Patterns of news making in Western journalism

A content analysis of newspapers across six Western democracies and five decades

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ABSTRACT

This synthesis discusses the findings of the four individual publications of this dissertation and answers the overall research questions. The study itself is based on a comparative content analysis of public affairs coverage in three press sectors (national, regional, weekly) in six countries (USA, GBR, GER, SUI, ITA, FRA) during routine periods from 1960 to 2007. Its findings indicate that mediatization effects on news content are more widespread today than in the past. A more commercially and professionally oriented news logic emerged but developed differently across countries. To attract large audiences, sensational and emotional presentation standards and negative and scandalizing aspects increased in most news systems. This transformation towards a more commercial logic is less distinct in the Swiss newspapers and does not occur in German newsmaking. However, British, American and Italian news organizations seem more vulnerable to the impact of commercialization. In line with expectations, negativity, sensationalization, emotionalization and scandalization have grown most in the commercialized U.S. and British press. What is surprising, though, is the intensity with which negativity and scandalization increased in the British papers. Interpretive patterns that refer to the journalists’ aspirations to preserve their independence from political manipulation similarly increased, leading to more contextualization, why-reporting and even commentary on political events. At the same time, the diffusion of the professional ideal of objectivity is spreading to most continental European news systems. While one could speak of the “Americanization” of European news coverage (i.e., the importance of objectivity), there is also a “Europeanization” of U.S. coverage taking place with respect to the role of analysis in political coverage. Regarding the widely spread assumption of convergence, the findings provide minimal support. Although journalism may be confronted by similar technological and economic changes around the world, there is no general trend toward homogenization of news content, at least not in the press. New journalistic features are not adopted one-by-one but are instead shaped and adjusted by local customs and deep-rooted traditions, leading to multi-faceted and hybrid empirical reporting patterns.

Keywords: Comparative media research, mediatization, political journalism
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INTRODUCTION

During the last few decades, the conditions for and the forms of political communication have changed. Currently, the mass media act as the main link between governments, political parties, political actors, and citizens (Habermas 1990). Most citizens are in touch with the political world only through the media. The mass media are moving to the center of political communication and are the dominant arena for public discourse (Lengauer 2007, p. 11). International surveys indicate that the media have become the primary provider and most important source of political information in contemporary societies (Hollander 2007, p. 377; Kunz 2013, p. 191). Mazzoleni (2008c) has coined the term “media society”, denoting that the media pervade all spheres of social life. Media systems and news organizations in particular have grown increasingly professional and differentiated from their political environment (Hallin & Mancini 2004a, p. 254) and have become independent of their former financial backers, which were, at least in the European media landscape, primarily political parties and churches (Jarren 1994, p. 23). At the same time, however, the media have become more dependent on media market developments. Transnational processes such as economic liberalization and political deregulation of media markets have induced commercialization trends of growing concentration, conglomeration and competition of media companies (Croteau & Hoynes 2006). Newspapers are faced not only with challenges such as declining circulation but also with growing competition from new communication channels due to recent technological advancements. These trends have resulted in pressures to increase efficiency and lower costs, promoting a reorganization of newsrooms and a redefinition of professional roles and skills (see Quinn 2004).

In other words, the news is not simply a mirror-image reflection of what happens. Newsmaking rather reflects a complex set of interactions between the imperatives of the marketplace and the professional aspirations of journalists (Iyengar 2011, p. 85). “The media now operate according to a specific media logic and […] are guided by commercial rules in order to maximize the audience shares” (Esser 2013a, p. 155; see also Hamilton 2004; Mazzoleni 2008d; McManus 1994) and professional rules that imply a distinct set of common journalistic norms and accepted criteria for selecting news material (Hallin & Mancini 2004a, 2004b). Reporters, columnists, editors, producers, and publishers have the “media power” to select and present politically relevant content according to their own logics, while also triggering and
framing public issues and thus influencing political agendas (Dearing & Rogers 1996; Habermas 2006, p. 415; McCombs et al. 1997). They are active participants in the formation of political messages (Cook 1998) and have a sizable influence on “what” and “how” an issue is communicated in the public sphere. The mass media are influential players who pursue their own rules and goals when intervening in the formation of public opinions and the distribution of interest (Donges 2006, p. 572; Jarren & Donges 2006, p. 119, 329). This circumstance underlines the central relevance of examining how the media construct political reality.

The transformation of the public sphere in the direction of “media society” (Mazzoleni 2008c) or “media democracy” (Jarren 2008) has resulted in intensified competition for attention. Political actors and organizations have realized that their behavior is becoming increasingly shaped by the rules set by the mass media and that they must thus address this new situation of increased “mediatization” (Donges & Imhof 2001; Esser 2013a; Mazzoleni & Schulz 1999). Against this backdrop, the aim of this cumulative dissertation is to scrutinize mediatization as a process-oriented analytical construct that integrates media-related phenomena of social change. This study sheds light upon the transformation of political communication in the context of mediatization, which as a superordinate framework has provided the initial stimulus to write this doctoral thesis. Mediatization binds the individual publications in this volume contextually even though they do not take up the explicit “jargon” of the mediatization literature. This dissertation assumes that political journalism today is closely linked to the logics of the media, which are driven by commercial and professional motives (i.e., processes of commercialization and professionalization), and asks what implications these operating logics have for democratic newsmaking and the functioning of democracy.

Skeptics worry that news production has become less motivated by the need to inform the public driven by democratic responsibilities and now instead intends to offer news that entertains. Scholars argue that this development has harmful effects on democracy and civil life. Bagdikian (1983, 2004), Chomsky (2002), Herman and Chomsky (1998) and McChesney (1999) have warned against the effects of a market-led journalism on society. It is feared that the mediatization of politics – particularly the commercial facet of media logic – will hamper democratic processes in certain areas (Mazzoleni & Schulz 1999). The concept is often directly associated with problematic consequences of media influence on politics, and critics claim that the public agenda is ever more determined by the market, which leads to the depoliticization of
citizens who have increasing difficulties in understanding and evaluating politics (Habermas 2006, p. 422; Mazzoleni & Schulz 1999, p. 249; Meyer 2002). A presumed marginalization of political news towards simplification of complex matters, sensationalism, dramatization, personalization, emotionalization, and other conceptions conflicts with the normative demands of a discursive public sphere in which political problems are defined and discussed and solutions sought. This marginalization clashes with the roles that democratic theory expects the mass media to serve (see Benson 2008; Graber 2003; Gurevitch & Blumler 1990; Iyengar 2011; Norris 2000; Strömbäck 2005). First, the mass media should inform citizens substantively about politics and offer opportunities for deliberation. Noninformation or misinformation, however, obviously undermines the media’s democratic function. Another role of the media is the formation of preferences, which is challenged if the spectrum of topics, sources, standpoints and perspectives is limited, thereby reducing the probability of unbiased information. Monitoring, interpreting, and commenting on the acts of public officials or even controlling and criticizing the government as further democratic roles seem impossible in a depoliticized news environment, as does the media’s ability to mobilize voters politically. Mediatized political communication may also cause a decline in political involvement and a rise in political cynicism. However, the media may not solely bear the blame for these circumstances. Politicians, parties, and governments have learned to adapt to responding to the media’s rules and production logics (Altheide & Snow 1979), including their preferred timing, formats, language, and content, to receive public attention, support, and legitimacy (Dayan & Katz 1992). Politicians have an interest in driving political news in a specific direction, playing up issues, and criticizing or even scandalizing political opponents (Esser & Matthes 2013, p. 178). At times, politicians portray themselves personalized (i.e., presenting their personal lives) without bringing important policy issues to the fore.

From a more optimistic perspective, van Zoonen (2005) argues that the opposite is true because this new style of popular culture may arouse interest for politics and mobilizing effects of those otherwise excluded or bored (see also Baum 2002; van Zoonen et al. 2007), but this perspective is not widespread in the scientific discourse.

In sum, this dissertation does not hastily assume that mediatized reporting patterns are per se good or bad for society (Hjarvard 2008, p. 113); this is an open empirical question. This work scrutinizes whether the logics of the media are uniformly global across time and culture or
are based on country-specific conditions, and this question must be addressed from a comparative angle. This study investigates systematically (across time and key countries) the impact of mediatization on the political content of print news reports. This dissertation expects this transformation process to be shaped by the media’s own selection and interpretation logics that may affect readers’ political worldviews and addresses the critical undertones that are associated with these long-term developments.

This dissertation tackles this process of change by focusing on print newspapers and weekly magazines. Other types of mass media, such as TV, radio or the Internet, do not allow researchers to conduct a comparable longitudinal analysis of news content that goes back to the 1960s. In a meta-analysis, Hollander (2007, p. 383) examined 18 published studies that analyzed the association between “media use” and “political involvement”, concluding that newspaper use is more strongly associated with political involvement than is, for example, television news use. Hence, newspapers are an important source of information for the citizenry and a highly relevant object of investigation.

RESEARCH SETTING

This dissertation takes up two opposing perspectives established in comparative journalism research. The first assumes that there is a blurring of national reporting traditions over time, as news journalism in affluent Western media systems has experienced a slow “standardization” in covering politics. News journalism has faced “homogenizing” trends in news practices and content since the 1960s due to technology, globalization, commercialization, and the diffusion of Anglo-American reporting techniques, leading to similar journalistic working routines around the globe (Hallin & Giles 2005, p. 14). One way to characterize this “convergence” of formerly divergent “news cultures” (Esser 2008) is that media systems have become less closely related to the world of politics and more rooted in the market. Communication scholars (see Caspi 1996, p. 175; Donges 2000; Hallin & Mancini 2004a, pp. 251-282; Lengauer 2007, p. 31; Plasser 2000, p. 51) have suggested that this convergence in Western journalistic practices is driven by the following: 1) the diffusion of Anglo-American training standards, textbooks and the broad acceptance of U.S. news principles; 2) the growing interaction of journalists using the same prestigious media outlets and news agencies (e.g., global news leaders such as the BBC, New York Times, Associated Press); and 3) the imitation of reporting techniques that proved
successful professionally (critical expertise, skepticism, pro-active agenda setting) or commercially (audience responses and advertiser-orientation) in the Anglo-American world. In addition, 4) the emergence of global media markets and 5) the universal differentiation from the political field have served as further forces of homogenization of news journalism.

The contrasting perspective does not negate these homogenizing tendencies but neither does it expect them to eliminate the deep-rooted differences caused by cultural traditions and long-established systemic features in national news cultures. These barriers reflect divergent journalistic traditions that showed their distinct contours most clearly in the 1960s and 1970s. The working habits of Western journalists may, to some extent, have become more similar but without dissolving their fundamental nation-specific identities. This perspective maintains that news reporting reflects deep-seated differences because of national media structures, news cultures and journalistic traditions. The historical and structural characteristics of these traditions are still assumed to be reflected in the contents of the news media. Moreover, factors such as national policy agenda and national political culture are presumed to affect political news reporting. Taken together, these relatively stable national differences should prevent political communication systems from adopting homogenized transnational patterns (Esser & Strömbäck 2012, p. 314).

In summary, one of the key questions in international journalism research is to what extent journalism is increasingly global, in the sense that a variety of interactions across borders has led to a convergence of news practices, or whether cultural and institutional barriers protect national news cultures against homogenization tendencies. Obviously, journalism research has moved beyond simply assuming an increasing homogenization across the board and expects outcomes to be much more complex. In this vein, this dissertation supposes global standards to emerge in certain regions but historical traditions to prevail in others. In other words, the main assumption is that the ongoing transformation of political communication leads to hybrid styles. The crucial questions then are where and how these hybrid styles emerge and with what consequences.

Even though this topic has received substantial attention among comparativists, the available empirical evidence has not yet provided a conclusive answer (Boczkowski et al. 2011, p. 379). Therefore, this dissertation formulates cross-national hypotheses to explore the extent to which media contents in different countries resemble existing conceptual “models” in media
systems research and formulates cross-temporal hypotheses to examine the validity of the convergence thesis during the last five decades. To empirically test these hypotheses, this dissertation identifies theoretically grounded indicators that are expected to uncover possible differences in political affairs coverage in daily newspapers and weekly news magazines across six Western countries (United States, Great Britain, Germany, Switzerland, France, Italy).

**Research Questions**

As outlined above, this study asks whether different patterns of political newsmaking exist across media systems. It compares differences in news content with regard to context factors inherent in the political setting and the media setting of each country. The underlying assumption is that differing structural and cultural conditions account for differences in newsmaking across media systems. This dissertation investigates the degree to which news content of political affairs is shaped by the logics of the media industry and assumes media logic to be dependent on both the degree of media commercialism and the degree of journalistic professionalization.

**Research Question 1:** How does print news coverage of political affairs differ between the six media systems under investigation with regard to the “commercial standards” (i.e., sensationalization, emotionalization, negative tenor) and “professional standards” (i.e., authenticity, interpretive reporting (why-reporting, contextual reporting), objectivity, transparency) of newsmaking?

The second research question aims to systematically investigate the changes in news coverage within systems and discusses potential conditions for these changes. This dissertation examines whether the news production in the past has been shaped more intensively by the political field (serving the needs of political actors and institutions) and whether it is today more closely shaped by the logics of the media. In this way, this dissertation addresses a major lacuna in previous research. Empirical longitudinal studies are rare; they are, however, crucial to the field of comparative communication research, as they often refer to processes, i.e., changes over time. Hence, longitudinal studies are necessary to understand transformation processes of news content.

**Research Question 2:** How does print news coverage of political affairs change over time (1960-2007) in the six media systems with regard to the “commercial standards” and “professional standards” of newsmaking?
Another core question this dissertation tackles is whether newsmaking is converging due to globalization trends and leading to a more uniform news logic. With hypotheses of the effects of globalization, Americanization, transnationalization and hybridization, this dissertation empirically explores how differences in specific patterns of newsmaking have prevailed or vanished over the last fifty years.

**Research Question 3:** Can a convergence of national news reporting patterns in daily papers and news weeklies be identified from 1960 to 2007 by looking at key indicators, such as opinion-orientation, scandalization, and negativity?

The final research question discusses the findings in a broader context. Hallin and Mancini’s (2004a) typology of media systems tries to historically explain differences in journalistic practices across systems. This dissertation asks if their oft-cited typology, in addition to other typologies, can be applied to *print news content* and if the factors identified therein seem to have receded in explanatory power.

**Research Question 4:** Can print news content be integrated into existing media typologies such as the one outlined by Hallin and Mancini in 2004?

One important requirement for answering these research questions is to develop meaningful empirical indicators that are assumed to discriminate political affairs coverage in different media systems. Based on a thorough review of previous literature, these indicators will be formulated in the following section.

**Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework is complex and challenging, as it intends to elucidate changes in political news coverage in six Western press systems over nearly 50 years by examining a wide range of indicators. The indicators and the cross-spatial and cross-temporal design are derived from and justified by theory. Therefore, this dissertation is based on a substantial amount of pioneering work, as there is no prime example study upon which it can draw. The first subchapter of this theoretical section discusses the mediatization thesis linked to political news content, and the second subchapter explains why this dissertation must explore political news journalism from a comparative perspective. These literature reviews provide the basis for defining the empirical indicators needed for the subsequent studies.
Mediatization

The research literature views mediatization as a concept indicating that the media increasingly move toward the center of the social process (Blumler & Kavanagh 1999, p. 211) whereby all parts of society become increasingly mediatized and dependent on the media and their logic (Asp 1986, p. 359; Asp & Esaiasson 1996, p. 80; Hjarvard 2008, p. 113; Schulz 2004, p. 88; Strömbäck & Esser 2009, p. 220). This dissertation focuses on the mediatization of politics that has been conceptualized in a growing body of literature (e.g., Asp 1986; Esser 2013a; Esser & Matthes 2013; Hjarvard 2008; Mazzoleni 2008b; Mazzoleni & Schulz 1999; Strömbäck 2008; Strömbäck & Esser 2009), which refers to an increasing media influence over political organizations and actors, political decision-making processes, political events, political discourses, and citizens’ political perceptions. The media have been moving from mere channels of communication to active players in the political arena.\(^1\) Recently, the mediatization of politics has gained speed with the commercialization of media systems and the modernization of politics (Hjarvard 2008, p. 120; Mazzoleni & Schulz 1999, p. 249). While the mediatization of politics can be studied across the four dimensions of contents, actors, organizations and processes, and audiences of political communication (see Strömbäck 2008; Strömbäck & Esser 2009), this dissertation focuses on the first dimension.\(^2\)

This dissertation draws on the historically informed “institutionalist” tradition of mediatization research because the institutionalist approach is particularly promising for studying mediatization (Cook 2005, 2006; Donges 2006; Hjarvard 2008; Ryfe 2006; Sparrow 1999, 2006). According to Hjarvard (2008), the media “emerge as an independent institution with a logic of its own that other social institutions have to accommodate to”, and “the term ‘media logic’ refers to “the institutional and technological modus operandi of the media,”\(^3\)

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1. *Mediatization of politics* is not to be confused with the concept of *mediation*, which signifies the neutral act of transmitting political messages through the mass media (Mazzoleni 2008b; Strömbäck 2008; Hjarvard 2008, p. 114).
2. This doctoral thesis is embedded in a research program of the National Centre for Competence in Research *NCCR Democracy* named “Challenges to Democracy in the 21\textsuperscript{st} Century” initiated by the Swiss National Science Foundation and the University of Zurich that explores how mediatization and globalization challenge democracy today (www.nccr-democracy.uzh.ch). The *NCCR Democracy* has launched various initiatives to define mediatization as a multi-dimensional framework, culminating in the book “Democracy in the age of globalization and mediatization” edited by Kriesi et al. (2013). Chapter 7 “Mediatization as a Challenge: Media Logic Versus Political Logic” (Esser 2013a, pp. 155-176) and Chapter 8 “Mediatization Effects on Political News, Political Actors, Political Decisions, and Political Audiences” (Esser & Matthes 2013, pp. 177-201) are based on our shared knowledge from various internal discussions, workshops, and progress reports in which the author of this dissertation has played an active role.
including the ways in which media distribute material and symbolic resources and operate with the help of informal rules” (p. 105). The pioneers Altheide and Snow (1979) introduced the notion of media logic and described it as a specific “format”. Media logic refers to how politics is represented, defined and formatted in the news media and is seen as the engine of the mediatization of politics (Mazzoleni 2008a). The media adopt their own mode of selecting and framing the news, and politicians who wish to address the public must respond to the media’s rules and production logics (Altheide & Snow 1979). As described by Hjarvard (2008), “one form this adaptation takes is when politicians phrase their public statements in terms that personalize and polarize the issues so that the messages will have a better chance of gaining media coverage” (p. 106). In sum, mediatization is seen (at least from an institutionalist stance) as the growing intrusion of the media logic and as an institutional rule of selecting, formatting, interpreting, and constructing political news messages into fields where other rules of defining appropriate behavior previously dominated (Esser 2013a, p. 159).

The news media develop into a trans-organizational entity, and in each nation, various factors push those working in this institution toward similar norms and practices (Cook 1998; Sparrow 1999). These factors include historically developed professional consensus, intermedia co-orientation, embedding in the same political, regulatory and economic environment, and orientation of their products towards the same national audience (Cook 1998, p. 70, 2006; Sparrow 1999, 2006). The news organizations are structured similarly to achieve similar goals; they follow the same basic rules when confronted with the question of what is important and interesting enough to be considered news (Cook 2005). Journalists follow professional rules when they select their stories (criteria of newsworthiness) and incorporate norms (objectivity, impartiality, neutrality, facticity; see Bielsa 2008, p. 349; Hafez 2002; Hallin & Mancini 2004a; Hjarvard 2008) into their news production. Cross-national differences in how news journalism has developed are explained by long-standing historical traditions in the formation of news media as social institutions, which shape news discourse in characteristic directions (Benson 2004, p. 281).

Neo-institutionalism holds that news organizations within various countries become more similar to one another as they seek to differentiate themselves from their political environments and gain independence (Benson 2004). The rules and norms that govern the media taken as a whole are often more important than what distinguishes one media company, outlet, type, or
format from another (Altheide & Snow, 1979, 1988, 1991; Mazzoleni 2008c). Following theoretical neo-institutionalist arguments that treat individual news outlets as components of one collective trans-organizational field within which each society follows similar norms and practices, this dissertation combines all news outlets per media system as one aggregate indicator of national reporting style (Cook 2006; Sparrow 1999, 2006). The empirical argument for combining the newspapers by country is that for all concepts and analyses central to this study, the effect sizes are greater between national press systems than between newspaper types. This finding, revealed by partial eta squares in a preliminary analysis of variance, justifies the decision to examine the results at the system level.

This dissertation conceptualizes media logic as a hybrid that includes commercial and professional aspects of media logic (see also Hallin & Mancini 2004a, p. 253; Mazzoleni 2008d). Correspondingly, the most important drivers of media logic are commercialization and professionalization.

The first constituent of media logic is commercialization, and the commercial aspects of media logic pronounce the presentation of news stories in ways that make them easier to sell. It can be argued that news organizations have become more detached from the political system because of growing neo-liberalism and deregulation in most Western media systems; however, the greater independence from the political field has mainly resulted in an increased loss of autonomy in relation to the market (Esser 2013a, p. 171). This line of reasoning is similar to Mazzoleni’s (2008d) understanding of media logic, which refers to the specific narrative techniques, presentation styles and production formats that news organizations use to succeed in a society-wide struggle for people’s attention. Journalists become forced to deliver sensationalistic, spectacular, and dramatic coverage of political events (Mazzoleni & Schulz 1999, p. 257). Competitive news production presents only a selective sample of newsworthy events and is associated with the depoliticization and marginalization of the core of politics. The

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3 There is one small exception for “contextual reporting” in 2006/07 in Publication III.
4 Other scholars stress that technology is a third key impetus of media logic (see Esser 2013a, p. 173). The technological aspects of media logic address medium-specific possibilities, constraints and consequences of new communication technologies for news production processes. As this facet of media logic is not discussed in one of the individual publications of this cumulative dissertation that focuses solely on the press, the theoretical explanations are kept to a minimum. However, more manuscripts are being prepared for submission, including one that investigates formal changes in newspaper layouts (e.g., the size and amount of pictures), which is related to technological innovations.
commercial aspects of media logic can then be summarized as a focus on the following characteristics (e.g., Hallin & Mancini 2004a, pp. 278-281; Mazzoleni 2008b, 2008c; Mazzoleni & Schulz 1999): strategic-framing (rather than issue-framing); personalization and privatization (rather than reporting about parties and institutions); personal narratives and vivid storytelling (rather than defining political problems, ideologies and possible solutions); local news (rather than more expensive international news); and easier marketable negative tonality favoring incompetence, conflict and scandals (rather than positive tonality, consensus and compromise). The commercial features are also linked to the spectacularization of news that relies on emotionalization, visualization, and vivid polarization, among others.

*Professionalization* is the second constituent of media logic. Based on Hallin and Mancini’s ideas (2004a, 2004b), professionalization of journalism means that journalism is differentiated as an occupation and institution from other social institutions, particularly politics. They distinguish three dimensions to illuminate professional production routines in newsrooms (see also Esser 2013a, pp. 168-170). First, professionalism means growing autonomy from outside influences and control over one’s work.\(^5\) Second, professionalism implies a distinct set of professional journalistic norms (i.e., objectivity, neutrality, impartiality) and universally accepted criteria (news factors such as timeliness, proximity, surprise, conflict) and common rules for selecting material. Third, professionalism signifies a claim to serve the public interest. It allocates democratic functions to the media, such as contributing to enlightened understanding through substantive, unbiased and uncensored information, contributing to public debate and opinion formation through diverse and inclusive issue debates and holding the government accountable in cases of misconduct.

To move from the conceptual to the empirical, Figure 1 connects the two major constituents of media logic with the indicators used in the four individual publications. It

\(^5\) Journalists became more autonomous in the late 1960s. They wanted to be more than a mere mouthpiece of politicians, and they now control, frame, and interpret the flow of political information themselves. This new and proactive kind of news reporting should be more assertive and skeptical (critical watchdog and adversarial attack-dog journalism). Journalists see it as their professional responsibility to make their own decisions on what to cover and how to cover it (Esser & Matthes 2013, p. 181). More autonomous journalists summarize, contextualize, interpret, analyze, and evaluate politicians’ messages (Farnsworth & Lichter 2007; Patterson 1993, p. 67). Theoretically speaking, autonomous journalists strive for a role that is active (rather than passive) and report in a more pragmatic (rather than sacerdotal) and adversarial (rather than loyal) kind of watchdog and attack-dog attitude (rather than lapdog and guard-dog attitude) towards politicians.
illustrates the close relationship between the commercial and professional drivers of media logic (depicted by the overlapping area) and also shows how commercialization is related to professionalism. One example of such an intersection is the indicator “scandalization”, which has a “professional” core but has been overlaid with a “commercial” logic. A focus on scandal is of high commercial value but is simultaneously connected to the rise of critical professionalism and investigative journalism. Scandalization can thus be said to reflect a commercially motivated exaggeration of the professionally motivated watchdog function. Other typical cases for overlapping indicators are conflict-framing and incompetence-framing. Although this classification into commercial and professional aspects is not entirely conclusive, it still shows how difficult it is to disentangle the explanatory factors of newsmaking. The two indicators “negative tenor” and “sensationalization” also provoke newsworthiness (bad news is more newsworthy than good news; unexpectedness has a greater effect than everyday occurrences), but as they are less linked to the watchdog function, this dissertation refrain from classifying them in the overlapping zone. However, it can be argued that the professional ideal of “objectivity” also has a “commercial” core in that commercial pressures and the need to increase readership and advertising revenues initially began to push partisanship out of newspapers (Chalaby 1996, p. 320). These pressures facilitated the spread of the objectivity norm, and from this historical perspective, “objectivity” can be categorized into the overlapping area.

[FIGURE 1 HERE]

In sum, the aim of this dissertation is to determine if these hypothetical expectations about mediatization are mirrored in the content of the news. It does not take mediatization and media logic for granted – the extent to which they shape news media content is an empirical question. The lack of clear empirical evidence is, in fact, a main limitation of many previous studies on that topic. This dissertation expects the degree of mediatization to be neither uniform nor static. It assumes the mediatization of politics to be context-sensitive and the extent to which political news coverage is characterized by media logic to be primarily dependent on the degree of media professionalization (the professional aspirations of journalists) and the degree of media commercialization (the imperatives of the market). Table 1 depicts the links between general theorizing to specific operationalizations, as it shows the indicators of the professional (see Publication III) and commercial (see Publication IV) components of media logic that are operationalized and covered in this volume.
The Comparative Perspective

Patterson (2008) emphasizes the importance of comparative media research by stating “journalism in Western democracies is not one practice but many practices, depending on the historical, market, political, and other forces that have shaped the various news systems” (p. 23). However, one main limitation of the existing research on political journalism is that many studies are grounded in a single national context. This dissertation explores the relationship with a cross-national research design and addresses the shortcomings via a systematic content analysis of 18 press titles from six established democracies. The cases represent distinct media systems covering different structural characteristics of their media system, political system, and cultural context. These varying contextual conditions provide explanations for the differences and similarities in news media coverage.

Therefore, the comparative analysis allows for testing the generalizability of concepts (e.g., the concept of an Anglo-American tradition) and theories (e.g., the framework of media systems outlined by Hallin and Mancini). This dissertation aspires to test existing classifications of cases and drafts its own typology based on extensive content data. It explains differences and similarities in newsmaking with the specific contextual conditions of the surrounding systems and cultures that differentiate the press systems by way of hypothesis-guided research. By doing so, one of the key questions that can be addressed is whether such system characteristics lose some of their relevance for shaping news content due to transnational transformation processes of social change and international exchange, co-orientation, and global interconnectedness.

On the one hand, from an institutionalist perspective, historical-institutional “pathways” of journalism explain differences in political news. This logic allows for the grouping of news systems with similar norms, media systems and journalistic traditions. As will be shown in the individual publications of this cumulative dissertation, the national level is found to be highly important for explaining differences in journalism. Statistical tests have revealed that the commonalities within the press systems are, from the perspective of mediatization, typically more important than the differences within the systems. Based on typologies of media systems (see Hallin & Mancini 2004a; Mancini 2005; Polumbaum 2010, Williams 2005), scholars distinguish three historical-institutional traditions of political journalism in affluent Western democracies: a) the Anglo-American tradition that was formative for the British and American press; b) the polarized Mediterranean tradition as established in Italy and France, for instance;
and c) the Corporatist tradition that emerged in Scandinavian and Germanic countries. The three traditions are not addressed in depth here but are carefully described in the individual publications (e.g., Publication I, p. 990); however, it is important to note that these typologies served as the main guidelines for choosing the six Western democracies under investigation.

On the other hand, similarities in news reporting are theoretically explained by commercial dynamics and standardized technologies that work across systems and by over-time diffusion and imitation of norms and standards. Diffusion is often connected to the dissemination of the Anglo-American tradition of news reporting. “Professional” drivers of such diffusion processes are textbooks, training standards (objectivity, neutrality, sharp separation between facts and opinion), growing journalistic cynicism, critical expertise, and autonomy. “Commercial” drivers are marketability, deregulation, which was imported to Europe in the mid-1980s (privatization, media concentration), and growing audience- and advertiser-orientation.

The historical-institutional pathways are theoretical ideal types drawn from the institutionalist literature on political systems and media systems. Previous research has not yet investigated in detail if these assumptions are reflected in news content or if they empirically fit observable real cases. In fact, there is a lack of content analyses that test these widely held assumptions in a comprehensive manner. This dissertation is making a moderate but important attempt to fill this research gap. Thus, it contributes to improving the weak theorizing in the field of comparative political communication research, which has not yet developed well-tested conceptual typologies (Norris 2004, p. 122). This work examines the relevance of Hallin and Mancini’s characterizations of media systems for the news output produced by print media embedded in these systems. Across space, this work asks if the kinds of differences in news content can be found as predicted by the theoretical models and asks if the countries under investigation are classified adequately when news content is the dependent variable. Further, this dissertation includes a longitudinal dimension, which allows for testing of whether convergence can be found in times of globalization or whether press systems develop along national pathways, thereby mainly confirming the country groupings as predicted by the theoretical models.

This dissertation provides a comprehensive conceptual framework guided by a multilayered understanding of journalism to comparative communication research. During the last two decades, a number of scholars have categorized the influences on mass media content in
a systematic order (e.g., Reese 2007; Shoemaker & Reese 1996). Donsbach (2010) argues that systemic features at the national level, organizational characteristics of media companies, and journalists’ predispositions on the individual level have an impact on news selection. These influences can be found at the micro, meso and macro level and consist of individual routines and organizational and institutional context factors (Reese 2007). Shoemaker and Reese (1996, p. 214) developed a “hierarchy of influences” model to examine news content. At the micro level of journalists, individual behaviors, preferences, subjective beliefs, attitudes, training, and role perceptions influence news content. At the meso level, the media’s organizational goals, policies and norms shape the news production and their editorial practices and routines. All news organizations within one country are then subjected to the influences exerted by forces at the macro level of media systems and the broader political, economic, societal, cultural, legal, and historical conditions. These contextual conditions lead to either favorable or unfavorable opportunity structures for the evolution of specific transnational reporting trends, such as interpretative journalism. The historical-institutional context refers to deep-seated differences in structures and cultures, such as differentiation of the press from the political field. These differences symbolize barriers that hinder a homogenization of news practices and content. Finally, the supranational level includes transnational developments, such as globalization, modernization and commercialization processes. Needless to say, such an attempt to draw models of influences neither captures all of the complex interrelationships involved in the media nor presents a complete theoretical explanation for the production of news content (Reese 2007, p. 31). Figure 2 shows a simplified theoretical framework, which allows for a detailed analysis of influences that might have an impact on news content.

[FIGURE 2 HERE]

The different levels in Figure 2 are to be understood as permeable sectors. Context factors can also change across time even though they are supposed to be relatively stable. Higher levels do not eliminate the influence of the lower level but set certain boundaries (Reese 2007, p. 37). Esser (2010, p. 19) concluded that country-specific distinctions in news content could be elucidated with influential factors at the national level of media systems, whereas similarities can be described with the diffusion paradigm at the supranational level and with the overtime assimilation processes of technological and economic conditions at the organizational level of the media. Scholars suggested that news content still differs markedly across countries because
countries have distinct media cultures, media structures and degrees of professionalism that are shaped by the country’s political and legal institutions. These factors inhibit a homogenization of reporting patterns (see Benson & Saguy 2005; Esser & Strömbäck 2012; Gurevitch & Levy 1990; Merrill 2009; Wiley 2006). The next subchapter clarifies how this dissertation relates to the presented general comparative literature, why the comparative design was chosen, and how it was implemented.

**Research Design**

This dissertation is based on a large-scale newspaper content analysis (approximately 6,500 political news stories) that compares political news coverage in six countries (USA, GBR, GER, SUI, ITA, FRA) during routine periods from the 1960s to 2000s that are not bound to specific events. The content analysis includes press systems from all three media system models by Hallin and Mancini (2004a) (Liberal, Democratic Corporatist, Polarized Pluralist). The choice of countries strengthens the quasi-experimental design, as it increases the variation in the type of media system and, thus, the generalization of the findings.

In each system, three outlets from different press sectors (national, regional, weekly) were analyzed. Although the sample is not representative of all news media in each country, these media outlets from three press sectors occupy similar positions of prestige and influence within their specific societies, making them suitable for a controlled comparative analysis. Interestingly, with the exception of Great Britain, all other press markets have historically been shaped more by regional than by tabloid newspapers. In France, Italy and the United States, tabloids of the British sort are close to non-existent, and Germany and Switzerland have each produced only one tabloid. Therefore, we chose to include regional instead of tabloid newspapers (for more information regarding the sample, see Publication I, pp. 994-996).

The comparative research perspective must disentangle national traditions and global influences and can account for the fact that journalistic practices and news organizations change over time. Large audiences, large international coverage and growing budgets characterized journalism of the early 1960s, whereas the challenges of increased competitiveness, commercialization, globalization and digitalization are found in the 2000s (see Tunstall 1996, 2008).
Information on the methodological proceeding and data collection is discussed extensively in the four individual publications and will not be elaborated here. In addition to formal variables such as article size, location and length, the codebook contained 35 content-related variables based on the existing literature (this dissertation presents only a small portion of the variables). All individual papers are hypothesis-driven (they clearly spell out hypotheses in detail), and the publications mainly rely on descriptive statistics and explorative grouping techniques such as correspondence analysis.

Scholars in the field have emphasized the need to combine spatial with temporal comparisons, particularly when examining political communication systems (see Esser 2013b; Nielsen, Esser & Levy 2013; Pfetsch & Esser 2012). It is here that this dissertation positions itself and where it provides an important contribution to our understanding of the factors shaping news media content and how they change over time. In the individual publications, the general assumptions about the mediatization of politics outlined above are broken down into more precise hypotheses that are tailored to the specific angle that the respective publication takes and the specific data it uses.

INDIVIDUAL PUBLICATIONS AND RESULTS

This dissertation is composed of four individual publications, each of which contribute to answering the overall underlying research questions raised in this synthesis. Present-day studies in international comparative research have become very complex, even more so when temporal comparisons are included. Therefore, Publication I is based on a high level of data aggregation, providing first insights into the overall study’s empirical data, while the succeeding publications go into detail with analyses at less aggregated levels. Table 1 offers a helpful overview of the theoretical approaches, indicators, news outlets and years included in the individual publications as well as their main objectives and shortcomings.

Publication I: Competing Models of Journalism

The first publication by Esser and Umbricht (2013) titled “Competing Models of Journalism? Political Affairs Coverage in U.S., British, German, Swiss, French and Italian Newspapers” highlights cross-national differences in political news journalism and, due to space constraints, refrains from considering temporal changes. It asks whether theoretical models of journalism in
media system research established by colleagues in the field (Hallin & Mancini 2004a) can be proved when looking at news content. The study focuses on Research Questions 1 and 4 and examines how Western news cultures can be categorized into existing conceptual typologies of media systems with regard to the following three theoretically grounded indicators: objective reporting, interpretative reporting, and opinionated reporting. A correspondence analysis pictures the cross-national similarities and dissimilarities on a visual map. The attempt to visualize reporting styles found evidence in support of Hallin and Mancini’s (2004a) models. The publication reveals three approaches to newsmaking: 1) a U.S.-led model of ‘rational news analysis’ (coexistence of objective and interpretative journalism), favoring critical yet fact-based interpretation of political affairs; 2) an Italian-led model of polarized, negative, conflict-oriented and opinionated reporting (coexistence of opinionated and negative news); and 3) a Germanic model of disseminating news with views, although with an emphasis on rational, factual and consensual reporting (coexistence of news and opinion). In addition, the analysis supports Hallin and Mancini’s theoretical assumption that French and British newspapers occupy borderline positions. However, it also finds an opportunity for further development of the models because the ideal of Anglo-American journalism as a coherent benchmark as established by Chalaby (1996) turned out to be of limited value. The correspondence analysis shows that the internal consistency of the Anglo-American model is lower than the theoretical ideal allows us to expect. The proximity of the British to the Corporatist newspapers can be explained by a greater appreciation of the dual dissemination of “news and views” in their day-to-day coverage of politics. In sum, the publication contributes to the comparative communication research, as it merges a historically informed intuitionalist approach with systematic content analysis and revises the assumption about the affiliation of individual systems to certain models. The last column in Table 1 illuminates that this publication has one major shortcoming: the absence of longitudinal analysis. This temporal assessment is addressed in Publication II.

Publication II: Long-Term Trends in Political News Reporting
The second publication by Umbricht and Esser (2013) titled “Changing Political News? Long-Term Trends in American, British, French, Italian, German and Swiss Press Reporting” adds a temporal perspective to the aforementioned mapping exercise of discursive, content-based models. It is linked to the first publication in that it investigates similar theoretical dimensions.
Additional factors introduced include the indicators of news sources and topics, more fine-grained analyses, and discussions of Research Questions 2 and 3 about temporal changes and the convergence hypothesis. The study systematically examines whether the political affairs coverage produced by the press in six Western media systems have retained their characteristic differences over time or whether the content has become more similar. It derives hypotheses from the three ideal typical theoretical media system models by Hallin and Mancini (2004a), which showed their distinct contours most clearly in the 1960s and 1970s, and relates them directly to measurable characteristics of news content. The study examines whether the historical and structural differences behind the models are reflected in political news coverage, and whether there is a blurring of reporting styles over time (convergence thesis) due to globalization (global interconnectedness), commercialization (audience response), and journalistic professionalization (diffusion of critical professionalism, recognition of norms, imitation of reporting techniques).

While the publication finds clear cross-national convergence in the preference for opinion-orientated stories in covering politics, it also finds persistent divergence in the use of objectivity-related and negativity-related reporting that continues to differentiate the models. First and with regard to opinion-orientation, the emerging convergence tendency of Western newspapers to devote approximately one-quarter of their political stories to opinionated journalism may be explained by a gradual blending of European influences (with a high appreciation for commentary) and American influences (with a growing appreciation for interpretation). Second, negativity is highest in systems marked by high levels of political polarization (ITA, FRA) and/or high levels of media commercialization (USA, GBR). Third, as hypothesized, objectivity is most prevalent in U.S. newspapers and least prevalent in polarized pluralist systems. The longitudinal analysis shows that British newspapers absorb more and more polarized elements in their day-to-day coverage of politics. Objectivity originated as a reporting convention in the U.S. and is gradually separating U.S. and British newsmaking “making the myth of a coherent Anglo-American ideal less and less sustainable” (Umbricht & Esser 2013, p. 214). The U.S., however, stands out as the press system that values opinion the least and the use of sources and other objectivity-related story elements the most.

The publication concludes that political reporting practices cannot be integrated into existing media systems typologies without contradiction. Nevertheless, it confirms several
expectations derived from the work by Hallin and Mancini, including their suspicion that France and Britain are borderline cases (see also Publication I). While both the liberal and the polarized pluralist systems lose internal consistency over time, the analysis reveals a remarkable resemblance and stability of reporting patterns at German and Swiss newspapers. Further analyses are needed to draw new groupings of press systems with regard to the use of sources in public discourse, where the patterns found here are only partly reconcilable with the theoretical expectations. Similar technological and economic developments around the globe and increasing transnational exchanges between the national models have not led to an overall standardization of news practices, which further underlines the relevance of comparative research.

The next two publications divide newsmaking into professional and commercial criteria, a differentiation that is neglected in the first two publications (see also Table 1). Publication III is dedicated to the professional imperatives of news reporting and focuses on the hard news paradigm.

Publication III: The Evolution of Objective and Interpretive Journalism
The third publication by Esser and Umbricht “The Evolution of Objective and Interpretive Journalism in the Western Press. Comparing Six News Systems since the 1960s” primarily addresses the professional imperatives of media logic and traces how the hard news paradigm as an ideal has been implemented, modified and expanded over time in Western press systems. The news paradigm refers to fact-oriented and evidence-based news reporting and is operationalized as consisting of reporting conventions in the pursuit of facticity, balance, transparency and authenticity. The publication traces how the paradigm diffused differently depending on external contextual conditions, such as longtime press freedom, liberal democracy, a substantial newspaper market with strong demand, and openness towards Anglo-American press principles. Further, it examines how the news paradigm expanded with the components of interpretative analysis (reflecting U.S.-style critical scrutiny) and expression of opinion (reflecting European-style advocacy). The expansion of the hard-news paradigm is mirrored in the growing popularity of story genres that allow journalists to include opinion (commentaries or stories mixing

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6 For reasons of simplicity, the term “Swiss” is used throughout this dissertation instead of “Swiss-German”. This term is not entirely accurate, as the news outlets analyzed for Switzerland are limited to the German-speaking region of Switzerland. Therefore, the terms “Swiss newspapers” and “Swiss journalists” introduced in this volume only pertain to “Swiss-German” newspapers and journalists.
information with opinion) and interpretation (stories mixing information and interpretation) in political affairs coverage but is also redefining classical pure news items that are becoming more analytical in their discursive composition. It shows how pure news items have been increasingly geared toward analysis (answering why-questions) and contextualization of political events (addressing causes and consequences of occurrences and showing connections to other events).

A trend toward more interpretative content seems justifiable and may even contribute to an informed citizenry and enriched public sphere if it provides deeper meaning and explanation of political substance and issues (“policy”), but it seems more disputable if it focuses merely on politicians’ strategies and tactical maneuvers (“process”). However, the cross-temporal analysis has shown that “process”-centered interpretation is on the rise in all six press systems at the expense of “policy”-related interpretation, a trend that warrants future attention.

In line with the two previous publications, the findings have led to the formation of three distinct news cultures: 1) a U.S.-style of interpretative journalism that relies heavily on experts, direct quotations, and considerations of pros-and-cons; what distinguishes American from continental European journalism is its distance from commentaries; 2) an Italian style that is furthest removed from the principles of facticity and balance and which can be considered a prototype for mixing interpretation with opinion; the Italian press system also applies more of an interpretative news style to covering “process” than “policy”; 3) a third approach to implementing the news paradigm is found in the Corporatist systems (GER, SUI), which are known for a characteristic coexistence of commentary and objectivity.

Despite growing trans-border diffusion and interconnectivity, newspapers in the six systems have not become more similar in their use of facticity-related news practices (measured by an increasing standard deviation indicating greater cross-national variation). However, the differences for “commentaries” and “items mixing information and opinion” decreased in all systems, thereby becoming more homogenous.

In sum, the publication contributes to a more nuanced understanding of news cultures and finds evidence for a gradual transformation of the objectivity ritual toward a more interpretative approach. It confirms “hybrid” forms of journalism in which old (tradition-bound) and new (border-transgressing) elements were freely mixed. U.S.-led reporting conventions in pursuit of facticity, balance and critical professionalism have spread to European systems. However, American newspapers have slowly moved along a more opinion-oriented trajectory that is more
in line with the European tradition. All Western news systems have experienced a shift from journalists as observers to more autonomous interpreters of politics. Changes in market dynamics, levels of education and the status of the profession have contributed to this development.

Publications IV takes a closer look at these market changes. It is devoted to the commercial reporting standards and integrates the political economy literature. The publication not only illuminates the differences and similarities at the system level – a shortcoming of the first three publications – but also offers, as specified in Table 1, a cross-organizational analysis.

Publication IV: The Push to Popularize Politics

The fourth manuscript (work in progress) by Umbricht and Esser, “The Push to Popularize Politics: Comparing Public Affairs Coverage in Six News Systems since the 1960s”, tackles the commercial imperatives of media logic. A core assumption in comparative journalism research holds that the increasing commercialization and globalization of the news industry encourage transnational standardization processes in the framing of news stories across different press systems toward newspapers with a catchall audience (see Aalberg et al. 2010; Curran et al. 2009). Hallin and Mancini (2004a, pp. 277-279) consider that a greater audience orientation has implications on newspapers in that news content will be streamlined, for instance, toward sensationalized, emotionalized, and scandalized presentation standards and that reporting patterns become more homogenous. It is argued that news organizations are tempted to imitate profitable reporting techniques seen in other countries because they are faced with similar challenges, such as declining circulation, sudden rise of free dailies, loss of advertising to the Internet, and growing competition from new communication channels. Growing co-orientation within the global news arena as well as economic liberalization and political deregulation are assumed to contribute further to a standardization of news practices. However, there is little conclusive evidence available that supports a converging trend towards market-driven journalism (see Brants 2007, p. 108); this publication remedies this shortcoming. It outlines five conditions that either promote or inhibit such an entertainment-centered reporting style: commercialism, tabloid tradition, communication culture, professional autonomy, and type of medium.

Cross-nationally, the news stories in the polarized pluralist news systems were more sensationalized, scandalized and emotionalized in the 1960s than expected, whereas the Anglo-
American newspapers used these indicators to a lesser extent, even though they have a much longer tradition of mass-circulating and tabloid papers and higher degrees of journalistic autonomy. These findings portend that the communication culture (i.e., high context (media) cultures) has a stronger influence on news content and is linked to a more aesthetics-driven, expressive, associative and sometimes spectacular reporting style than is often expected (see also Hahn, Lönnendonker, Rosenwerth & Schröder 2010; Hall & Hall, 1990; Schroeder 1994). In the 2000s, sensationalized reporting is still highest in Southern European newspapers, followed by the Anglo-American systems, while the news is least sensationalized in the Corporatist Germanic newspapers. For emotionalization in the 2000s, the Anglo-American news systems have overtaken the Polarized news systems, whereas the Corporatist Germanic trend lines are again the lowest. Cross-temporally, the analysis has shown that the three presentation patterns have increased in most news systems. Strikingly, the largest increase occurs in the more commercialized Anglo-American news industries. The increase in scandal politics is also associated with changes in the judicial system, which has become more independent and assertive, particularly in Mediterranean countries, and with growing journalistic autonomy. Regarding the convergence thesis, the differences between the six news systems have not clearly decreased with respect to scandal reporting, sensationalization and emotionalization. The Corporatist news systems are more resistant to tabloid trends, as all three indicators rank lowest in the 2000s. Germany and Switzerland have newspaper-centric systems, and their newspapers can rely on high subscription rates and are thus less dependent on daily kiosk sales. Other reasons for low scandal reporting in Corporatist systems may be a weaker adversarial journalism culture, stronger corporatism and consensus politics. The Corporatist countries’ unique institutional arrangements apparently suppress popularization effects to a certain degree, which in turn undermines convergence trends. In the 2000s, scandalous stories were most frequent in the two majoritarian democracies of Britain and France. It can, though, be argued that scandalization may be negatively correlated with features of consensus politics, such as power sharing, proportional representation, compromise and cooperation between opposing forces (see Lijphart 1999). Although the three indicators increase most in the Anglo-American countries, the findings presented here reveal that “commercialization” is not the explanation for everything. In contrast, the link to the long-established systemic features underlines the importance of the path dependency (i.e., context media cultures, political structures) and stresses the continuing
relevance of context-based comparative research. At the organizational level, sensationalized, emotionalized, and scandalized news reporting are lowest in national papers, moderate in regional dailies, and highest in news weeklies. Regional papers that normally have less financial resources at their disposal seem to be particularly vulnerable to commercial pressures, expressed by a steady upsurge in the practice of all three content-based variables.

**CONCLUDING DISCUSSION AND OUTLOOK**

This dissertation contributes to the comparative communication research in several ways. So far, the comparative literature has been influenced by conceptions of journalism that have arisen from self-declarations of journalists through surveys or from conceptions of media systems that focus on structure but not on content. The findings presented here rest upon a study of manifest news content reflecting actual production practices. Based on rich data sources, this dissertation fills a substantial gap in the research literature and helps validate and improve existing typologies in important ways.

**Main Conclusions**

From a cross-national and cross-temporal standpoint, this dissertation concludes that mediatization effects on news content are more widespread today than in the past but have developed differently across countries.

The longitudinal research design allows for analysis of transnational processes of change and answers *Research Question 2*. From a cross-temporal perspective, the findings show signs of rising commercial and professional aspects of media logic. *Sensational* and *emotional* presentation standards as well as *negative* and *scandalized* aspects increased in most but not all newspapers. To be exact, this transformation towards a more commercial logic is less distinct in the Swiss newspapers and does not apply to German news items, at least not with the measures used in this study. Journalists from the Corporatist systems use these standards at a generally lower level than do journalists from the other systems. British, American and Italian news organizations seem to be more vulnerable to the impact of the commercial imperatives of media logic than those from the other press systems. In line with expectations, *negativity*, *sensationalization*, *emotionalization* and *scandalization* have grown the most in the commercialized U.S. and British press. What is surprising, though, is the intensity with which
negativity and scandalization grew in the British papers. Interpretive patterns that refer to the journalists’ aspirations to preserve their independence from political manipulation similarly increased, leading to more contextualization and why-reporting and even commentary on political events. In the 2000s, most news organizations published fewer pure-news articles and more analysis- and opinion-based pieces than in the 1960s. This change shows that the profession of journalism is undergoing a profound shift in that interpretive journalism has largely supplanted descriptive reporting. At the same time, the diffusion of the professional ideal of objectivity is making headway throughout Western press systems (with the exceptions of Italy and Britain). Thus, while one could speak of the “Americanization” of European news coverage in terms of the importance of objectivity, there is also a “Europeanization” of U.S. coverage taking place with respect to the role of analysis in political coverage (two-way influences).

The cross-national research design of this dissertation allows us to answer Research Question 1. The presented results show that countries were predominantly aligned in the 1960s to the predictions of the three Hallin and Mancini media system models. Most expectations and hypotheses raised in this dissertation are confirmed, offering valuable knowledge for the international comparative journalism research. The summary of the study proves that the historical-institutional pathways are continuously relevant with regard to news content and indicates essential differences in news reporting across the six countries under investigation. In line with expectations, the study finds a high degree of opinionated coverage in French and Italian newspapers and a low degree in American news items.

Throughout the past decades, a process of convergence has taken place in terms of how much opinionated coverage is offered to readers. As expected, the study finds U.S. news reports to be the most objective, French and Italian news reports to be the least so, and the Corporatist model to take a middle position. The British press is a noteworthy outlier. Already in the 1960s, it made less use of objectivity-related story elements than anticipated. Even at the end of the study period, the British reporting style is closer to that of some Mediterranean papers than to U.S. papers. As anticipated, the level of negativity, scandalization, sensationalization, and emotionalization are lowest in Swiss and German news reports. News organizations in Corporatist countries are mainly embedded in consensus democracies with moderate polarization that rely on compromise and negotiations for political decision-making. In addition, the press markets of Switzerland and Germany are not very commercialized, and journalistic cultures are
not very adversarial. American and British papers were anticipated to be fairly negative, scandalized, sensationalist and emotional because of a stronger market-orientation, the need for dramatic, conflict-oriented storytelling, and a long watchdog history. However, this dissertation finds that the press in polarized systems is the most negative and sensationalist. The fact that the press in these systems is often involved in polarized battles among fragmented parties and that they are characterized by deep cleavages, sharply opposed ideologies and open political conflicts helps explain these findings.

When integrating the various results of the four individual papers to draw broader conclusions about the underlying news cultures, three approaches to newsmaking emerge (summarized in Table 2). As expected by the theoretical discussions of the models, the “American prototype” of newspapers favors highly objective yet critical analyses and integrates a large amount of sources. What distinguishes American from continental European journalism is its distance from commentaries and other forms of opinion expression on the news pages, which was true in the 1960s and continues to be true in the 2000s; however, while opinionated news was nearly entirely absent in the 1960s, it gained in importance over time. However, U.S. journalism represents a preference for mixing information with interpretation. The U.S. style of interpretative journalism has special characteristics: it relies heavily on experts, direct quotations, and considerations of pros-and-cons.

In contrast, the “Italian prototype” of news stories centers on opinion-orientation, integrates highly negative and conflict-focused information with much lower levels of objectivity (i.e., facticity and balance), and shows the highest preference for political elite sources, which supports most of the expectations. The Italian prototype has remained unique with respect to its use of interpretative and opinionated news and uses negative news to similar degrees as do the American and British systems.

A third approach to newsmaking is found in the reporting style of the newspapers of the Corporatist systems. The “Corporatist Germanic prototype” has become Americanized in the use of objective news but remains hesitant in adopting an overly negative, sensationalist, scandalous and emotional stance toward politics. As anticipated, the journalists in the Corporatist systems are far less negative or critical and follow the objectivity ideal at a respectable level. The Corporatist systems are known for their characteristic coexistence of objectivity and commentary. Swiss and German journalists seem to have attentively adopted many of the
facticity-related principles of the hard-news paradigm but also display an aversion to direct quotes from sources. Instead, they themselves prefer to take the lead in their stories, thereby opening the door to opinion. In fact, the Swiss and German newspapers show great similarity in their reporting patterns and the Swiss and German journalists seem to have increasingly come to a similar understanding of newsmaking.

This dissertation also confirms the assumption derived from the work from Hallin and Mancini that France and Great Britain are borderline cases of their respective models. These two noteworthy cases seem harder to properly classify into existing media models (see Research Question 4). The French papers have sharply reduced their preference for opinionated journalism, whereas British papers have given it even more space. Today, British political affairs coverage seems more in line with the reporting styles of the Italian system than with the U.S. press system. British journalism was placed between Corporatist and American styles in the 1960s and then moved to a middle position between the American and Italian styles in the 2000s. Negativity, scandalization, sensationalization and commentaries dramatically increased in the British press. These reporting criteria are typical characteristics of Italian newspapers. The British press was more consistent with the Corporatist model in the 1960s and has taken on several features of the Mediterranean model over time. The findings reveal that the Anglo-American tradition as “the” reference model is not a coherent benchmark when discussing news content. The Anglo-American ideal has turned out to be a category of, at most, historical value and seems less and less sustainable. Britain differentiates itself from the U.S. in its lower degrees of objectivity in the news, its greater emphasis on opinionated news stories and its much higher growth in the use of negative and scandalous stories. Finally, French journalism is located between the Italian and Corporatists style both in the 1960s and 2000s. French newspapers increasingly distinguish themselves from the Polarized Pluralist prototype of news systems in their greater respect for the objectivity norm, decreasing opinion-orientation, sharply declining focus on political elite sources, and growing emphasis on individual sources.

Hallin and Mancini have recognized that their own typology may benefit from adding an empirical content analysis component, and I am optimistic that the revised typology resulting from this dissertation contributes to a more nuanced understanding of journalistic news cultures in comparative perspective. It follows from my analyses that the three major reporting styles of
the 1960s as the 2000s (American, Italian, Corporatist) could be described as a triangle that stayed fairly stable (with the exception of the British transition from an Anglo-Corporatist to an Anglo-Polarized style). However, that triangle shifted in its entirety more toward interpretive journalism (answering why-questions, addressing causes and consequences of occurrences, showing connections to other events, and increasingly relying on process-related topics) and somewhat more toward popularized public affairs (highlighting the sensational and emotional facets of the news and hunting scandals or allegations of corruption among political leaders) as the decades passed.

[FIGURE 3 HERE]

Based on these lessons learned, one could conclude that mediatization tendencies exist, albeit in different forms and degrees in different news systems. As already described in the Introduction, I do not assume that a process towards more mediatized reporting patterns are per se problematic for society. A growing contextualization and profound interpretation of complex issues may indeed help the average citizen to gain a better understanding of politics. On a less positive note, the findings also reveal that “process”-centered interpretation that highlights politicians’ strategic maneuvers is gaining ground in relation to “policy”-centered public affairs coverage. This transformation combined with a more entertainment-oriented approach to newsmaking raises legitimate democratic concerns (particularly regarding the British news system that has more obviously changed in this direction) when considering that it has been argued that these developments lead to public cynicism and political apathy. Nevertheless, we should refrain from jumping to the conclusion that everything (i.e., the public affairs coverage) is getting worse and is jeopardizing the democratic public sphere. Future research should therefore address the consequences of an intensified media logic in newspapers. Content analyses must be linked to surveys and experiments to figure out the effects of mediatized news content on citizens’ behaviors and attitudes. This dissertation contributes by adding some pieces to the puzzle, and a more complete and, thus, convincing picture emerges through the sum of all scientific contributions (e.g., in the context of the NCCR Democracy).

Regarding the widely spread assumption of convergence, the findings prove minimal support (see Research Question 3). Despite the global forces within national media systems, political news coverage is still mainly shaped by a national policy agenda and a national political culture. Although the study finds transnational news logics in Western press systems (e.g.,
increasing interpretation and objectivity; integration of individual sources into news stories), the differences between the models have not dissolved across the board. The differences between the countries have decreased only with respect to opinion-orientation and sensationalization in covering politics, but the use of objectivity-, negativity- and emotion-related reporting features continues to differentiate journalism models more or less according to the theoretical expectations. These fairly stable tradition-bound differences in political news reporting prevent a universal homogenization of reporting patterns. For instance, German and Swiss journalists are less guided by commercial aspects of media logic and resist the intense use of negative, sensational, emotional and scandalous news. At the same time, however, British, American and Italian newspapers seem to be forced to adapt to market pressures, as their levels of commercially oriented news items increase the most.

In sum, political reporting practices cannot easily be integrated without contradiction into existing media system typologies. System differences do not map directly onto differences in news content. This is to say that new journalistic features are not adopted one-by-one but are shaped and adjusted by local customs and deep-rooted traditions that function as favorable or unfavorable opportunity structures. Hence, empirical approaches to newsmaking become more layered, multi-faceted, complex and hybrid. These hybrid reporting styles suggest a fusion of country-specific reporting patterns with elements of a transnational news logic. Although journalism may be confronted with similar technological and economic changes around the world, there is no general trend toward homogenization of journalism, at least not in the press. Few transnational actors have emerged in the press sector, and there is no workable commercial business model for truly global journalism that offers one single global vision of the world. What we do see, particularly in newsrooms in globalized metropolises such as New York, London, Paris and others, are global and domestic influences that come together, creating blended news cultures that mix transnational and national aspects. In short, the national context does matter for journalistic values and practices, particularly in this age of increased global news flows.

Limitations
This dissertation is not without limitations. Future studies and comparative political content analyses should therefore tackle the following points.
**Explanatory approach:** This dissertation has conducted explorative procedures, and the discussion of possible relationships between contextual conditions and the findings are not based on a strict causal design. Future research should elaborate on explanatory conclusions of causality and connect news content to the macro data of the media structure (i.e., degree of media competition, degree of press concentration, circulation figures, advertising revenues, and advertising spending as a percentage of gross domestic product). Based on such structural data, more sophisticated statistical analyses can be conducted. One possible avenue for future research is explanatory procedures such as *Qualitative Content Analysis* when analyzing news content to answer the question “what are the conditions for variations over time and across systems”. This dissertation serves as a starting point and further analyses are planned to causally explain variations in news logic.

**Use of multiple research methods:** The finding presented here that various news systems have shifted from the journalist as observer to a more autonomous interpreter of complex problems is consistent with the outcomes from surveys of U.S. journalists who argue that the interpretative role has become more important since the early 1980s (see Beam, Weaver & Brownlee 2008; Brownlee & Beam 2012). This congruence of survey and content analysis findings is more convincing than the evidence from either separately and reinforces this dissertation’s findings. Combining more than one methodological approach (whether qualitative or quantitative) for gathering data and investigating a research question provides a more complete set of findings and should therefore be striven for in future analyses. Such a procedure allows more substantiated claims about the relation between the views of political journalists and news content and answers the call for more studies that link journalists’ attitudes and values to the content they produce (e.g., see van Dalen 2011, Vos 2002).

**Expansion of the study’s scope:** a) *Spatial Expansion:* Another limitation of this dissertation is the geographical restriction to Western news systems (all established democracies with stable political culture and free market economies). It would be desirable to extend this Western-centered focus to other parts of the world to prevent faulty generalizations. However, the availability of coding material from the 1960s will be a challenging task in many countries. 

b) *Expansion of news outlets:* This dissertation has analyzed three press titles per country, which represent a substantial portion of their respective systems. Nonetheless, no three papers can represent an entire press system, and future research ought to consider replicating this study with
more newspapers. Further, it would be interesting to ask the same questions raised in this dissertation with respect to news on TV, Internet, and radio to examine whether some media types are more susceptible to producing mediatized news content than others. With evermore citizens turning to the Web, a core question is how the arrival of new online media and mobile communication (with its openness, interactive structure, and flexibility) will contribute to the present understanding of mediatization. Finally, the organizational differences have only marginally been addressed in Publication IV, and future research ought to address this issue more systematically.

c) Temporal expansion: A methodological challenge was the sampling of the routine periods and the uncertainty whether in some years extraordinary national events influenced news reporting (e.g., elections, wars). The dissertation has tried to take such events into account when discussing the findings, making me confident that the presented results provide an accurate picture of news coverage during routine periods.

Functional equivalents: A major challenge in comparative research is finding functional equivalents when analyzing news content. This dissertation focuses on front pages, which was theoretically derived and legitimated; however, the comparison became difficult when news magazines were included, as in the second phase of the NCCR Democracy. Some were designed such as newspapers, while others appeared with a proper cover, which made the selection of news stories rather challenging (for more details on the sample, see Publication I, p. 995, Publication II, p. 204)

Connection to the concepts of democracy and mediatization: To connect this study more explicitly to democracy and the concept of mediatization, additional manuscripts are being prepared for submission. One planned publication tackles diversity in newsmaking and discusses the range of the topics covered and the sources and perspectives being presented in the press. It refers to one of the media’s key roles, which is to provide a forum in which a broad and unbiased spectrum of viewpoints is offered that allows citizens to form their own opinions. A second manuscript will be more closely linked to previous mediatization research and explores the features of interventionism, such as journalistic initiative in newsmaking since the 1960s.

The “social-constructivist” tradition of mediatization is particularly related to digital media and personal communication. It is more involved in everyday communication practices and focuses on the changing communication construction of culture and society (see Hepp 2013, p. 4).
Despite these shortcomings, I am convinced that this dissertation is an important contribution to the relatively undeveloped field of comparative political communication research. Hopefully, it helps inform our understanding of the developments and trends in newsmaking across time and space and may provide a point of reference for researchers seeking to develop similar journalism models for other parts of the world.

**Future Directions for Political Communication Practice**

Finally, this dissertation discusses the implications of media logic in relation to democratic newsmaking and addresses what communication researchers can do in terms of policy recommendations. At times, contemporary news media organizations fall short of fulfilling their democratic responsibilities, and there is growing concern about leaving media outlets fully to market forces. These forces may threaten the basic democratic functions of the news media. The problem intensifies when news organizations become more interventionist and take over functions and powers that had initially been the preserve of political leaders, political institutions and political organizations. It is challenging for citizens but also for politicians when the mass media exaggerate their control function and focus excessively on the negative aspects of politics.

To report on topics such as scandals or corruption is not necessarily detrimental. The critical watchdog function is fundamental for keeping political authorities accountable by monitoring their activities and revealing possible abuses of political power (see Curran 1991). However, a problematic trend could be the increasing popularity of investigative reporting leading to false allegations and pseudo-revelations of scandals to entertain the public and increase sales. It is questionable when news reporting blindly builds on stereotypes, speculates instead of thoroughly investigates possible consequences, or actively invents scandals to capture public attention.

Policy makers may consider how media policy may ensure that media outlets contribute to the functioning of our democracies. Tools to achieve this goal may include setting some general rules and encouraging media organizations to abide by self-chosen principles.

Naturally, such normative principles may require media businesses to accept and adopt certain accountability standards in their political affairs coverage, even if such quality standards are costly. It may also require media regulators to set framework conditions that provide incentives for media businesses to institutionalize and adopt self-regulatory bodies and practices that monitor content, respond to complaints and observe their responsibility with regard to the
common good. However, because the principle of media freedom forbids direct control, the most effective policy implication for us as scientists is to aspire to an ongoing public debate that raises awareness among political actors, media actors, and the news consuming public about how vital these qualities are for a healthy democracy. It is our responsibility to investigate potential gaps between normative aspirations and empirical realities. One way to do so is to collaborate with leading journalism schools or media organizations of all kinds, to which our latest findings from journalism studies should be presented. Such interchanges allow overcoming inhibitions on both sides: academics are said to be out of touch with the real world of journalism, whereas media practitioners are condemned to care little about journalistic quality standards, particularly in an era when journalistic education comes increasingly under economic pressure. Political communication scholars should embrace the opportunity to raise awareness for responsible news production processes that may facilitate positive implications for democracy. The media are perceived as democratic institutions with an obligation to help democracy work. Nevertheless, the media’s ability to keep the public ideally informed is only possible when citizens are interested.
REFERENCES


## APPENDIX

### Table 1. Overview of the Individual Publications of the Cumulative Dissertation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Publications</th>
<th>Theoretical Approach</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>News Outlets Included</th>
<th>Years Included</th>
<th>Main Objectives</th>
<th>Shortcomings, Research Gaps</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. I</td>
<td>New Institutionalism</td>
<td>Opinion-Orientation</td>
<td>National Newspapers</td>
<td>1960/61</td>
<td>First Insights into Cross-National Analysis of Public Affairs Coverage</td>
<td>Longitudinal Content Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalism</td>
<td>Journalism Models</td>
<td>Objectivity</td>
<td>Regional Newspapers</td>
<td>1972/73</td>
<td>National Analysis of News Reporting; Revise and Expand Former Models of Journalism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Negativity</td>
<td>News Weeklies</td>
<td>1994/95</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(aggregated at system level)</td>
<td>2006/07</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Negativity</td>
<td>News Weeklies</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(aggregated at system level)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly (peer-reviewed journal)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Authenticity</td>
<td>Regional Newspapers</td>
<td>2006/07</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Transparency</td>
<td>(aggregated at system level)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Interpretation</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Topics</td>
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<tr>
<td>No. IV</td>
<td>Commercialization</td>
<td>Sensationalization</td>
<td>National Newspapers</td>
<td>1960/61</td>
<td>Longitudinal Analysis of Commercial Reporting</td>
<td>Explanatory Approach/Hypotheses-Testing Causal Analysis of News Reporting (e.g., with QCA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalism Studies (most likely) (peer-reviewed journal)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Scandalization</td>
<td>Regional Newspapers</td>
<td>1972/73</td>
<td>Commercial Reporting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Popularization</td>
<td></td>
<td>News Weeklies</td>
<td>1994/95</td>
<td>Standards at System- and Organizational-Level</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Convergence</td>
<td>Emotionalization</td>
<td>(aggregated at system and organizational level)</td>
<td>2006/07</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1. Indicators of Media Logic Used in Dissertation

- Interpretative Reporting
- Contextual Reporting
- Why-Reporting
- Transparency
- Authenticity
- Objectivity
- Scandalization
- Conflict-Framing
- Incompetence-Framing
- Negative Tenor
- Sensationalization
- Emotionalization
Figure 2. Simplified Analytical Framework (Based on Blumler & Gurevitch 1999; Hallin & Mancini 2004a; Esser & Strömbäck 2012)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transnational Context</th>
<th>National Context: Media, Political, Legal, Economic, and Historical Conditions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Media Structure: Degree of Media Commercialism, State Intervention in Media System, Degree of Press Freedom, Amount of Press Subsidies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Media Culture: Political Parallelism, Market Orientation, Journalistic Intervention, High vs. Low Context Cultures, Pragmatic vs. Sacerdotal News Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Media Professionalism: Journalistic Professionalization, Journalistic Autonomy, Critical Professionalism, Rational-Legal Authority, Self-Regulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Political Culture: Reputaion of Politics in Society, Approach Towards Politics, Party Loyalties, Rational-Legal Authority vs. Clientelism</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Political Professionalism: News Management, Political Marketing, Spin-Doctoring, Outsourcing of Political Communication</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organizational Context</th>
<th>Individual Context: Individual Behavior, Role Perceptions, Preferences, Subjective Beliefs, Attitudes, Values</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>News Reporting: Format, Content, Style, Selection, Framing of News</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Supranational Level

Macro Level

Meso Level

Micro Level
**Table 2.** Presentation of Empirical Approaches to Newsmaking in 2006/07

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>U.S. Prototype</th>
<th>Corporatist Germanic Prototype</th>
<th>Italian Prototype</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Objectivity</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>moderate</td>
<td>low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinion-Orientation</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>moderate</td>
<td>high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negativity</td>
<td>moderate</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>high</td>
</tr>
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<td>moderate</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scandalization</td>
<td>moderate</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotionalization</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>moderate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 3. Empirical Patterns of Newsmaking and Underlying News Cultures

American approach:
mix of objectivity and interpretation;
critical, highly source-based, balanced, emotional,
and least opinionated reporting.

British approach:
shifted from
Anglo-Corporatist (1960s) to Anglo-Polarized (2000s)

German/Swiss approach:
mix of objectivity and (some) opinion;
consensual, respectful, unspectacular,
unsensational, unemotional reporting.

French approach:
mix of Polarized and Corporatist approach.

Italian approach:
mix of interpretation and opinion;
polarized, negative, conflictive, spectacular,
sensational, scandalous, emotional reporting.