HALMSTAD UNIVERSITY

MASTER THESIS



# Political Communication Strategies Applied on Business Organizations

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# Abstract

**Title:**  Political Communication Strategy Applied on Business Organizations

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**Level:**   Master Thesis, 30 hp

**Keywords:**  *Political communication, signalling theory, framing theory, servant leadership, impression management, social media.*

**Background:** The importance of communication is something that becomes clear within organizations. Every leader in an organization has to communicate their vision to the people in an effective way to be successful. The similarities between a political party and a business organization are quite striking. The underlying problem to this study focuses on the way successful parties communicate and connect it in a way that business organizations can use and get a similar result.

**Research question:** *How do political parties implement communication and impression techniques to achieve growth and can these techniques be replicated from a business organization to get a similar result?*

**Purpose:** The purpose of this paper is to describe the current communication techniques and strategies used by political parties resulting in these parties achieving significant growth, understand the components of those communication techniques in order to isolate the factors attributing to this achieved success and develop a model that can be replicated from a business organization in order to achieve similar beneficial results.

**Method:** A qualitative research method with an abductive approach was used in this study. Qualitative interviews were conducted with respondents who are active within the political world and political scientists. The respondents had knowledge within political communication and are active within the field. Furthermore, a detailed e-research on the selected parties' social media was done to get a visual view about their communication strategies. To simplify our results and findings in a structured and logical way, the Gioia method was applied.

**Theoretical framework:** The underlying theories consist of scientific articles were the key words was used. The articles were carefully chosen to every topic within the theory to get

a great knowledge. Moreover, the topics within the theory were specifically chosen to fit with the main topic of political communication.

**Empirical data:** The empirical data was collected through the chosen methodology and consists of the respondent's answers and the e-research. The answers are structured in the same way as the theory to keep the red thread and make the thesis logic and easy to follow.

**Findings and conclusion:** The study revealed that there is a clear connection between political parties and business organizations, broadening the research fields of both entities respectively. Furthermore, the findings were categorized based on potential value, with practices such as "thriving on dissatisfaction", "taking advantage of emotions", "showing visible structures as an organization / political party", "intentional use of weak signals", "leader's direct connection to audience" and "formulating receiver interpretation of signals" appearing to have high potential in achieving success if implemented correctly in the communication strategy.

# Table of Contents

# 1 Introduction

*In the introductory chapter, the chosen topic of the study is introduced followed by a background that results in a discussion of problems. These three sections lead to the research question, purpose, and limitations of the study, which together describe the essay's starting point.*

## 1.1 Background

Competence in communication has been an issue concerning humanity from the very beginning. Having the ability to communicate and understanding how to do so are two very different things. According to Morreale et al. (2000) "humans are born with the ability to vocalize; but not with the knowledge, attitudes, and skills that define communication competence. The ability to communicate effectively and appropriately is learned and, therefore, must be taught". As a result, communication significantly contributes to an individuals' social adjustment and participation in satisfying interpersonal relationships (Morreale et al., 2000). Communication is defined as the ability to "understand how people use messages to generate meaning within and across various contexts, cultures, channels, and media" (Korn, Morreale, & Boileau, 2000). As such, the field of communication has become a major field of research with important inputs in both individual but also collective levels, such as partnerships, teams and organizations (Craig, 1993). Specifically, in terms of organizations and collective entities, the development of communication techniques has played a pivotal role to the success, or even survival of these entities (Morreale, 2008). Due to its importance, a great number of academic fields have been developed aiming to understand the intricacies of communication and which techniques can be used to achieve positive outcomes. An example is that of leadership communication, which is a developed area that contributes to understanding management and management issues (Madestam & Falkman, 2017). What characterises managerial work is that communication takes up most of the time of managers and leaders (Mintzberg, 1973; Carlson, 1951; Tengblad, 2002). The focus is specifically on communication, as leaders need to communicate their visions and cultural conversions (Kotter, 2013). At the same time, in the field of political science, for example, communication is particularly important since political organizations are located in hostile environments, a factor that increases its effective use. In these organizations, leaders are elected by the people and must therefore influence the voters and prove that they are trustworthy (Lid Andersson, 2009). Political leaders are the main representatives of their party and the communication approach has an impact on the party, the electorate, and the leader itself (Parmelee and Bichard, 2012; Utz, 2009; Kruikemeier et al., 2013).

To resemble a political party to an organization, although it sounds as an easy task, has been omitted by political scientists so far. On an equal note, economists have largely ignored political systems except as the impinge on the market (March, 1962). However, the similarities are quite striking. A political party needs their voters, just as a company needs their customers. This includes communication with potential customers, marketing of a company's products and services, leadership and responsibility that make a company perceived as serious and legitimate. This does not differ from a political party. The party, and its leader, must

communicate with the voters, market their political positions, their visions and main issues and possess leadership that is perceived as serious and legitimate. As such, one of the most important challenges of this paper, is to show a clear link between a business organization and a political party. To this extent, the authors of this paper will proceed by initially establishing the distinctive link and then further highlighting the specific elements that influence the two systems interchangeably.

The approach of viewing political parties as business organizations is not new. Among the first to make this connection were management gurus such as Weber (1948) and Schumpeter (1976) who introduced the notion of *political entrepreneurs*. According to them, political parties evolved into serving the private interests of their party leaders, whose aim was to occupy positions of power in public office for the benefits and prestige those provided. Through this approach, the entrepreneur offers to lead and coordinate the group / party in exchange of private profit; the prestige and material advantages of public office. As a result, the party instead of becoming a voluntary organization with social objectives, is transformed into a business firm in which the public goods produced are incidental to the real objectives of those leading it. Continuing on this notion, Schlesinger (1984) further notes that the similarities between businesses and political parties are not only striking but that these processes provide grounds for dyadic analysis of the two entities for literature development. In his example, he argues that a party's election campaign uses standard marketing and advertising procedures in order to *sell a product,* in the same manner an enterprise would use them to sell private consumer goods. Similarly, Lilleker (2015) emphasises the importance of building a brand around the political party similarly to how organizations do. However, it appears that moving forward there has not been an extensive continuation on these perspectives in the literature. It appears that although political science has been extensively implementing management principles and theories in its literature, the opposite has not occurred.

At the same time, according to Hopkin and Paolucci (1999), the shifting socio-economic circumstances has led to the rise of a dominant political party model, that of electoral-professional party. The new element of this model is that of *professionalization* of party organizations, which is the dependence of the party politicians on outsiders with specific technical expertise. Combining this new model with the extension of mass communications, especially television, has enabled political parties to mobilize support around party and leadership images which are carefully prepared by public relations consultants and media experts. As an outcome, Hopkin and Paolucci (1999) argue that political parties are transformed in business entities with distinctive characteristics. For example, these business firm parties, as they name them, deny themselves the traditional cushion of loyal voters since they refuse to establish a core electorate. Instead, they shift all their focus on strengthening their leadership authority and completely identify with it. Having a charismatic leader who is clear about what points the party focuses on can therefore be decisive (Apospori, Avlonitis & Zisoulie, 2010). On the contrary, the failure of the leader to guide may mean the possible death of the party, very similar to the relationship of an organization with its CEO. At the same time, party finances depend on *ad hoc* contributions from varied interest groups, most commonly from the

business sector. As a result, Hopkin and Paolucci (1999) go so far as to suggest that these are, in reality, business organizations disguised as political parties.

In the case of both business and political organizations, effective communication techniques and strategies are responsible for reflecting the organization's status and activities with respect to its perceived societal obligations (Brown & Dacin, 1997). Research suggests that the more companies expose their ethical and social ambitions, the more likely they are to attract critical stakeholder attention (Ashforth & Gibbs 1990) and thus gain a competitive advantage against competitors in their field (Pinto, 2010). Of the two entities, political parties have made effective communication as their core competence, with much of its focus revolving around agenda setting and swaying public opinion. (Sheufele, 2000; Petersen. Slothuus, Togeby, 2010). It is therefore crucial to examine this differentiation of communication techniques between political parties and business organizations with the aim to provide grounds for the latter to reach equal success levels.

## 1.2 Problem identification

Previous research has studied communication and communication techniques in various ways. The most prevailing constructs examined are; "Framing theory" (Chong & Druckman, 2007; Fiss & Zajac, 2006; Howard-Greenvile & Hoffman, 2003; Ellingsen et al, 2012), "Impression management" (Wayne & Liden, 1995; Elsbach & Sutton,1992; Bolino, Kacmar, Turnley & Gilstrap, 2008) and "Signaling theory" (Connelly, Certo, Ireland & Reutzel, 2011, Karasek & Bryant, 2012). These theoretical constructs have been used as the dominant models to comprehend effective communication techniques in the communication literature. They will be briefly explained in the following paragraphs to provide a rough understanding of their development so far.

"Framing theory" main assumption is that individuals cannot fully understand the world and therefore actively seek to classify and interpret their life experiences in order to make sense of the world around them. Therefore, the individual's reaction to sensory information depends on schemes of interpretation called "primary frameworks (D'Angelo, 2017). Chong and Druckman (2007) argue that framing is extremely vital in communication of any form as it can alter public opinion, a phenomenon known as "framing effects". Specifically, in the case of political organizations, framing has become a major communication technique where scholars track frames to identify trends in issue definitions, compare coverage across media outlets, and examine variations across types of media (Semetko & Valkenburg 2000). For example, in a political context, the frames for social security reform differ from the frames for immigration reform. Even the same issue at different times may invoke alternative frames, whereas even old issues can be presented as "new" given an altered enough framing. Currently, the discussion on framing revolves around the concept that there are two types of frames in communication: emphasis frames and equivalency frames (Cacciatore, Scheufele, & Iyengar, 2016; Chong & Druckman, 2007; Scheufele & Iyengar, 2014; Shulman & Sweitzer, 2018) where emphasis frames examine how political issues are thematically portrayed, or in other words, the content being communicated (Cacciatore et al., 2016; Scheufele & Iyengar, 2014) and equivalency

frames are frames of equal logical integrity but use different words, phrases or method of communication (Cacciatore et al., 2016).

"Impression management" describes efforts by an actor to create, maintain, protect, or otherwise alter an image held by a target audience (Bozeman & Kacmar, 1997). In order to succeed in this, actors employ a variety of different impression techniques, such as for example complementing the target, with the aim to create a desired image (Jones & Pittman, 1982; Tedeschi & Melburg, 1984). The majority of research in this area has evolved around business interviews (Ellis, West, Ryan, & DeShon, 2002; Higgins & Judge, 2004; Kristof-Brown, Barrick, & Franke, 2002; McFarland, Ryan, & Kriska, 2003), performance appraisal (Barsness, Diekmann, & Seidel, 2005; Bolino & Turnley, 2003a; Ferris, Judge, Rowland, & Fitzgibbons, 1994; Harris, Kacmar, Zivnuska, & Shaw, 2007; Treadway, Ferris, Duke, Adams, & Thatcher, 2007; Wayne & Ferris, 1990; Wayne & Kacmar, 1991; Wayne & Liden, 1995) and career success (Judge & Bretz, 1994; Wayne, Liden, Graf, & Ferris, 1997). Lately, impression management has also been used to understand achievement motivation and goals (Elliot et al., 2018), analysing stakeholder perceptions (Diouf & Boiral, 2017; Aerts & Yan, 2017), strategic deception by using impression techniques (Luo et al., 2017; Roulin & Bourdage, 2017) and implications of social media in creating specific impressions (Raban et al., 2017; Jung et al., 2017).

According to Karasek & Bryant (2012), "signaling is all around us in our everyday lives. People signal by the way they carry themselves, speak, and interact. Organizations signal as well in their advertisements, recruiting, and annual reports, just to name a few". "In the business management field, Yan, Wang and Deng (2018) discuss the implications signaling theory in foreign direct investments. Alsos and Ljunggren (2017) speaks of the financial implications of signaling theory and gender studies affecting financing and investments of start-ups. Anjos and Winegar (2017) used signaling theory to describe strategic signaling as a means to gain outside fiancning. Gallus and Frey (2017) use signaling theory to describe the effects of awards as a means to promoting certain behaviours. In the psychology field, Jordan et al. (2017) used signaling theory to examine the ethical perspective of hypocrisy and deception in the communication process, or in other words, false signaling. In the anthropology field, Sois (2003) used signaling theory in the context of religion and social behaviors. He argues that signaling theory "acts as a lens through which we can discern the selective pressures that have favored religious practices in the human lineage" (Sois, 2003). Karasek & Bryant (2012), however, argue about potential weaknesses to signaling theory, such as the lack of multidimensional scale to be able to measure multiple signals at the same time.

To conclude, social media is a relatively new phenomenon that has changed the field of communication theory significantly. Understanding the role of social media is critical for both researchers and managers (e.g. Fong & Burton, 2008; Kumar, Bezawada, Rishika, Janakiraman, & Kannan, 2016; Schultz & Peltier, 2013). In the business context, most existing studies focus on particular issues, such as purchase behavior (Chang, Yu, & Lu, 2015; Kumar et al., 2016; Relling, Schnittka, Sattler, & Johnen, 2016), customer relationship management (Trainor, Andzulis, Rapp, & Agnihotri, 2014), brand management (Asmussen, Harridge-

March, Occhiocupo, & Farquhar, 2013), innovation management (Gebauer, Füller, & Pezzei, 2013), and employee recruitment (Sivertzen, Nilsen, & Olafsen, 2013). However, currently social media is also used in identifying political intentions and messages as well as strengthening political discussion via online forums (Hampton, Shin and Lu, 2017; De Zuniga et al., 2017), as an emergency communication platform in crisis situations (Stieglitz et al., 2017) and as a means of corporate social opportunity (Grayson and Hodges, 2017).

Therefore, due to today's constant flow of information, the ability to successfully communicate a positive image in line with societal norms is one of the most important factors for getting individuals to choose a firm, brand, or political party. To this regard, elaborate efforts are undertaken by organizations to achieve legitimacy and create a base of stakeholders that would act as a safety belt against external threats. It is thus intriguing that despite the importance of the issue, the apparent success of certain political parties has drawn very limited attention in analysing their practically proven effective communication models towards this regard.

As such, the authors have identified a major issue: as noted, there have been previous attempts at linking business organizations to political parties in order to analyse the communication techniques used by both systems interchangeably. However, such a comparison has been very superficial. These previous attempts merely adopted a political lens under which they viewed organizations and as such lacked significant depth. In this paper, the authors combine prevailing communication theories with empirical data to create a deeper understanding of the factors that influence communication success and will use the success of specific political parties and review the elements that lead to their success in order to observe and analyse whether the business literature will be extracted intact or whether grounds for new breakthroughs have been created during the process, with the goal of developing a holistic communications model.

## 1.3 Research question
*How do political parties implement communication and impression techniques to achieve growth and can these techniques be replicated from a business organization to get the same result?*

## 1.4 Purpose
The purpose of this paper is to describe the current communication techniques used by political parties resulting in these parties to achieve immediate growth, understand the components of those communication techniques in order to isolate the factors attributing to this achieved success and develop a model that can be replicated from a business organization in order to achieve similar beneficial results.

## 1.5 Limitations
In this paper, the authors will not analyse the technical aspects of social media and will purely refer to social media as a communication platform where communication patterns are observed and analysed. At the same time, the refugee crisis will not be discussed in this paper. The authors understand that it may have had an impact in terms of success, but it contradicts this paper in terms of what is examined. This paper aims to examine the "how" rather than they

"why". There always has been and will be different reasons for communication strategies to be formulated. The important aspect, in the author's view, is how these strategies were used rather than the motive of why they were formulated in the first place. Lastly, ethics about what's right or wrong is not taken into considerations within this paper. The authors only observe and report the techniques which are used and recommend them according to the potential value these techniques may return. The individuals or organizations interested in the findings and recommendations are free to use them at their own discretion

# 2 Theoretical Framework

*This section will provide a background of the problem areas that the study concerns and present previous research and theories in the field of research. To increase the general understanding of what communication is, the theory begins with overall subjects in the field of research, and then go into depth of communication on social media. Political communication will be affected throughout the theory focuses on right-wing parties active in Sweden and Europe. The theory ends with an analysis model that clarifies what information in theory is considered relevant to continue investigating in the performance of the empirical section.*

## 2.1 Literature search implementation

The collected material consists of scientific articles and relevant literature. The literature has been obtained from the library at Halmstad University and Gothenburg City Library. All literature was focused on political communication. Examined scientific articles have been used to obtain strong secondary data and literature has worked as a complement. The scientific articles have been obtained from the databases available at the Halmstad University Library webpage, where keywords for the subject area have been used. As the essay relates to communication on the internet and social media, therefore articles and literature that can be applied to today's technology was of interest. However, older articles and literature were not excluded entirely if they were applicable to the essay, especially in cases where a historical perspective was necessary. Keywords have also been based on the essay's main area of communication in various forums, for example; internet, media, and social media. The keywords that laid the basis for the searches are; political communication. This with adjectives like; social media, media, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, and Strategy. With these words combined in different combinations, a wide range could be obtained. Rinecker and Jörgensen (2014) argue that a main rule is that literature becomes more reliable depending on the number of references it contains. This has been in mind and articles with several references have therefore been used in this study.

Exclusion criteria for searching for scientific articles were carried out solely to obtain articles whose relevance was linked to the purpose of the essay. Rinecker and Jörgensen (2014) argue that a critical approach is of importance to the collected material. Rinecker and Jörgensen (2014) also clarify that factors like who published the material, which publishers, which institutions, and universities refer to the material are essential to relate to.

The choice of literature was based on what was considered relevant to the essay both regarding the parties communication on social media and literature on communication at a more general stage. This resulted in a wider picture of the viewpoints of previous theorists on the subject. Since the political communication has evolved over the last decade, with the development of the Internet and social media, the focus has also been on literature that can be applied to today's modern society.

## 2.2 Problems with the search of literature

Political communication is a subject that contains a lot of material in scientific articles and literature. Hence, difficulties arose with restrictions and the collection of relevant material, as the vast amount of material was wide, despite well-chosen keywords. Another problem regarding the collection of materials was the boundary of the publishing years of articles and literature, since communication strategy was basically the same for a long time.

## 2.3 Motivation of the scope of the theory

The extent of the theory is based on what knowledge is relevant to being aware of within the specific subject. The scope extends from basic models, theories, and strategies in communication, and then covers communication at more specified levels in the world of politics. However, communication is a broad subject and social media has been the focus of this essay. Since social media has become a popular phenomenon and is well used in political communication, theory regarding the first breakthrough of communication on these forums has been reviewed. This is to show the impact of social media and how communication with a political purpose is reflected in these forums.

## 2.4 Motivation to the choice of theory

The theory of this essay is planned and taken based on the keywords mentioned above. The theory is designed to provide a foundation in communication as well as specific knowledge of political communication in different channels. This is essential for the reader to understand and understand the essay's major subject.

## 2.5 Servant Leadership

The importance of leadership in an organization has been extensively covered in the literature. In the relatively new field of positive organizational behaviour, leadership is viewed as a key factor for engaged employees and flourishing organizations (Luthans, 2002; Macik-Frey, Quick, & Cooper, 2009). Furthermore, leadership studies have clearly moved away from a strong focus on transformational leadership toward a stronger emphasis on a shared, relational, and global perspective where especially the interaction between leader and follower are key elements (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009). As discussed above, heavily relying on the leader is also a key characteristic of current political parties functioning as business firms. However, this linking of organizations and political parties regarding leadership came much earlier from the forefather of political science, the Greek philosopher Aristotles in 300 BC (Goodman & Talisse, 2007). Aristotles took a very different approach form what Weber (1948) and Schumpeter (1976) suggested about how politicians valued their own personal profit. He took a more idealistic approach that aimed to address the very definition of what a politician is, who he defined as an ethical public server and leader whose sole purpose is to dedicate

himself or herself in the betterment of the citizens who he or she serves, laying the foundation for what later became known as servant leadership. (Goodman & Talisse, 2007).

Following the majority of Aristotle's perspectives, Robert Greenleaf first introduced the notion of servant leadership in his work "The Servant as a Leader" (Greenleaf, 1977). According to him "The Servant-Leader is servant first… It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead… The best test, and difficult to administer is this: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, and more likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society? Will they benefit, or at least not further be harmed?" (Greenleaf, 1977). As both Aristotles and Greenleaf agreed, the core characteristic of servant leadership is going beyond one's self interest. The servant-leader is governed by creating within the organization opportunities to help followers grow (Luthans & Avolio, 2003). The servant leader does not use his power to get things done but rather aims to persuade and convince his staff (Reinke, 2004). Compared to other leadership styles where the ultimate goal is the well-being of the organization, a servant leader is genuinely concerned with serving followers (Greenleaf, 1977). There have been many interpretations of the specific characteristics that define a servant leader in the literature. Dirk van Dierendonck (2011), in an attempt to summarize the most important ones, suggested that there are six main elements that a define a servant leader; empowering and developing people, humility, authenticity, interpersonal acceptance, providing direction and stewardship.

*Empowering and developing* people refers to valuing the individual and encouraging their personal development (Laub, 1999). It is about enabling people to reach their potential. As Greenleaf explains, "the servant-leader's belief in the intrinsic value of each individual is the central issue; it is all about recognition, acknowledgement, and the realization of each person's abilities and what the person can still learn" (Greenleaf, 1998). *Humility* refers to the ability to put one's own accomplishments and talents in a proper perspective (Patterson, 2003).  It is about modesty and the realization that the leader can benefit from the expertise of others and actively seek their contributions. The leader puts the interest of others first, while supporting them along the way. *Authenticity* refers to expressing the "true self," that is expressing oneself in ways that are consistent with inner thoughts and feelings (Harter, 2002). It is related to integrity and adhering to a generally perceived moral code. This is shown by doing what is promised, visibly and honestly (Russell & Stone, 2002). *Interpersonal acceptance* refers to having empathy for others, understanding their feelings and where they are coming from (George, 2000). It includes the ability to forgive wrongdoings and not carry a grudge into the future (McCullough, Hoyt, & Rachal, 2000). As Ferch (2005) suggests, "For servant-leaders it is important to create an atmosphere of trust where people feel accepted, are free to make mistakes, and know that they will not be rejected". *Providing direction* refers to communicating to people what is expected of them and what is beneficial for them and the organization (Laub, 1999). It includes tailoring tasks according to the abilities of the followers while taking into account the specific values and convictions of the follower (Russell & Stone, 2002). Finally, *stewardship* is the willingness to take responsibility for the larger organization and to aim for service instead of control and self-interest (Block, 1993; Spears, 1995). It is closely related to

social responsibility, loyalty, and team work and the goal is to lead by example in order to inspire others. It is evident that these are the most identifiable characteristics that the public expects from their political leaders as well. In that regard, servant leadership is the idealistic definition of a politician and it provides a clear link between the identical nature of function between a business organization and a political party.

## 2.6 Framing Theory

As discussed, there is an inherent challenge in both organizations and political parties to favourably present themselves to both outside and inside actors. Both need to favourably sway customers and voters but at the same time managers and political leaders need to be able to persuade their followers into beneficial courses of action. For that reason, the ability to communicate effectively has been considered a key factor affecting success or failure in the business literature. The most important element in the communication process is understanding the existence of frames. The first to introduce the notion of frames was Gregory Bateson in 1954, who suggested that frames are cognitive maps that set the parameters for people to understand 'what is going on'. He showed that interaction always involves interpretative frameworks by which participants define how others' actions and words should be understood. Frames are defined as "an aspect of cultural knowledge, stored in memory, that permit social actors to move in and out of different experiences as if they were not completely new. They are used to explain speech acts, rituals, and commonly occurring behaviours in other cultures" and that *"frames* are mental structures or schemata. *Framing* is a behaviour by which people make sense of both daily life and the grievances that confront them" (Hymes, 1974; Frake, 1977). As such, frames aim to explain the "world out there" by selectively punctuating and encoding events in order to give them meaning (Hunt, Benford, & Snow, 1994), keeping some elements in view while hiding others (Williams & Benford, 2000). As such, framing holds a strategic importance in its activities (Hensmans, 2003) and emphasizes the potential for conflict as different actors promote their particular versions of reality to target audiences (Benford, 1993; Coles, 1998; Haines, 1996). For example, if a group of people perceives that they are treated unfairly, they will apply themselves cognitively in the injustice frame and will seek to rebel against authority. At the same time, it is important to add the existence of master frames. The master frame concept was introduced by Snow and Benford (1992) to describe general frames that dominated an epoch or an era regarding social change. For example, the civil rights master frame was named after the civil rights movement of 1950s and 1960s as a struggle against discrimination. However, some broader master frames transcend epochs, regions and cultures such as the nationalism master frame that has been observed throughout human history (Oliver & Johnston, 2000).

In the framing theory, frames are mainly considered to have two types; fixed and emergent, where fixed refers to the general reoccurring behaviours that define a culture whereas emergent frames refer to the frames created by a specific activity or event (Oliver & Johnston, 2000). To showcase the importance of how frames are exploited, Oliver and Johnston (2000) explain that in an organizational level, strategic framing is heavily utilised in order to draw customers, similarly to what a political leader would aim in order to elicit greater participation in his political party. As they suggest, "when a collective action frame is recast as something that

leaders must articulate so that it better "markets the movement," the interactive negotiation of "what's going on here" takes back seat to a one-way, top-down process." (Oliver & Johnston, 2000). In other words, leaders frame their message in such a way that it incorporates existing belief systems and cultural values in order to make their message not only believable but powerfully persuasive. At the same time, Ellingsen et al. (2012) examine society in terms of frames by introducing social framing theory. According to them, people by default respond to social frames because the frame affects how others interpret their behaviour, which in turn determines their social esteem. Even a person who has not internalized norms, and who holds strictly selfish preferences, may want to appear to be prosocial. Social frames, therefore, are defined as the frames under which a society applies itself into. It refers how actions and communication is perceived in a society. Understanding the current social frame is of major importance for both businesses and political parties. (Ellingsen et al., 2012) For example, in a selfish social frame, material incentives could potentially reduce employee effort (Frey & Osterloh 2005; Pfeffer, 2007), legal compliance (Tyran & Feld, 2006; Bohnet & Cooter, 2001), and other prosocial behaviors (Koneberg et al. 2010) as well as erode cooperation (Ferraro et al., 2005).

At the same time, framing theories have also affected decision making in an organization. Specifically, frames have been viewed as an important element in organizational change practices. By framing strategic change and thereby articulating a specific version of reality, organizations may secure both the understanding and support of key stakeholders for their new strategic orientation (Benford, 1993; Haines, 1996). In this case, frames are used as a means for organizations to restore legitimacy after controversial events (Elsbach, 1994), ward off stigma (Sutton & Callahan, 1987), or otherwise protect themselves from negative events (Elsbach et al., 1998; Meznar & Nigh, 1995). Framing a strategic shift also requires the use of appropriate frames. In the business literature, there are two main types of frames triggering strategic responses; acquiescence and balancing (Oliver, 1991). *Acquiescence* implies full compliance with a strategy of placing shareholder interests as primary objective. On the other hand, *balancing* aims to accommodate the interests of a variety of stakeholders collectively. Today, it is important for organizations not only to consider co-workers, owners, or customers. They should also relate ethically to society at large and to those non-customers (Donaldson & Preston, 1995). Both require appropriate framing in order to become understood which mainly occurs during the formation of vision statements. As a result, employees who understand an organization's vision and meaningfulness in building a relationship with the consumers are valuable resources that can lead to benefits (Catasus et al., 2009).

At this point however, it would be wise to emphasize the notion of decoupling. This refers to the frames that have only been communicated but not implemented (Fiss & Zajac, 2006). Decoupling is the act of seeking legitimacy not through actual compliance to course of actions announced, but rather by actions that appeared to reveal compliance but in fact concealed nonconformity (cf. Edelman, 1992; Elsbach & Sutton, 1992). In other words, and this is very familiar to political parties as well, organizations announce desirable course of actions by appearing to conform to a specific frame simply to make a positive impression, even though the act will never be actually performed or implemented.

Lastly, another important issue affected by framing theory is that of organizational culture. According to Howard-Grenville and Hoffman (2003), "culture refers to the shared meanings held by individuals that shape their understanding of situations and guide their actions within an organization". Cultures serve as a system of classifying what is normal vs what is abnormal, what should be acted upon and what should be ignored. For decision makers, cultures give the tools and models to reduce the complexity of issues and construct strategies for actions that are suitable for their environments (Swidler, 1986). As such, cultural framing is the process of using frames to legitimate and propel actions within an organization, where the challenge lies in *frame alignment,* that is to present the action that needs to be taken as compliant with the culture existent in the organization (Howard-Grenville & Hoffman, 2003). At the same time, an organizations culture can also influence the strategy. The culture is typically a product of an organizations history. The consequences of history and culture can cause strategic drift due to failure to create necessary changes (Johnson, et al., 2014). For example, in order for a company to promote a change initiative, it needs to frame it as a life or death scenario to provoke the sense of urgency and avoid resistance.

## 2.7 Impression Management

Impression management can be viewed as the continuation or outcome of framing theory. The main focus here is the outcome; that is the favourable impression achieved from proper framing practice. Wayne and Liden (1995) define impression management as "those behaviours that individuals employ to protect their self-images, influence the way they are perceived by others, or both". For organizations, that refers to the endorsement and support from social groups and individuals, where the key objective is to achieve legitimacy. Legitimacy is achieved when stakeholders – that is, both internal and external audiences affected by the organization- support the organization's goals and activities (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Pfeffer & Salancik (1978) point out that an organization only needs to be endorsed by some and not all segments of society to remain legitimate even in cases of external attacks. To this point, Palmer (2003) raises the issue of ethics. According to him, ethics is often a matter of what is considered right and wrong and there are different opinions about this affected by different elements such as different cultures. It is impossible, because of this reasoning, for an organization to capture an entire population (Palmer, 2003). Meanwhile, it is possible that a company in search of new customers damages the confidence of individuals who are already customers of the company (Johnson et al., 2014). Lees-Marshment (2012) agrees that it is impossible for an organization to be appreciated by all individuals in the environment and must therefore be clear with the target audience the organization is focusing on. Clearly segmentation of market stakeholders is therefore necessary to target potential voters or customers only (Lees-Marshment, 2012). If this segmentation is performed professionally, the chances of the organization receiving a positive outcome increase (Martin, 2011). On the contrary, Meyer and Rowan (1991) argue that an organization only needs to adopt visible structures that conform to social norms in order to increase legitimacy in the eyes of the public. Scott (1987) adds that by using socially acceptable procedures an organization can carry out controversial activities but still maintain the impression that they are rational and legitimate, even when those activities contradict social norms or organizational goals. In other words, by adopting visible and institutionalised

structures and practices, organizations can mask or distract attention from controversial practices by providing positive interpretations of those actions by use of impression management techniques such as justifications and excuses (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978).

To better explain this process of organizations decoupling illegitimate activities, Elsbach and Sutton (1992) created a five-step process model depicting the acquisition of legitimacy by illegitimate actions. To begin with, step one is the conduction of an illegitimate activity that generates media attention. Initial media reports will associate the organization with the illegitimate action and critique it negatively. Step two occurs when media representatives encounter two of the design features of the organization; institutional conformity and decoupling. *Institutional conformity* is the display of visible organizational structures and practices that are contradictory to the illegitimate action. This conformity implies that the organization and spokesperson are trustworthy, rational and legitimate (Reilly, 1989). *Decoupling* involves separating the organization from a member's illegitimate action. This is achieved by using individuals or groups to carry out actions on behalf of the organization but then claim they had no connection to the organization and are not formally linked to it. Decoupling can also protect or increase an organization's legitimacy by allowing a spokesperson to distance the organization and its legitimate goals from the illegitimate action of its members or subgroup of members (Elsbach & Sutton, 1992). Institutional conformity and decoupling prepare the ground for the third step in the process, which is *impression management.* Impression management takes the form of *defence of innocence* and *justifications.* Defence of innocence are claims that one is not responsible for an event or that the event did not occur (Schlenker, 1980). A spokesperson can claim that the organization did not endorse the illegitimate act and thus isn't responsible. Justifications are claims that an event was not bad, wrong, inappropriate or unwelcome because of the positive outcomes it achieved or the extreme circumstances it was performed under (Tedeschi & Reis, 1981). These tactics aim at shifting attention from the negative aspect of the illegitimate act and present it as a necessary evil that resulted in positive and needed outcomes. This results in the fourth step of the process; *enhancements* and *entitlings.* Enhancements are efforts to improve the perceived merit of an event, pointing out the progress made towards socially desirable goals through illegitimate actions. Entitlings are attempts to gain credit from the positivity derived from turning the negative event into positive (Tedeschi & Reis, 1981). Finally, the fifth and final step is acquiring organizational legitimacy. It is the outcome from the influence of both design features and impression management tactics used in the previous steps. The organization has successfully achieved shifting attention from illegitimate means towards legitimate ends and claims merit in the successful achievement of social goals (Elsbach & Sutton, 1992).

## 2.8 Information Asymmetry and Signalling Theory

Another important theory that relates to framing and creating impressions is the signalling theory and the effect of information asymmetry. To begin with, information affects the decision-making process of individuals in households, businesses and governments. Stiglitz (2002) argues that information asymmetry occurs when "different people know different things". George Akerlof, Michael Spence and Joseph Stiglitz received the 2001 Nobel prize for abolishing the traditional perspective that economists held of ignoring information

imperfections and asymmetries and largely assuming that markets with minor information would behave similarly to markets with perfect information (Stiglitz, 2000). As such, the main objective of signalling theory is "describing behaviour when two parties (individuals or organizations) have access to different information. Typically, one party, the sender, must choose whether and how to communicate (or signal) that information, and the other party, the receiver, must choose how to interpret the signal" (Connelly et al., 2011) and "reducing information asymmetry between two parties" (Spence, 2002). Signalling theory has been on the rise, aiming to assist managers and leaders in their behaviour and decision-making process analysing the following five constructs: signaller, signal, receiver, feedback and signalling environment (Connelly et al., 2011).

*Signaler* in this case, refers to an individual, product of firm who obtain private information, either negative or positive, that others will find useful. However, since signallers and receivers have partially competing interests, inferior signalers have incentive to "cheat," intentionally producing false signals so that receivers will select them (Johnstone & Grafen 1993). For example, some firms may signal future stock purchases and then not commit the signal. This is referred to as decoupling as we discussed above (Westphal & Zajac, 2001). Therefore, the notion of *signal honesty* or *signal reliability* is of importance to define the extent to which the signaler actually has the underlying quality associated with the signal (Durcikova & Gray, 2009; Davila, Foster, & Gupta, 2003).

*Signal* is the information the signaller holds. The key issue here is the signal quality. Since the information is private, the receiver sometimes can observe the quality of the information and sometimes it becomes extremely difficult to do so. As such, easy to observe signals are labelled as *strong* while the opposites are labelled *weak* (Gulati & Higgins, 2003). Warner and his colleagues (2006) refer to this as signal *clarity*, or *intensity* (Gao, Darroch, Mather, & MacGregor, 2008) or *quality* (Kao & Wu, 1994). The effectiveness of the signal can also be enhanced by *signal frequency* (Janney & Folta, 2003). Basically, signals are snapshots pointing to the quality of the signaller at a specific point in time (Davila et al., 2003). Since organizations function in constantly changing, dynamic environments communicating their continuous quality frequently enhances their legitimacy and positive perception, while reducing information asymmetry (Janney & Folta, 2003, 2006; Park & Mezias, 2005). The most important issue here though, is that of *signal consistency* (Gao et al., 2008). Conflicting signals confuse the receiver, making communication less effective (Chung & Kalnins, 2001; Fischer & Reuber, 2007). Also, signal quality is fundamentally concerned with *intent* (Johnson & Greening, 1999). A high-quality signaller will aim to produce a strong signal displaying his or her strength, but a low-quality signaller may choose to adopt a weak signal to camouflage his or her weaknesses and purposefully disorient the receiver (Filatotchev & Bishop, 2002). Meanwhile, it is important that all information is synchronised with the same signal. Failure to do so may result that the chosen target audience misses the message, which may be devastating (Soberman & Sadoulet, 2007).

*Receiver* refers to individuals or organizations who are actively searching for signals. The thing to note here is *receiver interpretation* of signals, since different receivers receive various

signals differently (Perkins & Hendry, 2005; Srivastava, 2001). At the same time, it is possible for receivers to mentally distort the signal received and create a different understanding of the signaller that differs from what the signaller aimed to emit (Branzei et al., 2004; Ehrhart & Zieger, 2005).

*Feedback* is the process of receivers communicating their perception and effectiveness of the signal to the signaller in form of *counter-signals.* The main assumption here is that information asymmetry exists both ways, therefore signallers are unsure of how the signal was perceived and require this information in order to adjust future signals (Gulati & Higgins, 2003).

Finally, *signalling environment* can affect the reduction of information asymmetry by *environmental distortion.* For example, when a signal is interpreted by the majority of a group or even society in a certain way, an individual who is unsure of how to interpret the signal on his or her own may look to imitate the decision making of his peers (Sliwka, 2007). This leads to the *bandwagon effect* where signals interpreted may or may not be accurate (McNamara, Haleblian, & Dykes, 2008).

## 2.9 Social Media

Below follows a description of what social media is and a short background about the different arenas. Every selected party is active within one or several social media described in the following text:

Facebook: Since its establishment, Facebook has grown from being a network of college students in London to becoming the largest global platform for social media. From a political point of view, Facebook has become a useful platform for sharing political messages (Tang & Lee, 2013). The last quarter of 2015 reports Facebook that the page had about 1.6 billion unique usage per month (Facebook, 2016).

YouTube: YouTube was founded in 2005 and quickly went from being an unofficial social media to having a strong impact on the US presidential election of 2008. At the presidential election there were approximately 70 million videos uploaded in total (Social Media, Web 2.0 & Internet Stats 2009; Hanson, Haridakis & Sharma 2011, p. 2). This multimedia is an example of media developed in the mid-00s that utilized two factors. Firstly, there was the interconnection of audience using the internet and secondly, the ability to create media content had become easier to perform, simply via a computer that increasingly more people have daily access to.

Twitter: Twitter has become the social media most used for strategic communication. Twitter is a real-time network that allows individuals from around the world to share information through private and public messages of up to 280 characters (140 initially). The ability to share real-time information has become a popular way to reach a large number of individuals and access to Twitter via mobile phones has further simplified the process (Tang & Lee, 2013).

Instagram: Via Instagram, images and videos are shared through private or public accounts. Through an Instagram account, the user can "follow" people in his or her vicinity, but also famous people such as fashion icons, athletes, photographers, and politicians. In 2016, Instagram had over 500 million users (iTunes Apple, 2017).

### 2.9.1 Communication on social media

The selected parties use social media to communicate to the people for different reasons. Bengtsson and Kalling (2012) and Baines et al. (2014) clarify that the dynamic world has an impact on how parties design their strategy to get the largest number of voters, which the parties like to share on social media. Apospori, Avlonitis and Zisoulie (2010) also point out that social situations are significant for which party people vote. Further, Fill (2009) clarifies that a shock strategy is appropriate to use where the goal is to surprise the target group in a way that violates social norms in society. Continuously, a shock strategy means that the recipient of the message can be emotionally concerned when the social codes are broken and the norms and values that are not considered. It can be implemented in several ways with, for example in social media. Further, Kotler (2008) has demonstrated the importance of a message being synchronized on all the channels which are used, so it is clear for the environment to understand what an organization stands for and strives for. About the use of message and social media by the selected parties, we consider that they have a clear agenda for how they want to be perceived by the environment. The parties Facebook page is covered by party information, focusing mainly on the positive aspects that laid the foundation for their successes.

From a business perspective, there has been an increase in consumers using social media platforms to gain information on products and turning away from traditional media, such as television, radio, and magazines. The rise of social media has changed the traditional one-way communication into multi-dimensional, two-way, peer-to-peer Apospori, Avlonitis and Zisoulie (2010). Social media platforms offer the opportunity for customers to interact and communicate with other consumers; thus, companies are no longer the only source of brand communication Kotler (2008). The social Web is altering traditional marketing communications where traditional brand communications that were previously controlled and administered by brand and marketing managers are now gradually being shaped by consumers. Empirical research on social media has focused on specific social media marketing objectives such as stimulating sales, increasing brand awareness, improving brand image, generating traffic to online platforms, reducing marketing costs, and creating user interactivity on platforms by stimulating users to post or share content. objectives (Ashley & Tuten, 2015; Bernoff & Li, 2008; Bianchi & Andrews, 2015; Schultz & Peltier, 2013). Apart from these proactive objectives, companies can use social media marketing in a more reactive way. Firms can monitor and analyse conversations in social media to understand how consumers view a firm or its actions Kotler (2008). Many firms also aim to reduce the risks of improper social media use by their employees by setting rules on how social media should be used in work-related contexts.

As such, social media offers a way to interact with customers so that greater salesperson responsiveness is achieved. For example, when consumers file a complaint in a social media

platform, 58% of consumers want a response; yet only 22% report receiving a response (Right Now Technologies, 2010). To this issue, social media may enable the salesperson to communicate in a more responsive manner. Secondly, social media is estimated to have serious implications on customer satisfaction. With increased interactions and contact with firms, power is shifting from seller to buyer (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). An increase in buyer-seller collaboration and co-creation of knowledge and value (Greenberg, 2010) has placed buyers on a more equal footing with sellers. As a result, customers hold higher expectations for these interactions and engagements, and organizations must adapt to meet these expectations (Hibbert, Winklhofer, & Temerak, 2012) or risk losing their customer base. For instance, a Harris Interactive report found that 82% of consumers have discontinued dealing with a company as a result of a negative experience (Right Now Technologies, 2010). Therefore, social media can play a critical role in providing a means to better enable positive experiences that meet the expectations of the customers. Specifically, the importance of information communication by the salesperson is considered as a key factor to customers' positive experiences. For example, Ahearne, Jelinek, and Jones (2007) consider information communication as one of the behaviours that salespeople can use to improve customer satisfaction and trust, even after a purchase has been made. On the same note, Agnihotri et al. (2009) argue that during the sales process, "information communication can provide not only a ground for a winning proposition but also customer satisfaction". Meanwhile, Shivinski and Dabrowski (2016) argue that social media also play a major role in how customers perceive brands, illustrating that social media communication have a positive influence on both brand equity and brand attitude.

Two-way communication benefits from social media in several ways because it allows direct communication for a user to its followers where the opportunity for quick feedback of information, thoughts and ideas is easily accessible. Such communication today is not only useful for ordinary companies but also for political activities. It offers potential for dialogue as well as interaction for political parties, which has been noted. To benefit from this two-way communication, social media are often used, such as blogs where information can be shared like Twitter, social networks like Facebook and multimedia webpages such as YouTube (Sadeghi, 2012; Scott, 2006; Wilcox, Cameron, Reber, & Shin, 2011; Hong 2013). According to research findings, Norris and Reddick (2011); Hong (2013) that this use is becoming increasingly popular with political activities where 67.5 percent of governments in Europe use at least one social media, the most common being Facebook with 92.4 percent, Twitter 69.8 percent and finally YouTube by 45.3 percent. Something to keep in mind, however, is that the use of these social media is primarily a way for governments to provide the population with information in text and video. However, it is limited how much social media are used for direct communication between the sender of the message and the population. At the same time Waters and Williams (2011); Hong (2013) argues that a mix of one-way and two-way communication is the most common. The use of social media in these contexts has increased significantly, as well as the effectiveness of communicating information in a cost-effective manner.

The new technology has led politicians with their message to reach a larger part of the public. The technology has also made it possible for individuals to choose, through most media, what

political information that matches and reinforces their ideological positions. This structure enables the political elite to influence public opinion through targeted use of new information technology. This new strategy to reach the public via the internet along with social media is one of the biggest contributing factors to how the 2008 presidential election was developed (Hong, 2013). Digitised brand building is something politicians use to communicate with the public and focuses on expressing their political attitude in a way that can easily meet the recipient (Simmons 2007; Lilleker 2015, p. 114).

The ability for politicians to reach their voters via the internet and social media has caused the traditional communication to break down. Traditional communication in this case is aimed at one-way communication where politicians reach out to the public with their message, but the chance of feedback is non-existent. The social media have made the opportunity to provide feedback and comments directly to the individual who made a statement exist (Túñez & Sixto, 2011).

After the US presidential election in 2008, the use of social media became much more successful and in 2012 elections it was common for politicians to use social media as several campaigns. Using Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram were strategies that were now implemented, which proved appropriate when about 40% of all Americans use some form of social media to stay politically active (Rainie, Smith, Schlozman, Brady, & Verba 2012's Bor 2014, p. 1196). A new opportunity to reach out to their voters and the public came via the social media as new messages could be broadcast 24 hours a day, seven days a week. This cheap and effective strategy is a method preferred when politicians can give a clear picture of themselves and their political messages (Bor, 2014). Why social media have had the impact that the phenomenon has, according to Boyd (2008); Bor (2014, p. 1197) depends on several factors. The first is that what's published on social media remains, which means that a message can be received long after its broadcast. Therefore, the public does not need to be online 24/7 to get updated with news. The second factor is the adaptability of those who use social media. By looking at what searches a user does, news can be tailored to these searches. Another factor is that it does not cost more to send a message to a million individuals than it does to send the same message to ten individuals.

# 3 Method

*The method chapter aims to clarify the approach during the study. With the help of this chapter, the reader should be able to perform a similar study with the corresponding results. The chapter describes the starting point of the essay from a qualitative point of view as well as a detailed description of the interview method.*

## 3.1 Study approach

In this study, the use of communication within political parties compared to other business organizations has been examined. The political parties have been carefully selected because of their successes the last decade. During this time the use of social media to communicate is something used by political parties to attract new sympathisers (Towner & Dulio, 2012). We have primarily used theoretical material that has been analysed. According to Bryman & Bell (2011), a literature review is the best way to examine what is already known about the studied area, which theories are relevant and which methods have been used to study the field before. The articles and have been found and accessed through Google scholar and Halmstad University library. We have also used qualitative interviews and e-research to obtain detailed information on the subject. The parties that we selected are right-wing parties which are active in European countries.

The thesis is based on interpretations of collected empirical material, which means that it is based on a hermeneutical approach. Allwood and Erikson (2010) explain that hermeneutics is the teaching of interpretation where the aim is to try and understand and create an opinion. They argue that a hermeneutical approach not only involves understanding the intellectual, but also understanding and interpreting a phenomenon. Allwood and Erikson (2010) points out that hermeneutics is based on a further source of knowledge in addition to logic and empiricism which is an impression.

Further, to simplify our results and findings in a structured and logical way, the Gioia method was applied in this thesis which is based on the article Seeking Qualitative Rigor in Inductive Research: Notes on the Gioia Methodology (Gioia et al., 2012). The reason why the Gioia method was applied is based upon two specific criteria:

- We required a method which has a well-defined process flow in a systematic and logical manner, by which we can improve the data in a concrete manner, without compromising the quality and validity.
- The need of using a method that fulfils the rigorous requirement of qualitative data analysis in its entirety was required.

The criteria above are necessary and made us feel confident with the Gioia method and we mean that this was the right approach to adopt in our thesis and within our data analysis. Based on these considerations, we felt confident that the Gioia Methodology would be the right approach to adopt in our data analysis.

### 3.1.1 Abductive Approach

There are different scientific approaches to relate empirical data to a theoretical framework (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). These are; deduction, induction, and abduction. The abduction is a mix of deduction and induction (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2008). Below follows a description of the approaches, and further, the chosen one to this thesis will be explained.

Deduction:     Theory → Empirical Data
Induction:     Theory ← Empirical Data
Abduction:     Theory ←→ Empirical Data

In this thesis the abductive approach was chosen to optimize the basis for the following analysis. The abductive approach as an alternative way to overcome the limitations the inductive and deductive approach brings and are based on empirical facts like the inductive approach, but it does not reject the theoretical approach contained in the deductive method (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The theoretical framework is developed together with the empirical research. This makes the process of the abductive approach more dynamic (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). The abductive approach involves a back-and-forth-process to find the best explanation when comparing the findings of the research with theory. Further, this makes the researchers able to extend the understanding of the theory and the collected data (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). The abductive approach can be explained as a back-and-forth-process. The reason is to find the optimal explanation when comparing the findings of the research with available theory (Dubois & Gadde, 2002).
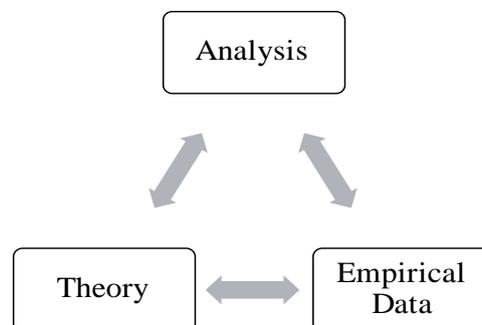


*Figure 1. Abductive approach Alvesson and Sköldberg (2008)*

### 3.1.2 Design

This thesis is a study where right-wing parties actual use of communication is reviewed with scientific theories and compared to ordinary business organizations. To increase the reliability (Bryman & Bell, 2013), political scientists have been interviewed. Because of this arrangement, most of the empirical section will be a clarification of the right-wing parties use of communication compared to how business organizations communicate on social media, together with the compilation of the collected interview material and the previous research, e-research and theory within the topic.

## 3.2 Data collection

3.2.1 Qualitative interviews

*Sample respondents*
The *background* is necessary for a truthful outcome of the (Bryman & Bell, 2011). That's why we selected respondents who have a background within the topic of political communication. *Position* is a criterion which also plays a significant role on the outcome of the interviews. Hence, to interview a respondent within the wrong area a position would cause a lack of reliability. *Experience* is an important aspect. Respondents who have several years of experience within the underlying topic. Below follows a description about the respondents:

*Table 1. Information about the Respondents*

| Respondents | Title | Position | Age |
|---|---|---|---|
| Respondent A RA | Member of parliament | Marketing/ communication | 20–30 |
| Respondent B RB | Member of parliament | Marketing | 30–40 |
| Respondent C RC | Political scientist | Lecturer | 40–50 |
| Respondent D RD | Political scientist | Lecturer | 40–50 |
| Respondent E RE | Political scientist | Lecturer | 40–50 |

*Interview guide and design of questions*
Jacobsen (1993) highlights that the conduct of interviews is important to achieve the expected outcome. In this case, it was essential that the questions held a red thread, to continually develop deepen in the subject investigated. To ensure that all areas were covered, it was necessary to develop an interview guide that worked like a checklist (see Appendix 1). This interview method is effective as it allows for comparison and processing of the material (Jacobsen, 1993).

It is problematic to structure a question in a manner that is practically possible to analyse, but at the same time highlighting the essence of what is being investigated. The important thing is to find a balance that makes the questions delimited by the methodology, but at the same time not too delimited, which means that the respondent is unable to formulate his answers. According to Jacobsen (1993) it should also be reflected on the theoretical understanding, purpose and problem posed when the interview guide is designed to make the interviews professionally performed.

*Conducting interviews*

To this essay, political scientists and people who are politically active were interviewed. At each occasion, the respondents were informed that the results of this study will be available at their disposal when the essay is published, but that the interview material is confidential. We received an approval for audio recording. This facilitated the compilation of interview data and gave the opportunity to analyse and interpret the collected material. The field of investigation is sensitive in several aspects as it concerns political ideologies. It was therefore important to keep in mind that personal opinions may have influenced respondents' responses. Designing the interview questions in a neutral manner was therefore important for not controlling respondents in a specific direction.

Qualitative studies are often divided into three stages where the first step relates to the performance of interrogators. The next step means that the collected material is analysed and then finally interpreted the data material using the theoretical tools that concern the subject (Trost, 2005). It is not necessary to take these steps in order, they can also be interwoven. To ensure that the interview questions followed a red thread, a decision was taken to conduct a trial interview. This gave an insight into which issues were relevant, if the questions needed to be restructured or change the nature of the interview time. Dalen (2011) highlights the benefits of sample interviews with one or more people, this to be able to test themselves as interviewers and to review the design of the interview lead.

*Documentation*

The interviews were documented using audio recording. This method is effective in performing qualitative interviews as the focus is on respondents' own words. Dalen (2011) highlights the importance of informing respondents that this material will only be reviewed by the researchers and that respondents will be able to listen to the material afterwards. This was taken into consideration during the interviews.

3.2.2 E-research

Social media, online portals as well as search engines gave potential to find information on the internet that acted as a tool for analyses and observations (Sams, Lim & Park, 2011). Observations took place in the spring of 2018, and the material on the official website and social media was reviewed from the parties first published material until today. Since most of this study consisted of own observations of the material published during the time the party was active on the selected social media, it meant that e-research was an appropriate method of application. The social media reviewed are Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and the parties' own website. E-research was fundamental to the empiricism and is therefore relevant material for the final analysis and Sams, Lim and Park (2011) emphasise that this is a proper way to conduct empirical material.

When reviewing social media, all material was chosen. The material that has received the highest number of visitors, comments, and dividends as well as recurring themes is something that has been considered when it has had a big impact. When the parties present material that

has received different types of response, it is important to keep in mind that all material can affect their success and popularity. This resulted in a variety of materials that were then reviewed to find the most relevant information for this study. All collected material is stored in documents and can be further examined if necessary.

The relevant social medias were examined:

*Facebook:*
By searching the Facebook search engine, the parties own Facebook page could be found. A focus was set on the messages conveyed and in what form they are presented. By processing new material as well as previously published material, we were able to get an understanding of what messages and choices of presentation that were recurring. Facebook has a constant flow of information; no specific keywords were used. On the other hand, all kinds of political messages were considered relevant to the research question and purpose of the study, irrespective of popularity.

*The websites:*
When the review of the parties' websites was conducted, focus was placed on the first viewing page. To find specific information about their policies, the links that are visible on the first page are used. Most of the review consisted of explanations and descriptions of the website's structure, colours, messages, pictures, and quotes.

*YouTube:*
To find relevant information about the parties' promotion on YouTube, YouTube's search engine was used. Through this search engine, the parties own YouTube channel could be found where only the party could update material. It minimised the risk of using material other than the parties themselves published. The advantage of YouTube is that the material is dated, which simplified the review of the parties' material from a historical perspective. Because of YouTube's design, it was even video material that was reviewed on this social media.

*Twitter:*
The parties Twitter account was found using Twitter's search engine. The updates which the party updated during the last year examined what could be applied to the research question and purpose. Texts, links, and relevant photos were reviewed to find a pattern in the use of this social media. Like other social media, it's easy to date the updates.

3.1.3 Qualitative Research
Qualitative research is focusing on soft data such as interviews Bryman and Bell (2011)., and this is what have been used in this study to answer the research question. The authors think the best way to answer the research question is s to interview individuals who have experienced and knowledge within the topic. The qualitative research is preferred when the study aims to describe situations and create theories, and this is what we aimed for. This qualitative research

allowed us to use other than numeric forms in the analysis and decide for a smaller number of respondents (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

3.2.3 Research ethical principles

There are requirements to consider when collecting data. This to achieve the ethical requirements imposed on this kind of survey.

*The information requirement:*

It is important to inform the respondents about the purpose of the survey. How the interviews are done and how the process is going to be, is also information that the respondents will be able to share, preferably at an early stage. The fact that all respondents have participated voluntarily and that their opportunity to be able to discontinue their involvement during the process must be demonstrated to meet the ethical requirements (Dalen, 2011). During the interview process we was clear on all the points and informed the extent to which the respondents' participation will affect the outcome of the essay. A clear and open dialogue reduces the risk of misunderstanding and dissatisfaction from the respondents (Dalen, 2011). In order not to neglect the importance of this, the interview guide was designed in such a way that this information was clarified for each respondent even before the interviews were begun.

*Consent requirement:*

Respondents' opinions and thoughts should not be directed to a specific individual, so it is important that all personal data be confidential. This is likely to result in respondents daring to be more open in their reasoning and responses, which is positive for the validity of the survey. Dalen (2011) argue that it can be a problematic balance when the goal is a correct and credible survey in parallel with the identity of respondents remaining anonymous. We chose not to deviate from any of these principles but failed to produce credible research results while taking into consideration the anonymity of the respondents.

*Confidentiality requirement*

The collected material from respondents may not be used for areas other than the specific survey. According to the Swedish Research Council (2002), it is forbidden to use and share studies for commercial or non-scientific purposes. Due to this rule, each respondent was incorporated into the interview material that can be linked to specific individuals, but the publication will be published.

3.2.4 Source criticism

A critical approach to the collected material was important as respondents' answers do not always reflect reality. There are various aspects that can affect the respondent's response and co-operation, for instance the design of the interviews (Dalen, 2011). These factors were in mind when respondents could be biased in the questions posed at the interview when the context and subject of the right-wing parties can be regarded as sensitive. We have also been critical of our own thoughts and preconceptions in order not to influence the essay itself during the review.

It is central to have neutrality in the processing of empirical material when the subject concerns political parties that often brings strong feelings (Dalen, 2011). This was considered by sharing information to respondents that the position of the parties ideologies is completely neutral and that the parties communication and use of social media is in focus. This probably resulted in better quality when the study was not affected by own political views. A neutral approach was also important in the execution of e-research. Because of the political successes of the parties, the last decade has given rise to active debate in social media around the parties and their positions. Therefore, the timeliness of the study can be regarded as high and something that is interesting to investigate.

## 3.3 Data analysis

In order to present our findings in a logical and structured way, the authors of this paper chose to use the Gioia methodology, based on the article *Seeking Qualitative Rigor in Inductive Research: Notes on the Gioia Methodology* (Gioia et al., 2012). The selection of this method was based on two major considerations:

- Firstly, the authors sought to use a method that fulfils the rigorous requirements of qualitative data analysis in its entirety.
- Secondly, the authors sought to use a method that could demonstrate a well-defined process flow without compromising the quality and authenticity of the raw data acquired.

As such, choosing the Gioia Methodology for our data analysis felt like the right choice since, according to Gioia et al. (2012), the very purpose of the Gioia Methodology is to "present a systematic approach to new concept development and grounded theory articulation that is designed to bring 'qualitative rigor' to the conduct and presentation of inductive research". To ensure captivating the 'qualitative rigor', the authors employed multiple data sources as well as interviews in order to create credible interpretations of the raw data that convince the readers that the conclusions are plausible and defensible. The process of this is as follows:

Concerning the Gioia method applied on the interviews, first we recorded the interviews, so we had all the raw data available and we could go through it several times. After analysing the date, a pattern crystallized, and we could find similarities among the respondents' answers. These answers were grouped up, which is showed within the 1st order concepts based on the terms used by the interviewees (informant-centric themes). The answers where divided onto different sections depending on the topic of the questions in the interview guide (this is explained further within figure 2 in the empirical chapter). This was duplicated concerning the e-research on the parties' social medias as well. In many cases, the parties chose to upload the same kind of information, same message and also similar pictures. The use of social media was grouped up in the same manner as the answers from the respondents and we started to structure the results according to the Gioia method. Hence, there was some differences between the parties use of their social media, but the main strategy was all the same.

The second part of analysis according to Gioia Methodology was to organize the 1st concepts into 2nd order themes. In this step, we aimed to link the terms and phrases from the respondents (informant-centric) and the results from the e-research with the terms in our own theoretical framework (theory-centric themes), wherever applicable in an attempt to link and group the terms used into separate and clear themes. Lastly, we combined these 1st order and 2nd order themes into aggregate dimensions to get a clear overview of the raw data acquired.

## 3.4 Reliability and validity

Validity and reliability are considered as two of the most important criteria of research (Bryman & Bell, 2011). It is not possible to count on the reliability of statistical data within this study. Therefore, the validity is assessed differently in contrast to whether the thesis has been quantitative. Validity is a criterion whose task is to measure how well the collected data compares the purpose and the question and whether it has been acquired in a manner deemed appropriate. An essay with low validity probably has low correlation with the purpose (Denscombe, 2010). The validity relates to the issue of causality (Bryman & Bell, 2011) and involves how the empirical data is in accordance with the presented theories. Bryman and Bell (2013) clarify four assessment criteria for qualitative studies. These are; credibility, transferability, reliability, and confirmation.

*Credibility:* This area relates to the research being carried out according to the rules established. At the same time, the results of the essay should be informed to the individuals who are part of the study to give them an opportunity to confirm that the essay reflects the reality in a proper way (Bryman & Bell, 2013).

*Transferability:* This means how the results of this essay can be generalised and used by third parties (Bryman & Bell, 2013). In carrying out this study, the population was the focus of obtaining knowledge about how political communication can affect the individual and thus the parties. However, other parties and companies may obtain information about how political communication can be performed on and thus utilize it for their own gain.

*Reliability:* Bryman and Bell (2013) explain that reliability works like the reliability of quantitative research. This is done by examining each part of the research process by third parties to ensure a reliable result. The reliability of this study has been strengthened through regular seminars with students and supervisors.

*Confirmation:* To ensure that the researchers' own thoughts and opinions do not reflect the study, it is important to maintain objectivity throughout the research process (Bryman & Bell, 2013). Because of the study's review of political parties, this is something that has been considered throughout the study to avoid that its own political views pervade the essay's results.

# 4 Empirical Data

*The empirical material is divided in three areas. The first area shows the results of the interviews like a summary of the respondents' answers. The second area is a review of the parties use of their communication channels on social media. This e-research was conducted on Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter. The third area is the use of the Gioia Methodology in an attempt to structure all data acquired.*

## 4.1 Interview Phase

### 4.1.1 Respondent A

Concerning the first question, RA mean that organizations and political parties are comparable entities with many similarities but draws a difference in the product the two entities are promoting. As RA states "a political party is like a company with the board and how they act. They have their tasks which they delegate to people within the party which is similar to how a company is built. Further, a political party needs their voters like companies needs their customers". However, the main difference is his view that a political party sells ideas that aim at "making the world a better place" whereas a company sells goods to achieve customer satisfaction. In his view, particular emphasis is given to a key characteristic that both entities share. That is the need for communication. Especially in the case of a political party, since their value lies in the implementation of ideas in order to make the world better, failure to attract public interest in the idea itself will result in the whole concept to end. As such, good communication is all about reaching out to the people and make them believe in the idea shared. As RA stresses, "it is the ideas as much as how the party communicate which is important, and that's what the people votes for".

On the topic of leadership, RA emphasizes the relative ease of visibility that a leader can achieve nowadays. Political leaders are now the face of their party more than ever, being the main communicator of their party's beliefs and ideas. Having a charismatic and skilled leader, well versed in his ability to persuade is extremely important but equally important is the ability of the leader to be seen and extend his message to the people. As such, "the digitalisation is one thing which has made the leader more important" where "nowadays the leader can be visible in a lot of arenas compared to some years ago". At the same time, RA believes that, in the case of right wing political parties, leaders are different from their peers since in their rhetoric they invoke feelings more than facts, mixing fake news with reality in order to get their message appeal to the people. As RA states, right wing political leaders "have the ability to play on people's feelings and concerns, that's why the right-wing parties grow. This in order to get a better position". As such, the scope of their message can affect a wider range of people since the goal is to get the crowd involved through feelings, which every individual possesses rather than elaborate fact checking, where individuals may lack the knowledge to do so.

According to RA, it is a quite common practice for right wing parties to frame incidents in a way that gives them the moral high ground or a specific advantage. Again, due to the possible lack of knowledge from the people, or their inability to acquire said knowledge due to the

constant flow of information and issues occurring around the world continuously, the right-wing political party assumes the role of the informant and they excel at it. As RA states, "things are happening everywhere, continuously and sometimes it is hard for people to do research about these happenings and the right-wing parties are very good at this situation". The problem arises when right wing political parties eloquently mix reality with fake news creating such a convincing story that the people listen without questioning what the party is communicating. Specifically, it is common practice for right wing political parties to "highlight problems which have no clear research", thus effectively increasing the difficulty of disputing their claims clearly. Even when some claims are disputed, chances are that it won't be a clear-cut dispute and will still leave lingering thoughts of disbelief in the minds of the people.

About signalling, RA state that it is not unusual for the message that a political party chooses to communicate to change depending on the arena the party chose to involve itself with. As such, flexibility on communication is a key characteristic. The party examines the arena it enters and adapts the message towards a specific target group, resulting in different messages to different target groups. For example, as RA illustrates, in the domain of social media, right wing political parties are aware that mainly younger people are active and therefore can opt to "push their messages in a more incorrect way". But it is not only age that matters. In the domain of social media, the rules are created by the party itself on its own social media page. As such, it has the freedom to communicate any message with little opposition. "There are not enough resources to check if the messages are true or false. It is considerably more difficult to do it in a newspaper or in television. Hence, in these channels it is not only the party itself who decides what to write or what to say". Moreover, channels such as newspapers or television have more than enough resources to fact check whether the message is true or false. As RA explains "what's on their channels is then classified as truth because nobody has the real facts because of limited resources to check this out.

As such, the party chooses the most optimal channel to create desired impressions with little dispute if any allowed. However, it is important to note here, that the message may be different depending on the arena entered but it cannot be the exact opposite or completely different. That is because "people must recognize the party's position whether the party appears on social media or television. The older generation reads both magazines and is still active on Facebook, so communication must match each other". As such, the message can be altered and distorted depending on the situation but not completely changed.

According to RA, social media is nowadays the key for right-wing parties. They are extremely more skilled when it comes to communication on social media and they are often early adopters. Of special interest is the fact that the bandwagon effect is emphasized here. Through social media, an individual may find like-minded people who together can nullify opposing views from outsiders. As Ra explains, "if a person is interested in right-wing parties then that's what they see on their wall on their social medias, without any vital argumentation about what is written might be wrong".

4.1.2 Respondent B

RB agrees that a pollical party and a business "are built in the same way". According to RB, both entities need a board who take care of the organization itself. The board has the responsibility to make the organization successful. A political party has its party leader and a company has its CEO. As RB believes, the biggest similarity is "the party's leader and the company's CEO. Without a good leader or CEO, the way to success is very difficult", as well as the importance of communication. Specifically, RB firmly believes that "communication is the most important tool for political parties and business organizations. Both may have good ideas or products, but if no one knows what they are up to, then what´s the point?"

RB believes that the leader and his or her leadership is the face to the people and one of the most important things for a party. He agrees that the leader must master rhetoric and have great charisma. If they have those two characteristics, then the people will listen to that person. As he explains, "impress the people with good rhetoric and good charisma is some kind of key for a political leader, especially the right-wing leaders. There are many leaders who have the competence, but they don't have the ability to show it to the people, and they are not successful".

Within the framing theory RB's first important notice here is that the political party must first be aware of its environment and become knowledgeable of things occurring in it at any given time. According to him, "a political party must be updated about the environment. They must embrace the current situations and make the best out of it. then, if they can communicate a solution to the people, well that's how you reach success". If this is achieved, then the party can initiate in making a stand and creating a message that will cause positive impressions. The important thing to note is that the value of the message being communicated in a convincing way may surpass the value of the actual message. In other words, stating to take action because you are the only one who can may be more powerful that the action being viable or even succeeding. The goal is creating the impression and not necessarily providing the solution. As RB states, "to impress the people and to gain voters one vital thing is to come up with a solution. Then, if the solution is realistic or not doesn't really matter that much. The thing is to make the people believe that the party is the only one who can do something about the current situation and save the people form a disaster". RB also continues to state that right wing political parties focus more on feelings rather than facts too. He explains that "the right-wing parties take the peoples feeling into consideration more than other parties. They can make big discussions out of nothing and try to make the people unsatisfied with the current situation and blame it on the other parties. Smearing is very common".

RB also points to the misinformation, within the signaling theory, that occurs due to the overload of information and the inability of the people to fact check effectively and constantly. According to him, "fake news exists, of course, especially among the right-wing parties. The research isn't always that good and the amount of information nowadays is huge. And thereby, the outcome is that fake news has grown among the political world". Likewise, he states that maintaining a constant message with adaptations depending on target groups. As such, "the

questions and arguments aren't the same in every channel where the parties are active. The message itself doesn't change, but the discussion is different depending on the arena".

### 4.1.3 Respondent C

Parties constantly try to maximize the number of voters by framing. A political party is thinking about communicating its policies and questions daily. A party focuses on avoiding certain types of words and statements while considering how the party will formulate its statements in a manner accepted by the public. Duplicate messages are a phenomenon that parties often use in their communication. An example is when a party wants a higher tax which is often not popular. The party then states that this decision will also benefit society and the country as a whole for the proposal to be more accepted.

High dissemination and sharing factor are important for reaching out with a message. The message may be in the form of symbolic issues that can be linked to a party. In parliamentary debates, questions may concern issues that are not a party's core issues. This is often the case, and the skilled debaters try to reword the discussion to their own advantage. If a debate is about "wrong questions", the party tries to angle the question that the party stands for and want to talk about. This is since the party has difficulty raising its voters' figures if questions are asked that the party does not wholeheartedly endorse.

About the topic of signaling, symbol issues are important to find, these questions do not have to be big. It is important to address the issues that touch people's emotional structures. Even if it isn't a big thing by itself it is important that it is a huge thing in media. A small question that depends very much on people's emotions is such questions. Then other parties get the chance to talk and give criticism based on a small trifle.

Political communication through social media is an obvious part of everyday life. The difference is that news today is political propaganda. Twitter is an example of a social media that proves this. There is always a symbiosis between news and politics. Parties today think about how to act to reach out with news that has a political foundation. The right-wing parties also have a power on the internet that other parties lack. This is a property second parliamentary party likely to possess. The right-wing parties can say what they think in social media in a way that differs from other parties. Social media is central to today's society. Hence, parties choose to use these forums to reach voters. It may also be thought that parties think they must create news by themselves which the party then wants to spread. The important thing is to send something to the public. A party wants the news to reach forums where the party is confirmed. Social media is central to this issue, it is extremely important and is probably the first forum on the priority list.

### 4.1.4 Respondent D

The right-wing parties have been dependent on framing and putting themselves in a postponed position and creating their entire identity around being the only opposition party who is telling the truth according to the party itself. However, this is currently a balance when the party wants

to be responsible at the same time as the other parties in the parliament. The parties often have the outsiders- and underdog role via the Internet and social media to convey information while representing themselves as a regular parliamentary party. If the right-wing parties wouldn't have had the starting point to stand next to other parties and to have their views, the party could never have attracted those groups of people who in any way want to protest against the establishment. This position has been crucial for the party's successes in recent years.

What is called the problem-formulation privilege is something that all parties want access to, which means that parties define what the problem in the society is, what is relevant and what is important to talk about and discuss.

The individuals who vote for the right-wing parties often believe that the party is the only one who speaks the truth. The parties also present itself as the only party daring to resist the rest of society which many voters appreciate. Most of the right-wing parties have created their own worldview and their own system regarding the values and positions of the party. It doesn't matter what the party members do, nothing happens with the party's opinion figures anyway, nothing happens if the party fails with anything else either. The right-wing parties are not influenced by such things because large numbers of those who vote on the party are often those who believe the media lies.

Concerning signaling, there are several channels the right-wing parties use, but the use of social media frequently is nothing to hesitate about, it is a success. Most of the right-wing parties have a whole "under-vegetation" of people who conduct the debate, which means that the party itself does not have to appear extreme. The under-vegetation can almost be compared to "storm troops" on the internet. The right-wing parties have a connection to their under-vegetation and have grown out of it in a different way from other parties, which almost resemble a social movement.

The use of social media is crucial for the right-wing parties. Other parties do not have the opportunity to turn negative publicity into a positive outcome, which the right-wing parties are good at. For example, if another parliamentary party had a failure and would blame it on the media, the party would instead have realized its defeat without the possibility of accusing the media of lies. The ring-wing parties can instead use every accusation and turn it as criticism to the media, because of this, the party is in constant winning position from that perspective. The right-wing parties are dependent on technological developments in recent years. The parties receive advantages in terms of what is often said in radio, television, and other media.

Social media consolidate this and as voters, it is possible to follow their own worldview on Twitter for instance. This might lead to an ignorance to other approaches. At the same time, an individual can get his worldview confirmed by like-minded every minute, it's a different world now than before the social media got this big impact.

4.1.5 Respondent E

About similarities between a political party and a business organization, RE emphasise that political parties' main characteristic is that they have three different arenas; one to the voters and the potential voters, one is how they want to be perceived by the other parliamentary parties and the third one is the intern arena. If compared to organizations, both entities share many similarities. According to him, "a party wants to gain new voters, just like a company want to gain new customers. With more voters or customers, the party or the company grow stronger and gets more influence on society. Both want to be famous and perceived by the society as an organization with good cohesion and good ideas" and that both their "internal communication is about strategies and ideas which are later presented to the voters, customers and society as a whole".

Referring to the leader and leadership, RE states that many right-wing parties have a charismatic leader who heavily relies on the populations feelings in his or her rhetoric. Ideally, the leader wants to be "a man of the people and be perceived like an ordinary citizen. By this, the voters and the people can feel sympathy with the leader and the party". Moreover, right wing party leaders excel at communicating their message in the simplest of ways so that it is easy to understand, avoiding complex arguments, heavily loaded with facts and numbers. As RE states, "emotional and easy hints about suggestions and ideas about their politics is something that the people appreciate. It is important to be seen as an underdog and a party made for the ordinary people".

Concerning how political parties frame a situation, RE explains that framing is not unusual within the political world. It really works, and parties can take a lot of advantages by framing different situations. As he highlights, "every party has to start from its starting point and frame the situations in a way that fit in with the party's own politics. The message has to be "we are right, the others are wrong". And it is easy to do. In order to for the party to appear convincing, all it has to do is simply chose the things which fit in within their politics and ideologies and only take those things into consideration, disregarding anything that would oppose their conclusion.

RE begins by explaining that the main thing to understand here is that politics isn't just about facts. To lead and communicate requires, to some extent, fake information. As such, it is not only pure fact that plays a significant role within the political world. "How things are perceived and values are equally important as "real" information and numbers". However, controlling every fact or value, irrelevant if it's fake or not is not attainable. Especially not on social media and that is why social media is important for the parties.

On social media, they can communicate things that aren't 100% true. To this point, RE suggests that "if it's about feelings and values, no one can say "your feelings are wrong". It is easier to say, "your statistics is wrong" and that's why it is easier for parties to communicate a message which contains emotional segments". Meanwhile, social media act as means of reaching new voters while keeping existing ones. RE recalls that there was a time when the parties marketed

themselves by knocking doors and hand out folders with information about the parties. Nowadays, social media has become the new marketing mechanism.

Concerning the message itself, RE suggests that it is not unusual to send out a message that, in some extent, is different depending on the target group. Algorithms exist and are utilized that measure people's habits, which the parties can get access to, and use to "create a tailored made message to different target groups", ensuring the party's success.

## 4.2 E-Research

### 4.2.1 Communication channels

The parties Facebook pages was used in the review of this social media. When using quotes from Facebook, the date is specified when the party posted the material to allow for a possible follow-up to the reader. Where upload date is missing, a date when the media was visited is stated. The parties YouTube channels clarifies the period during which the material was published, and reviewed videos will therefore be dated. Twitter require a membership to review material. Quotes and image usage from these social media are clarified with upload date.

### 4.2.2 Facebook

The parties use diligent their Facebook page, which is a hub for the parties' views and communication. The parties have chosen to mainly write about their successes. The occasions the parties ended up in a messy situation, which developed into major headlines in the media, they choose to ignore on their Facebook page. The parties have tens or hundreds of thousands follower on Facebook where the parties also shared links to other social media such as Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube.

During the parties' time on Facebook they have become well established and receive thousands of likes as well as hundreds of comments and people share their posts. The message in the posts is politically angled and often follows the same pattern. The parties often pose themselves as victims of the society's current policy and points out that the current situation is untenable, and that they are the only party that wants to make changes. This is a pattern for all the analysed parties, and in some cases their posts and updates are almost identical.

Smudging of other parliamentary parties is a recurring topic on their Facebook page. The parties' daily links to current debates where the parties debate with other politicians from other parties. Further, the success of the parties is something that they like to show. Measurements from different surveys are displayed diligently, however, only growing numbers are shown. Measurements that show the opposite are not available. The parties often have immigration as a central area on their Facebook page. This topic is recurring and most of all posts, photos and videos are angled for immigration. The parties describe immigration in texts as costly and illustrate this in an image describing that the society lose on the current government's decision, while the parties also write that s lot of money are spent on immigration. The current refugee crisis is something the parties take care of and share posts, newspaper articles, pictures, videos,

and current debates on the subject. Some of the posts and quotes that are shared by one party on the Facebook page are:

> During September, a total of 24 306 persons applied for asylum. The government has now, together with the Migration Board, declared that there is an acute shortage of housing and beds (2015-10-06).

> The government's immigration policy has wrecked in total. Instead, the we prioritize local assistance before the system collapse we are facing today (2015-10-05).

> Sweden has suffered psychosis and self-harm and needs help (2015-10-06).

> School and healthcare are already on their knees. Now the country's challenges take new proportions (2015-10-06).

> Another 100,000 new asylum seekers in the next three months (2015-10-06)

At regular intervals, the parties present photos on how many followers they have on Facebook. The message is often designed in a way that the parties congratulates themselves and thank all followers on Facebook who vote for the parties and for a better society.

4.2.3 YouTube

The parties widely use YouTube. The parties have an account where they use to upload videos. These videos are often linked to other social media which the parties use, for instance Facebook and Twitter. Their YouTube channels has been registered around 2010. The parties YouTube channels has hundreds of videos, thousands of subscribers, and millions of views of their uploaded material. Their YouTube channels has consisted largely of party politicians who take a position on various political issues in the parliament. Other recurring elements are the party leadership debates that are broadcast annually on national television channels.

The videos often contain debates, speeches from the party leaders and commercials. The immigration is a subject that often repeats. A dissatisfaction against the current society is another frequent subject that the party leaders like to share with their followers and sympathizers.

The videos also contain a lot of sequences which shows how good the parties seem to be compared to the other parties and the world as a whole. The videos often contain some sort of message where the parties find some sort of solutions on every existing problem and the parties take care of the current situations around the world. Even though the happenings don't always fully fit in with the parties politics, the parties seem to argue that they still have some

suggestions about how to solve the problems. This is something that is typical for all reviewed parties.
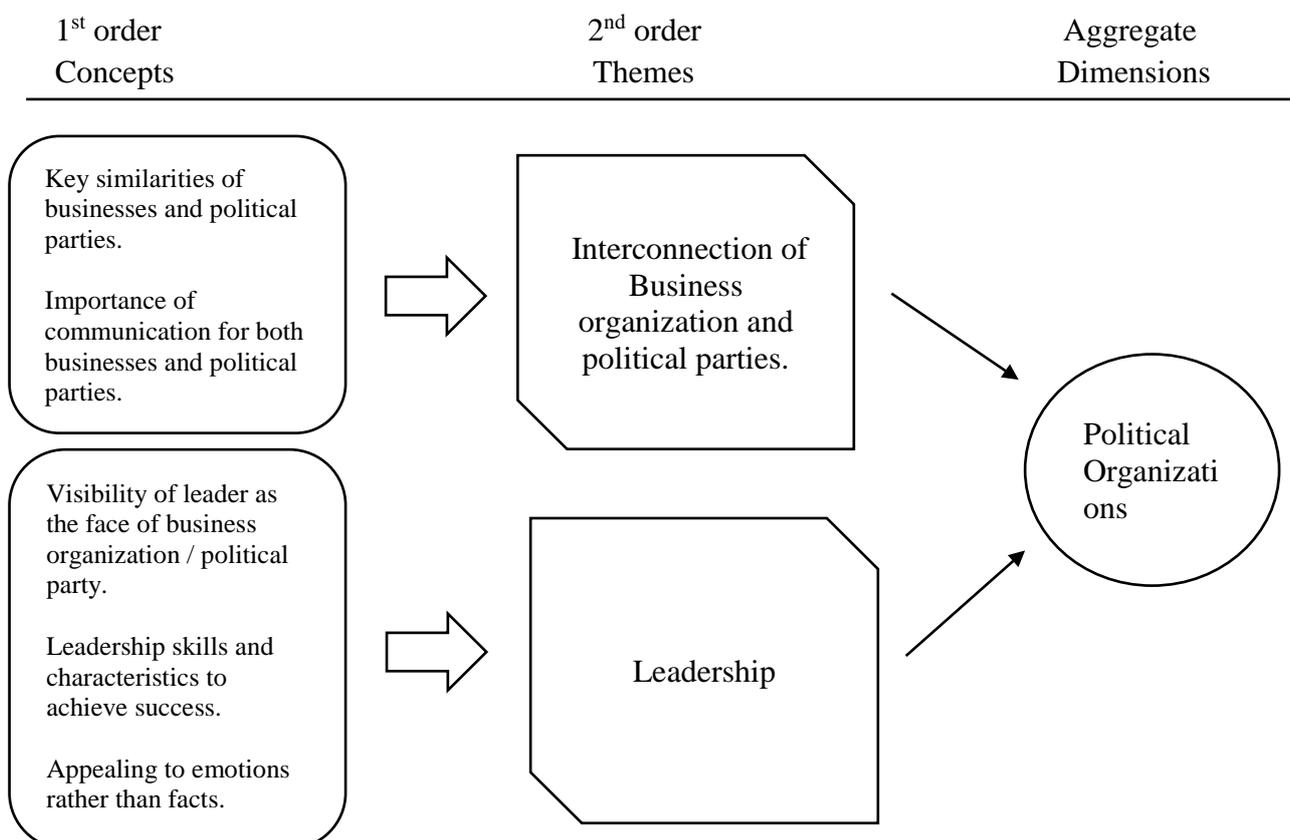
4.2.4 Twitter

The parties are well established on Twitter as well as the other reviewed social medias. On Twitter, the parties have thousands of followers and thousands of tweets have been posted to the parties' accounts. Twitter works like the parties Facebook page. They share similar information as well as links to debates, newspaper articles and YouTube. Some of the parties also have links to their own website.
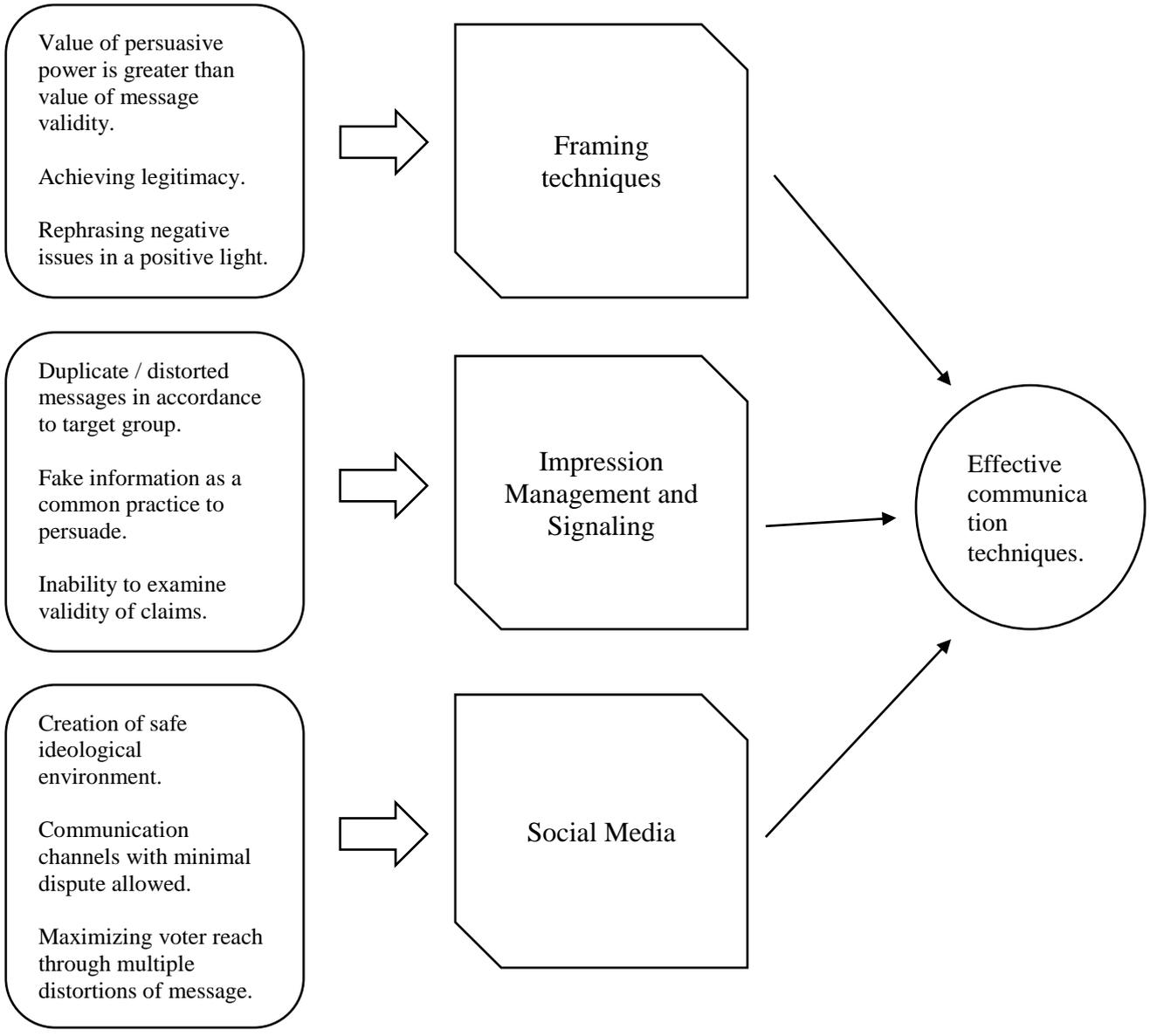
The Tweets which the parties' posts follow the same pattern as in previously described social media where the parties are active. Criticism to the immigration and the government is constantly recurring, and a solution to every existing problem is presented by texts or images. Pictures also show the parties dissatisfaction with the government and the untenable situation. Images of slogans and smudges by the government form a large part of the party's Twitter flow.

## 4.3 Gioia Methodology

In order to provide structure in the collection of data gathered above, the authors have decided to use the Gioia methodology as stated in the method. The initial data coding included the creation of 1st order concepts derived from the respondents' voice and terms (informant-centric). Next, the 1st order concepts where organized in 2nd order themes derived from the theoretical model used in this paper (theory-centric). Lastly, the authors assembled the 2nd order themes into two overarching aggregate dimensions as seen in the table below:

*Figure 2: Gioia Methodology*



| 1st order Concepts | 2nd order Themes | Aggregate Dimensions |

Key similarities of businesses and political parties.

Importance of communication for both businesses and political parties.

Interconnection of Business organization and political parties.

Visibility of leader as the face of business organization / political party.

Leadership skills and characteristics to achieve success.

Appealing to emotions rather than facts.

Leadership

Political Organizations

Value of persuasive power is greater than value of message validity.

Achieving legitimacy.

Rephrasing negative issues in a positive light.

⟹ Framing techniques

Duplicate / distorted messages in accordance to target group.

Fake information as a common practice to persuade.

Inability to examine validity of claims.

⟹ Impression Management and Signaling

Creation of safe ideological environment.

Communication channels with minimal dispute allowed.

Maximizing voter reach through multiple distortions of message.

⟹ Social Media

Effective communication techniques.

# 5 Analysis

*The analysis section is divided into two main headings that follow Gioia Methodology to obtain a uniform image and overview of the analysis. The empirical and theory section has been used as a basis for the analysis of the parties' communication on social media.*

## 5.1 Political Organizations

5.1.1 Interconnection of Business Organization and Political Party

We begin our analysis by undertaking the first major challenge of this paper, that is; establishing that business organizations and political parties are similar entities with common practices and factors that influence both entities interchangeably. To this regard, Schlesinger (1984) argued that the similarities of processes between businesses and political parties are not only striking but that these processes provide grounds for dyadic analysis of the two entities for literature development. In his example, he argues that a party's election campaign uses standard marketing and advertising procedures in order to *sell a product,* in the same manner an enterprise would use them to sell private consumer goods. Hopkin and Paolucci (1999) argue that political parties are transformed in business entities with distinctive characteristics, while Apospori, Avlonitis & Zisoulie (2010) emphasized that, political parties shift all their focus on strengthening their leadership authority and completely identify with it. Having a charismatic leader who is clear about what points the party focuses on can therefore be a decisive element since failure of the leader to guide may mean the possible death of the party, very similar to the relationship of an organization with its CEO, with Hopkin and Paolucci (1999) going so far as to suggest that these are, in reality, business organizations disguised as political parties.

Drawing from our respondents to the above points, RA agrees that both entities share similar processes and states that "a political party is like a company with the board and how they act. They have their tasks which they delegate to people within the party which is similar to how a company is built. Further, a political party needs their voters like companies needs their customers". However, RA draws a difference explaining that, in his view, a political party sells ideas that aim at "making the world a better place" whereas a company sells goods to achieve customer satisfaction. A point could be made however, about companies that include vision statements such as "making the world a better place". On the same note, RB is in agreement too and states that a pollical party and a business "are built in the same way". According to him, both entities need a board who take care of the organization itself. The board has the responsibility to make the organization successful. A political party has its party leader and a company has its CEO. Specifically, as RB believes, the biggest similarity is "the party's leader and the company's CEO. Without a good leader or CEO, the way to success is very difficult". On the other hand, RE admitted that he has not readily compared the two entities before, further showcasing the disconnection in literature between political parties and organizations. However, he agrees that both entities share many similarities. As he states, "a party wants to gain new voters, just like a company want to gain new customers. With more voters or customers, the party or the company grow stronger and gets more influence on society". Thus, it is the general consensus that both entities share similar processes.

In terms of communication importance, Brown & Dacin (1997) suggest that both business and political organizations, effective communication techniques and strategies are responsible for reflecting the organization's status and activities with respect to its perceived societal obligations. Ashforth & Gibbs 1990, Vallentin (2001) add that, the more companies expose their ethical and social ambitions, the more likely they are to attract critical stakeholder attention, with Sheufele (2000) and Petersen, Slothuus & Togeby (2010) stating that of the two entities, political parties have made effective communication as their core competence, with much of its focus revolving around agenda setting and swaying public opinion. RA firmly agrees that both entities are in need of effective communication by stating that especially in the case of a political party, since their value lies in the implementation of ideas in order to make the world better, failure to attract public interest in the idea itself will result in the whole concept to end. As such, good communication is all about reaching out to the people and make them believe in the idea shared. On this note RB shares his view that effective communication is of major importance to both entities by highlighting that communication is the most important tool for business organizations and political parties alike. According to him, "both may have good ideas or products, but if no one knows what they are up to, then what´s the point?". On the same note, RE states that both business organizations and political parties want to achieve recognition and be perceived by society as organizations with good cohesion and good ideas. As such, both entities' "internal communication is about strategies and ideas which are later presented to the voters, customers and society as a whole".

From the above discussion, it is safe to conclude that business organizations and political parties are similar entities and the factors affecting one of them could very well affect the other. As such, it is important to follow through with the elements that play a major role in both entities in order to further understand how effective communication is affected in both entities which was the reason why the first aggregate dimension was named political organizations as a word play that took the word organization from the business organization and the world political from political party to create a new single entity, that of political organization.

5.1.2 Leadership

Leadership is viewed as a key factor for engaged employees and flourishing organizations (Luthans, 2002; Macik-Frey, Quick, & Cooper, 2009) According to our theoretical framework, the emphasis on leadership focuses on a shared, relational, and global perspective where especially the interaction between leader and follower are key elements (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009). As such, the literature suggests that heavily relying on the leader is also a key characteristic of current political parties functioning as business firms. All our respondents heavily agree with this point, with RA suggesting that political leaders are now the face of their party more than ever, being the main communicator of their party's beliefs and ideas. In his belief, having a charismatic and skilled leader, well versed in his ability to persuade is extremely important but equally important is the ability of the leader to be seen and extend his message to the people. RB adds the importance of the leader being able to extend his thoughts and beliefs in a charismatic way, thus it is not only being capable as a leader but also being able to show it. According to him, "there are many leaders who have the competence, but they

don't have the ability to show it to the people, and they are not successful". RE states that the goal is to have a charismatic leader who heavily relies on the populations feelings in his or her rhetoric. Ideally, the leader wants to be "a man of the people and be perceived like an ordinary citizen.

Among the first to compare leadership figures between organizations and political parties were Weber (1948) and Schumpeter (1976) who viewed political leaders as political entrepreneurs, valuing their own personal profit above all else. Contrary to their beliefs, Greenleaf (1977) relied on Greek philosopher Aristotle's work to suggest that a more fitting leadership style that would apply to both political parties and business organizations is servant leadership, where the leader would go beyond his self-interest and main purpose is to serve others, creating opportunities for his followers to grow and become better. Reike (2004) suggested that the servant leader does not use his power to get things done but rather aims to persuade and convince. All our respondents agree with this point and emphasize the importance of a leader being able to persuade and convince by excelling at the use of rhetoric and being charismatic. Specifically, drawing from the most the most important characteristics of servant leadership, RA hints at the importance of *empowering and developing* people, which refers to the leader enabling people to reach their potential (Laub, 1999). To this point, RA adds on the responsibility of "making the world a better place", which could be grounds for allowing individuals to prosper and reach their potential. In the case of *interpersonal acceptance* which refers to having empathy for others, understanding their feelings and where they are coming from (George, 2000), RA, RB and RE make a case for the importance of understanding their feelings and where they are coming from, suggesting that it strengthens the persuasive power of the argument if the leader is aware of how his followers are feeling. However, in the literature it is suggested that this is done out of empathy for the follower. Instead, our respondents present it as communication technique to get a message across rather than truly caring about people's emotions. Knowledge of what people feel about an issue allows for manipulation of that feeling to achieve desired results. Lastly, *providing direction* refers to communicating to people what is expected of them and what is beneficial for them and the organization (Laub, 1999). This point is perhaps the most important that a leader is responsible for being the face of the organization or political party. As our respondents have stated, ensuring people why their view is the correct one and why it would be beneficial for them to follow the leader is the most important message for a leader to get across.

However, there are a number of important elements that are obtained in the interviews and that are not mentioned in the theoretical framework for the leader. For example, RA highlights the extend to which right wing political leaders manipulate specific feelings and create desired results by using fake information presented as facts to persuade the people. Similarly, RE adds that right wing leaders include the notion of "us vs them" in their rhetoric, in an attempt to appear as an everyday individual who doesn't engage in the systematic corruption that other parties partake in, appearing as the "common man" who cares truly about the people. As such, the *authenticity* characteristic which refers to expressing the "true self," that is expressing oneself in ways that are consistent with inner thoughts and feelings (Harter, 2002), is sacrificed here, or rather manipulated into achieving political success.

## 5.2 Effective communication techniques

5.2.1 Framing techniques

Kotler (2008) has demonstrated the importance of a message being synchronized on all the channels which are used, so it is clear for the environment to understand what an organization stands for and strives for. About the use of message and social media by the selected parties, we consider that they have a clear agenda for how they want to be perceived by the environment. The parties Facebook page is covered by information, focusing mainly on the positive aspects that laid the foundation for their successes.

The majority of the information published on social media is directly based on different situations and crisis around the world. The jargon used is often hard where direct criticism of other parliamentary parties is repeatable. Based on the majority of the respondents' answers, we were able to confirm that recipients of the parties communication perceive their policies as entirely based on society situations, especially crisis situations, where other areas are rarely seen. We argue that parts of the resurrection about the parties leadership and communication are based on the fact that the messages are often of shock-like nature. The party use the crisis as the main issue to any kind of problem, which is especially confirmed by RC and RD. This is a strategy that Dahl et al. (2003); Fill (2009, p. 487) argues that there is great resurrection because of strong messages that often contradict the social norms in society. Our view is that the parties succeeds in all plans when they put much attention to social media, often because of statements that completely violate the standards society has. It creates debate around the parties, which works like free launch, which can also raise the general interest of the parties which also is confirmed by RC and RD. In fact, the parties have not published too much commercials on nationwide television, which may have generated greater impact than if the material was approved from the outset. Instead, the population must find the party's political opinions on their own, which is unique, as other parliamentary parties do not constantly broadcast commercials on nationwide television, which instead complies with the norms and values in society.

It is clear that the aim of the parties' shock strategies is based on creating reactions and debates. The respondents claim that the constant focus and negativity surrounding crisis has indirectly de-dramatized and neutralized the discussion about this kind of subject. Just like Fill (2009), the respondents argue that increased publicity is, in many cases, positive and, as far as the parties are concerned, negative media publicity also acts as something positive from the parties' point of view.

Newman (2007)'s Apospori, Avlonitis and Zisoulie (2010, p. 117) argue that voters often share politics in what they appreciate, and also what they do not appreciate. The parties have in many ways become dissatisfaction parties, which we argue has increased significantly in popularity due to the majority of international crises that have arisen in recent years. This makes it easier for voters to vote for these kinds of parties if they are unhappy with how the world is developing. This is also something that RE emphasise and mean that the party talk about the

things they want. The things that might be current but don't fit in with the politics, the party chose to leave those subjects. On the parties website, it is clear that the party leader is important, and just as Apospori, Avlonitis and Zisoulie (2010) describe, charismatic leaders can be decisive for the outcome of a political election, which we think is the case with the selected parties. In the same way as these leaders are charismatic, they also follow Griffith et al. (2015) structure for an ideological leader. The leaders are often clear about the feelings of the existing crisis, and we mean that this is an effective strategy to use for the parties when the leaders, as an important party icon, turns out emotional and passionate about this societal situation. RB also emphasise the importance of the characteristics of the leader which have become an understanding for us as authors. RB mean that charisma is a key for a leader, especially when the leader communicates to the people.

The fact that the parties constantly fill our social media can hardly be something negative from the perspective of the parties when they are given the opportunity to express their views. We mean that the political development is based on emotional aspects such as fear, anxiety and ignorance about the subject. In this case, it should be easier to counteract this development, which is clearly based on the political successes of the parties last decade. On the parties' website, they also have statistics that again reflect the grouping of peoples the parties often represent. This is recurring on the social media.

Through social media, the parties can upload new political material daily, which can be checked by all voters who have access to the internet. There is a lot of material to share. We argue that this mix of logos, videos about the leaders, and strong messages have laid the foundation for the parties development. Again, the message is in many cases linked to fear, anxiety and hope, which Smith (2005); Baines et al. (2014, p. 174) clarifies is a strategy political parties often use. The respondents said that the parties had the opportunity to form an opinion on social media that no other party can compete with. There, the sympathizers of the parties can act as marketers and raise the boundaries of their position, while the leaders can act more properly and formally at the grand stage in the parliament, and therefore the leader does not seem to be extreme. We mean that this use of social media has favoured the parties and resulted in the party getting voters from other parties who previously did not sympathize with the parties. In this way, they have had the opportunity to grow.

Smith (2005); Baines et al. (2014, p. 174) describe that parties often use fear, anxiety and hope are something we consider to be a beneficial strategy aimed at any generation in society. The parties explain that they want to do something different, which often is presented on their social media. We mean that fear, anxiety and hope are three factors the parties use diligently when the material which they send out contains questions about the government's priorities. We mean that the parties communication can lead to dissatisfied votes from individuals, regardless of age.

While social media provide opportunities for infinity with information, there is also the possibility of shielding from ideas and, in this case, political ideologies that the voter does not consider to be the right one. RE said that social media allows voters with extreme opinions to

get their thoughts confirmed in a different way than before. With that knowledge, we argue that social media in some cases limit the voters' views and the opportunity to develop new approaches to politics. Because the parties on many levels stand for extreme opinions, we mean that this favours the party's development as the party itself does not need to discuss the most extreme issues. This is automatically handled over social media by the party's sympathizers.

The strategy is clear. The parties want to differentiate themselves compared to others. they want to be the ones who have all the answers to any kind of situation and crisis. We mean that if a company follow the same pattern, not fully but use some segments, that might be the way to the same success as the parties have reached the last decade. Thus, the majority of the respondents thought that parties and business organizations can be perceived as similar and thereby using the same strategy might be the right way to go for a business organization.

Bengtsson and Kalling (2012) explains that the dynamic environment is something organizations need to consider in their way of working. This is also emphasised by RA and RB who mean that the parties communication is based on the environment and this can easily be applied to the parties' communication strategies. The parties take advantage of happenings and exploits this on social media to pursue its policies. Thus, we mean that the parties set an ultimatum in most posts, since the party argue that the government can shoes between two ways to handle these situations. As this type of material reaches the parties chosen target group, we mean that the election should feel quite simple for the specific target group since the parties try to angle the message to fit with the specific target group. The parties' communication is also often designed in a way that can generate fear. By this strategy, we mean that the parties, in many cases, when the material reaches the chosen target group, can receive benefits and thus sympathizers and votes.

Further, politics isn't just about fact. All respondents stated that sending an emotional message is important. To lead and communicate with, in some extent, fake information is not unusual, it is not only pure fact that plays a significant role within the political world. RE stated that one important thing is how things are perceived, and values are equally important as "real" information and numbers. We mean that political parties can take advantages because of this, and it might be the same for a business organization as well. Further, to control every message and value if it is fake or not is not possible, especially not on social media and therefore social media is important for the parties and they can communicate things that aren't fully true. If a business organization would act the same, which we think they can to in some extent because there are big similarities, they can send out a message that fit their business and what they believe in. To work on this strategy, a business organization might see a similar result like the parties. If so, the result would be an increase of customers who would buy their products or use their services.

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we argue that social media in some cases limit the voters' views and the opportunity to develop new approaches to politics. Because the parties on many levels stand for extreme opinions, we mean that this favours the party's development as the party itself does not need to discuss the most extreme issues. This is automatically handled over social media by the party's sympathizers.

5.2.2 Impression Management and Signaling

As stated in the theoretical framework, impression management can be viewed as the continuation or outcome of framing theory. It is mainly about the outcome; that is the favourable impression achieved from proper framing practice. The main goal for an organization or a political party, according to Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) is to achieve legitimacy; it is achieved when stakeholders – that is, both internal and external audiences affected by the organization- support the organization's goals and activities. Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) also point out that an organization only needs to be endorsed by some and not all segments of society to remain legitimate even in cases of external attacks. To this point, Lees-Marshment (2012) agrees that it is impossible for an organization to be appreciated by all individuals in the environment and must therefore be clear with the target audience the organization is focusing on. As such, segmentation of market stakeholders is therefore necessary to target potential voters or customers only (Lees-Marshment, 2012). If this segmentation is performed professionally, the chances of the organization receiving a positive outcome increase (Gillian, 2011). To these points, our interview respondents agree and heavily emphasize the importance of being able to convince voters or customers that your organization is the only one who can provide a desired solution. Concerning segmentation and creation of target audiences, RA replies that the party or organization should be flexible and alter the message depending on which target group it is trying to reach, with social media and data gathering processes playing a huge factor in understanding the needs and feelings of each target audience for increased persuading power. Likewise, RB emphases the need to understand that realising your environment will also affect the ability of realising possible target groups within that environment. On another note, Mayer and Rowan (1977) argue that an organization only needs to adopt visible structures that conform to social norms in order to increase legitimacy in the eyes of the public. Scott (1987) adds that by using socially acceptable procedures an organization can carry out controversial activities but still maintain the impression that they are rational and legitimate, even when those activities contradict social norms or organizational goals. To this, RD agrees and states that this is currently a balance when the party wants to be responsible at the same time as the other parties in the parliament. The parties often have the outsiders- and underdog role via the Internet and social media to convey information while representing themselves as a regular parliamentary party. If the right-wing parties wouldn't have had the starting point to stand next to other parties and to have their views, the party could never have attracted those groups of people who in any way want to protest against the establishment. As such, even though right wing parties try to shift the blame to other parties and present themselves as the only ones capable of doing good, the also assume some of the blame as a political player in order to maintain the notion of political structure and be recognised as a legitimate political opponent.

Moreover, Elsbach & Sutton, (1992) raise the issue of decoupling, which involves separating the organization from a member's illegitimate action. This is achieved by using individuals or groups to carry out actions on behalf of the organization but then claim they had no connection to the organization and are not formally linked to it. They argue that decoupling can also protect or increase an organization's legitimacy by allowing a spokesperson to distance the organization and its legitimate goals from the illegitimate action of its members or subgroup of members. Schlenker (1980) also adds that organizations may apply defence of innocence techniques, which are claims that one is not responsible for an event or that the event did not occur. RD explains that this a common practice for right wing parties in particular, where they create a whole "under-vegetation of people who conduct the debate, which means that the party itself does not have to appear extreme. The under-vegetation can almost be compared to "storm troops" on the internet. The right-wing parties have a connection to their under-vegetation and have grown out of it in a different way from other parties, which almost resemble a social movement". As such, any extreme discussions or actions are not directly linked to the party itself and the party can denounce any official involvement to any negative practices. However, the mood has already been set in place will may affect other votes and spread out, increasing the party's view and creating grounds for expansion.

Lastly, another very important construct discussed is that of information asymmetry, also known as signaling theory. As Stiglitz (2002) argues, information asymmetry occurs when "different people know different things". Therefore, the main objective of signalling theory, as described from Connelly et al., (2011) is to "describing behaviour when two parties (individuals or organizations) have access to different information. Typically, one party, the sender, must choose whether and how to communicate (or signal) that information, and the other party, the receiver, must choose how to interpret the signal". According to Connelly and his colleagues (2011), the main elements to consider here are; the signaler, the receiver, the signal itself, the feedback received of what results the signal had and the signaling environment. The first element, that of the signaler, refers to an individual, product of firm who obtain private information, either negative or positive, that others will find useful. The main thing to note here is presented by Johnstone and Grafen (1993) who argue that since signallers and receivers have partially competing interests, inferior signalers have incentive to "cheat," intentionally producing false signals so that receivers will select them. This is showcased by our respondents replies that point out the mixture of fake information given by political organizations, specifically right wing political parties in an effort to become successful. Given their "weaker" position in terms of political strength, these signalers commonly issue false statements in order to get their points across or misrepresent their ability to provide solutions to social problems at hand. Specifically, RC states that sometimes the signaling party could also exaggerate an issue for the mere purpose of signaling its ability to resolve it. Likewise, RE argues that the main thing to understand here is that "politics isn't just about facts. To lead and communicate requires, to some extent, fake information. As such, it is not only pure fact that plays a significant role within the political world". As such, "cheating" your way to success is a common, with RD adding that the parties also present themselves as the only party daring to resist the rest of society which many voters appreciate.

The second element is that of the receiver, which refers to individuals or organizations who are actively searching for signals. According to our research, the main thing to note here is *receiver interpretation* of signals, since different receivers receive various signals differently (Perkins & Hendry, 2005; Srivastava, 2001). At the same time, it is possible for receivers to mentally distort the signal received and create a different understanding of the signaller that differs from what the signaller aimed to emit (Branzei et al., 2004; Ehrhart & Zieger, 2005). Concerning the above, RD states that the interpretation of individuals who vote for the right-wing parties often is that the party is the only one who speaks the truth. As such, they have already established a perception of what the party stands for and distortion of the signal will not dissuade them from maintaining this preconception of what the party stands for and its value. RE furthers this by adding that it is not possible to easily change this perception because it is based on people's feelings. As such, one can deny the validity of statistics or claims but cannot claim that a feeling is wrong. As he states, "if it's about feelings and values, no one can say your feelings are wrong".

Arguably most important element is that of the signal itself. Key issues such as signal quality (Gao, Darroch, Mather, & MacGregor, 2008; Kao & Wu, 1994) and signal consistency (Gao et al., 2008) may also point to the quality of the signaler himself (Davila et al., 2003). Signal quality refers to how easy it is for the receiver to understand whether the signals are easy to observe the quality of information shared. If it's easy to interpret its labelled as a strong signal and if its not then its labelled as weak (Gulati & Higgins, 2003). At the same time, Johnson and Greening, (1999) argue that signal quality is fundamentally concerned with *intent*, with Filatotchev and Bishop (2002) explaining that strong signalers intent is to be transparent in signaling their strength, whereas weaker signalers will aim at to camouflage his or her weaknesses and purposefully disorient the receiver. As stated from our respondents, in the case of right wing parties purposefully use weak signals. That is signals whose quality cannot be readily understood neither disputed. As RA states, right wing parties often get away with signaling false messages because "there are not enough resources to check if the messages are true or false". As such, those parties can push for more aggressive stances on one issue and more conservative ones in another, justifying their actions by fake information and appeasing people who cannot hold them accountable due to lack of evidence to the contrary. "As such, the party chooses the most optimal channel to create desired impressions with little dispute if any allowed". RB explains that this inability to check the signal constantly and accurately is due to the massive inflow of information nowadays. As he states "the research isn't always that good and the amount of information nowadays is huge! And thereby, the outcome is that fake news has grown among the political world".

Moreover, Soberman and Loïc (2007) argue that it is important that all information is synchronised with the same signal. Failure to do so may result that the chosen target audience misses the message, which may be devastating. RC disagrees here stating that a party will focus on avoiding certain types of words and statements while considering how the party will formulate its statements in a manner accepted by the public. This results in duplicate messages which is a phenomenon that parties often use in their communication. RD adds that by creating

their own world view they can affect likewise minded people with different messages and others that oppose them with different information to create different signals. On a slightly different note, RA states that it is important to understand that the message may be different depending on the arena entered but it cannot be the exact opposite or completely different. That is because "people must recognize the party's position whether the party appears on social media or television". As such, the message can be altered and distorted depending on the situation but not completely changed. However, he recognizes that the situation changes depending on the communication channel of choice where, in the case of social media, the message could appear to be extremely different due to the signaling environment being dominated by likeminded individuals. Likewise, RB and RE state that maintaining a constant message with adaptations depending on target groups is important although they agree that the measure of distortion in the original message is open to manipulation by the signaler and the future messages may differ according to the feedback that the signaler receives.

5.2.3 Social Media

Hong (2013) claims that social media have taken an important role in the political communication to the people and that many politicians and parties today have their own Twitter accounts and Facebook pages. This is something that the parties have also noted, and they are using a lot of social media. Based on our review of social media, a number of factors have been noted which appear to be typical of the parties and can easily be linked to a number of communication strategies.

When social media has become a popular phenomenon in the last decade, the thoughts about how this impacted the Swedish party "The Swedish Democrats" success story have arisen. From being an insignificant party with a result of 2.9 percent of Sweden's voters, in 2006, until two mandate periods later increased to 12.9 percent of voters (scb.se) is remarkable. The fact that social media has grown explosively during these years can very likely be linked to the success of the Swedish Democrats. This is also stated by the respondents, they argue that social media is a useful and necessary tool for their communication. Our pre-understanding before this study was that social media is a phenomenon that is useful by a large part of the population and that social media is to some extent used for communication. However, how political parties and the Swedish Democrats use social media were more unexplored from our side.

The Swedish Democrats Facebook page was launched in 2010 and has since grown to over 150,000 followers with thousands of likes, comments, and shared publications on the party's posts. The Swedish Democrats posts generally radiate similar messages that are constantly recurring in the form of texts and images. These texts and images often contain smudging of other parties and are most likely a pronounced strategy and we argue that this can help the Swedish Democrats to outwardly look better than other parliamentary parties. Further, RA and RB stated that smudging is common within the political world and that parties take advantages of other parties' mistakes. When the Swedish Democrats see themselves as the outsider and underdog, we argue that this can help people to sympathize with the party. Of course, party

politics also plays in how voters vote and why the Swedish Democrats have grown significantly over the last term periods.

We suggest that this can be applied to a business organization as well. Like the Swedish Democrats and the other selected parties, a business organization might have the same result if they act like an outsider and present new ideas that no other businesses do. To present yourself as an underdog compared to others and always have the attitude that all others are wrong but you, then people might sympathize with that specific organization. If not, we argue that the organization would at least be visible by the unique communication and make people curious about their business ideas. Even though the parties use a strategy to in one way scare the people, we argue that business organizations can use the same strategy, but instead of fear, the business organizations might use some other arguments that make people emotional.

On the parties Facebook page, the parties often write about current debates that party members have participated in, not least debates that contains discussions about happenings in the society and around the world. Links to these debates are also common. The parties want to reduce crisis and take care of the people in society. However, we consider that the parties, several times, tries to give the image of itself as parties that want to protect people in need, even in other parts of the world then the home country. The parties also communicate that they have the best proposals and that they are the only parties that can make a difference. This also confirms Smith (2005); Baines et al. (2014, p. 174) theory that this is a strategy which political parties use. We mean that the parties use a fear tactic, which not only appears in the form of images and texts. The parties also use videos available on Facebook and YouTube. This is a strategy that Rainie et al. (2012); Bor (2014, p. 1196) confirms as an effective way to continually update political information to the public. Further, the parties communicate that they have the best proposals, but according to RE, the parties only talk about things that fit in within the party's politics. That's why they can come up with possible solutions on the current situations and crisis. They won´t talk about things that doesn't fit in within their politics, they just ignore them.

The quotes, presented in the empiricism, from the parties Facebook page is something that we perceive as additional signs that the they are extreme in their communication. We also mean that they do not directly perceive themselves as extreme, but according to us, the text between the lines speaks a clear language. Even the party leaders take great place in the communication on Facebook which RB also stated was an important strategy. When we realized that the leaders are popular characters in the different parties, we mean that they have taken advantage of this and utilizes this for a large part of their use of social media. Ellis et al. (1996) emphasizes that a party leader can influence voters by creating confidence by presenting themselves as dominant, driven, and friendly. Through this communication, we mean that the parties through its double standards can attract more voters. We mean that this strategy is admirable from a communication point of view, as it appears to work for the different parties. However, we mean that this indicates some ignorance of the parties voters, since the dual message would be easy to read and, through this, conclude that the parties are ambiguous. The parties perform a communication that in many cases can be interpreted as offensive. They have been denied

television channels over the years who do not want to show their commercials. We say that the media's attention to this phenomenon made people curious. Fill (2009) claims that such cases lead to a situation where people often seeking information about the parties on their own.

In all communication, it is important to segment the people to gain insight into which target group is best suited to focus. Palmer (2003) describes this by gathering information about which group of individuals can best be addressed and how a party will differentiate from its competitors. With the help of social media and the new technology, the parties have opportunities to reach a broader target group than before. For example, the Swedish Democrats have more than 150,000 followers on their Facebook page. All material Swedish Democrats choose to publish on social media can be shared to other Facebook users resulting in a large information sharing. We mean that this has a major influence on the political development of the Swedish Democrats which also confirms by RC, RD and RE. It is both simple and cost effective to use social media and the material reaches out to large sections of the population. The Swedish Democrats have used this and, in view of the party's extreme message in many cases, the posts have been widely distributed.

Further, all respondents stated that it is not unusual to send out a message that, in some extent, are different depending on the target group. They mean that parties can use algorithms about people's habits, which the they can get access to. RE explained that these algorithms are used to create a tailored made message to different target groups and thereby, it is easy for parties to market themselves in a successful way. We believe that this is a reason why the parties have had a great success the last decade, and without the social media the result wouldn't be as good as it is today. Just as Palmer (2003) said, gathering information about your people is important.

# 6 Findings and conclusion

*In this chapter we present the findings and the conclusions. We show this by figure 2 which follow below. Further, we come up with suggestions about practical implications and recommendations for future research.*

As stated in the introductory chapter of this paper, effective communication has been a primary concern of humanity form the very beginning. It affects the ability of an individual to adjust to his or her social environment and create satisfying interpersonal relationships. On a collective level, communication affects the functionality of partnerships, teams and organizations not only being the most important element in their success but also determining their very existence. As such, the field of communication has become a major field of research, with a great amount of literature created aiming to understand the intricacies of communication and which techniques should be used to achieve desired positive results. Especially in today's age of information, where the flow of information can be overwhelming, the ability to successfully communicate a positive image in accordance to social norms has become one of the most important factors for individuals to choose a firm, brand or political party. It is, therefore, intriguing to the authors that despite these elaborate efforts, the wide success of certain political parties has drawn very limited attention in examining their practically proven successful communication techniques. The reason for this, as the authors realized, was simple: despite previous attempts at linking business organizations to political parties in order to expand the researching field and examine both entities interchangeably, the attempts were superficial. These attempts merely adopted a political lens under which they viewed organizations and lacked any significant depth. As such, in this paper, the authors aimed to combine prevailing communication theories with empirical data to create a deeper understanding of the factors that influence communication success. The authors used the success of specific political parties and reviewed the elements that lead to their success, with the goal of developing a holistic communications model. For that purpose, this study's research question was formulated as:

*How do political parties implement communication and impression techniques to achieve growth and can these techniques be replicated from a business organization?*

In order to provide an answer to this question, the authors faced two major challenges. The first challenge was to provide a clear link between political parties and business organizations. Without this link, this paper would lose the value of business perspective and would be reduced to a simple political paper. However, this was not the goal. For this reason, the first aggregate concept created and analyzed in the above chapter was that of interconnection between political parties and business organizations, effectively questioning whether they can be viewed as a single entity and examined as such. To this point, our analysis provided the following results:

1. Political parties and business organizations share the same structures, same processes and same goals.
2. Political parties and business organizations share the same high need for effective communication techniques.

3. Political parties and business organizations share the same high reliance on a leader figure.

As such, the authors suggest that there is sufficient evidence to support the claim that business organizations and political parties function similarly and are affected by the same elements resulting in similar needs for effective strategies for communication techniques.

Moving on to the second challenge faced, the findings revealed a number of practices implemented from political parties, some of which are already being implemented by business organizations in today's age to some degree, some cannot be assessed due to the lack of significant data pointing to their successful implementation but some pointing to a great degree of potential if implemented successfully.

To begin with, out of the findings that lack significant data to safely conclude their positive correlation to success, notions such as *shock-like messages, opposing social norms and values to create impact, decoupling* and *defense of innocence* appear to amount into a positive result for political parties examined but the same cannot be safely translated to business organizations. It's important to note here that these techniques are not restrictive as to suggest that they would fail if implemented, rather that the data acquired in this paper cannot readily support them. On the same note, the concept of *message synchronization* versus *duplication of message* yielded mixed results. Our data suggest that total deviation from the initial message transmitted cannot be achieved as a rule of thumb, as the risk of the political party or business organization losing its identity increases. However, there appears to be a possible solution to that by selecting multiple channels of communication where the channels' rules can be controlled by the party or organization itself and opposition can be contained or eliminated, thus reducing the chances of this duality of message being exposed. Still, further research needs to be conducted to observe the degree that this practice can be effectively used.
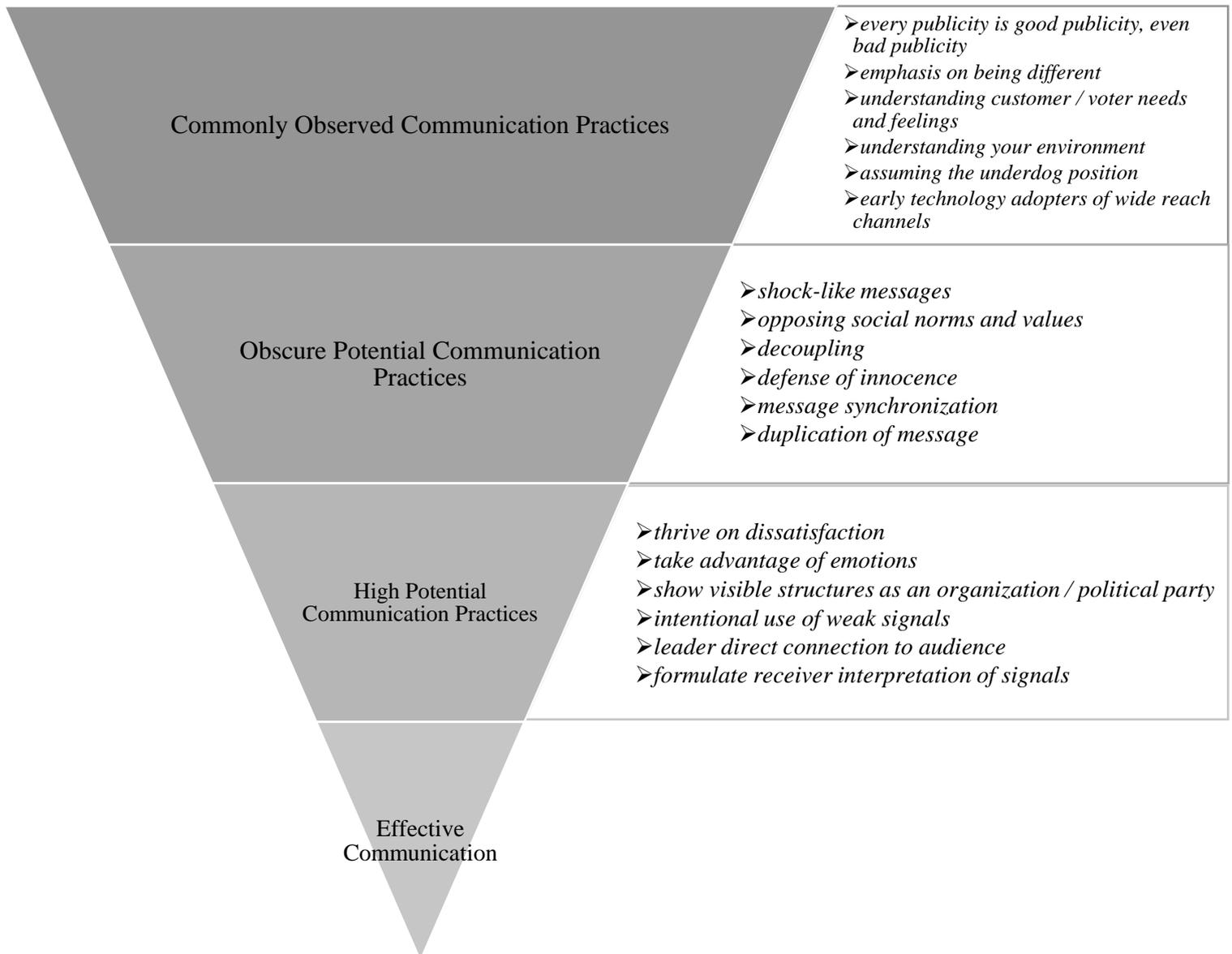
On the other hand, our findings reveal practices that to some degree are already being implemented in the business world. Notions such as *every publicity is good publicity, even bad publicity, emphasis on being different, understanding customer / voter needs and feelings, understanding your environment, assuming the underdog position* and *early technology adopters of wide reach channels* have been observed as common practices that are already being implemented to some degree by business organizations with positive results. As such, even though these above findings do not qualify as new breakthroughs, they still serve their purpose of strengthening further the interconnection of business organizations and political parties.

Lastly, the most interesting findings are those with the greatest potential value, if implemented efficiently, to business organizations. Those are identified as the ability to *thrive on dissatisfaction, take advantage of emotions, show visible structures as an organization or political party, purposeful use of weak signals, leader direct connection to audience,* and *receiver interpretation of signals.* Our data suggest that business organizations should be able

to focus on the above points and implement them accordingly, thus increasing their ability to successfully communicate and persuade their audience, with the goal of recreating the same, if not greater, amount of success the political parties examined have.

To conclude, summarizing the above findings, the authors propose the following theoretical model as shown in figure 5 below:

*Figure 2: Own Conceptual Mode*

| Commonly Observed Communication Practices | ➢ *every publicity is good publicity, even bad publicity*<br>➢ *emphasis on being different*<br>➢ *understanding customer / voter needs and feelings*<br>➢ *understanding your environment*<br>➢ *assuming the underdog position*<br>➢ *early technology adopters of wide reach channels* |
| --- | --- |
| Obscure Potential Communication Practices | ➢ *shock-like messages*<br>➢ *opposing social norms and values*<br>➢ *decoupling*<br>➢ *defense of innocence*<br>➢ *message synchronization*<br>➢ *duplication of message* |
| High Potential Communication Practices | ➢ *thrive on dissatisfaction*<br>➢ *take advantage of emotions*<br>➢ *show visible structures as an organization / political party*<br>➢ *intentional use of weak signals*<br>➢ *leader direct connection to audience*<br>➢ *formulate receiver interpretation of signals* |
| Effective Communication | |

## 6.1 Practical implications

Apart from establishing a clear link between business organizations and political parties, this paper primarily focused on identifying the factors that led to the success of the political parties examined in terms of communication practices and techniques, aiming at examining if those could be replicated from a business organization to achieve similar results. As such, this paper yielded some significant results on a theoretical level that are proposed above, specifically

emphasizing on the high potential communication practices. Here, the authors will attempt to exemplify how these practices could potentially be put to use in a business organization environment:

- Thriving on dissatisfaction and taking advantage of emotions could be used to gain a competitive advantage over a competitor's recent failure that received wide media coverage. Aggressive marketing campaigns could be created to establish superiority.
- Showing visible structures could be implemented by start ups that wish to gain legitimacy. Especially nowadays where shadow organizations are thriving, being transparent about the organization's structures could establish a sense of certainty from potential customers that the organization is a legitimate one and not a fake or temporary one.
- Intentional use of weak signals could be used as means for a weaker competitor to present itself as being on par with the bigger players in a market, thus possibly growing its customer base or attract new customers.
- Leader direct connection to the audience may significantly increase the trust of customers since they could be directly addressed, through social media for example, by a higher authority (such as the CEO), instead of a faceless customer support service. The example of U.S.A president Trump and his use of social media could be used here.
- Formulating receiver interpretation could be grounds for creating a strong customer base based on emotions, thus providing near-blind loyalty and acting as a shield towards external attacks.

## 6.2 Recommendations for future research

During the study, interest has been raised about how this theory would work in practice. Political parties have used the described communication strategy and have had great success. Further, together with the theory and the respondents' thoughts about the similarities between a political party and a business organization, it would be interesting to investigate if same communication strategies would work on a business organization.

Furthermore, we recommend that a stronger interview material shall be conducted to be even more sure about the thought that a political parties communication strategy can fit with a business organization. A stronger interview material can be conducted by a higher number of respondents which have knowledge and practical experience about the topic.

In practice, we suggest that a business organization would use the same communication strategies as the political parties described in this study. The business organization would be observed through the whole process and with help from existing statistics about the business organizations effectiveness the development with help from the new communication strategies would be visible.

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# Appendix

Appendix 1 Interview guide

- Could political parties be perceived as business organizations?
- How important are communication techniques to both entities?


- Could you describe the importance of the leader?
- Could you describe leadership traits in a political environment?


- How important is it to frame a situation in a specific way for a political party? (Creation of own reality)
- How can a political party / organization influence or manipulate those frames?


- Is creating positive impressions the end game?
- Could a negative impression shift into a positive one?


- Is it common for a political party to lead the audience with false information on an issue in order to gain favouritism?
- How important is it for a political party to communicate a coherent common message while also doing so on a frequent basis?


- Could you elaborate on how social media have changed the rules of the game?
- Would you say social media have a positive or negative effect on swaying voters / customers?