomponenten und entsprechende inhaltliche Variablen**

| Faktor/Deutungs-<br>muster                             | Variablen – positiver Pol   | Variablen – negativer Pol  | Anteil erklärter Varianz |
|--|---|--|--------------------------|
| 1 Empathisch-<br>offene Perspek-<br>tive               | Positive Betrachtung des Themas<br>Multikulturalismus<br>Empathie für Flüchtlinge<br>Erstarken Rechtspopulismus und<br>Fremdenfeindlichkeit   | Negative Betrachtung des Themas<br>Negative Betrachtung aus sozioökono-<br>mischer Perspektive | 21.11%                   |
| 2 Nationalistisch-<br>ausgrenzende<br>Perspektive      | Begrenzung der Zuwanderung<br>Negative Betrachtung des Themas<br>Nationalismus/Autoritarismus (starke<br>Ausprägung)<br>Autoritarismus: Terrorismus   | Neutrale Betrachtung des Themas  | 14.58%                   |
| 3 Elitenkritik   | Elitenkritik mit Bezug auf Konflikt-<br>dimensionen   | Elitenkritik ohne Bezug auf Konflikt-<br>dimensionen   | 10.90%                   |
| 4 Negative Folgen-<br>Perspektive                      | Autoritarismus: Terrorismus<br>Erstarken Rechtspopulismus und<br>Fremdenfeindlichkeit   | Kritik an einzelnen Politikern   | 10.31%                   |
| 5 Chancen-Pers-<br>pektive                             | Positive Betrachtung aus sozioökono-<br>mischer Perspektive   | Autoritarismus (starke Ausprägung)<br>Herausforderung für gesellschaftli-<br>chen Zusammenhalt | 9.24%                    |
| 6 Mediale<br>Repräsentations-<br>Perspektive           | Medienkritik  | Neutrale bis tendenziell negative<br>Betrachtung aus sozioökonomischer<br>Perspektive          | 7.41%                    |
| 7 Gemässigt<br>rechts-<br>populistische<br>Perspektive | Nationalismus/Autoritarismus<br>(schwache Ausprägung)<br>Autoritarismus: Sicherheit und<br>Kriminalität<br>Neutrale bis tendenziell negative<br>Betrachtung aus sozioökonomischer<br>Perspektive<br>Regulierung | Begrenzung der Zuwanderung   | 5.71%                    |

sellschaftssegmente auf der vertikal-stratifikatorischen Dimension zu fünf Gruppen von Staatsbürgerrollen zusammengefügt werden. So kennzeichnet sich die Gruppe der Aktiven Staatsbürger beispielsweise durch ein hohes bis sehr hohes Vertrauen in die eigene politische Selbstwirksamkeit und erachtet die politischen Eliten als sehr responsiv. Demgegenüber stehen am unteren Ende dieser Dimension zwei Gruppen mit einer relativ grossen Distanz zur Politik (Entfremdete Demokratiekritiker und Teilnahmslos-Distanzierte). Milieus, die diesen beiden Gruppen zugeordnet werden können, sind durch ein sehr geringes Vertrauen in das Handeln der politischen Elite charakterisiert. Sie unterscheiden sich allerdings wiederum darin, für wie politisch kompetent sie sich selbst halten. Milieus innerhalb der Gruppe mit der insgesamt grössten Distanz zur Politik, die Teilnahmslos-Distanzierten, weisen

geringe bis sehr geringe Werte bei der internen Dimension der politischen Selbstwirksamkeit auf, bei der Gruppe der Entfremdeten Demokratiekritiker schätzen sich Milieus selbst hingegen als politisch kompetent ein. Entsprechend der Kombinationsmöglichkeiten hinsichtlich der beiden richtungspolitischen Konfliktpositionen (libertär-sozialstaatlich, libertär-marktliberal, autoritär-marktliberal, autoritär-sozialstaatlich) erkennen wir auf der horizontal-segmentierenden Dimension wiederum vier Gruppen, denen die einzelnen Milieus zugeordnet werden können. Die «stratamentation»-Heuristik ist insgesamt sehr hilfreich, um die grundlegende Ausdifferenzierung der Bevölkerung in heterogene, politisch-kommunikative Milieus abzubilden. Weitergehend kennzeichnen sich die innerhalb des zweidimensionalen Rasters verorteten Milieus durch jeweils spezifische Merkmale in den

Abbildung 2: Typologie politisch-kommunikativer Milieus in Deutschland



|   |                                      | Richtungspolitische Verortung (Segmentierung über politische Wertorientierungen) |  |                                    |                               |
|---|--------------------------------------|--|--|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Staatsbürgerrolle (Stratifikation durch Interne und Externe Efficacy) |                                      | libertär und sozialstaatlich   | libertär und marktliberal              | autoritär und marktliberal         | autoritär und sozialstaatlich |
| Nähe zur Politik  | Aktive Staatsbürgerschaft (23%)      | Kritisch Engagierte (6%)   | Marktorientiert-involvierte (10%)      | Engagierte Konservative (7%)       | Engagierte Konservative (7%)  |
|   | Loyal-passive Mitte (32%)            | Sozialdemokratische Mitte (12%)  |  | Gemässigt Markt-Autoritäre (10%)   | Autoritäre Mitte (10%)        |
|   | Skeptische Mitte (19%)               | Unzufriedene Linke (13%)   | Staats skeptische Individualisten (6%) |                                    |                               |
|   | Entfremdete Demokratiekritiker (12%) |  |  | Konkurrenz-orientierte Rechte (8%) | Sozial-autoritäre (4%)        |
| Distanz zur Politik   | Teilnahmslos-Distanzierte (15%)      | Prekär-Distanzierte (3%)   |  | Wenig Interessierte (12%)          |                               |

sonstigen Beschreibungsdimensionen. Über verschiedene Items wurden die Dimensionen «Politische Verortung», «Bezug zur politischen Sphäre», «Kommunikationspraxis», «Sozialer Ort» sowie «Themenrelevanzen» erfasst. Diese können herangezogen werden, um den Zusammenhang zwischen milieuspezifischer Lebenswelt und Deutungen des Flüchtlingsthemas zu erläutern (siehe für eine Übersicht Tabelle 4 und vgl. für eine ausführliche Beschreibung der genutzten Items sowie allen Mittelwerten und Standardabweichungen pro Milieu Kösters & Jandura, 2018). (Abb2)

**4.2 Deutungen innerhalb der verschiedenen Milieus**

Mit Bezug zur ersten Forschungsfrage (FF1) erbringt die Analyse der Antworten zum Assoziationstest durch die Befragten sieben verschiedene Deutungen (Fakto-

ren) auf das Thema (siehe Tabelle 2). Mit einem Anteil von etwas mehr als 30% an allen getätigten Aussagen wird die empathisch-offene Perspektive am häufigsten genannt (Tabelle 3, Nennungshäufigkeiten der Themendeutungen). Das Thema Flüchtlingskrise wurde hier vor allem positiv attribuiert, eine Empathie mit den Flüchtlingen wird deutlich und gleichzeitig kommen Befürchtungen gegenüber einer steigenden Fremdenfeindlichkeit zum Ausdruck. Hinter dieser Perspektive verbergen sich Aussagen wie beispielsweise «Wir sollten offen sein für Neues», «Man sollte jedem helfen, der Hilfe braucht» oder «Ich denke an Rassismus und rassistische Diskurse, die in den Diskussionen um geflüchtete Menschen stark bedient werden». An zweiter Stelle wird die Flüchtlingskrise mit den Themendeutungen der nationalistisch-ausgrenzenden Perspekti-

ve und der medialen Repräsentations-Perspektive in Zusammenhang gebracht. Die Begrenzung der Zuwanderung, ein ausgeprägter Nationalismus sowie die Befürchtung negativer Folgen wie Terrorismus werden dabei mit dem Thema verbunden. Dazu zählen Schlagworte wie «Überfremdung und Kulturverlust» sowie knappe Aussagen wie «Das muss gestoppt werden, wir haben schon genug Probleme» oder auch «Wir holen uns die Terroristen ins Land». Bei der medialen Repräsentations-Perspektive stehen überwiegend kritische Aussagen zum medialen Umgang mit der Flüchtlingskrise mit Aussagen wie «Das ist ein viel zu großer Hype durch die Medien» oder «Man sollte in den Medien stattdessen die Vorteile der Zuwanderung stärker herausstellen» im Vordergrund.

Des Weiteren werden mit einer Gesamthäufigkeit von etwas mehr als sieben Prozent eine elitenkritische Perspektive, in der sich Aussagen zum Umgang, zu Entscheidungen und zum Handeln politischer Eliten wiederfinden, sowie die Chancenperspektive thematisiert. Im Rahmen letzterer werden die aus ökonomischer Sicht positiven Folgen einer steigenden Migration für Deutschland hervorgehoben.

Orientiert man sich an der Rangfolge des Anteils getätigter Aussagen folgt an vorletzter Stelle die gemässigt rechtspopulistische Perspektive (fast sechs Prozent der Nennungen). Diese vereint ebenfalls negative Deutungen des Themas. Hier werden Sorgen um eine steigende Kriminalität und rückläufige Sicherheit ebenso geäußert wie negative sozioökonomische Konsequenzen des Zuzugs von Migranten. Abschliessend wird die Perspektive *diffuser* negativer Folgen (4%), wie Terrorismus und wachsender Fremdenfeindlichkeit, genannt.

Die Aufzählung zeigt, dass die Deutungen in der vorliegenden Studie sehr differenziert sind und sich nicht nur auf eine Dichotomie von positiven und negativen Positionen reduzieren lassen. Ferner sind sie mit wertebezogenen, politisch-kulturellen und sozioökonomischen Konfliktpositionen verbunden.

Im Folgenden wird ausgeleuchtet, ob bestimmte Deutungen der Flüchtlingskri-

se in bestimmten politisch-kommunikativen Milieus anzutreffen sind oder ob diese gleich über die Bevölkerung verteilt sind (siehe Tabelle 3; FF2). Eine homogene milieuspezifische Sichtweise würde dabei als gesellschaftlich potenziell desintegrativ, eine hohe Vielfalt der Deutungen innerhalb eines Milieus hingegen als potenziell integrativ bewertet werden. Aus einer hohen Vielfalt leiten wir einerseits ab, dass das jeweilige Milieu selbst unterschiedliche Ansichten in sich vereint, und andererseits, dass innerhalb des Milieus eine Offenheit gegenüber anderen Perspektiven herrscht.

Für einen Vergleich der Pluralität der Deutungen von Milieus sind in Tabelle 3 drei Kennwerte eingetragen. Zum einen wird bei allen Themendeutungen zusätzlich zu den prozentuellen Anteilen in zweiter Spalte auch ein Vergleichswert (Differenz der relativen prozentuellen Anteile der Nennungen einer Perspektive im jeweiligen Milieu zum Anteil der Nennungen der betrachteten Perspektive über alle Milieus hinweg) angegeben. Zum anderen wird die Perspektivenvielfalt (letzte Spalte ganz rechts) durch ein Konzentrationsmass der (Un-)Gleichheit der Verteilung der Antworten (modifizierter Herfindahl-Index) abgebildet. Von der zuvor beschriebenen desintegrativen Tendenz würden wir dann ausgehen, wenn sich zeigt, dass bestimmte Milieus überproportional häufig eine oder nur einige wenige Deutungen einnehmen und das Mass zur Erfassung der Vielfalt der Perspektiven entsprechend höhere Werte annimmt. Zusammenfassend nimmt das angegebene Mass der Perspektivenvielfalt im Milieuvvergleich Werte zwischen 0,19 und 0,24 an, was sich zunächst als Anzeichen dafür interpretieren lässt, dass die Milieus hinsichtlich der Themendeutungen keine *vollständig* sozial und politisch abgeschotteten Einheiten darstellen. So findet beispielsweise auch in ein Milieu wie die Sozialdemokratische Mitte die nationalistisch-ausgrenzende Perspektive Eingang. Besonders auffällig ist im Hinblick auf das Mass zur Perspektivenvielfalt (0,246) das Milieu der Wenig Interessierten, die mit einem Anteil von fast 34 Prozent überpro-

portional häufig eine nationalistisch-ausgrenzende Perspektive einnehmen und bei allen anderen Themendeutungen deutlich weniger Aussagen getätigt haben.<sup>6</sup>

Aus dem Überblick über die milieuspezifischen Verteilungen der Deutungen kann keine gruppenübergreifende Polarisierung der Deutungen abgeleitet werden, dennoch zeigen sich je nach Milieu sowohl desintegrative als auch integrative *Tendenzen*. Wir finden auf Grundlage der verschiedenen Kennzahlen etwa eine Reihe von Milieus, in denen eine der identifizierten Hauptperspektiven (empathisch-offene sowie nationalistisch-ausgrenzende Perspektive) dominant ist. Dies deutet auf eine eher desintegrative Richtung hin.

So entfallen gemäss der in Tabelle 3 dargestellten Gesamthäufigkeiten etwa 35% der Aussagen des Milieus der Sozialdemokratischen Mitte auf die empathisch-offene Perspektive. Antworten, die zur nationalistisch-ausgrenzenden Perspektive oder zur damit verwandten gemässigt rechtspopulistischen Perspektive gezählt werden können, sind hingegen zusammengenommen in ca. 22% der Fälle zu finden. Eine ähnliche Verteilung liegt bei den Kritisch-Engagierten vor. Hier entfallen 38% der Antworten auf die empathisch-offene Perspektive, während knapp über 20% der Antworten auf *beide* rechtspopulistische Perspektiven zurückzuführen sind. Letztgenannte Perspektiven treten hingegen insbesondere bei den Milieus der Autoritären Mitte (55% zu 15%), den Wenig Interessierten (45% zu 9%), den Gemässigt Markt-Autoritären (40% zu nur knapp über 0%), den Sozialautoritären (62% zu 26%) sowie den Konkurrenzorientierten Rechten (57% zu 23%) dominant auf.

6 Neben dem Milieu der Wenig Interessierten sind es mit Blick auf das Konzentrationsmass zur Perspektivenvielfalt die Prekär-Distanzierten, die einen besonders auffälligen Konzentrationswert tragen. Bei genau diesen beiden Milieus handelt es sich um gesellschaftliche Teilgruppen, die durch Abkopplungstendenzen vom öffentlichen Diskurs charakterisiert sind (siehe weiterführend Kösters & Jandura, 2018).

Dass etwa bei den Sozialautoritären und den Konkurrenzorientierten Rechten (oder andererseits auch bei richtungspolitisch linken Milieus wie den Kritisch-Engagierten oder der Sozialdemokratischen Mitte, siehe oben) eine inhaltlich *konträre* Deutung relativ gesehen ebenfalls prominent ist, liesse sich über die Valenz erklären mit der Befragte entsprechende Assoziationen zum Ausdruck bringen. Das hiesse etwa, dass im Milieu der Konkurrenzorientierten Rechten Assoziationen genannt werden, die für eine Empathie mit der Situation von Flüchtlingen stehen, diese aber wiederum negativ *bewertet* werden. Während die Perspektiven-spezifische Valenz im Rahmen der Studie nicht empirisch erfasst wurde, so kann die Abfrage der generellen Bewertung des Themas «Zuwanderung von Flüchtlingen» in diesem Zusammenhang zumindest erste Hinweise geben. Für die Sozialautoritären und Konkurrenzorientierten Rechten zeigt sich nämlich beispielsweise eine vergleichsweise extrem negative, allgemeine Bewertung des Themas (siehe Tabelle 5 im Anhang).

Besonders bei den hinsichtlich ihrer politischen Ausrichtung her eher *extremen* Milieus der Konkurrenzorientierten Rechten und den Sozialautoritären ist die insgesamt einseitige Deutung in demokratietheoretischer Hinsicht als desintegrativ zu bewerten, da bei beiden Milieus in ihrem politischen Kommunikationsverhalten sowohl bei der Mediennutzung, als auch bei der interpersonalen Kommunikation zusätzlich *Abschottungstendenzen* zu beobachten sind, die zu einer Polarisierung der Gesellschaft führen können. Hinweise für solche Tendenzen lassen sich einerseits aus den Informationsrepertoires der Milieus ableiten, in denen Tageszeitungen der politischen Extrema, politische Blogs sowie soziale Netzwerke von hoher Bedeutung sind. Andererseits ist die politische Homogenität der Kommunikationsnetzwerke dieser Milieus ein Indikator dafür, dass diese Milieus im interpersonalen Austausch kaum mit anderen Sichtweisen in Kontakt kommen (siehe weiterführend dazu Kösters & Jandura, 2018).

**Tabelle 3: Milieus und Themendeutungen**

| Milieu   | Themendeutungen               |  |   |              |                             |                     |                                    |  |       |       |      |       |       |       |       |
|--|-------------------------------|--|---|--------------|-----------------------------|---------------------|------------------------------------|--|-------|-------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
|  | Empathisch-offene Perspektive | Nationalistisch-ausgrenzende Perspektive | Gemässigt rechtspopulistische Perspektive | Elitenkritik | Negative Folgen-Perspektive | Chancen-Perspektive | Mediale Repräsentation-Perspektive | Vielfalt der Perspektiven <sup>F</sup> |       |       |      |       |       |       |       |
| Sozialdemokratische Mitte                                  | 35.49                         | 5.68                                     | 9.49                                      | -6.35        | 12.21                       | 0.25                | 6.25                               | 4.34                                   | 10.83 | 0.43  | 2.93 | 0.54  | 2.36  | -4.89 | 0.212 |
| Autoritäre Mitte   | 10.31                         | -3.77                                    | 37.46                                     | 2.05         | 17.68                       | -0.44               | 9.08                               | -0.96                                  | 5.37  | 0.30  | 1.12 | 0.73  | 3.35  | 2.09  | 0.207 |
| Gemässigt Markt-Autoritäre                                 | 0.27                          | -0.91                                    | 27.82                                     | 2.09         | 12.27                       | -1.08               | 5.01                               | -0.61                                  | 3.65  | -0.68 | 2.50 | -1.76 | 2.11  | 2.96  | 0.223 |
| Staatskapitische Individualisten                           | 11.89                         | 0.44                                     | 23.97                                     | -1.53        | 8.87                        | 0.62                | 7.17                               | -0.77                                  | 0.93  | 2.51  | 0.38 | -1.46 | 0.98  | 0.18  | 0.207 |
| Wenig Interessierte  | 9.76                          | -1.67                                    | 33.69                                     | 6.77         | 11.30                       | -2.00               | 6.06                               | -4.59                                  | 2.04  | -1.01 | 1.09 | -1.82 | 1.30  | 4.11  | 0.246 |
| Unzufriedene Linke   | 14.68                         | -0.28                                    | 21.72                                     | -1.90        | 14.49                       | 3.55                | 12.36                              | -0.01                                  | 5.65  | 0.30  | 0.40 | 1.04  | 2.45  | -2.69 | 0.195 |
| Marktorientiert-Involvierte                                | 23.06                         | 2.22                                     | 9.26                                      | -5.36        | 10.07                       | 1.17                | 7.40                               | 3.11                                   | 8.54  | 0.56  | 3.00 | 1.83  | 0.95  | -3.53 | 0.198 |
| Sozialautoritäre   | 24.61                         | -1.80                                    | 48.86                                     | 4.71         | 13.26                       | -1.94               | 7.05                               | -1.34                                  | 1.54  | 0.61  | 1.98 | -0.05 | 5.97  | -0.18 | 0.218 |
| Engagierte Konservative                                    | 11.82                         | 1.13                                     | 17.75                                     | -1.29        | 17.31                       | -3.99               | 3.43                               | -0.89                                  | 4.26  | -0.82 | 4.24 | 2.92  | 6.24  | 2.95  | 0.225 |
| Prekär-Distanzierte  | 11.68                         | 2.11                                     | 23.98                                     | 4.32         | 13.62                       | -5.91               | 0.00                               | -0.26                                  | 6.97  | 1.61  | 0.25 | -1.70 | 3.70  | -0.16 | 0.239 |
| Konkurrenzorientierte Rechte                               | 20.63                         | -4.56                                    | 40.27                                     | 5.09         | 17.72                       | 2.06                | 25.72                              | -4.04                                  | 3.73  | -0.76 | 1.94 | -0.45 | 8.56  | 2.67  | 0.220 |
| Kritisch-Engagierte  | 38.23                         | 7.72                                     | 9.87                                      | -11.1        | 11.83                       | 0.75                | 8.31                               | 10.7                                   | 15.48 | -1.36 | 0.38 | -1.34 | 9.71  | -5.36 | 0.228 |
| Aussagen gesamt (abs.) <sup>F</sup>                        | 850                           | 630                                      | 630                                       | 166          | 166                         | 205                 | 206                                | 113                                    | 4.03  | 7.30  | 7.34 | 637   | 22.69 |       |       |
| Nennungshäufigkeit der Themendeutungen (in %) <sup>F</sup> | 30.25                         | 22.44                                    | 5.91                                      | 7.30         | 4.03                        | 7.30                | 7.30                               | 4.03                                   | 4.03  | 7.30  | 7.34 | 637   | 22.69 |       |       |

Anmerkung zur Interpretation der Werte: In der Tabelle dargestellt sind für die zwölf Milieus und die sieben Themendeutungen jeweils zwei Spalten. In der ersten Spalte links finden sich jeweils die prozentuellen Anteile von einem Milieu zugehörigen Befragten, die im Assoziationsstest eine Aussage mit Bezug zur betrachteten Themendeutung getätigt haben. In der zweiten Spalte rechts ist bei allen Themendeutungen ein Vergleichswert in Form der Differenz der relativen prozentuellen Anteile der Nennungen einer Perspektive im jeweiligen Milieu zum Anteil der Nennungen der betrachteten Perspektive über alle Milieus hinweg eingetragen. Diese Vergleichswerte geben – unter Berücksichtigung der sich aus der Grösse eines Milieus ergebenden unterschiedlichen Anzahl von Aussagen – an, inwiefern die in der ersten Spalte angegebenen Werte im Vergleich zur Gesamtzahl aller Nennungen (d.h. über alle Milieus hinweg) über- oder unterdurchschnittlich oft vorkommen. Für einen Vergleich der Häufigkeiten werden zusätzlich folgende zusammenfassende Angaben gemacht: "Gesamtzahl (abs.) an ausgewerteten Aussagen, die die Befragten zu den jeweiligen Themendeutungen gemacht haben"; "Prozentueller Anteil von Befragten an der Gesamstichprobe, die sich zu den betrachteten Themendeutungen geäußert haben. "Konzentrationsmasses zur Erfassung der Deutungsvielfalt (T), dass für die jeweiligen Themendeutungen als Summe aller quadrierten Anteile von Antworten der Milieus (pi) berechnet wird: Für die Beurteilung der Kennwerte des Konzentrationsmasses wird theoretisch von einem Wertebereich zwischen 0 und 1 ausgegangen. Im Zusammenhang mit der vorliegenden Studie würde der Wert 0 vorkommen, wenn alle Perspektiven im Rahmen eines Milieus ausgewogen vorkommen und der Wert 1, wenn ausschliesslich eines der Deutungsmuster von den Befragten eines Milieus genannt wird.

In anderen Milieus ist eine grössere Pluralität der Deutungen der Flüchtlingskrise zu verzeichnen. Als herausragendes Beispiel ist hier das Milieu der Unzufriedenen Linken zu nennen. Hier sind die empathisch-offene Perspektive (15%), die nationalistisch-ausgrenzende Perspektive (22%) sowie die gemässigt rechtspopulistische Perspektive (14%) ungefähr gleichverteilt. Zudem wird das Thema häufig mit der Elitenkritik (12%) in Verbindung gebracht. Ähnlich sieht es etwa bei den Staats skeptischen Individualisten und den Marktorientiert-Involvierten aus. Obwohl hier eine der dominanten Perspektiven relativ gesehen am häufigsten genannt wird, finden sich innerhalb der Milieus dennoch auch andere Deutungen mit bemerkenswerten Anteilen (vgl. dazu etwa auch den Kennwert der Vielfalt der Perspektiven, der bei diesen Milieus kleiner oder ungefähr gleich 0,2 ist). Dies könnte ein Hinweis

darauf sein, dass die Wahrscheinlichkeit mit anderen Themendeutungen in den milieuspezifischen politischen Teilöffentlichkeiten konfrontiert zu werden, für die Bürger, die diesen Milieus zugehörig sind, grösser ist. Dazu passt, dass sich für diese Milieus – anders als bei den Sozialautoritären oder den Konkurrenzorientierten Rechten – etwa keine ausgeprägte politische Homogenität der interpersonalen Kommunikationsnetzwerke ausmachen lässt (Kösters & Jandura, 2018). Insgesamt wäre die Grundvoraussetzung für den Austausch zwischen den Bürgern und die Wahrnehmung von unterschiedlichen Deutungen zur Flüchtlingskrise sowie die Verortung der Positionen des Einzelnen im öffentlichen Raum hier eher gegeben.

In einem weiteren Schritt sollen nun die Deutungen der Flüchtlingsthematik mit der milieuspezifischen Lebenswelt in Verbindung gebracht werden (FF3). Hier-

Tabelle 4: Charakteristika der Milieus «Sozialdemokratische Mitte» und «Unzufriedene Linke»

| Beschreibungsdimension   | Sozialdemokratische Mitte  | Unzufriedene Linke   |
|--|--|--|
| Politische Verortung<br>–Wertorientierungen,<br>–Parteipräferenz,<br>–Differenzsemantiken  | * eher sozialstaatlich<br>* libertär<br>* Parteipräferenz: Grüne (63%), SPD (56%)<br>* SPD im Gesamtvergleich am stärksten<br>* hoch ausgeprägte Sorge um Betrachtung von Ausländern als Belastung | * sozialstaatlich<br>* libertär<br>* Parteipräferenz: Linke (40%), Grüne (39%), SPD (30%) – relativ geringe Ausprägungen für AfD sowie bürgerliches Lager<br>* ausgeprägte Kritik an Entscheidungskompetenz der EU, ausgeprägte Elitenkritik |
| Bezug zur politischen Sphäre<br>–Interne & externe pol. Selbstwirksamkeit, pol. Interesse, mediales Repräsentationsgefühl, politische Partizipation, Demokratiezufriedenheit | * interne Efficacy unterdurchschnittlich<br>* hohe externe Efficacy  | * durchschnittliche interne Efficacy<br>* sehr geringe externe Efficacy<br>* relativ geringe Demokratiezufriedenheit   |
| Kommunikationspraxis<br>–Mediennutzung, Intensität der Informationsverarbeitung, interpersonale Kommunikation (ipK)  | * Informationsrepertoire mit leicht überdurchschnittlicher Präferenz für öffentlich-rechtliche Nachrichten sowie Qualitätszeitungen online   | * leicht unterdurchschnittliche Bedeutung nahezu aller Informationsangebote, Nutzung von Boulevardzeitungen durchschnittlich   |
| Sozialer Ort<br>–Geschlecht, Alter, Bildung, Beruf, Einkommen, Herkunft, Lebenszufriedenheit   | * eher jung, tendenziell höherer Bildungsgrad, relativ viele Auszubildende und vergleichsweise wenig Rentner, tendenziell etwas geringere Einkommen  | * relativ viele Nicht-Erwerbstätige/Arbeitslose, sofern berufstätig ist die begrenzte Verantwortung für Tätigkeit anderer relativ häufig, eher niedrige Einkommen, Lebenszufriedenheit sehr niedrig  |
| Themenrelevanz<br>–Top 5 der genannten Einzelthemen  | 1. Zuwanderung<br>2. Rente<br>3. Freihandelsabkommen<br>4. Bildungspolitik<br>5. Verteilungsgerechtigkeit  | 1. Zuwanderung<br>2. Rente<br>3. Altersarmut, Verteilungsgerechtigkeit<br>4. Freihandelsabkommen, Bildungspolitik<br>5. Agenda 2010, Hartz IV  |

Anmerkung: Aufgeführt sind Charakteristika, bei denen sich die jeweiligen Milieus hinsichtlich der Mittelwerte in den betrachteten Variablen von allen anderen Milieus unterscheiden.

für greifen wir mit den Milieus der *Unzufriedenen Linken* und der *Sozialdemokratischen Mitte* exemplarisch zwei Milieus heraus, die sich in ihrer politischen Verortung eher ähnlich sind, bei denen aber einerseits eine plurale und andererseits eine dominant positiv konnotierte Deutung der Flüchtlingskrise zu verzeichnen ist. Die für beide Milieus charakterisierenden Eigenschaften sind in Tabelle 4 aufgeführt.

Die politische Grundorientierung beider Milieus lässt sich bei der sozialstaatlichen Position auf der sozioökonomischen Konfliktdimension und der liberalen Position auf der politisch-kulturellen Konfliktdimension festmachen. Unterschiede finden sich jedoch auf der stratifikatorischen Dimension. Während im Milieu der Unzufriedenen Linken ein durchschnittliches politisches Kompetenzgefühl, aber ein sehr geringes Responsivitätsvertrauen zu finden ist, zeigt sich bei der Sozialdemokratischen Mitte ein eher unterdurchschnittliches Kompetenzgefühl aber ein hohes politisches Responsivitätsvertrauen. Diese unterschiedliche Nähe zum politischen System geht bei der erstgenannten Gruppe mit einer sehr geringen Demokratiezufriedenheit und bei der Sozialdemokratischen Mitte mit einer eher hohen Demokratiezufriedenheit einher. Trotz einer gemeinsamen Präferenz für die linken Parteien SPD, Grüne und Linke unterscheiden sich die Milieus in ihren Einschätzungen der sozialen Differenzsemantiken.<sup>7</sup> Während die Sozialdemokratische Mitte eher kosmopolitisch eingestellt ist und sich für eine Integration von Migranten einsetzt, finden wir bei der Unzufriedenen Linken eine eher auf das Nationale ausgerichtete Position mit Tendenzen zur Ausgrenzung von Fremden und Elitenkritik.

In ihrem sozialstrukturellen Hintergrund unterscheiden sich beide Milieus sehr deutlich. Die soziale Verortung politisch-kommunikativer Milieus wird – da-

durch, dass sie mit differenten sozialen Erfahrungskontexten einhergeht – als ein entscheidender Faktor für die Ausbildung von politischen Orientierungen und Grundhaltungen gegenüber der politischen Sphäre (politisches Interesse, politische Selbstwirksamkeit) erachtet (Kitschelt, 1994; Weiß, 2009). Das Milieu der Unzufriedenen Linken ist im unteren Bereich des sozialen Raums zu lokalisieren. Nicht-Erwerbstätigkeit und untere Einkommen dominieren das Bild. Die Lebenszufriedenheit ist eher niedrig. Die soziale Position des Milieus der Sozialdemokratischen Mitte lässt sich hingegen nicht klar bestimmen, da neben gesellschaftlich etablierten Milieuzugehörigen sich viele noch in der Ausbildungsphase beziehungsweise der Phase des Berufseinstiegs befinden. Hier finden wir auch eher niedrige Einkommen, jedoch einen vergleichsweise höheren Bildungsgrad und eine höhere Lebenszufriedenheit. Die soziale Lage spiegelt sich auch in den Themenrelevanz der Milieus wieder. Nach den Top-Themen Zuwanderung und Rente ist für das Milieu der Unzufriedenen Linken Altersarmut und Verteilungsgerechtigkeit relevant, während das Freihandelsabkommen und die Bildungspolitik für die Sozialdemokratische Mitte wichtig sind.

Die pro Milieu jeweils im sozialen Ort verankerte Verbindung einer sozialstaatlichen und libertären Position bei unterschiedlichem Responsivitätsvertrauen und bei differierenden Einstellungen zu soziologischen Differenzsemantiken geht einher mit einer sich stark unterscheidenden Deutung des Themas Flüchtlingskrise. Während bei der Sozialdemokratischen Mitte die empathisch-offene Perspektive auf das Thema mit 35% der Nennungen dominant ist und eine nationalistisch-ausgrenzende Perspektive mit 9% nur selten bedient wird, sind beide Deutungen bei den Unzufriedenen Linken eher gleichverteilt (15% zu 21%). Passend zum geringen Responsivitätsvertrauen des letztgenannten Milieus findet sich ein hoher Anteil der Perspektive der Elitenkritik (15%). Bei dieser vergleichenden Betrachtung der beiden Milieus wird die, u. a. von Grande und Kriesi (2012) für politische Parteien

7 Auf Kurzformeln gebracht wurden die folgenden Differenzsemantiken über jeweils zwei Items abgefragt und in der Analyse näher betrachtet: «oben vs. unten», «eigen vs. Fremd» sowie «Nation vs. supranationale Kooperation».

beschriebene Spaltung in eine «neue» und eine «alte» Linke hinsichtlich der Themenfelder Integration und Immigration – hier allerdings mit Blick auf die Bevölkerung – sehr deutlich.

Eine wichtige, ohne nähere Analysen an dieser Stelle jedoch nicht zu klärende Frage bleibt, in welchem Verhältnis die Kommunikationspraxis der beiden näher betrachteten Milieus und die daraus resultierende Rezeption und Verarbeitung bestimmter Medieninhalte zu den grundsätzlichen Politikeinstellungen und themenspezifischen Deutungen stehen (siehe Diskussion unten). Auch hinsichtlich der Kommunikationspraxis zeigen sich nämlich Differenzen. Im Milieu der Sozialdemokratischen Mitte prägen eindeutig Hard News (öffentlich-rechtliche Fernsehnachrichten und – auf Basis der Befragungsdaten nicht näher zu bestimmende – Online-Qualitätszeitungen) die politische Mediennutzung. Bei den Unzufriedenen Linken zeigt sich hingegen eine leicht unterdurchschnittliche Nutzung von Informationsangeboten mit Ausnahme von Boulevardzeitungen.

## 5 Fazit und Diskussion

Theoretischer Ausgangspunkt unseres Beitrags war eine Kritik am gebräuchlichen Zugang der Fragmentierungsforschung, über die empirische Identifikation von gesellschaftsweit geteilten Themen auf der Bevölkerungsagenda, Rückschlüsse auf eine integrative Wirkung zu ziehen. Mit Blick auf Erkenntnisse aus Forschungsfeldern, die sich einerseits mit Medienagenden und andererseits mit der Verarbeitung medialer Inhalte seitens des Publikums auseinandersetzen, kann die Annahme formuliert werden, dass hinter geteilten Themen – die es trotz Fragmentierungstendenzen weiterhin gibt – ganz unterschiedliche Deutungen stehen. Dies mag intuitiv einleuchten, es geht aber vor allem darum zu bekräftigen, dass diese Deutungen *zusätzlich* in den Blick genommen werden sollten, um Aussagen über das integrative Potenzial gemeinsamer Themen treffen zu können. Zur Verdeutlichung

unseres theoretischen Arguments haben wir eine nähere Analyse zu einem Thema durchgeführt, das seit geraumer Zeit ganz oben auf der Agenda heterogener Milieus der Gesellschaft steht – Migration bzw. spezifischer die Zuwanderung von Flüchtlingen.

Insgesamt zeigt unsere Untersuchung der bevölkerungsseitigen Deutungen zur so bezeichneten «Flüchtlingskrise», dass das untersuchte Thema zwar in allen Milieus als wichtig identifiziert wird, sich auf der Ebene der Deutungen aber zum Teil fundamental andere Interpretationen gegenüberstehen. Die jeweiligen Perspektiven sind gemäss einer grundsätzlichen Annahme des milieutheoretischen Zugangs massgeblich durch den lebensweltlichen Kontext einzelner Bevölkerungsgruppen geprägt. Dies wurde exemplarisch anhand einer näheren Betrachtung von zwei Milieus (Sozialdemokratische Mitte und Unzufriedene Linke) erläutert. Zudem unterscheiden sich die Milieus danach, ob einzelne Deutungen zum Thema jeweils sehr dominant sind oder ob innerhalb desselben Bevölkerungssegments verschiedenste Sichtweisen vorkommen. Öffentlichkeitstheoretisch problematisch erscheinen jene politisch vergleichsweise extremen Milieus, in denen nicht nur bestimmte Sichtweisen dominant sind, sondern die sich – mit Blick auf ihre mediale und interpersonale Kommunikationspraxis – durch Tendenzen zur Abschottung kennzeichnen. Die Befunde zu Milieus mit extremen Grundhaltungen sprechen – trotz des geteilten Themas – *gegen* eine integrative und eher für eine polarisierende Wirkung der Debatte. Demgegenüber stehen Milieus, aus deren Antwortverhalten zu unserem «Assoziationstest» zwar ebenfalls eine Präferenz für bestimmte Deutungen zu erkennen ist, in denen aber auch andere Perspektiven präsent sind und deren Kommunikationsnetzwerke sich nicht durch eine deutliche politische Homogenität auszeichnen. Für diese Milieus ist prinzipiell ein integrierendes Potenzial des gemeinsamen Themas abzuleiten. Die Untersuchung zeigt konzeptionell, dass die Betrachtung von Themendeutungen relevant ist, um das integrierende Potenzi-

al gemeinsamer Themen besser einschätzen zu können. Es ist keineswegs ausreichend, gemeinsame Themen zwischen Segmenten der Bevölkerung auszumachen. Es wird darüber hinaus eine weitere Analyseebene benötigt, jene der Deutungen. Der Zugang über den Milieu-Ansatz bietet insgesamt die Möglichkeit, differenzierte Aussagen darüber zu treffen, welche Haltungen wie zu erklären sind und in welchen Teilen der Bevölkerung Chancen auf eine die Gesellschaft vernetzende Kommunikation (noch) gegeben sind.

Aus methodischer Sicht hat die Einbindung eines offenen Assoziationsstes in die standardisierte Online-Befragung den erhofften Nutzen gebracht, d.h. wir konnten durch den Verzicht auf vorgegebene Auswahloptionen eine Bandbreite von themenbezogenen Sichtweisen in der Bevölkerung erfassen. Dies bezieht sich nicht nur darauf, dass je nach Milieu unterschiedliche Themenaspekte hervorgehoben wurden, sondern meint auch, dass Unterschiede im Differenzierungsgrad der Antworten deutlich wurden (Differenzierung von mehr oder weniger elaborierten Antworttypen). Dennoch sind dem methodischen Verfahren auch Grenzen gesetzt. Gerade bei Milieus, die etwa aufgrund von fehlendem politischen Grundwissen weniger in der Lage sind, ihre Ansichten zu artikulieren, scheinen qualitative Interviews besser geeignet zu sein, um einen besseren Einblick in die jeweilige politische Weltansicht zu erlangen. Eine weitere Möglichkeit für Anschlussstudien wäre es, auf Grundlage unserer explorativen Studie und den so ermittelten Faktoren und Antworten, Items für geschlossene, standardisierte Befragungen abzuleiten. Auch über diesen Zugang mag es für bestimmte Milieus im Vergleich zu einer offenen Fragestellung einfacher zu sein, ihre Sichtweisen auszudrücken. Zudem könnten im Sinne einer theoretisch-konzeptionellen Erweiterung Erwartungen gegenüber den Antwortmustern bestimmter Milieus formuliert und die standardisierten Befragungsdaten dann anhand einer *konfirmatorischen* Faktorenanalyse untersucht werden. In unserer Studie ging es vornehmlich darum, zu-

nächst die Verschiedenheit der Themenperspektiven zu identifizieren. Zusätzlich erachten wir es aber als gewinnbringend, in Folgestudien auch die Valenz der Perspektiven zu erfassen. So könnten die milieuspezifischen Begründungen einer ablehnenden oder zustimmenden Haltung zum Thema näher untersucht werden. Die Berücksichtigung der Valenz könnte auch dabei helfen, Tendenzen einer über die Fragmentierung hinausgehenden Polarisierung von Themenperspektiven differenziert zu erfassen. Beispielsweise könnte geprüft werden, ob in bestimmten Gesellschaftssegmenten konträre Themendeutungen nur deshalb aufgegriffen werden, um diese wiederum abzuwerten.

Hinsichtlich möglicher Folgestudien möchten wir uns ferner der Forderung anschließen, dass die Forschung zukünftig verstärkt die verschiedenen Analyseebenen von Fragmentierung (Angebote, Inhalte, Publikum und Nutzung sowie Rezeption und Wirkung) miteinander verknüpfen sollte (u. a. Kleinen-von Königs-löw, 2016). Im Hinblick auf die vorliegende Studie bietet es sich beispielsweise an, themenspezifische Medieninhaltsanalysen für relevante Angebote aus den Informationsrepertoires der einzelnen betrachteten Milieus durchzuführen, um die öffentlichkeitstheoretisch wünschenswerte Pluralität der Perspektiven in den Medieninhalten mit den lebensweltlich begründeten Problemsichten der jeweiligen Rezipienten zu vergleichen (Verbindung der Inhalts- und Publikums-/Nutzungsebene).<sup>8</sup> Ohne tatsächliche Wirkungen zu messen, liessen sich darüber bereits weiterführende Interpretationen zum Zusammenhang der lebensweltlich eingebetteten Kommunikationspraxis und milieuspezifischen Problemdeutungen zum fokussierten (Krisen-)Thema sowie zum mehr oder weniger integrativen, womöglich sogar eher polarisierenden Leistungsvermögen verschiedener Medientypen

8 Konzeptionell könnten hier Framing-Studien (z. B. Budde et al., 2018) oder Analysen zur medialen Vermittlung von normativen Grundhaltungen (Value-Framing; Weiß & Jandura, 2017; Weiß et al., 2016) angewandt werden.

ableiten. Über eine solche Herangehensweise liesse sich das Wechselspiel zwischen einem publizistischen Konflikt und dessen Resonanz auf Bevölkerungsseite näher beleuchten.

Gesellschaftliche Krisen berühren zwar grosse Teile einer Gesellschaft in ähnlicher Weise und sind damit geradezu prädestiniert, zu einem gemeinsam geteilten Thema zu werden. Aufgrund ihres bisweilen polarisierenden Charakters können sie allerdings eher eine Herausforderung für den gesellschaftlichen Zusammenhalt darstellen. Übertragen auf die Fragmentierungsdebatte führt diese Beobachtung zu der Frage, ob eine gesellschaftlich geteilte Themenbasis als hinreichende Bedingung *immer* integrativ wirkt. Und falls dies eben nicht so ist, welche weiteren Voraussetzungen es für die Integrationskraft gemeinsamer Themen gibt. Dazu könnte zukünftig die *Beschaffenheit von Themen* stärker in den Blick genommen werden. Hierzu lohnt der Rückgriff auf in der Politikwissenschaft vorliegende Issue-Typologien. Geläufig ist hier beispielsweise die Unterscheidung von hinsichtlich der angestrebten normativen Zielvorstellungen wenig kontroversen Valenzissues (z. B. Arbeitslosigkeit, Bekämpfung von Korruption) und Positionsissues, die deshalb stärker umstritten sind, weil die dazu existierenden Positionen wiederum gegensätzliche Zielvorstellungen ansprechen (Stokes, 1963; siehe weiterführend auch Green, 2007; Guinaudeau & Persico, 2013). Van Hoof und Kolleginnen (2014) unterscheiden weiter zwischen Themen, die z. B. «typisch progressiv» (Bürgerrechte) oder «typisch konservativ» (Durchsetzung von Recht und Ordnung) sind, sowie Konsensthemen, die in etwa den genannten Valenzissues entsprechen. Das integrative Potenzial von gemeinsamen Themen auf Ebene der Bevölkerung könnte sich ferner danach unterscheiden, wie stark umstritten Themen auf Seiten der politischen und medialen Elite sind (Bennett, 2016). Wünschenswert wären in diesem Zusammenhang Anschlussstudien, die ein ähnliches Vorgehen wie der vorliegende Beitrag wählen, dabei aber die bevölkerungsseitigen Deutungen zu gemeinsamen, hinsichtlich

ihrer Beschaffenheit jedoch voneinander abweichenden Themen miteinander vergleichen.

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## Anhang

Tabelle 5: Themenvaleanz pro Milieu

| Milieu                            | Themenvaleanz |            |         |
|-----------------------------------|---------------|------------|---------|
|                                   | positiv       | ambivalent | negativ |
| Sozialdemokratische Mitte         | 11.6          | 68.5       | 19.9    |
| Autoritäre Mitte                  | 4.2           | 43.8       | 51.4    |
| Gemässigt Markt-Autoritäre        | 6.2           | 57.9       | 34.5    |
| Staats skeptische Individualisten | 5.6           | 45.6       | 48.9    |
| Wenig Interessierte               | 5.5           | 46.4       | 44.8    |
| Unzufriedene Linke                | 6.4           | 55.3       | 37.2    |
| Marktorientiert-Involvierte       | 17.0          | 59.5       | 22.2    |
| Sozialautoritäre                  | 1.7           | 25.9       | 70.7    |
| Engagierte Konservative           | 12.5          | 50.0       | 34.4    |
| Prekär-Distanzierte               | 0.0           | 46.5       | 44.2    |
| Konkurrenzorientierte Rechte      | 2.5           | 28.7       | 68.0    |
| Kritisch-Engagierte               | 17.0          | 59.1       | 22.7    |

Anmerkung: Prozentuelle Anteile; Antworten auf die Frage «Können Sie angeben, ob Sie mit dem Thema «Zuwanderung von Flüchtlingen» positive oder negative Gefühle verbinden?»; «weiss nicht» bzw. keine Angabe hier nicht dargestellt.

Tabelle 6: Ergebnisse Hauptkomponentenanalyse

| Variable<br>(prozentualer Anteil erklärter<br>Varianz)                                | Faktor 1<br>(21.11) | Faktor 2<br>(14.58) | Faktor 3<br>(10.90) | Faktor 4<br>(10.31) | Faktor 5<br>(9.24) | Faktor 6<br>(7.41) | Faktor 7<br>(5.71) |
|---|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Positive Betrachtung  | 0.8219              | 0.2148              | 0.0091              | -0.3865             | -0.2469            | 0.0114             | -0.0259            |
| Neutrale Betrachtung  | -0.2117             | -0.9634             | 0.0504              | -0.1907             | 0.0084             | -0.1281            | 0.0138             |
| Begrenzung der Zuwanderung  | -0.2047             | 0.6999              | 0.0086              | -0.0611             | 0.1666             | 0.1847             | -0.3407            |
| Negative Betrachtung  | -0.3334             | 0.6509              | -0.0212             | 0.1156              | -0.0635            | -0.0686            | 0.2528             |
| Multikulturalismus  | 0.8949              | 0.1035              | 0.0841              | 0.0519              | -0.1821            | -0.1283            | 0.0302             |
| Empathie für Flüchtlinge  | 0.7775              | 0.1634              | 0.0336              | 0.2165              | -0.0630            | -0.1033            | 0.0225             |
| Nationalismus, Autoritarismus<br>(schwache Ausprägung)                                | 0.0901              | 0.0324              | 0.0886              | -0.1147             | 0.2146             | 0.0615             | 0.5576             |
| Nationalismus, Autoritarismus<br>(starke Ausprägung)                                  | -0.0637             | 0.3061              | 0.1405              | 0.2204              | -0.4425            | 0.0051             | 0.2590             |
| Autoritarismus: Sicherheit<br>und Kriminalität  | -0.1178             | -0.0350             | 0.0552              | 0.1591              | 0.2300             | -0.0281            | 0.6921             |
| Autoritarismus: Terrorismus   | -0.0090             | 0.4766              | -0.1745             | 0.6746              | 0.0693             | -0.0255            | 0.0040             |
| Positive Betrachtung aus<br>sozioökonomischer Perspektive                             | 0.0818              | -0.1178             | 0.0397              | 0.1312              | 0.8598             | 0.1171             | -0.0919            |
| Neutrale bis tendenziell<br>negative Betrachtung aus<br>sozioökonomischer Perspektive | -0.1816             | -0.1198             | 0.2428              | 0.1877              | 0.1395             | -0.6624            | 0.3679             |
| Negative Betrachtung aus<br>sozioökonomischer Perspektive                             | -0.5878             | 0.1146              | 0.1878              | 0.2626              | 0.1920             | -0.0944            | -0.0716            |
| Elitenkritik mit Bezug auf Konflikt-<br>dimensionen                                   | 0.1289              | 0.0084              | 0.9357              | -0.0872             | -0.0174            | -0.0481            | 0.1267             |
| Elitenkritik ohne Bezug auf<br>Konfliktdimensionen                                    | -0.0027             | 0.0944              | -0.9226             | 0.1441              | -0.3109            | -0.2582            | -0.0314            |
| Kritik an einzelnen Politikern  | -0.0280             | 0.2558              | 0.0907              | -0.7885             | -0.2304            | -0.1553            | 0.1031             |
| Medienkritik  |                     | -0.2406             | -0.0682             | 0.0352              | 0.1537             | 0.8106             | 0.0108             |
| Erstarken Rechtspopulismus<br>und Fremdenfeindlichkeit                                | 0.5433              | -0.3036             | 0.2218              | 0.4469              | -0.2469            | 0.0227             | -0.1852            |
| Herausforderung für gesellschaft-<br>lichen Zusammenhalt                              | 0.0988              | -0.2043             | -0.2109             | -0.0226             | -0.6084            | 0.2384             | 0.1757             |
| Regulierung   | 0.2152              | -0.0795             | -0.2453             | -0.0200             | 0.1666             | 0.2332             | 0.3348             |

Anmerkung: In der Tabelle sind Faktorladungen grau hinterlegt, die größer oder kleiner als 0,3 betragen. Erläuterung: Tabelleneinträge sind Faktorladungen einer Strukturmatrix der durchgeführten Hauptkomponentenanalyse mit schiefwinkliger Rotation. Anzahl der Faktoren bestimmt durch KMO-Kriterium mit einem Eigenwert der Faktoren höher als 1.



## Political communication in and about crises. Potentials of a fragmented field

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### Abstract

While there is growing interest in political crises in political communication research, crisis has not yet become a meaningful concept. Also, research tends to be reactive, which is suggested by an analysis of when and how the “crisis” label occurred in Swiss media from 2000 to 2018 and how recent scholarship examines political crises. This commentary gives an overview of different research areas within this fragmented “crisis” field and discusses a nuanced concept of crises that is more sensitive to the causes and dynamics of communicatively constructed crises on the macro level. It argues that a more systematic, more comparative and more macro-oriented research on political crises will help reduce the reactive nature of the field and enhance its public relevance.

### Keywords

political crisis, political communication, crisis theory, crisis communication, public sphere, social change

## 1 Introduction

Crisis quickly has become an issue in political communication research. Just let us look at three recent conferences in the field. First, the Political Communication Section of ECREA labeled its bi-annual conference (Zurich, November 2017) “Political Communication in Times of Crisis: New Challenges, Trends & Possibilities”. Second, at the annual conference of the ICA (Prague, May 2018), two panels of the Political Communication Division debated on the “crisis of democracy”: one focusing on “Global Populism, Local Populism: Comparing Sub-National Dynamics of the Crisis of Democracy”, another on “Social Media Platforms: A Crisis of Democracy?” Third, the political communication groups of DGPuK, DVPW and SGKM devoted their annual conference to “Political Communication in and about Crises” (Fribourg, February 2018). This last conference is the basis for three papers published in this special issue and the basis for this commentary.

What does this apparent interest in crises reflect and what could we learn from it? First, there is a tendency for polit-

ical communication scholars to use crisis as a buzzword, sometimes not even defining how crises differ from non-crises. In this sense, some scholars seem to react mainly to current (Western) public debate where the “crisis of democracy” frame has become prevalent especially since the conflict between Ukraine and Russia, the sudden increase of migrants in Europe in the summer of 2015, the Brexit vote 2016 and the election of Donald J. Trump as the president of the United States in 2016. Second, political communication scholars also understand very different things when allegedly talking about the same thing (crisis), which reflects a fragmented field. For instance, scholars apply crisis either to society and public communication at the macro level, borrowing theories from sociology and political science, or to concrete organizations on the meso level, relying more on public relations research.

In this essay, I will argue that crisis has not yet become a meaningful concept in the field yet but there is potential to integrate a fragmented field with a nuanced concept of crises that is more sensitive to the causes and dynamics of communicatively constructed crises on the macro lev-

el. If we do this, I believe this would also allow us as a field to contribute with our research even more to society because we would use it to address more directly society's pressing concerns. This means we could contribute more to the seismographic function (discussing problems before they turn into a crisis), more to a deep understanding of past crises (keeping the focus on explaining crises even if they have fallen out of the media's spotlight) and more to a sober assessment of current crises (avoiding episodic, ad-hoc research as a mere reaction to public debates). This essay is meant to stimulate further debate within the field, which is why I will use a more commentary-oriented style and will take the liberty of making some general, simplified judgements.

This essay is structured into four parts. First, I analyze when and in which contexts the "crisis" label has been used in news coverage of Swiss media since 2000 and try to relate it to current research interests of scholars examining crises. Second, I give an overview what this broad and fragmented "crisis" research field looks like and what the implications are for political communication research. Third, I sketch out an approach that offers more linkages within the fragmented field. I conclude with general remarks on the need for diachronic, comparative analyses and more public engagement.

## 2 Mediated crises and research interests

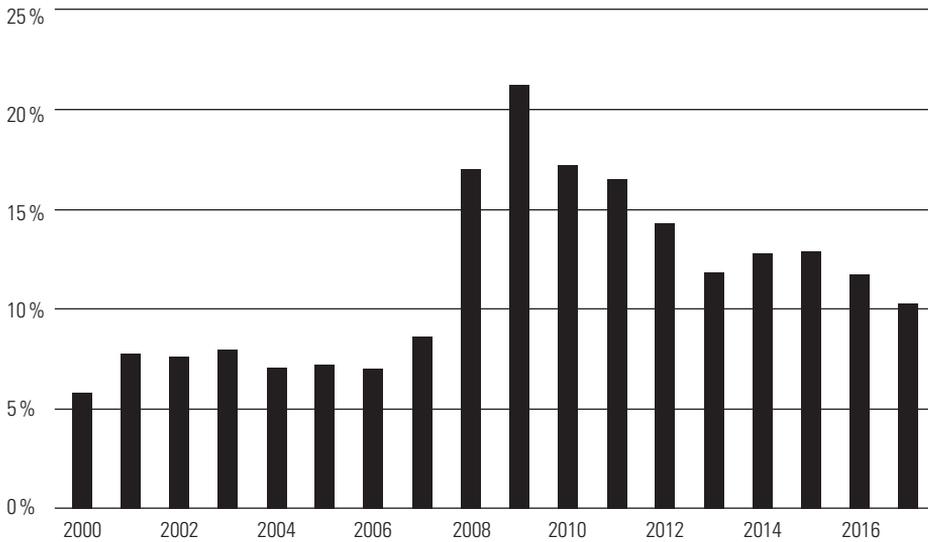
As I argued, the current scholarly interest in political crises might be driven also in part from the current public debate. While I cannot prove this point with exact methods, especially not in an international context, I try to find plausible linkages between media coverage and scholars' current interest by looking at the debate about crises in Swiss media in a slightly longer time period. Especially when we focus on the more European or global crises, leaving aside Switzerland's domestic crises, we can use Swiss media coverage as a possible (albeit not perfect) yardstick for me-

dia attention to crises in general (at least in Western Europe and more specifically in Germany). This is because (Western) media across countries have developed professional standards and specific logics which events make the news. With the rise of international 24/7 TV channels, news agencies and generally more transnational news flows, big transnational events find it easier to be reported than before (Brügge-mann & Wessler, 2014). In addition to that, in view of the "next-door-giant" effect, it is clear that German-speaking media in Switzerland show a significant overlap with news coverage in neighboring Germany.

To track the salience of crises in Swiss media coverage, I was able to work with a pre-structured database of coded media articles at fög – Research Institute for the Public Sphere and Society at the University of Zurich. In the context of several research projects, full editions of newspapers were analyzed, with some restrictions, e.g. excluding very short articles, news agency reports, or ordinary sports coverage (game reports). Each article was assigned to an inductively generated "communication event" or issue (cf. Imhof 1993; Udris, Schneider & Lucht, 2015). In view of this inductive logic and the semantics that journalists themselves use when making sense of events, communication events can range from concrete episodes (e.g. earthquakes) and more mid-range events (e.g. elections including run-up and reflection afterwards) to more long-term, abstract processes (e.g. economic performance in general) (Eisenegger, 2005). In this database, each communication event carries a distinct label capturing the geographical scope, the main actors involved and the thematic focus of newspaper coverage.

From this collection, I chose three newspapers, each of which represents an important segment of the (German-speaking) Swiss press system: Neue Zürcher Zeitung (NZZ) as a quality paper with an international outlook, Tages-Anzeiger as a quality-oriented "mid-market" paper addressing wider audiences than the NZZ, and finally Blick, Switzerland's

Figure 1: Share of articles in Swiss media mentioning crises (2000–2017)



Source: Pre-structured database of communication events at fög – Forschungsinstitut Öffentlichkeit und Gesellschaft

largest tabloid daily. Within all coded issues that these three newspapers covered over a time period from 2000 to 2017 ( $n=570929$ ), I used basic search strings to look at the intensity and type of debate of crises in general (regardless its context) and the crisis of democracy in particular. In addition, I analyzed in which communication events (issues) these articles appear. The following results are meant to show the broad picture and not the exact number of correct instances, which is why I did not check individual articles for false positives.

The results show that “crisis” as a term is often used but with noticeable peaks. In 2009, the year with the highest frequency and highest share, these three newspapers mention “crisis” in around 18 news articles every single day, which constitutes 21% of the coded articles in 2009. In 2017, it is (only) around 10%. Just looking at the development, it becomes clear that “crisis” is used more often from 2008 on, and the decrease from 2011 does not reach the pre-2008 level any longer. As can be seen from the list of the largest five communication events per year (cf. Table 3 in the Appendix), the main driver of this peak from 2008

to 2012 is the “economic crisis” and the according communication events clustered around it: the global financial crisis in 2008, which also affects Switzerland’s largest bank UBS, and later the “Euro crisis” or “Debt crisis”. Other drivers in that peak period include the accident at the nuclear power plant in Fukushima 2011 and the war in Syria in 2012. In 2014, “crisis” is most often used in connection with the conflict in the Ukraine. In 2015, another round of crisis in the Eurozone (e.g. the referendum in Greece) as well as a perception of a (European) “refugee crisis” dominate. This “refugee crisis” also explains part of the relatively high attention to “crisis” in 2016, and the decreasing media interest to this issue in 2017 also correlates with decreasing mentions of crisis overall.

Taken together, these results indicate that crises discussed in Swiss media in the last two decades refer more often to economic than political crises and more often to violent conflicts and wars than non-violent political crises. One could argue that applying the term “crisis” to economic crises (including crises of concrete companies such as Swissair or Fiat) than to political institutional crises is easier for

the media as they can use seemingly simple and uncontested indicators such as falling stock market prices, state debts etc. Of course, economic crises had a clear political impact (e.g. regulation debate) and often were accompanied with political crises. Also, the results indicate that rapidly escalating violent conflicts such as in Syria (for Swiss media mainly in 2012), in Iraq (in 2003), between Israel and Lebanon (in 2006) and between the Ukraine and Russia (in 2014) find high attention and are labeled as crisis events, especially since violence and the physically visible erosion of the social order pose an imminent threat. The same can be said for riots like in France (2006). Finally, disasters such as the floods in Switzerland (2005), the tsunamis in Thailand (late 2004) and Fukushima (2011) and epidemics such as the Bird Flu (2005–2006) and Ebola (2014) are interpreted as “crisis” events and shape the media agenda. Given this overall pattern, the high attention to the “refugee crisis” in 2015 and 2016 is remarkable, as this policy issue is neither a measurable economic crisis nor an obvious violent threat to the social order like a war (attack on one’s country) or a natural disaster which strikes suddenly.

Regarding political crises on the system level, I checked the use of “crisis” in context to the “crisis of democracy”, using a basic string with “crisis” that appeared in the same article as the word “democracy”. This is deliberately a very strict criterion, as crisis debates on the system level do not necessarily use the label “democracy”. Not surprisingly, the numbers mirroring this potentially much more self-reflexive debate are much lower ( $n=4376$ ); overall, they constitute a mere 0.8% of all coded articles. In 2017, for instance, there is less than one article every day when crisis appears in the context of democracy. But the development over time suggests an increasing awareness to political crises on the system level. Before, at the start of the century, the data shows much “noise”, meaning many isolated instances of crises that refer to one case (one country) and are thus geographically confined (e.g. the riots in Thailand in 2008). Not even the

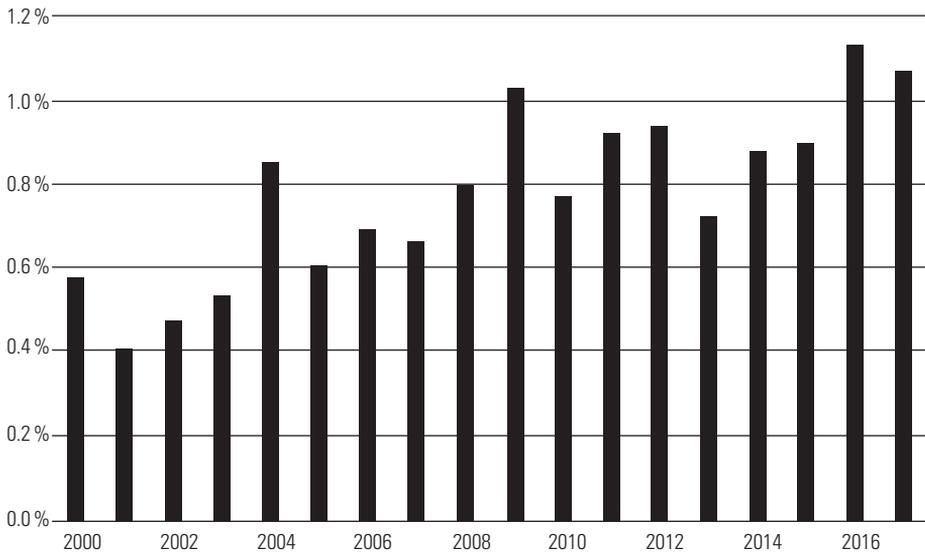
terrorist attacks on 9/11 (2001), in Madrid (2004) or London (2005) increase the perception that there is a crisis of democracy of the Western world or a crisis of democracy in general. The peak in 2009 reflects a whole series of isolated events (e.g. difficult coalition-building after the elections in Germany and protests in Iran).

It is only after 2009 that the articles really reflect a perception of more encompassing crises affecting democracies as such. For instance, in 2011 and 2012, events during and after the Arab Spring are set in relation to political crises, as are events following the crisis in the Eurozone. The more recent peaks (2016 and 2017) reflect the renewal of a political crisis in Europe in the context of the debt crisis and in the context of increasing Euroscepticism, which is found in the high attention to Brexit or to the success of right-wing populists in Poland. Especially following the US presidential elections in 2016, there is much debate about the rise of populism, which again is used to highlight the alleged crisis of formerly stable political systems in established democracies (e.g. the seemingly surprising success of the right-wing populist AfD in the German elections in 2017).

In sum, news coverage of Swiss media shows clear patterns when it comes to media attention to “big” global crises and different types of crises in general (economic crises, war, conflict, disaster), some of which will look familiar also to scholars in other European countries given the regularities in international news flows.

Against this background, what can we observe when looking at researchers’ current projects on political crises? To give an example, I examined how scholars at the conference on “Political Communication in and about Crises” (February 2018) used the crisis concepts in their abstracts and which crises they focused upon. The vast majority of scholars came from German-speaking universities in Switzerland and Germany, which again makes the analysis of Swiss media coverage a reasonable starting point. There were 15 abstracts, each around one page long, which means potentially enough space to give at

Figure 2: Articles in Swiss media mentioning the crisis of democracy (2000–2017)



Source: Pre-structured database of communication events at fög – Forschungsinstitut Öffentlichkeit und Gesellschaft

least some information on the crisis concept. 10 abstracts had a first author from a university in Germany. 5 abstracts had a first author from a Swiss university.

13 out of those 15 abstracts did indeed use the word crisis, thus offering starting points for further debate among conference participants. (Two abstracts, focusing on terrorist attacks, did not even mention the word crisis.) Most abstracts focused

on concrete crises that are and have been also salient in more recent Swiss media coverage (“refugee crisis”, Brexit, Ukraine, Euro “debt crisis”), while a few abstracts focused on more general, long-term processes (climate change, terrorism, populism). In this sense, scholarship seems to be responsive but unfortunately also reactive. To be clear, my critique is *not* a plea against conducting studies on recent salient crises such as the “refugee crisis” per se – after all, its extraordinary impact on the media agenda and public agenda is striking, which makes it a highly relevant case. My plea is for a well-reasoned, justified selection of the crisis cases and the according links to theory. This justification is not always given sufficiently; the reactive nature of our field was apparent at the conference because only two abstracts explained why the chosen, examined crisis “is” actually a crisis (rather than just a conflict, a challenge, a routine process, etc.). Most abstracts just labeled something as a crisis without giving any reason. Typically, authors mentioned the “refugee crisis”, sometimes not even using inverted commas. In this sense, scholars willingly

Table 1: Examined crises and scope of analysis

| Examined crises   | N=(15) |
|---|--------|
| Refugee crisis*   | 7      |
| Climate change  | 2      |
| Terrorist attacks (abstracts did not mention the word "crisis") | 2      |
| Ukraine crisis*   | 2      |
| Brexit  | 1      |
| Euro (debt) crisis*   | 1      |
| (Right-wing) populism   | 1      |
| Crises in general   | 1      |

Note. Examined crises and scope of analysis in 15 abstracts prepared for the conference “Political Communication in and about Crises” (2018); \* one abstract examined and compared three crises (cf. Lichtenstein & Nitsch, 2019)

or unwillingly accept the crisis labeling from public discourse. This is a problem because the term “crisis” is contested and crises are usually defined in public communication, which also means crises are defined by political actors with a strategic interest in labeling events a “crisis” or by media following certain logics (be they political or commercial). Therefore, a stronger awareness in our field regarding the labeling of political problems and conflicts would be helpful. Ideally, scholarship will address political crises without contributing to “hyped-up” crises and without neglecting those formerly big crises that are now disappearing from the media agenda.

Regarding the reactive nature of the field, we could also wonder why political communication scholars do not (any longer) study former “big crises” such as the global financial “crisis” or the Euro “crisis”. Do we really know enough already whether and how political communication patterns were at the root of these crises and how political communication as a whole relates to the still ongoing effects of the crises? For instance, what does it mean that new protest actors such as “Occupy Paradeplatz” (who in 2011 protested against the financial sector on a square in Zurich where Switzerland’s two largest banks have their headquarters) appeared rather quickly with much media attention but rather quickly fell out of the media spotlight? Are we as a field confident enough we can share our insights with the public and political actors to help prevent or alleviate a (likely) further economic “crisis”? And even more generally, are we doing enough to find basic patterns of different crises that would allow us to be more sensitive to upcoming crises and thus allow us to be more of a seismograph of problems in a democratic society?

Some studies can be indeed considered less reactive and more continuous, as they focus on more long-term processes such as climate change (2 abstracts), terrorism (series of terrorist attacks) (2 abstracts) and populism (1 abstract). However, it is striking that the link to “crisis” in these abstracts was either fully absent or rather weak – with the study on populism

as an exception. The studies on terrorism did not even mention the word “crisis” in the abstracts, and the abstracts on climate change just stipulated that climate change was one of the main crises of our time without giving any reasons why and how climate change really (now) is a political crisis. To put it bluntly, scholars focusing on concrete, delimited crises should clearly justify their cases in order not to do episodic research, and scholars focusing on long-term processes should clearly justify when exactly and under which circumstances these long-term processes change their dynamics and turn into political crises.

Reviewing the contributions at the conference in this light, the selection of three papers for this special issue is convincing: First, the study by Kösters et al. (2019) chooses the most salient recent “crisis”, i.e. the “refugee crisis”, but it does not take the crisis label at face value but rather asks how one shared topic which is salient in all segments of the population is interpreted differently in different political and communicative milieus. Thus, the study uses one indicator of “crisis” (high media attention) and links it to other indicators of “crisis” such as polarization (ideally two conflicting milieus) and sinking legitimacy of political elites in some milieus. In this sense, the results could also be used in the ongoing debate about “filter bubbles” and fragmentation. One strand of research suggests that selective exposure especially on digital media leads to filter bubbles in which different people and different milieus each have their own topic preferences. But this argument is difficult to sustain, especially when “extreme events” such as the “refugee crisis” are covered in the media, which reach most segments in the population (Pörksen, 2018). At least in my reading, the results of the study by Kösters et al. (2019) speak against the existence of filter bubbles, since these milieus all consider the “refugee crisis” to be important. The results rather suggest the existence of what Pörksen (2018) would call a “filter clash”. Different milieus actually share and debate the same topic but in a networked and digital public sphere, they directly and immediately collide with each other

as their perceptions of the world (and of this topic) radically differ from each other. Second, the study of Nitsch and Lichtenstein (2019) is one of the rare examples when several (types of) crises are analyzed and compared. Furthermore, the study is innovative as it applies established concepts such as framing or indexing on satire shows, a news genre often overlooked and hardly ever linked to crisis research despite its general relevance in people's media consumption (also for news purposes) and despite the fact that satire often is especially important during crisis periods. Third, the study by Wirz et al. (2019) does justice to the active and strategic use of crisis rhetoric of political actors who dramatize developments and ultimately create a political crisis from which they hope to benefit. In terms of operationalization, using dramatization in populist rhetoric as an indicator of crisis rhetoric is an important step to close the gap in the literature (cf. also Bos & Brants, 2014); at the same time, more attention could be paid to how dramatization (crisis rhetoric) relates to other elements of the populist style (e.g. emotionalization). From Wirz et al. (2018), we can learn that the (right-wing) populist rhetoric does have an effect on attitudes of media users but only in combination with anti-immigrant rhetoric (nativism) of political actors and only for individuals holding populist attitudes.

### 3 Spotlights on political crises and blind spots of research areas

As mentioned, the three papers in this special issue are laudable exceptions to the rule, i.e. scholarship tends to be reactive and does not systematically link political crises to established social theories. One of the reasons for these shortcomings outlined above might be the heterogeneity of crisis research. Political crises are studied in many different research areas, but in hardly any area do these crises play a prominent role. Even in crisis communication research, the field that exclusively deals with crises, "political crises are a blind spot" (Auer, 2016). This becomes

apparent especially in publications that claim much authority: encyclopedias and handbooks.

In the *International Encyclopedia of Communication* (Donsbach, 2008), the only two entries with the word "crisis" in the title refer to more meso-oriented research, focusing on "Crisis Communication" (Coombs, 2009) and on "Communication in Organizational Crises" (Sellnow, 2008). The number of entries mentioning crises is relatively high (143), but the number mainly shows the heterogeneity of how the term is used (e.g. in the entry on "Disasters and Communication" or on the cultural theorist Stuart Hall). This heterogeneity is also visible in the *Handbook of International Crisis Communication Research* (Schwarz, Seeger & Auer, 2016a) but one clear advancement of that handbook is the attempt to offer clear linkages between the different approaches in studying crises (e.g. Heath & Palenchar, 2016) and integrate a few chapters explicitly dealing with political crises (e.g. Auer, 2016) – a point to which I will come back later.

In political communication research, crisis is certainly less a core concept. In the *SAGE Handbook of Political Communication* (Semetko & Scammell, 2014), for example, there is not even one subject index entry for "crisis"; the only article out of 41 mentioning "crisis" in the title deals with a very specific crisis (Tait, 2014). Furthermore, only one out of 61 articles in the *Oxford Encyclopedia of Political Communication* (Kenski & Hall Jamieson, 2017) focuses on crises, i.e. "media responsiveness in times of crisis" (Winkler, 2017). Furthermore, the handbook by Reinemann (2014) on *Political Communication* devotes little space to political crises and again relates crises more to organizational crises than to political crises on the macro level. In the subject index, "crisis communication" is listed with a link to Strömbäck's entry (2014) on "Political public relations", indicating the main lens how political crises are studied despite a few cross-references to related issues such as "hypes, waves and storms" (Stanyer, 2014) or "political communication in social transformation and revolution" (Hertog and Zuercher, 2014).

Reviewing the literature more broadly, I would suggest there are six areas where *political* crises are studied (cf. Table 2). There are, of course, some overlaps between these areas and my main goal in highlighting their specific conception of crisis and their weaknesses and blind spots is not to overly problematize this heterogeneity but to offer possible linkages and starting points for further common ground. When reviewing the research areas, I focus on which types of crisis come into focus; I also focus on conceptual problems and blind spots of these research areas, which relate to the social level of analysis (e.g. predominant meso perspective), the definition and conceptualization of crises and the time delimitation (crises as short events or long-term processes). Other categories such as national vs. comparative or cross-cultural analyses (Schwarz et al., 2016b) are not the scope of this essay.

To begin with, *risk communication* (e.g. Ruhrmann, 2015) as an important field focuses on disasters such as epidemics (e.g. bird flus) or accidents (e.g. in nuclear power plants) and examines, among others, the role of political organizations before, during and after disasters. Disasters constitute clear risks, as they might appear with high probability and inflict much damage, possibly threatening the social order physically in the short term (e.g. deaths) and morally also in the long term (e.g. erosion of trust). Relating disasters to political crises, one could argue that risk communication takes into account insecurity and responsibility-attribution, which are important elements of crisis definitions. Of course, insecurity will be especially high in the immediate aftermath of an unexpected disaster (e.g. earthquake), where political actors are expected to bring the situation under control. But insecurity might also be high already before disasters if people anticipate (more) disasters and if people have reasons not to trust political actors with managing a crisis. Thus, risk communication offers crucial insights into the more episodic character of the aftermath of disasters (post-crisis phase) and in the more

process-oriented character of anticipated disasters (pre-crisis phase). That being said, however, one weakness is the unclear relation to political crises. After all, if disasters can be anticipated and risks calculated, disasters might be more easily controlled once they strike. A government in California will expect a likely earthquake (and hence prepare for it) but a government in France will not expect a certain type of political protest such as the «Gilets Jaunes». In this sense, disasters become routine events with clear expectations, thus pointing more at the stability of the social order than its erosion in a period of crisis.

A more precise understanding of crisis is used in the field of *crisis communication*, the only one out of these six fields that puts crises at the very center of its research. Crisis communication is a communicative process where situations that are perceived as threatening and disruptive are also being labeled as crises by individual and organizational actors (Schwarz, 2015). Typically, this strand of research is connected to public relations research and focuses on organizational crises on the meso level. Thus, a crisis is a “perception of an unpredictable event that threatens important expectancies of stakeholders and can seriously impact an organization’s performance and generative negative outcomes” (cf. Coombs, 2012). A crisis occurs when an organization confuses its internal view and external views and when it neglects the changing issue environment (Kepplinger, 2015). This research field offers a number of established indicators to measure the reputation of actors in crisis (e.g. guilt-attribution frames, negative evaluations etc.). Using organizations as cases, it can examine more clearly more distinct time periods when an organization is in a state of crisis and what it does to strategically “manage” the crisis – hence “issues management” or “reputation management” are defined as allied fields (Coombs, 2012). In terms of political crises, this research includes political organizations that themselves experience a crisis – for instance a political party following a decisive electoral loss – or that

**Table 2: Research areas dealing with political crises**

| Research Areas                              | Type of Crisis and Overall Focus   | Conceptual Problems  |
|---|--|--|
| Risk Communication                          | disasters; anticipation and reaction to events   | focus on expected and calculated risks   |
| Crisis Communication (Public Relations)     | organizational crisis (meso level) with clear time period; strategic action and communicative construction of crisis | few macro theories (e.g. also regarding reasons why expectations towards organizations change)                                   |
| Structure and Function of the Public Sphere | (dys)function of the public sphere (media system etc.) (holistic approach)   | few dynamics, no clear time period, unclear connection between concrete political crises and overall crisis of the public sphere |
| Conflict, War and Protest                   | crises as processes with high threat potential for society (interdisciplinary approach); conflict dynamics           | unclear distinction between (manageable) conflict and (escalating) crisis, no clear time period                                  |
| Agenda-building (“Media Storms”)            | media logic; media reactions to external events  | not primarily (political) crises   |
| Cultural Studies (“Moral Panics”)           | social order (hegemony), communicative construction (narratives)   | (in-depth) analysis of single cases instead of overall patterns  |

play a decisive role in causing a crisis for other organizations, for instance NGOs scandalizing the use of toxic chemicals in clothing production or the government executing new and unexpected regulatory measures. Similar to the field of risk communication, this field advances the argument that insecurity (when will a crisis strike?) and high damage are constituting elements of the crisis definition. Pointing at the fact that crises are perceived anomalies that break with the status quo even if they are expected, this research enhances our understanding of the communicative construction of crises.

However, it is striking that the main lens of the *crisis communication* field is the meso lens where crisis management is understood primarily as an organization’s constant anticipation of and reaction to changing stakeholder expectations in order to avoid crises. This is a clear limitation of the crisis communication field (for this cf. Schwarz et al., 2016b) and leads to blind spots. First, it is certainly possible that crises might not necessarily be an exogenous factor and not even a negative factor for an organization. Instead, one could also argue that crises are actively constructed and created by (parts of) an organization itself, since a crisis rhetoric and the resulting loss of security tends to benefit charismatic power-holders (within an organization) (cf. Imhof, 2010). Related

to that, “crisis” can be strategically used as a “descriptor of institutional disarray because it has utility for those invoking it” (Zelizer, 2015). A second blind spot is the question why organizations’ environment changes on the macro level in the first place (cf. Eisenegger, 2018). As this meso-oriented research area is interested more in how (concrete) crises can be controlled rather than in the actual causes of crises and the reasons why crises take the form of certain dynamics, (for this, cf. Malsch et al, 2014), links to more encompassing theories from sociology and political science are rather weak.

A more macro-oriented perspective on political crises is apparent in research which ultimately is based on *public sphere* theories. In this perspective, crisis is used as a concept with two different meanings. First, broadly defined, a crisis (usually singular) occurs when the public sphere (or public communication) stops to fulfil its function for a democratic society. Second, political crises (usually plural) refer to “situations (...) in which a government or other ruling body finds its command and control of the communicative levers of power, its authority and legitimacy, its very capacity to govern undermined to the point where collapse becomes possible or likely or where good governance becomes difficult to sustain” (McNair, 2016). Scholars point at the increasing occurrence of

concrete crises, which is explained with theories from conflict sociology and the changes in the media logics that awards taboo-breaking, conflict-intensifying political actors higher media attention. The increasing number of political crises (plural) is then used to illustrate the overall crisis (singular) of the public sphere.

In this holistic approach, much attention is paid to the communicative infrastructure of a society. Scholars point at the crucial role of the media as a forum for public debate, watchdog of power holders and space offering the integration of society, or they examine processes on the level of audiences (e.g. selective exposure, fragmentation). In this view, scholars go beyond examining the “many crises of Western journalism” (Nielsen, 2016), thus linking an analysis of journalism to an analysis of society overall. For instance, Jay Blumler (2018) in his recent essay on “The Crisis of Public Communication, 1995-2017” points to the more process-oriented functional crisis definition, saying that “an institution may be regarded as in crisis when it is no longer able to serve its ostensible purpose”. The current crisis diagnosis is formulated against the backdrop of rapid digitization and social change. Considering the internet as a disruptive force that is accompanied with a “profound disconnect” between politics, journalism and ordinary citizens, Blumler finds that public communication as a whole does not fulfil its function to foster citizenship. Similar arguments can be found in Kurt Imhof’s (2011) “Crisis of the Public Sphere”, whose crisis diagnosis is related to the commercialization of the media and the growing de-nationalization of political and economic spheres that lack according public spheres.

This double meaning of crisis mentioned above is apparent in Brian McNair’s (2016) book on “Communication and Political Crisis”. The number of political crises increases because of the increasingly volatile information environment (cf. also Pörksen, 2018). The overall crisis, in McNair’s view, results from the fact that the current media change leaves societies in a transition phase with uncertain outcome.

It is unknown whether the inevitable transition of “elite control” to a liberating “cultural chaos” (where the high number of scandals are beneficial for society) will succeed, also because tendencies of polarization are at play (autocratic elite actors vs. democratic non-established actors). To sum up, this holistic approach offers great advantages by empirically and normatively assessing the characteristics and impact of political crises both on the level of concrete events and on the overall system level. However, questions remain how exactly to link these two types of crises. Also, the process-oriented crisis definition (crisis of the public sphere) needs to be linked more to concepts that give justice to the more dynamic nature of political crises in order to claim more convincingly when the crisis of the public sphere actually begins and when it might end; after all, just by definition, a peaceful democratic society (or a public sphere) with working institutions can hardly be in a permanent state of crisis for decades.

The theme of polarization with uncertain outcome is a recurrent feature in the research field studying the communicative aspects of *political conflicts*, including wars, revolutions and social protest. Typically, this strand of research is broader when it comes to using and borrowing theories from sociology and political science. For instance, scholars link the occurrence of social movements and protest actors to “crises” in society such as the global economic crisis (e.g. Flesher, 2016; Kyriakidou & Olivas Osunas, 2017). Often, classic theories from political sociology such as (relative) deprivation etc. (for an overview cf. Della Porta & Diani, 2006) form the background of these explanations. It is also typical, however, for scholars to use insights from conflict sociology to show that relative deprivation etc. does not constitute the crisis itself, i.e. a necessary cause (crisis) for further processes. Conflict theory suggests it is rather the rapidly increasing political polarization itself which is both an indicator of a political crisis and a factor for subsequent crisis (Imhof, 2011). Sociological theories are then supplemented with more media-cen-

tric factors focusing on the interplay of communication strategies of protest actors and the news media. Among others, the “protest paradigm” (e.g. Weaver & Scacco, 2013; Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2014) of the news media is used to discuss possible discrepancies between “real” grievances of protest and crises constructed in and by the news media (e.g. Kepplinger, 2009). In the case of violent conflicts like wars, attention is paid to the shift from stable conflicts to escalating conflicts and vice versa (e.g. Auer, 2016). In the escalating mode, the role of the media changes: to name just a few patterns, news media are incentivized to assume particular issue stances or change their selection routines (e.g. deselecting “hostile” sources) (Baden & Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2017). Overall, while this strand of research is relatively sensitive to conflict dynamics (escalation and de-escalation), these dynamics are not often enough used as indicators to specify when a conflict is actually a crisis or a crisis is not more than an intense but ultimately stable, “frozen” and manageable conflict.

An even more dynamic perspective is used by scholars focusing on “*media storms*”, *hypes* or *waves*. The starting point is the fact that media coverage on an issue is usually not continuous but shows remarkable peaks. This is in line with the definition of crises as extraordinary events that trigger extraordinary attention. Research in the tradition of agenda-building and intermedia agenda-setting concepts stresses how different these two phases (the peak or “storm” phase and the non-storm phase) are for a number of indicators. For instance, media storms start with a sudden increase in attention but then, once in a storm mode, media coverage becomes less explosive, meaning it does not oscillate very much on a day-to-day basis as media coverage in non-storm phases. Also, fewer issue areas become subject of media storms (Boydston, Hardy & Walgrave, 2014). Reasons for this are also found in the production logics of the news media, which points at the herd-like behavior of journalism (co-orientation) in the context of commercialized media systems that increasingly and especially fo-

cus on scandals (Staney, 2014). The main strength of this strand of research is its clear empirical focus and clear delimitation of storm periods (on average 15 days, cf. Boydston, Hardy, & Walgrave, 2014) and work with clear mid-range theories. However, the connection to crises remains unclear. Sometimes, these storm phases are used as an indicator of a crisis itself. Describing the highly volatile (but normal) nature of attention dynamics, peak phases with “disproportionate” media attention are labeled as “crisis”, with phases of “stasis” with low media attention being the opposite (Boydston & Russel, 2016). Looking at further empirical examples given for “media storms”, one would probably not be surprised to see the media devote much attention to these “big-ticket news stories of the decade” such as the Clinton/Lewinsky scandal, 9/11, Enron, and the Terri Schiavo debate but one might wonder if all of these examples really constitute political crises (Boydston, Hardy, & Walgrave, 2014). Thus, one main challenge of this research area is to distinguish ephemeral storms and hypes (e.g. scandals) with few consequences for politics and society from encompassing political crises that affect larger parts of society also in the long run.

A clear interest in periods and issues with intensified media attention can also be seen in research done in the context of *cultural studies*. Most notably, Stuart Hall and his colleagues (Hall et al, 1978) consider a “moral panic” an indicator for an overall crisis of society. In a holistic approach, the authors start with a “real” problem and a “real” series of events. In their case study, the authors study the social phenomenon of “mugging”, which was a form of robbery committed by young adults in Great Britain in the early 1970s. But the main point is that the authors focus their analysis both on society’s reaction to these events and, above all, the contradictions and the underlying ideological currents causing first the moral panic about “mugging” and then the moral panic about seemingly increasing crime rates. These panics, which are accompanied by high media attention, are “about other things than crime, per se. The society comes to perceive crime

in general, and ‘mugging’ in particular, as an index of the disintegration of the social order (...). So the book is also about a society which is slipping into a certain kind of crisis. It tries to examine why and how the themes of race, crime and youth – condensed into the image of ‘mugging’ – come to serve as the articulator of the crisis, as its ideological conductor (...) for the construction of an authoritarian consensus, a conservative backlash” (Hall et al., 1978). Methodologically, fine-grained qualitative content analyses of news coverage and letters to the editors are qualitatively set in relation to crime statistics, legal texts and, overall, broader ideological frameworks (which reflect and shape class struggles) and historical developments of key values and terms. One of the strengths of this holistic approach is its attempt to contextualize concrete patterns of extraordinary media reactions (and the reactions of the public) with wider social issues. Combining the use of concrete indicators (moral panics) and discourse analyses of underlying ideological struggles over cultural hegemony, constitute an encompassing analysis of contemporary society. In this sense, this approach complements more empirical research on media hypes and storms as it asks why media and society in general rapidly construct a “crisis”. Another example is the analysis of Colin Hay (1996) on the “winter of discontent” as a “moment of state crisis” in Great Britain in 1976/1977, when tabloid media and right-wing political actors scandalized the wave of strikes and managed to narrate a crisis that needed to be solved with more drastic measures – in Hay’s assessment a “hegemonic moment of Thatcherism”. Whether one would call the openly normative character of these analyses as overly critical or overly interventionist is, of course, open to debate. (More recent, less normative examples include, among others, the case of “fake news” as an “informational moral panic”, cf. Carlson, 2018.) It is also open to debate to what extent these types of qualitative analyses can complement the numerous quantitative analyses in the positivist tradition. One could certainly agree, though, that the tendency of this type of

research to conduct in-depth, extensive case-study analyses leads to blind spots because observed patterns might not be generalized. Case studies, of course, have lots of merits, but mainly if they are conducted at least with an implicit comparison in mind.

#### **4 Political crisis, social change and media change**

While the overview of the research areas deliberately stressed the heterogeneity, I now want to emphasize in this chapter those (hopefully) fruitful research endeavors that try to relate these research areas to each other. An important starting point of the more integrative approaches is the communicative construction of political crises. It does not really matter whether we take a more “realistic” perspective or a more “constructivist” perspective. In the “constructivist” perspective, the logic of how this construction takes place and what are the driving actors that define what “is” a crisis is at the core anyway. In the realistic perspective, we would distinguish “real” crises and the “real” character of events from the “disproportionate” attention to crisis mainly in the news media. But we would still consider the crucial importance (because of its “deviation”) of this communicative construction. This is probably an assumption that most researchers from these different fields would share. In this sense, political crises become phenomena that should be studied not only as independent variables but also as dependent variables.

Taking this one step further and relying on a phenomenological perspective, we could argue that political crises can be identified when looking at communicative processes in the mass media. After all, public communication and, above all, the mass media, is the main place where a society can define problems (and crises) and observe and integrate itself. In this ongoing struggle in the definition and solution of political problems, we can distinguish between usual political problems and political crises. Political crises differ massive-

ly from the usual communicative reproduction of structures with their tendency to escalating turbulences. An encompassing theory of how crises differ and when and why they occur in public communication was offered by Imhof (2011, 2016). In his crisis theory, Imhof speaks to several of the research areas outlined above. His approach is a sociological one concerning the causes and dynamics of political conflicts but also an approach relying heavily on the communicative infrastructure of the public sphere, the insights from cultural studies regarding “moral panics” as a crisis indicator and the insights from crisis communication and conflict sociology regarding the sudden loss of reputation of organizations and institutions. Some of these theoretical elements will be sketched out briefly:

As for the causes of crises, theories of social change stipulate that crises occur not only because of unexpected events (e.g. scandal about corruption in government) but also because formerly raised expectations cannot be fulfilled. Every societal model depends on shared expectations, and it is obvious that these expectations change on a discontinuous basis because of slowly developing unintended consequences of social action (e.g. traffic jams in growing suburbs that were actually meant to be an idyllic refuge from crowded cities). Unfulfilled expectations go hand in hand with growing disenchantment (Imhof, 2016). Formerly held expectations are shattered, meaning people are disappointed and lose security. People are then confronted with a world in which they cannot be and act the way they once thought they would (be) (Siegenthaler, 1993). Given these increasing anomic tensions across society, the need for a reduction of complexity increases. Here, the use of “crisis” as a label in public discourse is instructive, as “crisis” allows people to position phenomena as identifiable and finite, which can be more easily grasped and controlled; “crisis” promises closure (Zelizer, 2015). Hence, in these situations, the need for clear problem definitions and real problem solutions increases, which is typically mirrored in public communication’s focus

on very few issues. Usually, in these few high-attention issues (which can include one or several media storms), established political actors suffer from a sinking reputation and a loss of legitimacy while new actors (or new ideas) enjoy increasing reputation. On the level of society, this typically coincides with growing polarization until (in the extreme case) two completely antagonistic conflict camps with two competing problem diagnoses and problem solutions are set for a stand-off. While polarization helps to reduce complexity, it increases insecurity as it becomes uncertain which of the two competing camps will gain the upper hand. A crisis will then be solved either with violent means (e.g. civil war), where one camp will impose his preferred social model, or with compromises between the conflicting camps, new institutions (e.g. more political regulators) and new ways that public communication handles topics (e.g. integrating neglected issues).

In this process, media are not only mere mirrors reflecting political contestation. Media change has to be analyzed carefully, as the media in their own logics contribute to escalating or de-escalating political crises, with one argument being that increasingly commercialized media and the increase of social media as “emotional media” tend to give disproportionate attention to polarizing conflicts and polarizing actors (who might have a strategic interest in the crisis mode). Again, the interest lies in to what extent the communicative infrastructure of a society is a factor in explaining political crises.

To identify and explain political crises, we can look for the following characteristics in public communication (cf. Malsch, Florian & Schmitt, 2014; Imhof, 2016; Hirschman, 1994): 1) conflict-induced cluster of communication (high media attention), 2) statements reflecting unfulfilled expectations (anomic tensions) and diffuse threat and risk potentials that are not really understood (insecurity), 3) marked loss of reputation (even if only temporary) of relevant individuals, organizations and institutions, 4) intensified and dramatized pressure to act and to

decide while the process cannot be controlled, 5) polarization into two conflicting camps where routine conflicts of “more or less” are transformed into fundamental conflicts of “either-or”, 6) anticipation or imagination of solutions which oscillate between doom and salvation, 7) more visibility and resonance of new actors or new positions in the news media.

Bearing this in mind, we could start examining which of the many problems and conflicts that are labeled as “crisis” by scholars fulfill these criteria. In his empirical analysis of public communication in Switzerland between 1910 and 2012, Imhof identified seven main clusters of intensified media attention and fundamental conflicts within 100 years, hence seven periods of crisis (Imhof, 2011, 2016; cf. also Udris 2011). These periods were 1) at the end of World War I, where a fundamental conflict culminated in the “General Strike”, 2) in the mid-1930s with sharp conflicts about the role of Nazi and fascist groups in Switzerland and the Swiss democratic model, 3) in the mid-1960s when the issue of “Over-Foreignization” through immigration of “foreign workers” suddenly increased in salience and the perception of a “Helvetisches Malaise” was apparent, 4) in the early 1970s when the separatist Jura movement and new right-wing populist actors severely challenged the political system, 5) around 1990s when several scandals about Swiss political institutions and the polarizing referendum on Switzerland’s (non-)admission to the European Economic Area took place, 6) around 2000 when Switzerland’s economic and political elite was delegitimized because of its role in the “grounding” of Switzerland’s national, prestigious airline, 7) insecurity resulting from the financial crisis in 2007 and turmoil in Switzerland’s financial sector.

While one might want to opt for less strict criteria to include more cases for comparative reasons, this overall historical analysis and its focus on relatively few crises helps us become aware when we deal with really extraordinary crisis situations or with the more or less usual mode of mediated conflicts. Against this background, the high number of scholars

currently working on the “refugee crisis” might check to what extent this issue constitutes a crisis or not. There are reasons to consider this refugee question a crisis: Vowe (2016) claims that “no other topic has occupied us [i. e. the Germans] as migration – migration has challenged us, it has partially overwhelmed us. This is why one can speak of a migration *crisis*” (emphasis in the original). Still, more research is needed to see whether all the criteria listed above are fulfilled. In this context, scholarship would benefit from more comparative approaches. Thus, recent “crisis” phases should be compared with earlier phases of high-media attention of which some turned out to be crises and some did not (because other criteria were not fulfilled), ideally using similar issues in earlier phases. The current “refugee crisis”, for example, should be compared with the period with sudden increase in German refugees coming from former German territory right after World War II or with the highly salient debate about asylum seekers in the early 1990s, which triggered a series of violent attacks against foreigners and in turn stimulated further media attention (Koopmans, 2004).

At the same time, this theoretical approach can lead us to discover the importance of issues usually not considered as “crises”: when analyzing media coverage in the United States in the interwar years, it became apparent that Prohibition (the ban on alcohol) was definitely not a human interest or amusing issue for contemporaries but in fact the decisive issue of the 1920s and early 1930s which transformed from a routine conflict in the early and mid-1920s into a fundamental conflict in the late 1920s and led to a high polarization, rapidly erosion of trust in political elites and social trust in general (high increase of violence), new emerging actors, and a complete re-alignment of the two political parties based on the Prohibition issue – all this preceding the economic depression (Welskopp, 2010; Udris, 2012). As regards the communicative infrastructure, US-American media in the 1920s were in a period of transformation where different logics collided: newspapers embracing the

newly emerging ideal of objectivity (e.g. New York Times), partisan newspapers owned by business moguls with political ambitions (e.g. William Randolph Hearst, who changed his view on Prohibition unexpectedly in 1929 and then used his newspapers to lead an anti-Prohibition campaign), newspapers following clearly commercial rationales (e.g. tabloids in New York), and radio as a new medium for conveying political messages. Again, in order to make sense of the current so-called “crisis” of (Western) democracy in the age of Trump, social media and disinformation, examining earlier periods of rapid social change and transformations of both the political system and the media system can be illuminating.

## 5 Conclusion

In the previous sections, I argued for a nuanced understanding of political crises which takes into account the peculiar dynamics of crises, analyzing when, how and why routine conflicts are transformed into fundamental conflicts and which role the media play in shaping and amplifying the crisis. Even though I highlighted the heterogeneity of the field, I would emphasize that especially now is a good time and an important time for more integration of the fragmented field.

This is a good time for crisis scholars because the current phenomenon of (right-wing) populism and its crisis potential offers even more linkages between the research areas. In *crisis communication*, the strategy of populists to use a crisis rhetoric has to be emphasized (Wirz et al., 2019). Populists in their communication strategies not only attack the political elite and out-groups but they also depict the current or future situations as overly critical, offering radical solutions to overcome a crisis they themselves have an interest in (re-)emphasizing (Bos & Brants, 2014). Thus, not necessarily the media but political actors might be amplifiers of political crises. Still, the crisis rhetoric of populists seems to apply only to certain issues such as migration or law and

order. “*Risk issues*” such as terrorism and climate change are increasingly politicized by right-wing populist actors. Strikingly, however, these actors stress various risk issues but emphasize the crisis potential for some (terrorism) while de-emphasizing the crisis potential for others (climate change), again highlighting how the crisis rhetoric is instrumentalized for strategic purposes. Using *public sphere* theories, scholars examine the fragmentation of media audiences also as a result from political polarization, with supporters of (right-wing) political actors constituting milieus that use news media differently than large parts of the population and that do not trust established media and political actors (Kösters et al., 2019; Kösters & Jandura, 2019). These theories also connect “media populism” resulting from the commercialization of the media with better chances for populist actors, including (purposefully triggered) counter-reactions of political elites, news media and (also) satire shows (Lichtenstein & Nitsch, 2019) against populists. Transferring this idea from traditional news media to social media, public sphere theories point at “elective affinities” between social media and populism because social media as “emotional media” are better suited to populists’ communication styles (Ernst et al., 2017). Not surprisingly, the right-wing populist AfD dominated the election campaign on Facebook in Germany, triggering most user reactions, especially in emotionally charged fields such as migration or law and order (Lucht, Udris, & Vogler, 2017). All these developments on the level of media audiences and on the level the communicative infrastructure is taken as proof of the alleged crisis of the public sphere. Learning from research on “*media storms*” and *hypes*, we can argue that one reason for the current success of populists is their ability to trigger some of these storms. Just think of the deliberately provocative statements by populists that lead to strong, negative counter-reactions, which sets and keeps the populists’ issue on the agenda and helps the populists confirm their main narrative that “everybody” is against them, in some cases set-

ting off a discursive escalation where a formerly stable political situation suddenly spirals “out of equilibrium” (for the case of Pim Fortuyn in the Netherlands in 2002, cf. Koopmans & Muis, 2009; for Switzerland cf. Udris 2011). Also, one could also argue that the more public communication is shaped by a growing number of media storms, the more volatile, more episodic and more emotional public debate becomes, making also the reputation of organizations and institutions more volatile. One could link this increasing volatility also to “*moral panics*”, either against out-groups problematized by populists (e.g. refugees) or against populists themselves. Again, this fits the populists’ communication logics. Finally, based on theories on *political conflicts, protest and war*, one can see elements of a growing fundamental conflict between populists and “the elite” that is discussed as a looming or imminent crisis of democracy. However, at the same time, this literature also reminds us that not every highly visible and not every highly politicized conflict is a crisis. This literature also reminds us that the success of populist actors in the long run heavily depends on the reactions of elite actors, i.e. political actors with their policies and their communicative strategies, and on internal power dynamics within populist movements or populist parties (e.g. Mudde, 2007).

A more integrative perspective would basically mean taking note from each other, acknowledging these different research areas and learning from them. More concretely, meso-oriented studies of organizational crises can be conducted as a more explicit contribution to when these organizational crises lead to societal crises. The concept of reputation can be useful in empirical analyses as dependent variable – the question being how and why the reputation sinks not only in the case of few organizations but on the level of sectors and organizational types and especially regarding powerful organizations and institutions (Eisenegger, 2018). Holistic case studies of a specific societal crisis in turn can benefit from more testable and more

mid-range theories developed in the field of crisis communication.

A more integrative perspective would also mean going beyond case studies and especially conducting diachronic, cross-country comparative analysis of several cases of societal crisis or at least several “crisis events” and “critical junctures”. This is a point that the leading experts in the field of crisis communication rightfully stress (cf. Schwarz et al., 2016). In communication studies in general, we have seen an impressive move towards more comparative research (cf. Esser, 2016) but empirically, this research applies mainly to routine periods or elections, probably because these periods can be more easily controlled by researchers (cf. Humprecht & Udris, 2019). “Crisis events” such as referenda with far-reaching impact (e.g. the Brexit referendum in Great Britain in 2016), wars, catastrophes (e.g. nuclear disasters), “moral panics”, big political scandals (e.g. revelation of corruption) or events with massive protest upheavals are studied much less in a comparative perspective. Scholars might consider them to be too idiosyncratic and too “messy” for a meaningful comparison over time and across countries. At the same time, not studying them also means neglecting exactly those events that are especially important for the media and society as a whole. In this light, cross-country analyses of single crises such as the financial crisis are an important step in the right direction as they reveal how political system factors and media system factors shape the way these crises were dealt with in the news media (Kleinnijenhuis et al., 2015.; Picard, 2015) The trend towards more collaborative research projects will hopefully also lead to more cross-country analyses that *also* use a diachronic perspective *and* compare cases over time (e.g. for the importance of “crisis events” for national and European identities cf. Krzyzanowski 2009; Tréfás & Lucht 2010).

This is not only a good time for crisis scholars but also an important time. Hardly any other phenomenon is as instructive for a societal analysis as crises. Studying political crises allows us to see how and

why the social order starts to erode, which strategies are used to re-stabilize the social order and how social structural change begins and takes full shape. Crises, like societal analyses, basically do the same thing: they question that society as we know it is not self-evident (Malch et al. 2014). In addition to this, studying political crises is important because every democratic society is inextricably linked to a functioning public sphere. Thus, how and why the mass media as the main arena in the public sphere convey or amplify political crises are ultimately normative and highly relevant questions that touch the core of social analysis.

Finally, an integrated research field which takes into account these normative questions will tackle one of the main problems: the field is rather reactive than proactive. Researchers start doing a project on crises usually after the start of an alleged crisis, and they tend to study the very crisis that is happening at that moment or that has recently happened. Also, in their analysis scholars usually focus on the reactions to a crisis, not the phase leading up to the crisis. In general, the field could do more to help society detect early warning signs of an upcoming crisis and, of course, contextualizing a crisis once it is in full swing or pointing out that not every “crisis” currently discussed in the media is actually a real crisis. Some of us might readily want to criticize the media for having failed to ring the alarm before a crisis or for magnifying a crisis once it has started. We should probably take even more efforts to make sure that research does not show the very same patterns as the media. On a broader and sounder theoretical and empirical basis, we can probably also be more confident in engaging with the public in discussing our research. “No one cares what we know” – Nielsen’s (2017) provocative but apt comment on the lack of engagement and the resulting “irrelevance” of political communication research – will hopefully serve as an early warning sign and a stimulation to us all to do better in the future.

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## Appendix

**Table 3: Top 5 communication events (issues) in Swiss media mentioning crises**

| Year | Communication Event (Issue)                 | Number of Articles |
|------|---|--------------------|
| 2000 | Israel – Palestine: Conflict                | 54                 |
|      | Germany: Donations Scandal CDU              | 43                 |
|      | Northern Ireland: Conflict                  | 39                 |
|      | Zimbabwe: Regime Mugabe                     | 37                 |
|      | Switzerland: Reform of the army             | 37                 |
| 2001 | Switzerland: Swissair grounding             | 206                |
|      | Switzerland: Swissair performance           | 113                |
|      | USA: Terrorism (9/11)                       | 108                |
|      | Afghanistan: Global conflict                | 103                |
|      | Macedonia: Conflict                         | 101                |
| 2002 | Argentina: Economic performance             | 125                |
|      | Israel – Palestine: Conflict                | 89                 |
|      | Iraq: Global conflict (preparation for war) | 82                 |
|      | Italy: Fiat performance                     | 67                 |
|      | Switzerland: Economic performance           | 41                 |
| 2003 | Iraq: War                                   | 246                |
|      | North Korea: Global conflict                | 86                 |
|      | Switzerland: Swiss – New airline            | 85                 |
|      | Iraq: Post-war order                        | 79                 |
|      | Switzerland: Economic performance           | 77                 |
| 2004 | Iraq: Post-war order                        | 75                 |
|      | Sudan: Civil war                            | 50                 |
|      | Thailand: Tsunami                           | 49                 |
|      | Switzerland: Gov't performance              | 43                 |
|      | USA: Presidential elections                 | 34                 |
| 2005 | Thailand: Tsunami                           | 132                |
|      | EU: Integration                             | 46                 |
|      | Germany: Elections                          | 40                 |
|      | Switzerland: Flood                          | 39                 |
|      | Global: Bird flu epidemic                   | 30                 |
| 2006 | Libanon – Israel: War                       | 144                |
|      | Israel – Palestine: Conflict                | 103                |
|      | Iran: Global conflict (nuclear program)     | 40                 |
|      | Global: Bird flu epidemic                   | 39                 |
|      | France: Protests                            | 37                 |
| 2007 | Global: Performance of financial sector     | 199                |
|      | Switzerland: UBS performance                | 59                 |
|      | Israel – Palestine: Conflict                | 57                 |
|      | USA: Economic performance                   | 51                 |
|      | USA: Housing sector                         | 49                 |
| 2008 | Global: Performance of financial sector     | 677                |
|      | Switzerland: UBS performance                | 210                |
|      | Switzerland: Economic performance           | 152                |
|      | USA: Elections                              | 112                |
|      | USA: Economic performance                   | 72                 |
| 2009 | Global: Performance of financial sector     | 391                |
|      | Switzerland: Economic performance           | 165                |
|      | Switzerland: UBS performance                | 118                |
|      | Switzerland: Bank secrecy                   | 112                |
|      | Switzerland: Economic policy                | 83                 |
| 2010 | EU: Economic performance (debt)             | 419                |
|      | Switzerland: Economic performance           | 136                |
|      | Switzerland – USA: Fiscal conflict          | 111                |
|      | Switzerland: Regulation financial sector    | 102                |
|      | Global: Performance of financial sector     | 100                |

Continuation of the table on the following page

Continuation of table 3

| Year | Communication Event (Issue)       | Number of Articles |
|------|-----------------------------------|--------------------|
| 2011 | EU: Economic performance (debt)   | 718                |
|      | Switzerland: Economic performance | 166                |
|      | Japan: Tsunami (Fukushima)        | 126                |
|      | Global: Economic performance      | 95                 |
|      | Switzerland: Central Bank policy  | 79                 |
| 2012 | EU: Economic performance (debt)   | 635                |
|      | Syria: War                        | 138                |
|      | Switzerland: Economic performance | 81                 |
|      | France: Elections                 | 71                 |
|      | USA: Elections                    | 65                 |
| 2013 | EU: Economic performance (debt)   | 234                |
|      | Syria: War                        | 117                |
|      | Italy: Elections                  | 57                 |
|      | Egypt: Conflict                   | 56                 |
|      | Switzerland: Economic performance | 53                 |
| 2014 | Ukraine – Russia: Conflict        | 523                |
|      | EU: Economic performance (debt)   | 92                 |
|      | EU: Central Bank policy           | 61                 |
|      | Africa: Ebola epidemic            | 57                 |
|      | EU: Elections                     | 45                 |
| 2015 | EU: Economic performance (debt)   | 407                |
|      | EU: Migration / Refugees          | 282                |
|      | Switzerland: Migration / Refugees | 94                 |
|      | Ukraine – Russia: Conflict        | 90                 |
|      | Switzerland: Elections            | 69                 |
| 2016 | EU: Migration / Refugees          | 175                |
|      | USA: Elections                    | 77                 |
|      | UK – EU: Brexit / Negotiations    | 68                 |
|      | EU: Economic performance (debt)   | 68                 |
|      | EU: Integration of member states  | 66                 |
| 2017 | EU: Migration / Refugees          | 67                 |
|      | Germany: Elections                | 75                 |
|      | Spain – Catalunya: Conflict       | 60                 |
|      | EU: Economic performance (debt)   | 54                 |
|      | North Korea: Global conflict      | 53                 |