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Doing Things in Relation to Machines

Studies on Online Interactivity

ANDERS OLOF LARSSON



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Abstract

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The Internet is often discussed in conjunction with various notions of interactivity. Recently, conceptualizations of a “Web 2.0”, mainly focusing on harnessing user-generated content, have grown increasingly common in both public discourse and among researchers interested in the continued growth and transformation of the Internet.

This thesis approaches the use and non-use of online interactive features by societal institutions. Specifically, the thesis focuses on online newspapers and online political actors, studying the practitioners working within those institutions and on their respective audiences. Consisting of four empirical studies, the thesis is informed theoretically by the application of conceptual tools pertaining to structuration theory. In Anthony Giddens’ original conception, structuration theory posits that social structure is recursively shaped (and possibly altered) as human agents choose to re-enact certain modalities of specific structures. By changing their uses of the rules and resources made available to them by structure, humans are given agency in relation to overarching, macro-level structures. Giddens’ writings have also been contextualized to the study of information technology use by Wanda Orlikowski, who has mostly focused on organizational research.

Combining insights from Giddens and Orlikowski, the thesis suggests that most Internet users are enacting a “structure of audiencehood”, entailing somewhat traditional consumer behavior, rather than a “structure of prosumerism”, which would entail extensive uses of the interactive features made available online. Similar traditional use patterns are discerned for practitioners. The thesis suggests that we should not be surprised at relatively low levels of use of interactive features by practitioners and audiences in these contexts. While the chosen areas of study are often surrounded by expectations and “hype” regarding the consequences of online interactivity, institutionalized news and politics can be said to represent stable structures – structures that have functioned in similar ways for extended periods of time, and, thus, are not so easily amended.

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*'Without music to decorate it, time is
just a bunch of boring production
deadlines by which bills
must be paid'*

- Frank Zappa

List of Papers

This thesis is based on the following papers, which are referred to in the text by their Roman numerals.

- I Larsson, A.O. (2012). Interactivity on Swedish newspaper web sites – What kind, how much, and why? Accepted for publication in *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*. Published online before print.
- II Larsson, A.O. (2011). Interactive to me – Interactive to you? A study of use and appreciation of interactivity on Swedish newspaper web sites. *New Media & Society*, 13(7).
- III Larsson, A.O. (2011). “Extended infomercials” or “Politics 2.0”? A study of Swedish political party web sites before, during and after the 2010 election. *First Monday*, 16(4).
- IV Larsson, A.O. and Moe, H. (2011). Studying political microblogging: Twitter users in the 2010 Swedish election campaign. Accepted for publication in *New Media & Society*. Published online before print.

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Additionally, parts of Chapters one, three, four and five have been refashioned into the following journal articles:

- Larsson, A.O. (in press). Understanding non-use of interactivity in online newspapers – Insights from Structuration theory. Accepted for publication in *The Information Society*.
- Larsson, A.O. (in press). ‘Rejected bits of program code’ – Why notions of “politics 2.0” remain (mostly) unfulfilled. Accepted for publication in *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*.

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Uppsala, March 2012

Anders Olof Larsson

Contents

Introduction	11
From Web 1.0 to Web 2.0	12
Aim of thesis	14
Institutions online	16
Media organizations	16
Political organizations	20
Structure of thesis	27
Research Strategy	29
Methodological considerations	34
Theoretical considerations	35
Generalizability	37
Summary of included studies	40
Study I	40
Study II	44
Study III	49
Study IV	52
Structuration theory	57
The duality of structure	58
Routines and institutions	61
Critique	63
Structuration Theory and ICTs	65
Use of and contribution to structuration theory	70
‘Most people don’t do things very differently’	72
Understanding non-use – three modalities of structure	76
Three types of enactment	80
Conclusions	83
Limitations and suggestions for future research	84
References	87

Introduction

The purpose of this introductory chapter is twofold. First, the reader is provided with an overview of the broader thematic area to which this thesis makes a contribution. This is done by reviewing the recent developments of the World Wide Web – developments that are popularly, and, to some extent also academically, understood as a transition from a “Web 1.0” to a “Web 2.0”. Second, the presented broader theme is narrowed down to introduce the aim and the research questions that serve as guides for the thesis. Following this, a literature review on research undertaken regarding the specific cases studied in the thesis – online news media and online politics – is provided. The chapter concludes with a section outlining the structure for the rest of the thesis.

This thesis deals with a technological phenomenon that many of us make use of, often on an everyday basis – the Internet (Buick, et al., 1995). And yet, while most of us have become quite entangled in the World Wide Web, utilizing various online services for business and leisure time activities alike, certain aspects of these services remain largely unused. Specifically, the thesis places its focus on the use of online interactivity in the context of what is often categorized as societal institutions. Arguably a very broad term, the concept of an institution can be popularly understood as “established ways of doing things” or, in the words of Anthony Giddens, ‘institutions by definition are the more enduring features of social life’ (1984: 24).

Beyond the abstraction of theoretical definitions and discussions, we can distinguish what could perhaps be labeled a more “common sense” definition of the term under discussion. In other words, when we think of the concept of institutions, what comes to our minds? Assuming that the reader of this thesis has a background in the social sciences or the humanities, long-standing, established organizations with some variety of power vested in them would perhaps be a suitable forecast of the thought processes activated by this request. Consider, for example, the Catholic Church – an organization that for centuries on end virtually controlled mainland Europe through a consistent liturgy and by means of efficient communication channels (for that particular time period, at least). Furthermore, consider organized parliamentary politics as we know it, societal practices that grew out of feudal society, grew into democracy and that today enjoys persistence in most

western nation states. And finally, consider the mass media, purveyors of information (and, in some questionable cases, “truth”) to the public, gatekeepers and agenda-setters, who today hold somewhat weakened positions, considering the challenges to their privileged positions often posed by the Internet. Church, politics and media – all three can be considered institutions that have played important parts in shaping the development of western societies during the course of the last few centuries.

Being certain that there are plenty of adequately skilled theologians who would be interested in an analysis of how the church has made use of the interactive features made available by the Internet to further their communicative efforts with their different constituencies, the decision was made to leave this specific case behind. While it is an interesting topic, the church will not be scrutinized in the thesis. Instead, focus will be placed on the other two institutions discussed above – politics and mass media.

Specifically, the thesis studies how practitioners working within political organizations and media organizations approach the Internet with regard to its potential for interactivity with their respective audiences. Conversely, the thesis will also take the reverse perspective in order to assess how the audience in the political and media contexts approach the presented possibilities for interaction. By studying how institutional practitioners and their respective audiences make use of online interactivity, the thesis contributes to the understanding of how historically important societal actors took the step to go online – and what consequences this appears to have had.

The next section discusses the online developments that have been taking place during the last couple of years – a developmental process that, at least according to some, has supposedly led from a “Web 1.0” to a “Web 2.0”.

From Web 1.0 to Web 2.0

In the approximately twenty years that have passed since the spread of the Internet through western societies during the mid-1990s, the use of it has developed in different ways – a manner of progress that is similarly valid also for changes regarding the Internet itself. While the more technological side of these developments is beyond the scope of this thesis, some of the more non-technical aspects of these elaborations are all the more essential.

It might be practical to approach these developments in reverse chronological order, thus starting with the latter of the two suggested phases of online developments. The notion of a “Web 2.0”, a second, conceivably upgraded, version of the World Wide Web has been prevalent in popular as well as academic discussions since at least 2005, when a white paper entitled *What is Web 2.0? Design Patterns and Business Models for the Next Gener-*

ation of Software was published by Internet advocate and consultant Tim O'Reilly (2005). While O'Reilly is not a scholar himself, this particular publication has enjoyed popularity within scholarly circles, as it is frequently quoted and used as a starting point for researchers interested in online developments. In the paper, O'Reilly outlines a set of principles and practices that he suggests together make up the collective rationale behind the 2.0 dictum. Specifically, he proposes eight core patterns of Web 2.0. These are as follows:

1. Harnessing collective intelligence
2. Data as the next 'Intel Inside'
3. Innovation in assembly
4. Rich user experiences
5. Software above the level of a single device
6. Perpetual beta
7. Leveraging the long tail
8. Lightweight software and business models and cost effective scalability

As the individual items on the list implies, the concept of Web 2.0 can largely be understood as 'an umbrella term for a number of new Internet services that are not necessarily closely related' (Warr, 2008: 591). In addition, while many of the ideas and concepts listed by O'Reilly are worthy of further explanation and study, the purposes of the thesis merits delimitation. With the focus of this thesis in mind, concepts relating to such more technical aspects shall be set aside. Instead, what is deemed to be most important here is the concept addressed at the very beginning in the list presented above – harnessing collective intelligence.

Sometimes referred as '*the* core pattern of Web 2.0' (Warr, 2008: 592), the practice of harnessing collective intelligence, of allowing users to play key roles in the co-creation of web sites and services, is indeed often pointed to as one of the most important aspects behind the 2.0 idea. Certainly, the media-savvy among today's organizations have been quick to capitalize on what could be described as the "2.0 brand" – For example, libraries have adopted the term, resulting in the paraphrase "Library 2.0" (i.e. Casey and Savastinuk, 2007; Curran, Murray and Christian, 2007; Dobrecky, 2007; Gross and Leslie, 2008) and similar configurations of the apparently popular labeling can be readily found in several other areas of professional activity.

While the "Library 2.0" example might seem a bit off track given the topic at hand, it is used here primarily as an example of the popularity of the 2.0 label. With this wide-spread use in mind, one might be somewhat surprised to find how little appears to be new about this supposedly novel way of organizing and operating presences on the World Wide Web.

While the technical platforms that allow the Internet to function are constantly subject to new and sometimes revolutionary developments, the goals behind what could be described as the more operational side of the web, the view of the web that most of us interact with in our everyday lives, appear to have changed little. While the technical as well as the exterior appearance of the Internet in general has definitely been augmented since the mid-1990s (and, quite possibly, also since last month), it has been proposed that the underlying principles guiding the 2.0 rhetoric are perhaps not that innovative.

Indeed, the suggestion has been made regarding the 2.0 label that ‘nobody even knows what it means’ (Tim Berners Lee quoted in Anderson, 2006), signaling doubts regarding the supposed novel aspect of this alleged second version of the World Wide Web. Similarly, the point has been made by Tim Berners Lee that a 2.0 paradigm offers nothing radically new in terms of outlook for web design, since participation and mass collaboration has been inherent in the Internet from its outset (e.g. Harrison and Barthel, 2009: 158-159). The basic view of web 2.0 as ‘about participating rather than about passively receiving information’ (Tapscott and Williams, 2006: 37) could thus be said to rather similar to the ideas and thoughts that were allegedly inherent also in the initial, “1.0” version of the world wide web. The differences, then, are not linked so much to underlying ideology as to online technological developments helping to make what is sometimes called the read-write web (e.g. Gillmor, 2004) a possibility.

Aim of thesis

This thesis is based on four empirical studies, reported in four journal articles. Two of the included studies deal with the topic of online news, and two are focused on online politics. As discussed in the previous section, these areas of activity could be considered as baring institutional qualities – and as such, the ongoing activity within these respective contexts are dependent not only on the work performed by the practitioners within each profession, but also on the modes of use employed by their respective audiences. Through both sides respective uses of the interactive features made available by the Internet, further emphasized by means of the previously described “Web 2.0” principle for web design, the activities within both thematic areas are often pointed to as undergoing changes or even challenges due to the supposed external influences from the assumed increase of user activity. The aim of this thesis, then, is expressed as follows:

How do practitioners working within societal institutions and their respective audiences make use of the interactive features made available by the Internet?

This overarching aim has been broken down into two research questions that have guided the work performed and reported here:

RQ1: How do practitioners within societal institutions make use of online interactivity?

RQ2: How do their respective audiences make use of the interactive features offered to them?

By focusing on not one, but two societal institutions, the thesis will be able to make stronger claims about the use of online interactivity by such actors and their respective audiences. Moreover, the choice of these particular institutions can be further merited by the fact that these are areas where the Internet has often been pointed to as having a particularly large influence (e.g. Bowman and Willis, 2003; Foot and Schneider, 2006; Gillmor, 2004).

As will be made evident through the individual studies contained herein, the thesis makes its case by means of large-scale empirical data collection and analysis. This analysis is complemented by a literature review that outlines previous work performed on the use of interactivity by media actors, political actors and their respective audiences. Moreover, the thesis is informed theoretically by employing structuration theory, as introduced by Anthony Giddens (1984) and further developed by Wanda J. Orlikowski (Orlikowski, 2000). The specific use of structuration theory and the contributions to theory development as actualized in the thesis is discussed at length in the fourth chapter.

The contribution of this thesis is twofold. First, an empirical contribution is made by unearthing and addressing a series of research gaps pointed out by previous studies performed in the contexts under scrutiny here. In this way, the literature review presented later in this chapter provides a background from which to assess the individual contributions of the four studies included in the thesis, as well as the thesis itself.

Second, a theoretical contribution is made by employing conceptual tools associated with structuration theory in order to provide a theoretical assessment of the results obtained from the four empirical studies. As will be discussed further in the fourth chapter, suggestions for future employment of structuration theory have been made by previous researchers. This thesis follows up on one such suggestion, made by Jones and Karsten (2008), by using structuration theory according to their suggestions.

Similarly, a suggestion to use the theory in institutional settings was proposed by Orlikowski herself (2000: 423). While the theoretical contribution of the work presented here is discussed in detail in the fourth chapter, the empirical contributions of each study included in the thesis is specified each of the individual studies, as well as in the third chapter.

The following section presents a review of research performed looking into the uses of online interactivity in the contexts under examination here.

Institutions online

‘Institutions by definition are the more enduring features of social life. In speaking of the structural properties of social systems I mean their institutionalized features, giving ‘solidity’ across time and space.’

(Giddens, 1984: 24)

While the basic principles of structuration theory are discussed at length in the fourth chapter, the quote provided above offers a further indication of what is meant by *institutions* according to this perspective – stable, societal bodies that are based on continuous human activity and that have enjoyed such longevity for a considerable period of time. This thesis focuses exclusively on two such established societal actors – the media sector (exemplified here with online newspapers) and online political actors (exemplified as parliamentary political actors). As will be shown in the literature review pertaining to each of these cases, these are institutions that have often been thought of as being especially affected by the advent of the Internet – be it Web 1.0 or Web 2.0.

Furthermore, the literature review provides the reader with short introductions to the rationales behind the included studies, providing specific contexts for the empirical contributions of the thesis. Additionally, the review is organized with the previously presented research questions in mind, using subsections that clearly deal with practitioners and audiences for each of the specified cases.

Media organizations

While media organizations have always had to face challenges from their environments (e.g. Engwall, 1978), the spread of the Internet in western countries during the mid-1990s brought with it plenty of speculations regarding its supposed influence on journalistic traditions and practices. While the claim has been made that journalism has always been influenced by techno-

logical innovations (Pavlik, 2000: 229), views regarding the assumed effects of the Internet on the journalistic profession have arguably been rather dramatic, with references to the impending ‘death of the printed newspaper’ (Thurman and Myllylahti, 2009: 1) as a not entirely uncommon part of the rhetoric (e.g. Fortunati and Sarrica, 2010). Whereas casualties of printed newspapers have (unfortunately, one might add) been part of the digital reality faced by today’s news organizations, other newspapers have nonetheless made the move to the online environment in an attempt to meet the challenges and opportunities posed by the Internet. Such online ventures have often been part of a larger transformation; moving print-focused organizations towards broader roles of “media houses”, attempting a variety of diversifying actions in order to more efficiently face the new digital environment.

While a variety of digital initiatives have been part of the rationales for numerous newspapers since the spread of the Internet, research on online newspapers have mostly shown that the majority of such initiatives have largely resulted in what could be described as *status quo* situations. Apparently, professionals within the news business have ‘tended not to realize the potential of new technologies, thus affecting limited change across the industry’ (Mitchelstein and Boczkowski, 2009: 567). Similarly, audience members have adopted a rather reluctant stance towards becoming engaged ‘as content co-producers’ (Boczkowski, 2002: 278), expressing skepticism towards using the opportunities for interaction on newspaper web sites (Bergström, 2008). As interactivity has been described as the defining character of the Internet (Downes and McMillan, 2000; Kioussis, 2002), these reported behavioral patterns merit further investigation. Is it all hype?

While some online newspapers have embellished their online presences with a variety of interactive features (e.g. Chung, 2004; Mitchelstein and Boczkowski, 2009), the argument is sometimes made that most online news actors still appear as ‘cautious traditionalists’ (Chung, 2007: 53), thus adopting a somewhat conservative stance towards the Internet (e.g. Boczkowski, 2004; Cohen, 2002; Quandt, 2008; Robinson, 2010). Similarly, audience members are not necessarily making use of the interactive features made available to them on the newspaper web sites. The following two sections outline research done on journalists and audiences online, respectively.

Journalists online

Early research often suggested that newspaper web sites tended to be characterized by what is sometimes referred to as “shovelware” journalism, a term that suggests a transferring of content from the offline to the online platform with little or no adaptation to the characteristics of the Internet (e.g. Schultz, 1999; Tankard and Ban, 1998). By the mid-2000s, Boczkowski (2004) noted that change was perhaps on its way regarding this rather traditional principle.

Specifically, he suggested that the cumulative transformation effect that online newspapers seemed to be undergoing, perhaps as a result of increasing online competition between newspapers or increasingly aggressive other online actors, had resulted in more imaginative newspaper web sites. Likewise, Greer and Mensing (2006) found an increase in the employment of interactive features, albeit minimal, in their longitudinal study of online US newspapers. Similar results, indicating incremental changes, have been reported by other researchers (Chung, 2004; Mitchelstein and Boczkowski, 2009).

While these developments might have challenged the notion that interactivity is ‘counterintuitive with the principles of traditional journalistic culture’ (Domingo, 2008: 698), journalists have, as pointed out earlier, for the most part conveyed a rather cautious stance towards the Internet. While some have expressed a more positive view of the novel possibilities for reader interaction offered (Bowman and Willis, 2003; Gillmor, 2004; Pavlik, 2001), most accounts detailing journalist’s views and actions have suggested an approach somewhat akin to the aforementioned conservative stance.

Employing an ethnographic approach, Domingo (2008) studied the work practices in four online newsrooms, finding that firmly established journalistic routines tended to counter the notions of increased interaction with the audience. Similarly, Singer (2010) used an online survey in order to gauge the attitudes towards various forms of user-generated content among British journalists. Her results suggested that while most journalists appear at least somewhat positive towards the inclusion of user-generated content on their respective web sites, there is an apparent need for the provided content to be ‘carefully monitored’ (Singer, 2010: 127) – a costly gatekeeping task, both in terms of personnel and time (Thurman, 2008). Thus, interactivity in the online newsroom becomes a difficulty that most journalists and editors need to deal with on an everyday basis.

As for more recent developments, relating to the advent of the so-called Web 2.0 (O’Reilly, 2005), we are starting to see studies on the impact of blogs as well as micro blogs (i.e. Twitter) on journalistic practices. For example, in her influential study on how political journalists appropriated the blog format of online publication, Singer (2005) found that journalists tended to normalize the blog channel to make it conform to established work routines. Likewise, in his study of how British newspaper *The Guardian* made use of their blog for audience interaction, Matheson (2004) concluded that while the blog at least potentially challenged the traditional, established one-way relationship between journalists and audience members, the specific case of the *Guardian* was ‘not in any way revolutionary’ (Matheson, 2004: 460), suggesting an appropriation of the blog format to a conventional, time-honored variety of journalism.

Much like the blog format, its derivative micro blog (in particular Twitter) has been pointed to as having potential influence over the journalistic profession. Taking as their starting point the aforementioned study by Singer (2005), Lasorsa et al (2011) found similar patterns of use among the “j-tweeters” (journalist Twitter users) they studied that Singer found among journalist bloggers. In other words, while journalists might be quick to start using new means of mediated expression, their specific approaches to such new channels are often adapted to established forms of journalistic practice. These results suggest that while some journalists are indeed “early adopters” of social media and other features that allow for audience interaction, most journalists tend to adhere to what has been previously described as “conservative” or “traditional” journalistic thinking (e.g. Chung, 2007; Domingo, 2008; Domingo, et al., 2008; Gillmor, 2004; Vobic, 2011).

In sum, research performed during the past decade indicates that most media practitioners are perhaps closer to the notion of online journalism as ‘TV news on a computer screen’ (Dahlgren, 1996: 64) than some critics and pundits might suggest. While scholars have shown that journalist attitudes towards employing interactive features in their everyday work routines might be subject to age, where younger journalists tended to be more positive (Chung, 2007), there still appears to be an inherent tension in the reporter-audience relationship (Robinson, 2010: 141).

As made clear by the outline presented above, most research on online newspapers seem to conclude that their approach to interactivity is careful at best. While some researchers have attempted to chart out the types of interactive functionalities available on newspaper web sites, rather few scholars have assessed what features of newspaper organizations that seems to have influence over the degree to which they use interactive features on their web sites. This research gap is addressed in this thesis by means of Study I, entitled *Interactivity on Swedish newspaper web sites – What kind, how much, and why?* As the title implies, the study makes a contribution to research on online newspapers and their utilization of interactivity by providing a large-scale investigation of Swedish newspapers. The study rationale and results are further discussed in the third chapter.

News audiences online

Initial studies regarding audience opinion on online interactivity tended to report on audience members as expressing mostly positive and curious attitudes towards the new phenomenon. For example, an early study conducted in the USA indicated that users tended to feel a sense of commitment towards sites that offered more interactive features (Shyam Sundar, 2000). Similarly, other scholarly work concluded that more interactive features on web sites usually resulted in more positive audience attitudes towards the

site (Aikat, 1998; Kiernan and Levy, 1999; McMillan, 2000; McMillan, Hwang and Lee, 2003). For newspaper web sites, it has been suggested that interactive features would lead more visitors to spend time on the site (Gerpott and Wanke, 2004).

As such, while attitudes towards interactivity appear to have been positive, levels of use have consistently been found to be low in a majority of studies. While notable exceptions of increased audience interaction in the online newspaper context is available (e.g. Bruns, 2010; Deuze, 2006), other empirical accounts have suggested different opinions. For example, Hujanen and Pietikainen (2004) used a multi-method approach, employing surveys and in-depth interviews in their study of how young Finns perceived and used opportunities for interaction in the online news context. Finding rather low levels of interaction, the results suggest that this non-usage of interactivity might stem from the fact that respondents saw the news web sites as “untouchable”, a finished product arranged by professionals, in little or no need of amendments from the audience. In Sweden, similar results indicating mostly non-use from the audience side were reported by Bergström (2008), suggesting that these traditional views on the journalist-reader relationship might stem from the ‘strong position of the printed newspaper in the Swedish context’ (Bergström, 2008: 77; see also Hallin and Mancini, 2004).

In sum, research performed has showed that most journalists and audience members do not partake in the interactive capabilities of the Internet to any larger degree. These combined results indicate that the transition to a more ‘dialogical’ (Deuze, 2003: 207) form of journalism might be farther away than sometimes suggested.

Furthermore, the suggestion has been made that even if audience members do not use the interactive features made available to them, they might appreciate the fact that they are offered the possibility to interact (e.g. Deuze, 2003). The premise of such “indirect” effects of interactivity is evaluated in Study II included in this thesis. Entitled *Interactive to me – Interactive to you? A study of use and appreciation of interactivity on Swedish newspaper web sites*, the study employs large-scale survey methods to query online newspaper audience members regarding their use and appreciation of interactive features in the online newspaper context. The full rationale behind this second study is provided in the third chapter.

Political organizations

Much like with the previously discussed media sector, there has been plenty of discussion on the Internet and its supposed potential to ‘reshape political communication and campaigning’ (Lilleker and Malagón, 2010: 26). Indeed, early studies suggested that the Internet would be ushering in a third age of

political campaigning (Blumler and Kavanagh, 1999), bringing with it increased and ongoing contact between politicians and electorate. Similarly, almost a decade later, analogous rhetoric is prevalent, discussing ‘postmodern’ or ‘professionalized’ campaigning through the Internet (Zittel, 2009). Coupled with the establishing of terms like e-democracy or e-representation (Coleman, 2005), much of the early rhetoric around the consequences for political activity in the wake of the Internet was characterized by a rather optimistic tone (e.g. Castells, 2001; Coleman, 2005). Indeed, in a very early study from 1997, Barnett noted that most of this rhetoric was ‘relentlessly upbeat’ (1997: 194).

Nevertheless, this view of the Internet as the “the magic elixir [...] to reinvigorate the masses to participate in the process of government” (Stromer-Galley, 2000: 113) does not appear to be unique for the digital era. Much like for the profession of journalism, technological development has often been perceived as a ‘key driver of change in the electoral area’ (Gibson, Lusoli, and Ward, 2008: 15), suggesting the development of new, more interactive roles for politicians as well as the electorate. However, as pointed out by Kalnes (2009: 251), one should be careful not to overemphasize these supposed changes at the expense of continuity. Indeed, most research into online political communication has given weight to a view of stability and continuity with regard to usage patterns of political actors and citizens alike. While an online presence of some sort could be considered almost mandatory for politicians seeking office (as suggested by Druckman, Kifer, and Parkin, 2007: 426), and while the abundance of political information and opportunities for political mobilization of citizens are surely acted upon by certain citizens, most researchers seem to conclude that we are predominantly seeing a transferring of offline patterns into the online context, giving way to ‘politics-as-usual’ (Margolis and Resnick, 2000).

With recent tendencies towards a “Web 2.0” rationale of online activity, placing more focus on the user and user participation (e.g. Cormode and Krishnamurthy, 2008; O’Reilly, 2005), propositions regarding the Internet and its potential for political rejuvenation have been raised yet again (e.g. Lilleker, et al., 2011; Lilleker and Malagón, 2010). The apparent online success of the 2008 Obama campaign for the US presidency has further invigorated such claims (Kalnes, 2009: 264; Wattal, Schuff, Mandviwalla and Williams, 2010).

Adopting the view of the politician and the citizen respectively, the following sections presents a discussion on the popular hypotheses of innovation and normalization with regard to online politics. Specifically, the first of these hypotheses suggests the introduction of novel practices for both politicians and citizens through employment of the Internet, while the latter of the two implies a status quo of more traditional roles for both identified groups.

Online politics – providing innovation or normalization?

Although there are exceptions, many scholarly efforts on online political communication have taken some dichotomization of the aforementioned hypotheses as their starting point. While the pairing of innovation and normalization hypotheses are arguably among the more common of these dichotomies, there are of course other varieties of this nomenclature – perhaps most notably, the couplings of optimist/pessimist (Bentivegna, 2006) and shift/enhancement (Jackson and Lilleker, 2009; Stromer-Galley, 2000).

Regardless of the label used, these oppositions appear rather similar in their twofold outlook – the former suggesting an overarching pattern of change in the relationship between politicians and their respective constituencies, the latter a more conservative outline, with little or no change following the introduction and the continued development of the Internet.

As briefly mentioned above, the innovation hypothesis suggests that the impact of the Internet on political communication will be a powerful one, providing ‘radical systemic changes’ (Kalnes, 2009: 251) for both citizens and politicians. While definitions and formulations of these hypotheses are abundant, Schweitzer (2008) outlines a series of specific assumptions that proponents of “both sides” in the proverbial confrontation tend to adhere to respectively.

First, according to the innovation hypothesis, the Internet is believed to make information dissemination more efficient, give rise to more dialogue between voters and politicians through the employment of various online interactive features, overall ushering in more sophisticated approaches to web design and similarly matching online publication rationales. Beyond these more structural aspects of web development, the innovation hypothesis also suggests developments regarding content and political discussion, such as providing more room for policy discussions, decentralized debate and less political “attacks” and foul play through the supposed quality of online argumentation and instant fact-checking (Schweitzer, 2008: 451).

Second, following the normalization hypothesis, proponents here suggest that offline structures and forces will fundamentally shape political activity on the Internet (e.g. Margolis and Resnick, 2000; Resnick, 1998; Vaccari, 2008b). Again, Schweitzer (2008) outlines some of the basic claims often included in definitions of the hypothesis under discussion. As for structural aspects, the hypothesis suggests an underutilization of interactive functions at the hand of the politicians, as well as a neglect of interactive options, adding up to lower degrees of web site sophistication than as suggested by the proponents of the formerly discussed hypothesis. Focusing on aspects concerning online content, the normalization hypothesis provides even more contrast to its innovation counterpart, foreseeing an increase in self-referential campaign coverage, a focus on the main candidates up for elec-

tion as well as a prevalence of slander and other forms of what is often referred to as negative campaigning (Schweitzer, 2008: 452).

Politicians online

As pointed out by Kleis Nielsen, ‘the Internet’s potential for political mobilization has been highlighted for more than a decade’ (2010: 755). However, for this potential to come to fruition, it must be acted upon by the politicians up for election, as well as by their respective electorates. Discussing US presidential politics, Gibson pointed out that by the year 2000, the Internet ‘had become virtually ubiquitous’ (Gibson, 2004: 98) – a development that, at least according to popular debate, seems valid for other contexts as well. Indeed, political actors in the US context would appear to be more apt towards employing Internet features than politicians in other contexts (e.g. Gibson and McAllister, 2011; Wattal, et al, 2010). Utilizing in-depth interviews with senior e-campaigning managers for the candidates during the 2004 US presidential election, Vaccari (2008a) found that the various online activities undertaken by democrats and republicans alike tended to target supporters and activists, rather than attempting to persuade undecided voters. Furthermore, Vaccari’s respondents suggested the increasingly important role of the Internet for political communication, predicting adoption throughout entire campaign organizations instead of merely among those staffers responsible for online affairs.

The US context, arguably one of the most commonly studied when it comes to political communication, has also been subject to a number of comparative research efforts. For example, Hara and Jo (2007) studied the use of online functionalities (defined by the authors as fundraising, civic participation and e-mobilizing) by candidates up for election in the 2004 US and 2002 South Korean presidential campaigns. Results indicated that traditional representative mechanisms tended to have large influences over the scope of online representation, suggesting that the ‘equalizing effect’ (e.g. Vaccari, 2008c) of the Internet was perhaps not as persistent as some had proposed. Comparing the 2008 parallel campaigns for President of the USA and Prime Minister of Canada, Jaeger et al (2010) compared the uses of ICTs by the campaigns to organize and disseminate their messages, finding differences between the two countries, as well as internal differences in the employment of the Internet. Perhaps not very surprisingly, the results further strengthened the view of the 2008 Obama campaign as ‘defined by its creative use of new technologies’ (Jaeger et al, 2010: 79). Reporting somewhat different results, Kleis Nielsen (2010) found the use of *mundane internet tools* (like email and search functionalities) to be more important than the use of *emerging tools* (such as web 2.0 services) or *specialized tools* (like custom designed campaign web sites) in the practices of staffers working for

two congressional campaigns, suggesting that as such, ‘the mobilizing potential of the Internet will remain potential’ (2010: 758).

Broadening the scope to the European context (as suggested by Gibson, 2004: 97; Lilleker and Malagón, 2010: 26; Schweitzer, 2008), a number of research projects have indeed been performed. In a study comparing the 2002 and 2005 German national elections, Schweitzer (2008) found minor parties to be ‘reluctant to jump on the Internet bandwagon’ (2008: 464), given their apparent underutilization of structural features allowing for voter interaction and mobilization when compared to the major parties. As for the United Kingdom, Jackson and Lilleker (2009) concluded that political actors had been somewhat slow on the uptake of a ‘Web 2.0 style of political communication’ (2009: 232), and that a paradigm of “Web 1.5”, offering a comfortable segue between the two extremes, was in the making (2009: 247). Similar to the results reported from the US, Gibson et al (2008) compared online candidate campaigning in the UK and Australia and found patterns of major party dominance in both countries.

In southern Europe, reports from recent election campaigns seem to correspond to the practices outlined above. In France, Lilleker and Malagón (2010) studied the levels of interactivity on the web sites of presidential candidates, concluding that the presupposed changes to political communication following the employment of the Internet were ‘minor and at best incremental’ (2010: 39). Focusing on the same election, Vaccari (2008c) analyzed the characteristics of the web sites of parties and presidential candidates, finding significant gaps between major and minor political actors, giving further evidence against the claim that the Internet would function as an equalizer between larger and smaller parties. With this in mind, Vaccari suggested that ‘despite the media hype, online electioneering in France is still at an intermediary stage’ (2008c: 1), discerning an approach somewhat akin to the “Web 1.5” mode discussed previously. As for the 2006 Italian parliamentary elections, the same author found partial support for the normalization hypothesis, reporting on specific variance in the utilization of the Internet based on party ideology, voter demographics and media strategy (Vaccari, 2008b). Overall, though, Vaccari described the uptake of Internet functionalities among political actors as ‘slow and half-hearted’ (2008b: 75).

Finally, the Nordic region of Europe is often pointed to as characterized by high levels of election turnout as well as a high percentage of Internet penetration and use. It follows from this that the use of the Internet on behalf of politicians in these countries might be more advanced than as reported from other areas, so as to match the alleged digital competencies of the constituency. For the 2003 Finnish parliamentary elections, Strandberg (2009) found that while other variables were certainly at play, belonging to a major party emerged as a strong predictor for candidate web site functionalities and sophistication. Four years later, during the 2007 Finnish elections, Carlson

and Strandberg (2008) focused on the use of the video sharing site YouTube, concluding that while the site gave voice to certain minor candidates up for election, only 6 per cent of the total number of candidates shared videos through YouTube. In Norway, Kalnes (2009) studied the adaption of Web 2.0 features (such as blogs, Facebook and YouTube) before and during the local elections of 2007. Results indicated ‘a slight e-ruption’ (2009: 261) in relation to the innovation hypothesis, suggesting incremental changes in electioneering practices.

In sum, then, results from a decade or so of research seem to indicate that ‘an architecture of participation is in the process of being built, but perhaps in a limited form’ (Kalnes, 2009: 261). However, Jackson and Lilleker (2009) point out that as more voters become more competent with online practices and use of Web 2.0 features, politicians might find themselves forced to more clearly integrate such features into their campaign efforts.

As outlined above, many of the studies performed are focused on one election, or comparisons between two elections in the same country, or in two different countries. The empirical contribution made here with regard to this is evident in Study III, entitled “*Extended infomercials*” or “*Politics 2.0*”? *A study of Swedish political party web sites before, during and after the 2010 election*. The study features a longitudinal analysis of Swedish political party web sites before, during and after the 2010 parliamentary elections, focusing on party use of different types of interactive features (as informed by Foot and Schneider, 2006). The study provides a novel approach to research on how political parties make use of their web presences, as well as new insights into how these uses are played out during the course of an election year. The complete rationale behind Study III is provided in the third chapter.

Political audiences online

Much like in the previous section, it seems feasible to start with the US context, as the majority of studies have been performed there, and as the Internet has been pointed out as influential for citizen’s political information gathering and involvement during both the 2004 (Foot and Schneider, 2006) and the 2008 (Smith, 2009) presidential campaigns. Providing more in-depth data regarding the 2008 campaign, results reported by the Pew Research Center indicated that 55 per cent of US adults used the Internet to get news or information about that particular election. The researchers further concluded that younger citizens tended to be among the most involved in online political processes, but that this type of involvement was found to some degree across virtually all generations (Smith, 2009).

Furthermore, while claims about the potential of Web 2.0 features like various social media services are often aired in conjunction with political events (e.g. Baumgartner and Morris, 2010), criticisms regarding their supposed rejuvenation effect on the political engagement of young citizens in particular have been brought about as well. Among the more stern critics are Evgeny Morozov, who has focused mostly on the many “social media revolutions” that have taken place in various totalitarian countries during the “arab spring” of 2011 (Morozov, 2011). While his focus was beyond the scope for the established democracies dealt with here, the labeling of online political activity as unengaged ‘slacktivism’ without any tangible results (Morozov, 2009: 13) has made its way into western political discourse as well. However, the argument has also been made that this alleged “blackboxing” of emerging patterns of online political engagement is a simplification, and that online political activity is ‘at worst harmless fun and can at best help invigorate citizens’ (Christensen, 2011).

Moving to the European context, focus here has indeed mainly been placed on younger voters. Presenting data from a transnational survey on university students in three countries (Italy, Spain and the Netherlands), Calenda and Meijer (2009) concluded that while the use of various Internet tools tended to reinvigorate political participation in the respondents, this participation tended to take on what the authors labeled as traditional forms. As such, ‘the online political world is indeed a natural extension of the offline world’ (Calenda and Meijer, 2009: 893) – a statement that gives at least partial confirmation to the normalization hypothesis. Also in the Netherlands, Hirzalla et al (2011) studied the use of Vote Advice Applications during the 2006 Dutch parliamentary elections, finding support for the innovation hypothesis among younger respondents, while older voters tended to behave more conservatively (see also Bakker and de Vreese, 2011).

As mentioned earlier, the Nordic countries are often pointed to as characterized by high levels of ICT use and similarly high levels of voter turnout. Again, this might suggest likewise high levels of Internet use for various political purposes. In Finland, the previously mentioned study by Carlson and Strandberg (2008) on the use of YouTube during the 2007 presidential elections also detailed the use of the platform at the hands of the voting public, concluding that videos featuring presidential candidates did for the most part not ‘create any significant viral buzz’ (2008: 171). Utilizing data from the 2005 Norwegian Election Study, Karlsen (2009) found that younger voters were more likely to go online for political information than their older counterparts (see also Karlsen, 2011). Again, we see the focus on young voters in many research projects – a focus that appears also in studies performed in the Swedish context. In a study of Internet use during the 2006 Swedish parliamentary elections, Bergström (2007) found that younger cohorts tended to use the Internet to gather political information more often

than their older counterparts. Specifically, those who make use of the Internet for political purposes tend to be the same people who are politically engaged in the offline realm. A rather obvious result, perhaps – as well as a result that could be said to give some merit to the normalization hypothesis.

As made clear from the presentation above, notable examples of innovative use of the Internet for political purposes have been reported on behalf of both citizens and politicians. However, the bulk of the research performed seem to largely support the normalization hypothesis (see also Schweitzer, 2011), thereby giving merit to Kalnes' suggestion that the apparent changes and developments in digital political campaigning and engagement, significant as they may seem, should not be 'overemphasized [...] at the expense of continuity' (2009: 251).

In the context of this thesis, matters relating to the citizen's role in the political context are dealt with in Study IV, entitled *Studying political microblogging: Twitter users in the 2010 Swedish election campaign*. As the title implies, the study places its focus on the Twitter platform and provides a structural analysis of its use during the 2010 Swedish parliamentary elections. The study thus provides the research community with insights regarding political use of social media such as Twitter in an established democracy, as well as with a new means for data collection and analysis of Twitter messages. As with the previously mentioned studies, the rationale and findings of Study IV are described at length in the third chapter of this thesis.

Structure of thesis

Following this first introductory chapter, the second chapter labeled *Research strategy* provides a conceptual overview of the work performed. As already mentioned, this thesis consists of four empirical studies, published in four journal articles. This second chapter starts out by discussing the relationship between each of the included studies to the aim and research questions that have guided the work performed. The succeeding subchapter introduces the methodological considerations dealt with while undertaking the work presented here. Similarly, the following subchapter introduces the theoretical considerations of relevance here. The final subchapter provides a discussion regarding how generalizability might be assessed in the context at hand.

The third chapter provides extensive summaries of the four empirical studies that make up the bulk of the thesis. The reader is introduced to the rationales, methodology, literature reviews and results of each study, altogether providing an overview of the empirical work performed.

The fourth chapter contains an introduction to structuration theory as conceptualized by Anthony Giddens and Wanda J. Orlikowski. Specifically, the chapter introduces the terminology and conceptual tools used in the thesis. Furthermore, the chapter provides the rationale for employing this particular theoretical perspective, pinpoints the theoretical contributions made by the thesis, and considers some of the criticisms sometimes brought to the fore when discussing structuration theory.

Finally, the fifth chapter provides an analytical discussion based on the results from the empirical studies. Specifically, terminology relating to structuration theory, as introduced in the fourth chapter, is employed in order to provide a theoretical understanding of the collective empirical findings presented in the individual studies. By providing such a theoretical reading of the empirical data, the thesis makes a contribution not only to structuration theory, but also to scholars and practitioners interested in the continuing development of the World Wide Web. Following a subchapter with conclusions, the chapter finishes up with a discussion of the limitations of the work performed and provides some suggestions for future research.

Research Strategy

The purpose of this chapter is to present the conceptual design behind the research performed. First, each of the four included studies is discussed with particular regard to their individual contributions, as well as their contribution to the aim of the thesis. Each study is also gauged regarding their relevance for researchers and practitioners. Second, I discuss the methodological considerations dealt with during the empirical work. Similarly, the third section of the chapter provides a discussion on the theoretical considerations undertaken. The final section discusses how the concept of generalizability has been assessed.

As mentioned previously, the empirical material that make up the bulk of this thesis consists of four empirical research studies, reported in four journal articles. While these studies are summarized extensively in the next chapter, in what follows I provide a conceptual outline of how the four studies relate to the research questions as presented in the former chapter. As a starting point, Table one provides an overview of the four studies, detailing their respective titles, aims, material, methods, themes and foci.

Table 1. Studies included in the thesis.

Study	Aim	Material	Method	Theme	Focus
I – Interactivity on Swedish newspaper web sites – What kind, how much and why?	‘to examine what kind of interactive features are available on the websites of Swedish newspapers, and what factors seem to influence the utilization of those features’	Data on presence or non-presence of interactive features according to Chung’s typology	Content analysis, regression analysis	Online news	Practitioners (RQ 1)
II – Interactive to me – Interactive to you? A study of use and appreciation of interactivity on Swedish newspaper web sites	‘to study variations in newspaper website visitor use and appreciation of interactive features.’	Survey data on use and appreciation of interactive features according to Chung’s typology	Online survey, Exploratory factor analysis, regression analysis	Online news	Audiences (RQ 2)
III – “Extended infomercials” or “politics 2.0”? A study of Swedish political party Web sites before, during and after the 2010 election	How do the political parties use interactive features on their web sites during an election year?	Data on presence or non-presence of interactive features according to Foot and Schneider’s typology	Longitudinal content analysis, descriptive statistics	Online politics	Practitioners (RQ 1)
IV – Studying political microblogging. Twitter users in the 2010 Swedish election campaign	‘to study participation in political debate on Twitter’	99,832 tweets	Descriptive statistics, social network analysis	Online politics	Audiences and Practitioners (RQ 1, 2)

First, the classification into specific themes is recognizable from the discussion and literature review presented in the first chapter. Two studies each relate to the two identified themes of online news (studies I and II) and online politics (studies III and IV). As discussed in the introductory chapter, these thematic areas are of specific interest for the thesis. As such, the four studies all individually relate to one of the two specified institutions.

Second, focus here refers to the units of analysis under scrutiny in each of the studies. The terminology of “Practitioners” and “Audiences” is familiar from the research questions introduced in the first chapter – thus, Table one presents each study with labels as relating particularly to one of the two. By making an analytical distinction between the professionals working with online newspapers or within political organizations on the one hand (labeled here as “Practitioners”), and the Internet users visiting these online presences on the other (labeled here as “Audiences”), the dynamics of structuration theory is touched upon more clearly. Similarly, much of the literature review presented in the first chapter revolved around such a delimitation for both themes of interest.

While Giddens’s original outline regarding institutions can be understood as an essentially ongoing, collective construct between those that work within them on a day-to-day-basis and those that somehow take part in the activities of each institution, this does not make an identification and analytical delineation between the different actors involved in the reproducing of structures an impossibility. Rather, the argument is made here that such a separation has helped in taking an overarching view of the individual studies performed, provided clear links between the research questions and the studies performed, and allowed for a means of comparing results from both thematic areas.

As mentioned previously, the detailed outlines of the four included studies will be provided in the third chapter. The emphasis here, however, is placed on how each of these individual studies fit into the conceptual design of the thesis. In the following, the included studies are briefly introduced with particular regard to their relevance to the aim of the thesis, their scholarly relevance to their specific field of study, and their relevance for practitioners in applicable professional fields.

Study I is entitled *Interactivity on Swedish newspaper web sites – What kind, how much and why?* As the title of the study implies, the aim is ‘to examine what kind of interactive features are available on the websites of Swedish newspapers, and what factors seem to influence the utilization of those features’. The focus of Study I on the product of online journalists clearly places the study in line with research question number one, with its focus on the roles of practitioners.

Moving beyond the contribution to the thesis, the study also makes a specific contribution to research on online journalism. By complementing what could be labeled as a descriptive analysis of what types of interactive features tend to be employed in the online news context with an attempt to explain the influences for such uses, the study answers the call for research to look beyond what is seen on the web page (Boczkowski, 2002: 277; Chung, 2007: 43-44). Besides its scholarly relevance, practitioners might find the study useful as it provides a critical exposé over Swedish online news – offering insights into digital journalism that could be beneficial for the everyday working conditions of the digital newsroom.

Study II is entitled *Interactive to me – Interactive to you? A study of use and appreciation of interactivity on Swedish newspaper web sites*. Focusing again on the theme of online news, the aim ‘is to study variations in newspaper website visitor use and appreciation of interactive features’. Thus, the focus is placed on the online newspaper audience, an emphasis that directs the study in line with research question number two.

Besides the contribution to the thesis, Study II also responds to questions and calls posed by previous, similar research efforts. For example, the study presents an identification of factors that appear to predict audience use of interactive features in the online news context (suggested by Chung, 2008: 673), and furthermore provides insights regarding user attitudes towards interactive features in the specified context (suggested by Chung, 2007; Hwang and McMillan, 2002; Sohn and Lee, 2005). Moreover, the results on use and appreciation of interactive features should be of relevance for practitioners within the online news industry who seek to amend their practices and provide their audiences with meaningful online experiences.

Study III is entitled *“Extended infomercials” or “politics 2.0”? A study of Swedish political party Web sites before, during and after the 2010 election*. As outlined in Table one above, the theme shifts from online news to online politics. Study III is somewhat akin to Study I in that it goes beyond a descriptive analysis of the web pages of the respective institutions, trying to unveil some of the supposed “inner workings” that appear to have influence over what we as audience members see when we visit these particular web pages. Specifically, the study features a longitudinal analysis of the web pages of Swedish political party web sites before, during and after the 2010 Swedish parliamentary elections. Focus here is once again placed on the practitioners – looking into the different uses of the web pages of political actors during the 2010 election year.

With regard to the two research questions that have guided the work performed, Study III relates specifically to the former of these, focusing on practitioners. Besides its contribution to the thesis, the study makes an individual scholarly contribution by providing unique longitudinal data on these

matters, collected during the course of an entire election year. Moreover, its relevance to practitioners is similar to those specified for Study I – by providing data on year-long performance of political web sites, the study should prove useful for political actors who seek to engage their respective audiences on- and off the electoral season.

Finally, Study IV is entitled *Studying political microblogging. Twitter users in the 2010 Swedish election campaign*. Much like Study III, the final study to be included in the thesis deals with the theme of online politics, but differs in two important aspects from all three previous studies. First, while studies I through III all deal with web pages in different ways, Study IV places its focus on a particular social media application, namely the microblog service Twitter. Second, as can be seen in Table one, the Study also takes a different approach when it comes to its focus – while studies I through III have placed their respective emphasis on either practitioners or audiences, the fourth study applies what can perhaps be described as a “bottoms-up” means of data collection, focusing on both groups. As discussed in the literature review presented in the first chapter, social media services such as Twitter have been heralded as baring with them a potential for rejuvenation of political debate – allowing for more users to be heard in online discussions of supposed societal relevance. Study IV tests these propositions by providing a large-scale structural analysis of Twitter users during the 2010 Swedish parliamentary election campaign. Based on the results of a social network analysis, the most frequent users are identified and classified according to a typology that is derived iteratively.

Besides its contribution to the thesis in addressing both research questions, the study is also of relevance to the broader field of political communication and e-government research. In particular, it introduces a methodological means by which structural analysis of Twitter user networks can be performed. Additionally, Study IV approaches the seemingly endless scholarly and societal discussions on what roles different ICTs can have for political discussion, dissemination and campaigning (e.g. Wattal, et al., 2010). By providing pertinent results on such uses, the study should be of high relevance for practitioners working with political campaigns – as well as practitioners working with online communication more broadly.

In sum, the previous paragraphs have detailed the conceptual design of the thesis and the four studies included herein. Specifically, the relational patterns between each of the four included papers to the overarching research questions presented earlier have been described. While the following chapter provides extensive summaries of all papers, the previous sections have discussed the relevance of each of the studies to the thesis itself, the individual contributions of the studies, as well as the significance of the work performed for practitioners within relevant applied fields. Moreover, while de-

tailed descriptions of the methods employed for data collection and analysis are offered in the individual papers as well as in the summaries provided in the next chapter, the next section discusses the methodological considerations dealt with during the empirical work.

Methodological considerations

Besides detailing the aims of the included studies, and how these studies relate to the research questions guiding the thesis, Table one provides an overview of the materials and methods employed for data collection and analysis in each of the studies. Although the included studies make use of a number of different means of data collection and analysis, they can all be described as belonging on the quantitative end of what can perhaps be labeled as a continuum of quantitative and qualitative methodological approaches. Indeed, delimitations between the end points of such a dichotomy between quantitative and qualitative methods can be frustratingly difficult to pin down.

Drawing on the sometimes fiery debates regarding this matter, Dey suggested that 'it is difficult to draw as sharp a division between qualitative and quantitative methods as that which sometimes seem to exist between qualitative and quantitative researchers' (1993: 4). While difficulties pertaining to delimitation certainly exist, most attempts to describe the differences between the two extremes tend to include some definitions of quantitative research methodology as focused on 'numerical analysis to illustrate the relationship among factors in the phenomenon studied', while qualitative methods tend to 'emphasize the description and understanding of the situation behind the factors' (Chen and Hirschheim, 2004: 204).

With this distinction or, rather, continuum in mind, I have consciously chosen to work with (more) quantitative methods rather than with their (more) qualitative equivalences. This choice was made partly due to personal preference. Be that as it may: I do not consider myself a 'quantitative researcher' (Dey, 1993: 4), finding it hard or even refusing to see the merits of other perspectives on the processes of data collection and analysis (what Gibbons, 1987: 1 has referred to as 'methodological monism'). The studies included in this thesis appeared to lend themselves particularly well to such methods. These approaches have allowed me to take a wide-ranging grasp of the empirical situations under examination. However, such a grasp has necessarily carried with it a loss of insights on a closer level of inquiry. Nevertheless, I argue that by employing different types of methods, I have been able to clearly address the research questions that have guided the work presented here.

While these types of methods are indeed powerful and have provided interesting and relevant insights into the studied phenomena, there are limits to the conclusions that can be drawn based on quantitative data. Of course, this claim certainly goes the other way: had a more qualitative approach been selected, other possibilities as well as delimitations would have come into play.

For example, for studies I and II, research designs focusing on interviews with journalists and readers respectively, dealing with how they approach the interactive features on the sites with which they work or get their news, is an interesting opportunity – which is also pointed out in the individual studies themselves.

Similarly, the topic under scrutiny in Study III could also have lent itself to a more qualitative form of inquiry – an ethnographic design, perhaps inspired by Kleis Nielsen (2010), could certainly have served as a suitable starting point for a more qualitative variety along these lines.

Study IV, then, represents a somewhat different approach than its three preceding papers. While segments of the analysis certainly make use of what can easiest be described as quantitative methods and approaches, the classification of user types and other delimitations made are not as clear-cut, method-wise. These definitory difficulties point again to the suggestion by Fry et al that ‘the matter of method is not an either/or proposition, it is a matter of degree of emphasis’ (1981: 145). By making use of both traditional quantitative analysis as well as social network analysis in combination with ‘big data’ (e.g. boyd and Crawford, 2011; Bruns, 2011; Manyika, et al., 2011), Study IV could be said to take a step beyond the often confounded border between quantitative and qualitative approaches in order to study new forms of media such as Twitter (as suggested by Chin, Junglas, and Roldán, 2011).

By using a variety of quantitative methods, I can provide the “big picture” of an empirical phenomenon. Through the use of these methods alone, however, I cannot make more detailed claims regarding individual user reactions or on specifics relating to individual cases in the studies (Kaplan, 1964). Such insights, while definitely relevant and interesting, are beyond the scope of the work presented here.

Theoretical considerations

As shown in Table one and as further detailed in the next chapter, each of the studies included in this thesis are informed by typologies, classification schemas or by suggestions adhered from previous research. In order to more clearly articulate the contributions to the thesis, and to provide a means for

meta-analysis of the empirical results reported in the individual studies, this thesis employs key terminology related to structuration theory in order to discuss the combined results from the included studies. Indeed, scholars like Kaplan (1964) and Merton (1967) suggest that theory can provide us with answers to questions of *why* a specific empirical phenomenon occurs. The assertion made here is that structuration theory can provide such enlightening and possibly also explanatory interpretations of the empirical results reported in the studies. The use of structuration theory as situated in this thesis is depicted in Figure one.

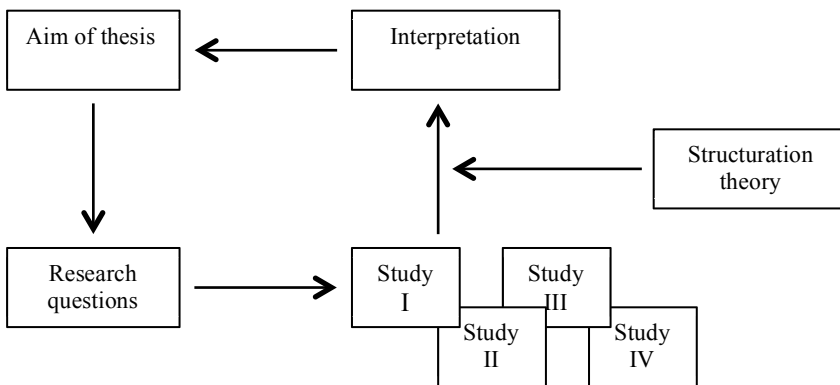


Figure 1. Conceptual design of thesis.

Figure one provides a conceptual overview of the work performed, detailing the flow between the different parts of the thesis. Starting in the top left corner of Figure one, the aim of the thesis is broken down into two research questions. The aim, and the specific formulations of the research questions (focusing on the use of online interactivity by practitioners and audiences respectively) were introduced in the first chapter of this thesis. The research questions are then dealt with in the four empirical studies, summaries of which are provided in the following chapter. Finally, structuration theory is employed in order to inform the interpretation of the empirical results from the four studies in accordance with the aim of the thesis –

How do practitioners working within societal institutions and their respective audiences make use of the interactive features made available by the Internet?

As such, structuration theory is not used explicitly in the four included studies – rather, it is employed as a means to offer theoretically informed interpretations of the summarized empirical results from these studies, providing

an overarching view of the work performed. Thus, in the context of this thesis, structuration theory is understood in accordance with what Gregor (2006) has labeled a theory for explaining, ‘showing others how the world may be viewed in a certain way, with the aim of bringing about an altered understanding of how things are or why they are as they are.’ (2006: 624).

In fashioning the thesis in accordance with the conceptual design outlined above, I agree with Sutton and Staw who ‘argue for greater theoretical emphasis in quantitative research’ (1995: 383). While the four included studies all make use of specific individual theoretical or typological appropriations, informing the data collection processes and analyses in each study, the employment of structuration theory has provided a means of interpreting the quantitative results presented in the studies, moving beyond what could otherwise perhaps be considered an accumulation of empirical findings. The conceptual design has been constructed in order to help avoid ‘underweighting the theoretical contributions of quantitative research’ (Sutton and Staw, 1995: 383).

Indeed, empirical data by themselves cannot be considered theory (Bacharach, 1989: 497; Weick, 1995: 387), and the need for more theoretically informed research, performed quantitatively or not, is touched upon by several other authors. Perhaps somewhat scalding, arguments have been made that research publications need to be more than ‘storage devices for obtained correlations’ (Sutton and Staw, 1995: 379), more than entries into an ‘r-square sweepstakes’ (DiMaggio, 1995: 391), more than ‘business journalism with regression’ (Davis and Marquis, 2005: 335).

In sum, by employing terminology and conceptual tools associated with structuration theory as described above, I have made the effort to appropriate my empirical results beyond their specific contexts and make a clear contribution to theory. Drawing on these efforts, the following and final section of this chapter offers an outline of how generalizability was approached in the thesis.

Generalizability

As pointed out by Gregor (2006), it is often seen as rather difficult for social scientists to make extensive claims – or even “laws” – regarding generalizability in the vein of our colleagues in the natural sciences. This is supposedly due to the ‘very large number of conditions that might impact on any outcome’ (Gregor, 2006: 616). With specific regard to the generalizability in conjunction with the type of theory employed in this thesis, DiMaggio (1995) has described such theories as ‘device[s] of sudden enlightenment’

where the point is ‘not to generalize, because many generalizations are widely known and dull’ (DiMaggio, 1995: 391). Nevertheless, the argument is made here that social scientists should still strive for some notion of generalizability in their scholarly efforts.

For this particular thesis, the work undertaken can be conceptually understood or framed as two case studies – one dealing with online newspapers (studies I and II), one with online political actors (studies III and IV). Thus, by using structuration theory as outlined above and as further specified in the fourth chapter of this thesis, I have been able to trace tendencies and mechanisms relating to this theoretical perspective in two different, albeit similar cases. As previously mentioned, structuration theory is not easily classified as a ‘theory for explaining and predicting’ but rather as a ‘theory for explaining’ (as suggested by Gregor, 2006). As such, generalizability as a means of predicting precise outcomes in other case settings, i.e. other societal institutions, than those covered here can perhaps be seen as beyond the scope of the work performed. However, by showing how the theory can help explain empirical phenomena in not one, but two case study settings, the argument is made that this thesis is indeed able to make some claim of generalizability from case study findings to theory (Yin, 2003), thereby corroborating the tenets of structuration theory beyond its popular appropriations in the Information Systems field (e.g. Jones and Karsten, 2008).

Indeed, as many researchers appear to be in agreement that rigorous generalizations can be based on knowledge claims from a single case study (e.g. Lee and Baskerville, 2003; Walsham, 1995; Yin, 2003), the present thesis, understood as two case studies, should be able to at least partly generalize to other, similar contexts. As suggested by Seddon and Scheepers (2011), ‘if the forces within an organization that drove observed behavior are likely to exist in other organizations, it is likely that those other organizations, too, will exhibit similar behavior’ (2011: 17). While the topic under examination here was not placed on the organizational (or meso) level, this line of argument should be relevant also for macro contexts, such as the ones studied here. As the individual studies included show, similar tendencies can be seen in the two different case settings under scrutiny here – thus, perhaps those similar tendencies are exhibited also in other contexts.

In conclusion, Lee and Baskerville state that ‘whether research is conducted quantitatively or qualitatively, there is only one scientifically acceptable way to establish a theory’s generalizability to a new setting: It is for the theory to survive an empirical test in that setting’ (2003: 241), effectively arguing that generalizability is almost an impossibility if it is not carried out through extensive empirical research. With this in mind, this thesis cannot make any extensive claims regarding broader generalizability, predicting specific outcomes in other contexts. However, while structuration theory can be de-

scribed as a 'sensitizing device to view the world in a certain way' (Klein and Myers, 1999: 75) and thus as hard to operationalize and test empirically, this thesis has employed conceptual tools derived from structuration theory in two separate empirical situations with similar analytical results. In closing, Seddon and Scheepers remind us that 'generalizing to other settings based on findings from a single case always needs to be done with great caution: it is so easy to jump to the wrong conclusions' (2011: 17). I agree with the above sentiment and resolve that as I base my conclusions on theoretical interpretations of not one, but two case studies, I am able to at least partially generalize from my findings to theoretical propositions (e.g. Walsham, 1995; Yin, 2003). However, given this design, the possibility to generalize to other empirical contexts has to be viewed as limited, given the caveats discussed above. Future research can perhaps show if the observed tendencies in the institutions under analysis here do indeed appear also in other, similar contexts.

Summary of included studies

This chapter provides extensive summaries of the four empirical research studies that make up the bulk of the thesis. Specifically, each study is assessed by focusing on their individual rationales, data collection procedures, methods employed and main results. Additionally, the previous versions of each study (conference proceedings, workshop presentations) are disclosed.

Study I

Larsson, A.O. (in press). Interactivity on Swedish newspaper web sites – What kind, how much, and why? Accepted for publication in Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies.

A previous version of Study I was presented at presented at the New Media and Information: Convergences and Divergences conference, Athens, Greece, May 6-9 2009.

As the title of Study I implies, the emphasis here is on the web presences of Swedish newspapers. Specifically, the study tries to fill a research gap identified by previous scholars, mentioned briefly in the first chapter of this thesis: while plenty of research efforts have attempted to map out what kind of interactive features are available on the web sites of newspapers, rather few have made attempts as to assess factors that appear to have influence over the utilization of such features.

Specifically, the aim of the study was to examine what types of interactive features are available on the web sites of Swedish newspapers, and what factors pertaining to these newspapers that seem to influence the employment of such features. In the study, the concept of interactivity was defined according to a four-part typology of online interactivity specific to the context of online newspapers developed by Deborah Soun Chung (Chung, 2008; Chung and Nah, 2009). The typology is based on empirical studies of US newspaper web site visitors, and posits that four different types of interactive features are distinguishable in the online newspaper context.

First, *human* interactivity refers to those features that facilitate interpersonal communication in different ways, making it possible for web site visitors to chat, e-mail or in other ways contact other readers or journalists.

Second, *medium* interactivity details the more technical features available, features that allow users different choice options when browsing web sites. Medium interactivity can thus denote rather basic features, like on-site navigational possibilities, or more advanced functionalities, like interactive news graphics or video streams, providing the user with more choices for how to fashion their online news consumption experience.

The third and fourth types of interactivity are essentially conceptualized as combined forms of the first two. Accordingly, the third type is labeled *human-medium*, indicating a set of features aimed towards allowing user contributions to the site, thus “engaging users as content co-producers” (P. Boczkowski, 2002: 278). Common features under this heading include functionalities that allow users to submit their own news tips, stories or photos to the newspaper web site, or features that can be likened to offline “Letters to the editor”.

Finally, the fourth identified type of interactivity is labeled as *medium-human*, and places its focus on features that allow users to customize various aspects of site content to their respective liking. Common functionalities found under this heading include customized topics, headlines as well as different options for search and news updates or alerts. The four-part typology is summarized in Table two below.

Table 2. Summary of Chung’s four-part typology of interactive features on newspaper web sites.

Type of interactivity	Chung (2008), p. 666	Chung and Nah (2009), p. 858	Function on site	Example features
Human	‘human interactive features facilitate interpersonal communication online’	‘interactive options that promote human interactivity facilitate user-to-user mutual communication’	‘Users can communicate with peers and staff’	‘Chat, discussion forums, “e-mail-a-friend” feature’
Medium	‘medium interactive features generally allow readers more control or choice options in experiencing news stories’	‘Features representing medium interactivity rely on technology to allow users to select and elicit choice options’	Users can experience content in a variety of ways	Video streams, News graphics, mobile version of site
Human-medium	‘human/medium interactive features allow users to express their personal opinions’	‘human/medium interactive features that allow users to submit customized perspectives and opinions further provide the audience with a sense of ownership’	Users can contribute own content	E-mail-links to journalists, “Reader news tip” Reader blogs, Reader news, pictures etc.
Medium-human	“medium/human interactive features allow users to customize news to their liking”	“Medium/human interactive features, or features that provide interactive tailoring, allow users to personalize information to their liking”	User customization of site looks, content and use	Customizable content, RSS feeds, e-mail-alerts, SMS alerts

The typology outlined in Table two provided a set of guidelines for the content analysis that was employed to facilitate data collection for the dependent variables – i.e., the degree to which newspapers use different types of interactive features on their web sites. Inspired by previous, similar research (e.g. Gerpott and Wanke, 2004; Massey, 2000), as well as by classic titles detailing the method at hand (Krippendorff, 2004), a representative selection of Swedish newspaper web sites were content analyzed in order to grasp the extent to which features classified according to the typology were used on these sites. Features were identified based on an extensive literature review,

sought after on the selected sites, and classified according to the typology introduced above.

To gauge reliability, a second coder was trained in order to recode a random 20 per cent sample of the included sites. Intercoder agreement ranged from .88, a score well above the common threshold of .80 (suggested by Krippendorff, 2004) to perfect agreement, all using Holsti's formula (Holsti, 1969). The overall figure of intercoder agreement was .96.

In order to fulfill the aim of discerning what factors might influence the use of interactivity, a literature review was first performed. The assumption was made that since the web sites were all part of newspaper organizations, previous research focusing on factors affecting newspaper performance in general should be of interest also here. The literature review suggested that six different factors should be employed as independent variables for the analysis to be performed – thus, these six factors were identified as possibly having influence on newspaper company operation. These factors, and their respective operationalizations, were: newspaper size (operationalized as circulation of parent newspaper), media ownership (operationalized as net result of owner), region (operationalized as local or national region of operation), competition within region (operationalized as total N of newspapers within each respective region), length of web presence (operationalized as N of days the newspaper had had a web site), number and age of staff (operationalized as N and mean age of web staff). Data for the first three variables were gathered through document analysis, while data for the last three variables were collected by means of a small questionnaire distributed via e-mail to the editors-in-chief of the newspapers included in the study.

To avoid what Boczkowski commented on as “the lumping together of apples and oranges” (2002: 276-277) in analysis, i.e. the apparently common practice of treating different types of interactivity as one and the same, multiple regression analyses were performed in order to assess the influences of the independent variables on the dependent variables. The latter set of variables were formalized as a series of indices, one for each of the four identified types of interactivity, and one for the total number of interactive features identified on the newspaper web sites.

In short, the results indicated that the only variable having a significant influence on the utilization of *human* interactive features was the one measuring circulation, a variable that emerged as significant for all types except for the medium variety. Perhaps not very surprisingly, the size of the parent newspaper appears important for web site performance.

For *human-medium* features, the age variable proved to be significant, indicating that younger web staff leads to features that allow the readers to involve themselves more actively in the web site. As suggested in the study,

this particular result could stem from different journalistic work ideals in different age groups, with younger journalists challenging the work routines established by their ‘cautious traditionalist’ (Chung, 2007: 53) older colleagues.

While the remaining categories of *medium* and *medium-human* interactive features were both significantly predicted by the variable measuring the number of site staff, this was the only independent variable that emerged as significant for medium interactivity. This indicates the importance for a newspaper to sustain a sizeable staff in order to augment their web site with the more technically challenging features included under this label.

Finally, results indicated that on average, Swedish newspaper web sites offer a little more than a third (35 per cent) of the interactive features identified in the study. This particular finding merits the question of whether or not this should be considered a rather low or high percentage – a question that could be the focus of comparative or longitudinal research efforts, also taking other contexts than the Swedish into consideration. The study finishes off by discussing some of the limitations dealt with during the work performed – perhaps most importantly, that the readers and their usage and opinions are not assessed. How do they feel about the features (not) offered to them?

Study II

Larsson, A.O. (2011). Interactive to me – Interactive to you? A study of use and appreciation of interactivity on Swedish newspaper web sites. *New Media & Society*, 13(7).

Previous versions of Study II were presented at the International Conference on Information Systems (ICIS 2010), St. Louis, Missouri, USA, December 12-15, 2010 and at the 2011 Conference of the International Communication Association (ICA 2011), Boston, Massachusetts, USA, May 26-30, 2011.

The limitations described in conjunction with Study I served as inspiration to undertake the work presented in Study II. As stated above, the analytical focus here was placed on newspaper web site visitors; specifically, how these visitors make use of and appreciate the different types of interactive features available on these types of sites.

While previous research have reported audience use of interactive features on online newspapers at rather low levels (i.e. Bergström, 2008; Hujanen and Pietikainen, 2004), and found similar, somewhat reluctant views towards the employment of such features among journalists (e.g.

Chung, 2007; Domingo, 2008; Singer and Ashman, 2009; Thurman, 2008), scholars have posited what could be called an “indirect” effect of interactivity, pointing to the possibility that while visitors on newspaper web sites might not actively engage in interactivity, writing their own news pieces or uploading their own pictures to the site, they might have positive views about the very presence of those features, about the mere possibility to interact. Consider the quotation offered in Deuze (2003: 214), where a user states that ‘I do not want to – or feel the need to – participate in an online discussion or email the editors, but other people can, and its really cool that the site offers users that option’, indicating that such indirect effects might indeed be at work. With this in mind, the aim of Study II was to study variations in newspaper website visitor use and appreciation of interactive features.

The study was performed by means of a large-scale online survey, focusing on questions regarding use and appreciation of interactive features. The same four-part typology used in Study I was employed here, thus distinguishing between use and interactivity of *human*, *medium*, *human-medium* and *medium-human* features. In the survey, example features relating to each of the types were provided. Respondents were asked to specify how often they used such different types of features when visiting a specific newspaper web site, as well as to what degree they appreciated those features. These questions were measured by using seven-point Likert-type scales, with higher scores indicating higher levels of use or appreciation. Aside from questions regarding interactive features, the survey also included a series of questions regarding socio-demographics, social engagement, media use and digital literacy, all based on established measurements and motivated by the supposed effect on user activation attributed to these variables by previous research.

The survey was administered with the help of LimeSurvey, an open-source survey tool. It was hosted on a server at the department of Informatics and Media, Uppsala University. Respondents were encouraged to partake in the survey via links leading to it from two newspaper web sites: *aftonbladet.se*, one of the most popular web sites in Sweden, under the administration of Sweden’s most popular tabloid newspaper, and *sydsvenskan.se*, the web site connected to *Sydsvenska Dagbladet*, one of the most popular regional newspapers in Sweden. *Aftonbladet* hosted the survey for eleven days, while *Sydsvenskan* did so for eighteen days, altogether resulting in 1343 respondents turning in complete answers.

The collected data was subjected to three waves of analysis. First, descriptive statistics provided insights regarding the distributions of the variables measuring use and appreciation of interactive features. Second, in an attempt to uncover any underlying patterns of use and appreciation, those specific variables were subject to an exploratory factor analysis. Third, in order to

provide explanatory evidence, the extracted factors were used as dependent variables in a series of multiple regression analyses, where the previously mentioned variables regarding socio-demographics, social engagement, media use and digital literacy were employed as independent variables. The three waves of analysis will be dealt with in the following.

In order to provide an overview of the respondents' self-reported use and appreciation of interactive features, mean comparisons for both the use and appreciation measures were reported along with standard deviations. A series of Wilcoxon signed-rank tests were also reported in order to gauge the significance of the measured differences between values of use and appreciation.

The overall result was one of low values – while respondents tended to appreciate features more than use them, all the means for the included measurements were reported at rather low levels. For example, while the commenting functionality was not used to any greater extent ($M=1.52$, $SD=1.13$), respondents tended to appreciate this feature to a higher degree ($M=3.66$, $SD=1.84$). This pattern of slightly higher values for appreciation than for use tended to repeat itself for each of the other features. The differences were small, albeit statistically significant, for all the use-appreciate pairings save for one (use/appreciation of video/audio/slideshow features).

In sum, the average mean for the “Use” measurements was reported at 1.85, while the same statistic for the “Appreciate” scales was found to be 3.43. Given that these measurements were assessed on seven-point Likert-type scale (with a “7” indicating high levels of use or appreciation), these results do indeed indicate that the availability of interactive features do not appear highly salient to the average newspaper web site visitor.

As mentioned earlier, exploratory factor analysis was employed in order to uncover any underlying patterns or modes of usage in the data. Five factors were extracted, together accounting for 50.2 per cent of the variance. The five factors were labeled according to their loadings on underlying variables and are presented in Table three.

Table 3. Five extracted factors and their underlying variables.

	Factors				
	<i>The Bystander</i>	<i>The Prosumer</i>	<i>The Lurker</i>	<i>The Filter</i>	<i>The Critic</i>
Appreciates features:	Email article to friend, Chat, Reader blogs/news, Contact staff, Links to similar content, Share content to SNS		Comment		Reader blogs/news, News updates, Customization
Uses features:		Comment, Chat, Reader blogs/news, Contribute image/video, Contribute news tips, Contact staff	Reader questions/polls, Video/audio/slideshow, Links to similar content	Email article to friend, Share content to SNS, News updates	

As mentioned before, the influences of the independent variables on the extracted factors were assessed by means of a series of multiple regression analyses. By gauging these influences we can provide a picture of newspaper web site visitors and substantiate visitor types based on the factor analysis. In what follows, the five identified visitor types are described with the results presented in Table three and the results from the regression analyses in mind.

First, *The Bystander* is easiest described as a rather passive visitor, who does not tend to use, but rather appreciates, a number of different features. As per the results of the regression analysis, The Bystander is likely to be a young, internet-savvy female characterized in her on-site behavior by irregular visits to several different parts of the site.

Second, the factors associated with *The Prosumer* indicate that this particular visitor type is arguably the most active of the five, making use of several of the interactive features identified in the study. According the regression analysis performed, The Prosumer, tends to be a male reporting high levels of digital literacy. As for his visit patterns, he tends not to visit the site on an everyday basis, although when he does, he tends to spend a considerable amount of time there.

Third, rather few of the independent variables helped predict *The Lurker*, a visitor type characterized mainly by rather passive behavior. As can be seen in Table three, The Lurker makes use of several types of features, but it could be argued that these types of features are perhaps not very demanding

to use. Consider, for example, features like reader polls or links to similar content: While they are indeed interactive according to the applied typology, they are perhaps not as demanding or inviting to actual on-site participation as some of the other features included (for comparative purposes the usage pattern of the The Prosumer can be considered).

Fourth, *The Filter* is so labeled because of the apparent tendency to use features that allow the visitor to function as an information hub of sorts, sharing content on social network sites (abbreviated “SNS” in Table three), and e-mailing articles to friends. Given the results of the regression analysis, The Filter tends to be a female, quite focused visitor, mostly visiting specific parts of the newspaper web site. This could relate to the result that The Filter tends to use news update services, and thus does not need to visit as many parts of the site in order to gather the information necessary.

Fifth, and finally, the factors underlying *The Critic* can be said to demonstrate some level of skepticism or criticism towards online newspapers. Following the regression analysis, The Critic is often male, further characterized by higher age and lower level of education, who appears as a rather intense visitor of newspaper web sites, spending quite an amount of time on the site when he visits it.

Taken together, the results indicate that while there are visitors who make use of what could be described as the more demanding features offered by newspaper web sites (i.e. The Prosumer), most site visitors appear rather uninterested in the opportunities to interact. While the majority of the features scrutinized in Study II were not used by the respondents to any larger extent, the features that actually were used could perhaps be classified as somewhat “low” in their degree of interactivity, demanding considerably less energy than higher forms - features that require ‘more effort in that individuals must do more than clicking or selecting in order to actively use them’ (Chung, 2008: 661; see also Stromer-Galley, 2004).

Taking this distinction between higher and lower forms of interactivity into account, most visitors seem to be satisfied with keeping their use of higher forms of interactivity to a minimum, instead focusing mainly on the less demanding ‘bells and whistles’ (Deuze, 2003: 214) often available on newspaper web sites. Before discussing the limitations of the performed study, the suggestion is made that newspaper web site visitors thus could perhaps be understood as “slow learners”, taking their time to adapt to the possibilities for interaction made available by the Internet. With the results from Study I fresh in mind, the same argument could perhaps be made when discussing some of the conservative tendencies relating to journalists and their employment of these types of features.

Study III

Larsson, A.O. (2011). “Extended infomercials” or “Politics 2.0”? A study of Swedish political party web sites before, during and after the 2010 election. *First Monday*, 16(4).

A previous version of Study III was presented at the Evaluating Social Media workshop held in conjunction with the Internet Research 11.0 Conference (IR11), Gothenburg, Sweden, October 21-23, 2010.

With Study III, the theme of the thesis shifts from online news to that of online politics. As the title implies, the study draws on the hopes and expectations that are often aired regarding the Internet and its supposed potential for political purposes. As made clear in the literature review provided in the first chapter of this thesis, many of these initial promises were eventually largely disproven by empirical research (i.e. Chadwick, 2006). Thus, research on this particular topic tends to give less weight to a paradigm of a “shift” in political engagement through the use of Internet technology, instead suggesting that the Internet helps in “enhancing” already existing patterns of civic engagement, generally regarding information provision rather than increased opportunities for voter participation (Vaccari, 2008a, 2008c; Ward and Vedel, 2006). This twofold heuristic relates to the previously mentioned dichotomy of “innovation” on the one hand and “normalization” on the other, as discussed in the first chapter of this thesis.

As the title further implies, the study presents a longitudinal study of Swedish political party web sites during the election year of 2010. While the election itself was held in September of said year, political campaigning tends to be prevalent throughout the entire election year, or at least during the months preceding election day. The choice of Sweden was motivated by the findings and suggestions of previous research, where many studies have focused on US or UK contexts (Chadwick, 2006; Coleman, 2004, 2005). As Sweden boasts high Internet penetration rates among its citizens (Facht, 2008), and as political actors in the country apparently took to the Internet rather early (Gibson, 2004), the country makes for an interesting case study. Similarly, the longitudinal focus was also motivated by the findings as well as recommendations of earlier research efforts – while many studies have focused their analyses on the web presences of political actors during times of electoral campaigning, most such studies have primarily analyzed up to three different iterations of the respective web sites. As such, no yearlong longitudinal study taking these issues into account had been published at the outset of Study III. Thus, the work presented in Study III wanted to capture the ‘initial or tentative approaches’ (Lilleker and Malagón, 2010: 31) of the political actors, and therefore employed longitudinal analysis of said web

sites in order to trace their developments before, during and after the election.

In order to accommodate this, data collection was performed throughout the 2010 election year. Specifically, a web site archiving tool (SiteSucker for Mac OS X) was used in combination with PDF printouts (utilizing WebSnapper for Mac OS X) of the individual political party pages, which were archived three levels deep. In essence, this means that the first or “index” page, as well as the main second and third pages were subject to archiving. The archived sites were then content analyzed based on a four-part typology of features employed on political party web sites, the idea being to be able to assess the “ebb and flow” of these different types of features during the election year. The typology used was suggested by Foot and Schneider (2006) and further complemented by other types of features identified by similar studies. Moreover, the web sites under analysis – i.e. the web sites of all major Swedish political parties – were visited *a priori* in order to search for any features not identified by previous research efforts. As for the typology guiding the data collection, it suggests four types of features often found on political web sites. The four types of features are described below.

First, *informing* features provides information on party issue positions as well as plans and priorities for governing. In the context of online campaigning, techniques for informing often involve providing documentation regarding party history, ideology and talking points (Foot and Schneider, 2006: 50 ff; Kann, Berry, Grant and Zager, 2007; Vaccari, 2008c).

Second, *involving* features are defined by Foot and Schneider as ‘facilitating interaction between site visitors and the campaign organization’ (2006: 70). While the basic techniques for involving, such as opportunities to contact the campaign through e-mail, social media (like Twitter or Facebook) or on-site “contact functionalities” are quite common, features often described as more advanced (such as discussion boards or live chats with politicians) are repeatedly found to be rather uncommon (Vaccari, 2008c: 1).

Third, *connecting* features facilitates interaction with other online actors through the use of hyperlinks (Foot and Schneider, 2006: 103). In linking to other online actors, the campaign can be described as deeming those actors important in some way (Rogers and Marres, 2000: 16-17). The practice of connecting also provides the visitors of campaign web sites with a way to place the party in a specific cognitive context or frame (Foot and Schneider, 2006: 105), making the party “understandable” in relation to the other, linked to societal actors.

Fourth, Foot and Schneider define *mobilizing* features as ‘using the web to persuade and equip campaign supporters to promote the candidate to others, both online and offline’ (2006: 131). By motivating supporters to take concrete action and promote the candidate or party, site visitors can be made

to function as campaign organizations on to themselves (Bimber and Davis, 2003: 59). Parties can engage in mobilizing practices by providing site visitors with a number of tools, ranging from "tell-a-friend" on-site functionalities to supplying campaign materials for on- and offline distribution. Advanced forms of mobilizing might involve parties encouraging their supporters to blog, tweet or act online in some other way in order to spread the party message (Foot and Schneider, 2006: 143 f).

The typology suggested by Foot and Schneider (2006) provided a set of guidelines for the content analysis performed. Based on the typology, as well as the review of previous research as described above, a coding scheme was developed identifying 39 features for the informing category, 18 involving features, 16 for connecting features and 9 features for the mobilizing category. In total, then, 82 features were coded as being present or non-present in the archived web pages.

Reliability for the coding was gauged by means of the employment of a second coder, who analyzed a random 20 % sample of the material. Following the recommendation of Lombard et al. (2002), Krippendorff's α was used to determine the levels of reliability for the variables. Specifically, the KALPHA macro for SPSS (constructed by Hayes and Krippendorff, 2007) was employed in order to facilitate testing. The values of α ranged between .65 and 1.0, with a mean agreement figure of .95. Consequently, the results of the coding process were considered reliable.

In an attempt to move beyond a descriptive approach, focusing only on the degrees to which the examined sites utilized the identified features or not, data regarding supposed influences for use of these features were also collected. Based on the results of previous research efforts, this involved utilizing variables assessing party size (operationalized as the share of votes received during the 2006 parliamentary election), parliamentary status (in or out of parliament), temporal influence (sites are believed to be utilizing more features as election day approaches) and ideological influence (suggesting that different ideological persuasions might result in different levels of utilization of features).

Results indicated that while the indices for informing and connecting functionalities were not subject to much change during the election year, their involving and mobilizing counterparts appeared more dynamic throughout the examined time period. These last two groups of features tended to reach their respective high points during the election month of September, after which they both gradually decreased, indicating less motivation on part of the political actors to involve and mobilize the electorate after the election.

In sum, the results from Study III suggests that while some political actors try to maintain more long term relationships with citizens, most parties choose to concentrate their efforts to engage the voting public to the more intensive campaign period building up to election day, after which the presence of these features on the studied sites decreases. As for the supposed influences on party utilization of these features, the analysis performed suggested that differences related mostly to party size, parliamentary status and party ideology.

Overall, while the ‘stop-start’ nature of political activity, arranged around election cycles, has made its mark also in the online realm (Gibson, 2004: 102), the results further suggests a need to go beyond the dichotomy of normalization and innovation as discussed in the introductory chapter of this thesis, and to instead see the case presented here as an example of a leeway between these two perspectives – albeit with a slight lean towards the more conservative normalization hypothesis.

Study IV

Larsson, A.O. and Moe, H. (in press). Studying political microblogging: Twitter users in the 2010 Swedish election campaign. Accepted for publication in *New Media & Society*.

A previous version of Study IV was presented at the 19th European Conference on Information Systems (ECIS 2011), Helsinki, Finland, 9-11 June, 2011.

The second study dealing with online political activity, and the final one to be included in the thesis, places its focus on the role of social media within the context of parliamentary elections. As with Study III, the setting under scrutiny here is Sweden and the 2010 parliamentary election. While various social media applications have been used more passively as indicators and variables for studies I through III, Study IV deals more exclusively with one such Internet service. Specifically, the study introduces a novel approach to the gathering and analysis of Twitter messages sent during the final campaign period leading up to the aforementioned election, focusing on a structural analysis of the use patterns of high-end users.

Social media in general and Twitter in particular is one of the latest in a long line of information- and communication technologies often thought to possess the potential for more or less radical systemic changes when it comes to enabling political participation (e.g. Smith, 2009). As pointed out by previous research, studies are needed that go beyond the conceptualization of

Twitter and similar technologies as interesting novelties (Honeycutt and Herring, 2009: 10). Study IV thus attempts to answer the apparent need for empirical studies of the Twitter phenomenon - especially in the context of political uses. Indeed, the literature review presented in the introductory chapter of the thesis sketched a rather bleak history of the impact of the Internet on political activity and engagement. Can a novel service such as Twitter be said to contribute to a broadening of public debate, or does it mainly serve as yet another arena for those who could be classified as established societal actors?

Twitter is sometimes referred to as a microblog, and as such, can be likened to a diminutive version of a regular blog. Blogs have indeed drawn a lot of attention from scholars interested in the political potential of online communication services (e.g. Kerbel and Bloom, 2005; Sweetser Trammell, 2007), and much of this attention is now focused on services like Twitter.

As for Twitter's structural properties, the service allows users to send short messages ("tweets") of up to 140 characters to a network of followers. The act of following a user on Twitter is not necessarily reciprocal - a user can follow any number of other users, although the user being followed does not necessarily have to return the favor. Besides sending undirected messages (sometimes identified as "singletons"), users have utilized the open-ended character of Twitter to go beyond the uses intended by the service providers. Besides the singleton type message, which is undirected and visible to all, Twitter users utilize the @ sign in order to facilitate conversations. Posting a message including @USERNAME indicates that the message is intended for or somehow relevant to a specific user. Retweets (RT) refers to the practice of redistributing a tweet originally posted by another user. For analytical purposes, Study IV employed the typology proposed by Kwak et al (2010) to distinguish between Singletons (an undirected message); a Mention or a Reply (@ sign followed by a user ID) or a Retweet, as mentioned earlier (marked with "RT").

Tweets also frequently include so-called hashtags, where the # character is in conjunction with a word or a phrase in order to signal a theme. The use of hashtags allows for searching the "Twittersphere" for tweets of specific interest. In order to study the use of Twitter during the 2010 Swedish election, the hashtag #val2010 (Swedish for #election2010) was identified as the most commonly used for purposes of discussing the upcoming election. This hashtag, then, served as a guide for data collection.

With election date set to September 19th, the process of archiving tweets was initialized on August 17th and aborted on September 22nd. This particular time period was selected in order to capture the final weeks of election campaigning, as well as some of the post-election activity. By utilizing the YourTwrapperKeeper application (TwrapperKeeper, 2010), data could be easily archived and downloaded for analytical purposes. In total, 99 832

tweets were archived during the specified time period and thereby made subject to analysis.

Analysis was performed looking into the top uses of each category of tweets – Singletons, @ messages and retweets. By focusing specifically on such advanced users and visiting their Twitter profile pages, we were able to say something about who these users were – were they to be considered as established in civil society, or could they be said to constitute new voices, taking part in online discussions?

First, though, an overarching analysis showed that over half of the tweets sent during the specified time period were sent on election day – specifically, most of these tweets were sent on election night, supposedly when users were taking part of the post election media coverage. Moreover, the majority of tweets sent during the entire time period were singletons (N=60 088, 60,2%), followed by retweets (N=32 780, 32,8%) and @ messages (@; N=6 964, 7%). With these results in mind, the claim that Twitter has become ‘more conversational’ (Honeycutt and Herring, 2009: 10) would seem invalid in the context at hand.

Moving beyond these results and focusing instead on the specific Twitter practices as identified above, we turn first to the practice of sending undirected messages, i.e. singletons. While the top user identified in this regard can be classified as providing political comedy (its name, “all_insane” is a play of words hinting towards “alliansen”, the collective label for the right-wing alliance of four political parties that have collectively ruled Sweden for two consecutive terms of office), the remainder of users identified here tended to identify themselves on their Twitter profile pages as politicians, journalists or political bloggers – arguably users who could be defined as at least somewhat established in Swedish public debate.

Second, for the practice of sending directed messages by means of the @ character, the open source software package Gephi (Bastian, Heymann and Jacomy, 2009) was employed. By using social network maps created with Gephi, the top users of the @ character could be easily discerned and classified according to their specific use patterns. Drawing on established terminology (i.e. Shannon and Weaver, 1949), these top users were classified as either *senders* (meaning that their frequency of messages sent were relatively higher than messages received), *receivers* (frequency of messages received relatively higher than messages sent) or *sender-receivers* (user appeared as more reciprocal in sending and receiving @ messages). Results indicated that while the sender group consisted almost exclusively of political actors on the national level, the two remaining groups also included users identifying themselves as journalists, political bloggers and politicians at local and regional levels.

Third, Gephi was further utilized in order to analyze the retweeting networks inherent in the collected data. Applying a similar approach to the one described above, a social network map of the top RT users was produced. Based on the results from the social network analysis, and applying a similar scheme to the one discussed above, the top users of the retweet functionality were then classified as belonging to one of three groups. *Retweeters* tended to retweet the messages sent by others more often relative to their own messages being redistributed. *Elites* were so labeled based on their tendency to be retweeted relatively more often than they themselves redistributed messages sent by other users. Finally, *networkers* appeared more mutual in their retweeting practices. In the categories of Retweeters and Networkers we found mostly users affiliated with niche political parties (i.e. the Pirate party), anonymous pundits or journalists, whereas the accounts classified as Elites tended to belong to well-established political parties, journalists or IT professionals.

In sum, the overall results presented in Study IV indicate that the core users of the #val2010 hashtag employed quite diverse uses and engaged themselves in different network connections with each other. However, it became apparent from the data presented here that many of the identified top users can be said to enjoy rather privileged positions in their respective professional capacities of journalists, politicians and so on. Taken together, then, the findings from Study IV indicate that Twitter falls somewhat short of the expectations held by those most enthusiastic on behalf of the democratic and disruptive potential of new web tools. Be that as it may – the findings also indicate the potential of the Twitter platform as a means of outreach for minor, partly marginalized actors. While major political parties and actors appear to have a hard time adapting to the reciprocal nature of @ message and retweeting practices using Twitter, these identified means of conversation and networking appear to play some part in the use patterns of minor political actors as identified in this study.

Study IV finishes up with a discussion regarding possible directions for future research into political (as well as other forms of) microblog research. Arguably, the work presented in the study provides valuable insights into usage patterns when it comes to political Twitter use. However, given its methodological approach, it fails to take into account what is actually being said in the messages sent via the Twitter platform. As such, it could very well be feasible to supplement the structural approach employed here with more qualitative advances, focusing on the semantics rather than on the structure.

Finally, we argue that it is important to acknowledge the relative scarcity of Twitter users. What we are studying are advanced Internet users and their patterns of dissemination and interaction. Nonetheless, by studying early

adopters (e.g. Rogers, 2003) like these, we might be able to get a glimpse of how use of microblogs or other, similar services will be shaped in the future – and of how relatively marginalized political voices can, at least partially, make themselves heard on a somewhat wider scale.

Structuration theory

In this chapter, I present and discuss the theoretical perspective to be employed for the overarching analysis of the empirical studies that make up the bulk of this thesis. As previously mentioned, I have employed structuration theory to guide the analysis. Developed by British sociologist Anthony Giddens, structuration theory has travelled well beyond the disciplinary boundaries of sociology and has provided insights for researchers in a multitude of other fields, such as information systems. The apparent popularity of structuration theory does not mean, however, that its use is entirely unproblematic. In the following, I focus on both the suggested strengths and weaknesses of structuration theory. I also provide a discussion regarding my own use of the theoretical perspective, and how it relates to my chosen research cases.

'We should see social life, not just as society out there or just the product of the individual here, but as a series of ongoing activities and practices that people carry on, which at the same time reproduce larger institutions.'

(Giddens and Pierson, 1998: 76)

Efforts in the social sciences are growing ever more interdisciplinary and the field of information systems (IS) is no exception. In order to grasp the fast-paced developments of the online world, insights from more than just one scholarly tradition are duly needed (Orlikowski and Barley, 2001: 145).

While this thesis has its starting point within the IS discipline, my aim here is to provide interesting results for scholars working in other fields and disciplines as well. With this in mind, I have adopted a broader scope in my search for theoretical guidance. Indeed, Pozzebon et al (2009: 2) point out that IS researchers have often sought theoretical inspiration from related scientific fields, engaging with or adopting specific thoughts and arguments in order to assist in their endeavors (see also Baskerville and Myers, 2002). Similarly, Evans and Brooks (2005: 216) mention the usefulness of adopting social theory into the IS discipline.

Of particular interest, it would seem, has been the work of British sociologist Anthony Giddens, professor emeritus at the London School of Economics. While many facets of Giddens' diverse body of work has been adopted by IS researchers (Pozzebon, 2005), it is his theory of structuration that appears to have enjoyed the most popularity in the IS field. The claim by

Evans and Brooks that ‘social theory in general and structuration theory specifically have been used extensively in IS’ (2005: 215) is further strengthened by a number of literature reviews on the use of structuration theory within the field (e.g. Jones, 1997; Jones and Karsten, 2008; Rose, 2000), altogether giving further merit to the view expressed by Jones and Karsten: ‘the suitability of structuration as a vocabulary for understanding IS phenomena should [...] by now be a matter of record.’ (2008: 149).

Although the advantages of approaching empirical data with structuration theory appear obvious, Giddens’ writings on the topic have been subject to a fair share of criticism. Before discussing the more specific points of criticism, the next section will provide the reader with an overview of structuration theory as conceptualized by Anthony Giddens.

The duality of structure

First, a point of clarification needs to be made. The intention here is not to provide an extensive, in-depth account of structuration theory and its inner workings. Aside from Giddens’ original accounts (1979, 1984; Giddens and Pierson, 1998) a number of authoritative texts on the topic are readily available (e.g. Jones, 1999; Loyal, 2003; Stones, 2005). Rather, what follows will focus on the specifics of the theory that have proven most relevant to IS researchers in general, and to the research topic dealt with here in particular. As such, I follow the example set by Andersson (2010: 67) who used structuration theory as a ‘tool-box [...] pick[ing] concepts and levels of granularity’ at will – a view seemingly also proposed by Giddens himself (1989: 294; see also Rose and Scheepers, 2001).

In a series of texts dating back to the late 1970s and early 80s, culminating in the publication of *The Constitution of Society* in 1984, Anthony Giddens outlined the theory of structuration. The theory was developed in order to address what is perhaps one of the most permeating and challenging issues within the social sciences (Cohen, 1989; Giddens and Pierson, 1998): the roles and respective hegemony of the structuralist and hermeneutic schools of thought.

Specifically, Giddens set out to ‘put an end to each of these empire-building endeavors’ (1984: 2) by recasting the mutually exclusive dualism of said perspectives as a recursively constituted duality of structure. While functionalist or structural traditions of scholarly thought generally favors structure or the macro level as having more influence over social change (Giddens, 1993: 4), the opposite approach of a hermeneutic or interpretative school of thought places more power in the hands of the individual human

agent. Both directions were deemed as equally inept to explain the complex processes of societal development. Instead, Giddens suggested that insights from both views are duly needed in order to provide a fuller picture. Enter Giddens' concept of the duality of structure, basically stating that the two schools of thought briefly introduced above essentially feed into each other rather than being mutually exclusive.

Specifically, Giddens acknowledges that while human agents always act within structures that simultaneously constrain and enable human activity (Giddens, 1984: 177; Pozzebon, 2005: 1358), the structures themselves are dependent on the human activity they govern. Structure can thus be understood as made up of 'rules and resources [...] recursively implicated in the reproduction of social systems' (Giddens, 1984: 185). As for rules and resources, these are described as the 'techniques or generalizable procedures' that agents apply in their ongoing enactment of social structure (Giddens, 1984: 21). Rules, then, can be explained as explicit or implicit formulas for action, whereas resources are defined as what agents bring into this action (knowledge, abilities etc.). Hence, structure provides agents with a way of *doing things* in the more general sense – or with a way to 'go on' in life as Giddens puts it himself (1984: 21).

As mentioned above, the longevity of structure depends on how it is enacted by agents – how we as humans choose to engage with more or less established notions of how to do things in social life. Since structure is understood as a product of ongoing, repeated human action, it does not exist *per se*. Rather, structure is understood as a collective memory of established ways of doing things, as 'instantiations in [reproduced social] practices and as memory traces orienting the conduct of knowledgeable human agents' (Giddens, 1984: 17). Thus, structure is not visible in itself as it is essentially 'all in our heads' (Andersson, 2010: 56) – individually and collectively. As such, while the structures that govern are essentially invisible to the human agents involved in these ongoing processes, we can, however, discern the traces and results of structure, its instantiations in everyday life.

As structures depend on agents to reproduce them in order to prevail, it follows that agents, according to Giddens, are granted the potential to transform structures by employing the provided rules and resources differently – by re-enacting the structure in different ways. This capacity to make a difference stems from the view proposed by Giddens of human beings as knowledgeable and capable agents. Rather than being at the mercy of hegemonic structural properties, agents are seen as very conscious of 'a great deal about the conditions and consequences of what they do in their day-to-day lives' (Giddens, 1981: 281), and as capable to at least potentially act in a different way than the structure at hand would immediately suggest. This 'transformative capacity' (Giddens, 1984: 15) of the agent is perhaps best understood on a more philosophical level, meaning that in essence, 'even the most insignif-

icant person on earth has some capacity to make a difference’ (Andersson, 2010: 56).

The available literature provides numerous examples on how structuration plays out in everyday life – each more imaginative than the other. For example, Rose and Scheepers (2001) interpret a practice very well known to many academics – that of the conference presentation – using structuration theory.

The authors argue that as a conference delegate, you draw on certain rules (in this particular case, rules could be interpreted as the time limit posed upon you by the conference organizers, or the dress code presumed to be adhered to whilst presenting) and resources (for example, access to and skills in using certain software [e.g. PowerPoint or Prezi]) when presenting. The assumption is that the other delegates, as well as the presenter, have a shared understanding of how a conference presentation ought to be performed with regard to such aspects as dress codes, ways of organizing and interpreting the ideas being presented, explicit or implicit codes of seminar behavior, and so on. By performing the presentation in accordance to the statutes of the structure, it is strengthened through re-enactment. However, should the conference delegate choose to diverge from established ways of presenting, ever so slightly, the potential for change at the hands of agents has been acted upon. The structure has been reproduced differently, potentially inspiring other presenters to diverge from the norm and, over time, contributing to changing the structure itself.

While the example above will hopefully clarify the internal mechanisms of structuration-at-work, processes of structuration can also be assessed by means of the commonly used illustration available in Figure two.

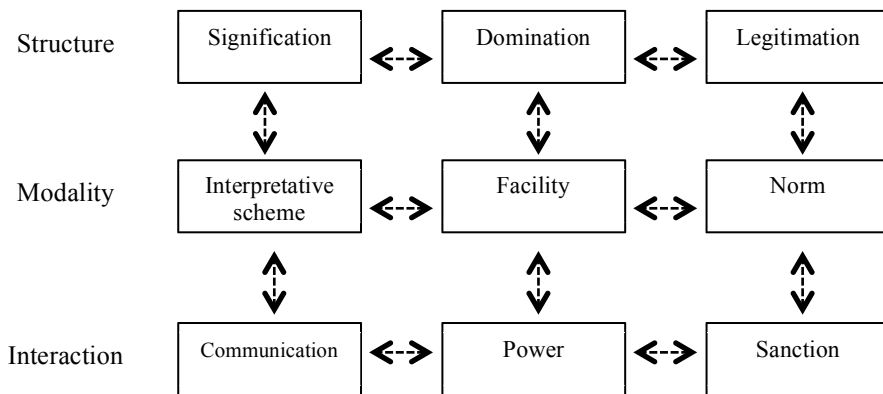


Figure 2. The dimensions of the duality of structure (after Giddens, 1984: 29)

Figure two provides an outline of Giddens’s original account, which proposes that structure on an analytical level can be understood as consisting of three

major dimensions (as shown in the first row of Figure two, labeled Structure): *Signification*, *Domination* and *Legitimation*. Each structural dimension has a corresponding dimension of agency (as shown in the third row, labeled Interaction): *Communication*, *Power* and *Sanction*. The middle row, labeled Modality, is where agency and structure meet and where, essentially, the duality of structure can be made visible through the inter-linkage and reproduction of agency and structure. As such, agents ‘draw upon the modalities of structuration in the reproduction of systems of interaction, by the same token reconstituting their structural properties’ (Giddens, 1984: 29). The three dimensions pertain to different aspects of structure, where *Signification* deals with meaning; *Domination* with power as exercised through control of resources; and *Legitimation* with moral orders like norms, standards or rules.

As the arrows in the figure suggest, the dimensions are ‘inherently intertwined’ (Andersson, 2010: 57) and thus separated only for analytical reasons. While the discussion regarding the relationships outlined in Figure two have hitherto been rather general and non-specific regarding the use of these concepts in the thesis, a more precise treatment of these terms will follow at the end of this chapter, utilizing also the views put forth by Orlikowski (2000).

As pointed out by Rose and Scheepers, the illustration in Figure two is often employed as a starting point for analysis using structuration theory, regularly using the concepts discussed in the figure as a checklist of sorts (2001: 223). Even if such an exact use will not become an actuality in this thesis, the figure has provided conceptual tools for other researchers interested in the theory – conceptual tools that will be used also in this thesis.

Summing up, then, Evans and Brooks (2005: 215) stated that ‘in and through their actions, actors produce the conditions that make their activities possible’, pointing to the duality of structure and action that is at the very core of structuration theory. Next, the concepts of “routines” and “institutions”, central to this thesis, will be dealt with.

Routines and institutions

‘In structuration theory “structure” is regarded as rules and resources recursively implicated in social reproduction; institutionalized features of social systems have structural properties in the sense that relationships are stabilized across time and space.’

(Giddens, 1984: xxxi)

As discussed above, structuration theory posits that agents have the possibility to reproduce structure differently, thereby potentially contributing to alter

a specific structure. However, as social structures grow more stable and human agents become comfortable within those structures, most of the actions undertaken by agents take on the form of routine - 'the habitual, taken-for-granted character of the vast bulk of the activities of day-to-day social life' (Giddens, 1984: 376). Most of our time, we repeat the same or similar actions over and over again – go to work, eat lunch, work some more, have dinner, go to sleep – these are the routinized facets of the *durée* or the temporality of day-to-day life.

Indeed, routinization can in this regard be understood as 'integral to the continuity of the personality of the agent' (Giddens, 1984: 60). Such predictability can be said to provide agents with 'ontological security' (Pozzebon, 2005: 1357). Thus, routines help us make sense of the world – not only in our immediate environment, but also on a macro level.

The concept of "institution" can be understood as a specific set of enduring routines – as *ways of doing things* that have been prevalent for an extended period of time. In principle, this means that the further that social practices extend through time and space, the more common they become over geographical and temporal distances, the more established they become – and the more likely to be regarded as institutionalized features of social life. This postulated relationship and its combined effect on the stabilization of social practices can be demonstrated with a simple, albeit clarifying illustration, as seen in Figure three.

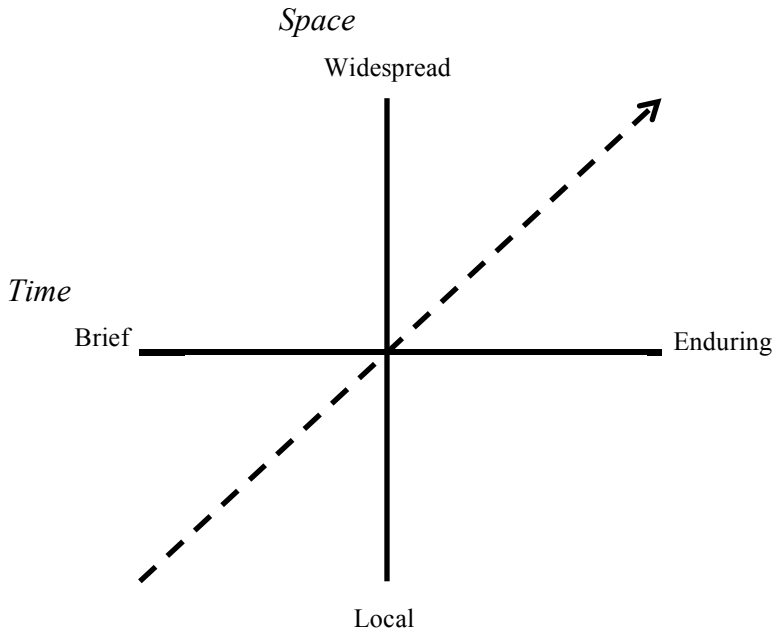


Figure 3. Illustration of social practices stabilizing through time and space (Rose and Scheepers, 2011: 225)

The processes depicted in Figure three, constituting the *longue durée* or temporality of social institutions, can be exemplified with some of the established practices of western society like market capitalism, political elections or the media sector – all of them understood as structures, in turn dependent on the actions of agents, having enjoyed longevity throughout the time-space continuum illustrated in Figure three. As the “embeddedness” or bite of such structures increase, they gradually reach institutional status.

Critique

While structuration theory has proven to be a powerful tool to illuminate empirical situations and to analyze complex data (Walsham and Han, 1991), it has also received its fair amount of criticism. Aside from what could be classified as more general comments, suggesting difficulties in grasping the basic tenets of the theory (e.g. Evans and Brooks, 2005: 219; Jones and Karsten, 2008: 129), one especially pertinent area of critique is focused on the theory’s perceived “black-boxing” of social mechanics as discussed by,

among others, Archer (1996). By proposing the duality of structure, Archer argues, Giddens does little to advance our knowledge about the relations between the macro and micro levels of structural conduct. On the contrary, structuration theory merely ‘throws a blanket’ over the concepts structure and agency, effectively preventing ‘investigation of what is going on beneath’ said blanket (Archer, 1996: 688-689).

The problem described above is sometimes referred to as conflation, pointing explicitly to the difficulty within structuration theory of documenting an institution separate from agency (e.g. Barley and Tolbert, 1997). As pointed out earlier, institutions can be popularly described as “established ways of doing things” – a description that, although perhaps rather simplistic, appears to work well with Giddens’ own conceptualization as outlined in the present chapter.

In relation to this, Giddens’ views on structures and institutions as, essentially, collective mental constructs, has been described by Thompson as loose and abstract (1989). Other critics chime in, arguing that these views proposes institutions as being something ‘never concrete’ and ‘essentially processual’ (Archer, 1996: 689), making it difficult to “pin them down” for the purposes of analysis. Admittedly, Giddens’ somewhat fluid account of social interaction and the structure it relates to – ‘understood as the fitful yet routinized occurrence of encounters, fading away in time and space, yet constantly reconstituted within different areas of time-space’ (1984: 86) – can be seen as both a ‘theory of hope’ (Andersson, 2010: 57), suggesting that structural change is possible, or as ontologically obtuse (e.g. Archer, 1996).

All in all, these and other criticisms collectively build up to a perceived difficulty in applying the theory in empirical situations (Archer, 1995), causing Pozzebon to pose the question of whether Giddens’ thoughts make out the ‘boon or bane’ of empirical research (Pozzebon, 2005: 1355). Indeed, Giddens himself acknowledges that the theory touches upon what might be classified as more philosophical matters (Giddens, 1989), and other writers have suggested that structuration should be understood as a ‘meta-theory’ of sorts (e.g. Jones and Karsten, 2008: 134) – as a way of seeing social practice (Orlikowski and Robey, 1991), as a rationale for approaching empirical data or as a way of thinking about the world, rather than as a fixed set of empirically testable propositions, readily available for operationalization (Weaver and Gioia, 1994; see also Gregor, 2006).

These views apparently resonate well with what seems to be the original intent of the author himself. Indeed, Giddens has suggested that theories like the one employed here should be viewed more as ‘sensitizing devices than as providing detailed guidelines for research procedure’ (1989: 294). Such sensitizing devices could help guide the researcher in identifying particularly interesting empirical phenomena (Myreteg, 2007), and could moreover function collectively as a ‘source of concepts’ (Pozzebon, 2005: 1368) for under-

standing the various processes at play in specific empirical contexts. As pointed out earlier, these uses of structuration theory have evidently been fruitful for researchers in IS as well as for scholars working in other disciplines. Certainly, Stones (2005) argue that Giddens' own preoccupation with ontology-in-general (as opposed to ontology-*in-situ*) does not necessarily disqualify structuration theory from having an important role to play in more situated analytical contexts.

In sum, then: while the tenets of structuration theory provides a set of powerful conceptual tools with which to zone in on and carefully analyze specific empirical material and contexts, it cannot be considered a flawless social theory. Then again, is there such a thing as a flawless, perfect theory? While different theories help us make sense of the world and our objects of study in different ways, help us tell different stories, it is important to clearly acknowledge the anomalies that one finds within each theoretical perspective, and the critique that each perspective is thus deserving of.

Given the focus of this thesis on societal institutions, clearly a key aspect of the theory under scrutiny here, the decision was made to employ structuration theory to help inform my empirical results on a theoretical level. The meeting places between structure and action, the modalities, have been of specific interest in the analysis. Also of relevance for the decision to make use of the theory was the fact it has been proven and appropriated for the social scientific study of Information- and communication technologies (ICTs), as discussed in the next section, which is focused on the situated use of structuration within IS and related fields.

Structuration Theory and ICTs

'[...] as they do these things in relation to machines and so forth these are the stuff out of which structural properties are constructed'

(Giddens and Pierson, 1998: 83)

As a general social (meta-)theory rather than a theory specific to the study of Information- and Communication technologies, structuration theory is usually amended or adapted in some way before applied in specific empirical or disciplinary contexts. For social scientists interested in the societal role of ICTs, Giddens' apparent 'neglect of the technological artifact' (Jones and Karsten, 2008: 128) has constituted some controversy in adapting the theory. Notwithstanding some sparse commentary on the digital economy and knowledge society (e.g. Giddens and Pierson, 1998; Hutton and Giddens, 2001), Giddens' writings in general and about structuration in particular

have been described as unspecific about technology (Monteiro and Hanseth, 1996).

While there appears to be some alleged difficulties in relating structuration theory to the study of ICTs, the quote presented at the beginning of this section has not only provided this thesis with its title, but it is also pointed out by Jones and Karsten (2008: 150) as indicative of the roles of technology as implicated in the reproduction of structure. It follows from this that “Machines”, computers, are suggested by Giddens as conceivable resources for human agents undertaking the ongoing processes of structural conduct. As agents “do things” with computers and other ICTs, they are provided with a new means for structural reproduction – and possibly also structural change, through their repeated actions.

The quote indeed implies the usefulness of structuration theory for the study of technology use, a potential that has not been overlooked. In particular, the potential of structuration theory to further understanding in situations characterized by technological change has been singled out (Gynnild, 2002; Wanda J. Orlikowski, 2000). Given the topic of the thesis, then, the theory seemed appropriate for further inquiry and application.

Within the IS field, as well as in other, related fields, two specific appropriations of structuration theory can be distinguished.

The first of these asserts a view of structure as *embedded* in technology, suggesting that structural properties are inscribed in IT artifacts, effectively setting up “rules” for how said artifacts can and should be used. Examples of scholarly work employing such an embedded view include a series of studies following the approach of Adaptive Structuration Theory (AST), as penned by DeSanctis and Poole (e.g. DeSanctis and Poole, 1994; Poole and DeSanctis, 2004). Theorists inspired by AST work according to the notion of structures as existing independent of agents. Thus, when an IT artifact is fashioned, it is designed with a specific intended use. Given these inscribed starting points, analysis of technology use can be understood as “faithful” or “unfaithful”, and focus is placed on the degree to which a technology is used accordingly, and the degree to which this use matches the specified expected outcomes (DeSanctis and Poole, 1994: 130).

Of particular interest here is the work of Wanda J. Orlikowski, who over the course of ‘two seminal papers’ (Pozzebon, et al., 2009: 4) published in *Organization Science* (1992, 2000) developed her view of structuration theory in relation to ICTs and organizations. Arguably starting out with an embedded view as discussed above, Orlikowski’s original 1992 account takes as one of its focal points the view that designers ‘build into technology certain interpretive schemes [...], certain facilities [...] and certain norms’ (1992: 410), effectively subscribing to the embedded view of technology as isolated from human agency and viewing the IT artifact as a finished prod-

uct, that by way of its design stipulates certain forms of human agency (e.g. Barley, 1986; Walsham, 2002).

Arguably, the embedded view described above differs from Giddens' original account of structuration theory, most importantly in relation to the role of human agency. While an embedded approach usually recognizes that agents are not entirely at the mercy of the structures rooted in technology, the basic tenet of structures as embedded appears to diverge quite significantly from Giddens' position that structure is virtual and dependent on its recursive relationship with human agents – the duality of structure. Indeed, Jones point out that 'to suggest that structure may be somehow fixed into the technology is to separate it from agency' (1999: 127), with such a view effectively turning Giddens' suggested duality back into oppositional dualism. Moreover, in one of his rare direct statements relating to technology, Giddens points out that it 'does nothing, except as implicated in the actions of human beings' (Giddens and Pierson, 1998: 82). Thus, while an embedded view of structure has provided scholars with useful insights into empirical phenomena (as suggested by Jones and Karsten, 2008: 152; Orlikowski, 2000: 404) such a view does not appear to remain faithful to the foundations of the original theory (Evans and Brooks, 2005: 219; see also the recent debate in *MIS Quarterly*: Jones and Karsten, 2008; Jones and Karsten, 2009; Poole, 2009).

Remembering that while users can and do use technological artifacts in accordance with how they were designed, users also frequently exhibit tendencies towards circumvention of technological properties, non-use or even inventiveness, coming up with new and perhaps unforeseen ways of employing ICTs for their professional or leisure-time purposes. Accordingly, the second appropriation of the theory suggests an *emergent* view of structure. It takes as its starting point the human agent and how s/he 'enacts emergent structures through recurrent interaction with the technology at hand' (Orlikowski, 2000: 407). Here, the later work of Orlikowski takes a leading role. In her influential 2000 paper *Using technology and constituting structures: A practice lens for studying technology in organizations*, she describes her revised approach, arguably very different (Halperin, 2005; Jones and Karsten, 2008) from the 1992 account briefly described above:

‘When humans interact regularly with a technology, they engage with (some or all of) the material and symbol properties of the technology. Through such repeated interaction, certain of the technology's properties become implicated in an ongoing process of structuration. The resulting recurrent social practice produces and reproduces a particular structure of technology use. Thus, structures of technology use are constituted recursively as humans regularly interact with certain properties of a technology and thus shape the set of rules and resources that serve to shape their interaction.’

(Orlikowski, 2000: 406-407)

Thus, as agents “do things in relation to machines”, these machines become an integral part of structural reproduction, where agents act in relation to ‘the institutional contexts in which they live and work, and the social and cultural conventions associated with participating in such contexts’ (Orlikowski, 2000: 410). Certain practices, performed with or without computers, might be seen as *faux pas* or inappropriate within certain contexts. The knowledgeable, reflexive agent, as suggested by Giddens, will act accordingly.

While this view of technology as gaining structural properties only after being adopted in practice is more in line with Giddens’ original account than the embedded view, it certainly needs to be put in relation to what we can do in the physical world and the properties thereof. As Giddens puts it: ‘you can’t just walk straight through a wall’ (Giddens and Pierson, 1998: 82). It follows from this that each IT artifact provides specific properties, suggesting the physical (or digital, for that matter) limits for what can and cannot be done with it. However, contrary to the embedded view, the use of these properties is not predetermined (meaning that there are no “right” or “wrong” modes of usage) and as such, it does not structure human behavior until it comes into play at the hands of agents. As an example, Orlikowski notes that while software tools such as word processors and spreadsheet applications are mainstays in almost every personal computer, our regular day-to-day use of such tools typically involves us utilizing ‘at best, 25 percent’ of the functionalities made available to us by them. She further argues that the development of the World Wide Web at the hands of its users must be considered to have reached well beyond the expectations of several early Internet pioneers (Orlikowski, 2000: 407). With the popularity of the web 2.0 dictum in mind, the traditional roles of designers as well as users of technological artifacts, such as web pages, could be expected to be subject to change (e.g. Sjöström, 2010).

Given the emerging approach of Orlikowski’s appropriation of structuration theory, she proposes a “practice lens” through which to view technology use (or non-use) as implicated in the continuous, recurrent recreation of structure. This framework of “technologies-in-practice” is based on Giddens’ original account of the dimensions of the duality of structure as outlined

previously, and can perhaps easiest be described as an adaptation of said dimensions to the context of ICT use. Orlikowski's model over the enactment of technologies-in-practice is depicted in Figure four.

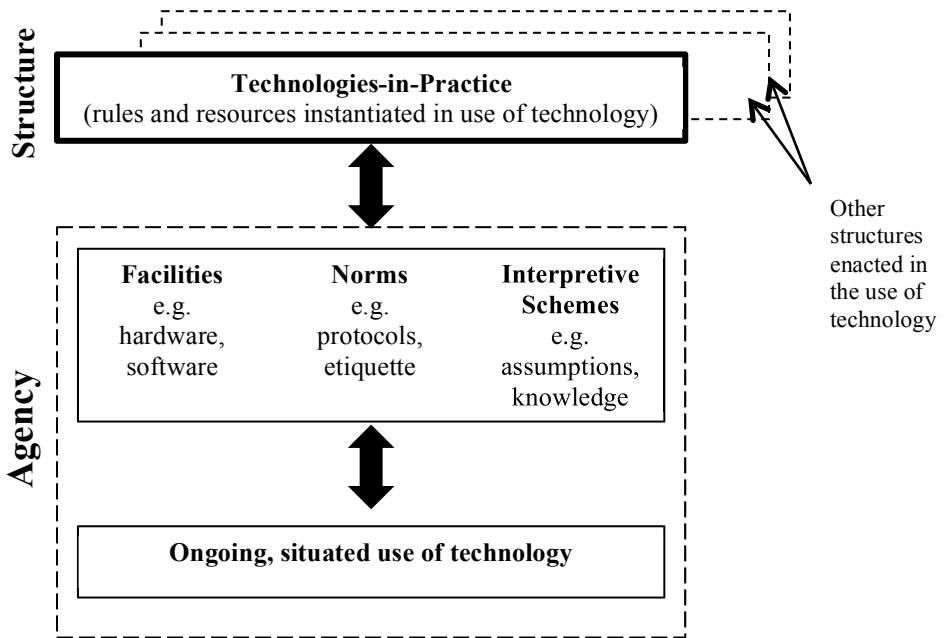


Figure 4. Enactment of technologies-in-practice (Orlikowski, 2000: 410)

Much like Giddens's 1984 outline, Orlikowski places the structural level at the very top of her model. For Orlikowski, then, technologies-in-practice is here understood as the structure, regulating and at the same time dependent upon the ongoing employment of rules and resources instantiated in the use of technology. As discussed earlier, structure is dependent on modalities, where agents interact with the rules and resources made available to them by structure. Building on Giddens original theorizing, Orlikowski further specifies and contextualizes the three types of modalities, which together make up the links between agency and structure.

First, *Facilities* refer to the properties of the hardware and software under investigation – 'those provided by its constituent materiality, those inscribed by the designers, and those added on by users through previous interactions' (Orlikowski, 2000: 410). Second, *Norms* refer to protocols and etiquette linked to technology use, with users drawing on their respective contextual obligations as well as related 'meanings, habits, power relations [and] norms' (Orlikowski, 2000: 410) when appropriating technology. Finally, *Interpretative Schemes* refer to the 'skills, power, knowledge, assumptions,

and expectations about the technology and its use' (Orlikowski, 2000: 410) that the agent could be expected to have.

Following this outline of structuration theory in general and as employed by Orlikowski, the use of and contribution to structuration theory within this thesis is discussed in detail in the next and final section of the current chapter.

Use of and contribution to structuration theory

In one of the more recent literature reviews on the use of structuration theory within the IS field, Jones and Karsten outline several 'opportunities for future structuration IS research' (2008: 147-149). In the following, I touch upon some of the opportunities identified by these and other authors, discussing how the thesis relates to some of the suggestions made. Specifically, I will focus on three areas of recommendations: The first dealing with how structuration theory is understood and used, the second relating to research scope, and the third pertaining to opportunities for interdisciplinary efforts.

The first suggestion for future research that this thesis acts upon deals with how structuration is used – specifically, studies are suggested to approach analysis through 'sympathetic but critical engagement with Giddens's work [...] without abandoning its central claims' (Jones and Karsten, 2008: 148). With this claim and the discussion provided above in mind, I employ the view of structure as emergent from technology. My intention with this is based not only on the fact that this approach appears to remain more faithful to Giddens' original account, and that it will allow me to draw from the insights of Orlikowski's 2000 interpretation, but also that an emergent view provides a more suitable starting point to theoretically gauge both use and non-use of technology (as pointed out by Andersson 2010: 59-60).

The second suggestion concerns research scope in relation to employment of the theory. Jones and Karsten point out an interesting dilemma in relation to this: while structuration theory was constructed as a general theory of society with its analytical focus arguably at the macro level, most structural IS research has placed its focus elsewhere, paying 'little attention to the broader social context of the phenomena that it addresses' (2008: 139). Indeed, it should come as no big surprise that most structural IS research as well as most research in IS in general appears to have been performed at the meso or organizational level (Evans and Brooks, 2005: 215; Rose and Scheepers, 2001: 225). While the need to understand the influence of ICTs in social life and not only within organizations has long been recognized (e.g. Walsham, 1993; Walsham and Han, 1993), it is only recently that such studies have become more pertinent (Pozzebon, et al., 2009: 2). By

placing the analytical focus of this thesis on the societal or macro level, I contribute to a better understanding of the supposed role that ICTs are sometimes thought of as having in reproducing structure. While I cannot claim to present an exhaustive, all-encompassing account of such practices, the empirical material presented in this thesis should suffice to provide the research community with at least some insights into how these mechanisms come into action.

The third suggestion relates to disciplinary alignment – specifically, the already suggested increasing need for interdisciplinary insights in order to provide richer understandings of societal phenomena like those under scrutiny here. This relates to the debate surrounding the status of the IS discipline as a reference discipline or not (e.g. Baskerville and Myers, 2002). Without recapitulating this debate *in toto*, it would seem that an engagement with the original tenets of structuration theory would help interested researchers connect with debates in other research fields, possibly encouraging ‘reciprocal exchange with other fields that have similarly sought to apply structuration in their work’ (Jones and Karsten, 2008: 152). As pointed out above, while Orlikowski’s work emanated from organization studies, her insights and findings have been useful for many researchers outside this particular field. Since the issues discussed in the present text evolve around areas often dealt with by related disciplines (e.g. media studies, communications and political science), my hope is that the work presented here can provide further linkage between the IS discipline and what I see as my three reference or aligned disciplines. Thus, I would like to suggest an expansion of the claim by Orlikowski and Barley that ‘much can be gained from greater interaction between IT [Information Technology] and OS [Organization Science]’ (2001: 147) to also include other related disciplines into the fold.

Research on ICTs is not performed exclusively within the IS discipline. By opening up the discipline to outside influences, much like has been done before, researchers will be provided with complimentary sets of terminologies and conceptual tools with which to further their endeavors. Of course, such openness is not without difficulty. However, given the proper ontological and epistemological alignments across disciplinary borders, I feel that the benefits of interdisciplinary work are too promising not to be acted upon in some way.

‘Most people don’t do things very differently’

In this, the final chapter of the thesis, I first provide a brief summary of the results from the empirical studies. With this as a starting point, I then move on to discuss the presented results utilizing terminology related to structuration theory as conceptual tools. Specifically, I draw extensively on the three modalities of structure in order to frame my empirical results. Following this discussion, the subsequent section discusses the combined empirical results with regard to what Orlikowski has labeled as three types of structural enactment. The aim of the thesis is then reiterated and related to the preceding discussion before the chapter and the thesis itself finishes with a discussion regarding the limitations of the work performed. Finally, I suggest some opportunities for future research efforts on themes similar to those dealt with here.

The title of this chapter begs an explanation. As probably expected, it is a quote from an interview, where the interviewee is Wanda Orlikowski, talking about her experiences of doing research on IT and its role during organizational changes. Below you will find the quote set in its original context:

[...] most people don’t do things very differently. Most of my studies, if you look at them, are more about people doing more of the same. In fact, finding very little degrees of freedom for people, either by choice or – coercion’s a strong word – but by the force of their situation, because of career paths, or because of political pressures, or finding it very difficult to try and do things differently. Very often, even though the espoused reason is to try and change the way we work with this new technology, in reality the practice has often been more of the same with technology.’

(Scharmer, 1999)

In the interview segment, Orlikowski talks about how the bulk of empirical research into ICTs and organizational change has provided little evidence of technology as having a potential for inducing change in work patterns. Of importance here is to remember that bulk of Orlikowski’s research has been performed in organizational contexts. As pointed to in the quote above, and as made evident throughout her body of work, we should not be surprised at the extent to which career paths or internal organizational pressures can take hold over an individual co-worker’s incentive to make novel use of the tech-

nological tools available to him or her. Again remembering that scholars have pointed out the perceived usefulness of structuration theory on the societal level of analysis, I argue that in essence, the same views expressed by Orlikowski in the quote above will be useful when assessing the combined results of the empirical studies presented here.

As made evident in the third chapter of this thesis, the included studies have indeed shown that ‘Most people don’t do things very differently’. I should like to build this last chapter around a discussion of these combined results as interpreted using concepts derived from structuration theory. Specifically, the argument made is that we as readers and journalists of online newspapers (relating to studies I and II) or as citizens and politicians (relating to studies III and IV) are not, to any larger extent, using the Internet in order to challenge the existing structures of what could perhaps easiest be described as different types of “sender-receiver” relationships. Instead, we are mostly using new technology to do more of the same, thus, using Giddens’ terminology, largely reproducing the structures pertaining to these activities in a relatively traditional manner, thereby further institutionalizing the media industry and organized party politics.

Journalists are still mostly acting as “traditional” journalists; politicians too. The same goes for citizens, understood here as readers (in the context of online newspapers) and citizens (for online politics). As pointed to in the quote from Orlikowski above, structures are not that easily amended – especially not when they’ve enjoyed prevalence for longer periods of time. While these forms of organized human activity have certainly undergone internal developments throughout the years, their basic functionality has been and is still fashioned in pretty much the same way. Thus, structuration theory, and the results presented in this thesis, would suggest that such stable, institutionalized practices do not simply change overnight, or as a result of the introduction of some new technological innovation.

Focusing first on the theme of online newspapers, Study I dealt with trying to discern what factors seemed to have influence over the utilization of interactive features on newspaper web sites. As shown in the study, the average Swedish newspaper web site tended to use a little more than one third of the features included for analysis in the study. Whether or not this is to be considered a high or low ratio could be subject for debate – the argument could perhaps be made that given the amount of media attention regarding audience participation in journalistic contexts, this figure, along with the more detailed results offered in the study itself, could have been expected to be somewhat higher. The interpretation could be made that while most newspapers still follow what could be described as somewhat traditional journalistic norms, tendencies that challenge these norms are indeed in the works. Consider, for example, the supposed “age effect” reported in Study I, suggesting

that younger journalists tend to be somewhat more open to utilize more challenging forms of interactive features on the web sites that they manage. While Study I suggested that journalists were not utilizing interactivity to degrees that might have been expected, it did not take into account the consumers of the news product – the readers, or more specifically, the newspaper web site visitors.

Enter Study II, where focus was duly placed on the activities of these visitors. In some ways, this second study yielded results that were reminiscent of the results presented in the first one. While the aims and methodology were arguably different for the two studies, we can clearly see how most of the identified visitor personas appear as mostly passive and uninterested in taking part in what is argued to be the more challenging aspects of online interaction in the specific context, rarely leaving the confounds of what could be described as “audiencehood”. However, much like the tendency for younger journalists to employ more demanding interactive features (as reported in Study I), similar variations could be discerned with regards to the readers. Consider The Prosumer, arguably one of the more active identified visitor types. While this particular type only make up for one out of five specific visitor types, it still shows that some newspaper web site visitors are making rather extensive use of the interactive features offered to them.

Second, regarding the theme of online politics, Study III featured a longitudinal analysis of the web pages of Sweden’s major political parties. While the overall findings indicated that most political parties tended to act somewhat unadventurous with regard to letting their respective constituencies take on more active roles through the web pages during the election campaign, results also indicated some novel approaches to web campaigning. Specifically, while the statistic for involving and mobilizing features clearly fell following election day, these values were on average still kept near the .5 coefficient - indicating that nearly half of these types of features were employed even when no election was at stake. Of course, these reported values are to some extent due to an inflated mean, given the comparably larger scores shown by a few of the studied parties. Nevertheless, it says something about electioneering processes – maybe they have not undergone the radical progressions often pointed to by some pundits, but the results presented here could be seen as examples of ongoing, incremental change.

Finally, Study IV focused specifically on one of the currently popular social media applications – Twitter – and its use during the 2010 Swedish parliamentary elections. Specifically, tweets containing the relevant hashtag #val2010 (Swedish for #election2010) were archived and analyzed, focusing on mapping out the structural relationships between top users of the service at hand. While the findings indicated that the majority of these top users identified themselves as already having established roles in society, results also revealed that some of these users were affiliated with minor political

parties (mainly the Pirate Party), or were otherwise relatively unknown with regard to status in civil society. As such, while much of the “happy-go-lucky” rhetoric regarding the political and participatory potential of the Internet was at least in part disproven by the study, the potential for non-established actors to make their respective voices heard was also clearly discerned.

As shown in the studies presented here, as well as in the literature review presented in the introductory chapter of this thesis, journalists, politicians and their respective audiences appear to be having some difficulty in adapting to the suggested new forms of interaction that have come about as a result of the introduction of the Internet. To be fair, there have been important changes in the relationship between senders and receivers, with increased audience interaction in the journalistic process being reported by researchers (e.g. Carpenter, 2010; Steensen, 2009). Similar results regarding political participation have also been reported, as discussed in the introduction of the thesis.

In this regard, journalistic as well as parliamentary political practices have apparently undergone changes through the development of online practices. However, as this thesis has shown, the bulk of empirical research on these topics still suggest that the attitudes of practitioners, understood here as politicians and journalists, towards increased user interaction are mostly somewhat conservative. This suggests that both professions, their respective audiences, and thereby societal institutions at large, cannot be easily classified as ‘shared spaces’ (as suggested by Singer and Ashman, 2009: 3), collective products, created in participation with an involved audience. Something is indeed happening – but the *structures that be* have not, apparently, undergone sufficient amendments yet.

Journalists are not the only ones involved in the profession of journalism. There has to be someone on the receiving side of things – someone to consume the journalistic end product. Likewise, political actors need an audience – someone to listen to their message and, possibly, vote accordingly. In the context of this thesis, we cannot forego the web site visitors: the readers, who through online developments such as the increasingly popular Web 2.0 rationale supposedly have more input and power when it comes to amending and contributing to the different online experiences.

The research presented here has shown that while opportunities for such visitor inputs could be described as at least somewhat increasing, rather few audience members appear to take the time to engage with the more demanding of such opportunities. Most visitors on newspaper web sites appear content to remain just that – visitors, who appear rather jaded and uninterested in the supposedly ever-increasing opportunities to provide the newspaper with various types of input. While this thesis has not made such in-depth

inquiry into the uses of interactive features by visitors of political web sites, the results presented by previous research and in the studies presented here provide quite a similar view when it comes to this particular category of web sites.

Understanding non-use – three modalities of structure

Research suggests limited use of interactive features on behalf of both senders and receivers in most of the cases accounted for above. With Orlikowski's model for technologies-in-practice (reproduced in Figure four) in mind, the studied relationships between practitioners and audiences can be further understood through the three modalities she draws from Giddens – *Facilities*, *Norms* and *Interpretive schemes*. As previously mentioned, modalities can be described as the pathway between the structure and the agent, where the interaction between these two levels takes place and is made discernible for analytical purposes. The three modalities, and how they can be comprehended in the context of this thesis, are discussed in the following.

As mentioned earlier, *Facilities* refer to the characteristics of the technical artifacts, the hardware and software. For media organizations, this would refer to their respective web presences and how they choose to use them. For their audiences, facilities would denote the technical equipment available to them. As for the context of online political activity, a similar sketch could be drawn. Indeed, as computers and Internet access have both become more available and accessible across several socio-economic strata, the assertion can be made that more and more people are getting access to at least some form or level of online experience. The same goes for media companies and established democracies in the western hemisphere, where most research on matters relevant to this thesis has been performed. Thus, the technical facilities – the hardware and the software necessary for interaction between sender and receiver – are in place, ready to potentially spring into action at the click of a computer mouse button. However, as the results of the empirical studies included in this thesis suggests, these types of interaction do not regularly take place.

Be that as it may, we are nonetheless seeing an admittedly less clear-cut sender-receiver relationship, since some 'power users' (Orlikowski, Yates, Okamura and Fujimoto, 1995) on both sides have started to amend the structures that govern these everyday processes. Consider, for example, the more active visitor types identified in Study II, or the engaged politicians pointed to in Study IV. Still, most agents, be they readers or journalists, citizens or politicians, do not appear to use these features to any larger degree. This pattern of mostly non-use appears somewhat akin to Orlikowski's example

regarding the use and non-use of word processors and other, similar applications discussed briefly above, where she suggests that ‘in our regular use of these tools, most of typically utilize, at best, 25 percent of these tools functionality’ (Orlikowski, 2000: 407). It would appear, then, that this approximation is a valid description also for the empirical results presented in this thesis.

Why is this? Why are we not seeing more changes taking place in the contexts studied here? As this thesis has shown, the claims that the Internet would assist in increasing political participation among previously unengaged citizens (e.g. Castells, 2007: 255), giving way to a new era of ‘post-modern campaigning’ (Vaccari, 2008a: 648), were indeed somewhat overstated. Similar findings have been reported regarding the journalistic context, as shown earlier. Indeed, simply because the technology is in place does not mean that change regarding human agency will take place – such an assumption would border on something similar to technological determinism.

Perhaps we can move towards an increased understanding regarding these questions by focusing on the modality of *Norms* – to be understood as established ‘codes of conduct’ as suggested by Orlikowski (2000). As discussed earlier, the norm for journalistic practice still appears to be that of the long-standing, established one-to-many form of news reporting and dissemination. While recent developments have indicated that changes to this work routine might be on their way, due perhaps to changes in journalistic schooling (Deuze and Dimoudi, 2002) or to more general aspects of generational differences (as shown in Study I, this thesis), research has mostly found interactivity to be an ‘uncomfortable myth’ (Domingo, 2008: 688) for many journalists and other media professionals.

Similarly, the widespread norm for political practice for both the elected and the electorate still appears to be that of established mass communication from the politician to the voter. While research has indicated that changes to this regular routine might be on their way, due to ideological differences among politicians (e.g. Gibson, et al., 2008: 26; Vaccari, 2008c: 15), incumbency status or party size (e.g. Druckman, et al., 2007: 429; Schweitzer, 2008: 457; Strandberg, 2009: 837-838) or voter demographics (e.g. Vaccari, 2008b: 75), the research performed, including the results presented in this thesis, has mostly reported on various forms of online interaction between citizens and politicians at rather low levels. Most opportunities for interaction at the hands of politicians could be likened to what Foot and Schneider describe as ‘kissing virtual babies online’ (2006: 108), indicating limited and perhaps somewhat superficial use of the possibilities made available.

In sum, the ‘uncomfortable myth’ of interactivity suggested by Domingo (2008: 688) found in newsrooms apparently extends its grasp also to agents within the political context. As the results presented in this thesis has shown, most agents, regardless of context, are not engaging with interactive features

to any greater extent. Instead, in our everyday lives, most of us appear to be reproducing what could be labeled as different structures of “audiencehood” – remaining readers and voters, consumers of news and politics, largely uninterested in the possibilities for online interaction with institutions that are, at least in some cases, readily available for us.

However, we can also discern changes in this regard. Study I suggested a different, perhaps more challenging, approach to the utilization of interactive features at the hands of younger media professionals. Similarly, age differences were in place also for the different types of newspaper website visitor types discussed in Study II. Study IV found that non-established political actors (mostly members of the Pirate Party) tended to employ Twitter in a somewhat different way than their more established counterparts. These findings could be interpreted as ongoing norm changes – while more established actors are largely adhering to habitual norms of structural conduct, we are also seeing gradual changes to these norms, perhaps creating openings for further structural amendments.

As for the third modality identified by Giddens and implemented by Orlikowski, *Interpretative Schemes* denotes the ‘skills, power, knowledge, assumptions, and expectations about the technology and its use’ (Orlikowski, 2000: 410) or the ‘stocks of knowledge’ (Giddens, 1984: 29) drawn upon by the user during technology-supported practice. For the purposes of the topic under scrutiny here, interpretative schemes can be understood as the knowledge and assumptions held by politicians and citizens respectively regarding the concepts and functions of information technology use for political purposes. This particular modality is sometimes understood as the level of technological knowledge held by an individual user regarding a specific system (i.e. Orlikowski, 2000). However, this perhaps slightly limited view misses out on the beliefs, assumptions and perceptions of technology use as held by the user. As shown in this thesis, such underlying beliefs about online political practices are sometimes held high – not only by practitioners and audiences, but also by the many academics interested in these topics.

Indeed, while some politicians and citizens might perceive the online realm as carrying with it increased opportunities for interactions and deliberation, these perceptions appear to clash with the norms of technology use for various political purposes as discussed earlier. In other words, while our assumptions regarding the role of technology for such purposes might suggest otherwise, the norms (as discussed earlier) often associated with these uses appear as somewhat restraining. With some notable exceptions, it would seem from the research overview previously offered in combination with the results presented in this thesis that most agents, be they practitioners or audience members, tend to share similar interpretative schemes regarding interactivity in the journalistic and political milieus respectively – signifying assumptions and knowledge of a rather traditional, established variety.

Thus, the identified situation for online newspapers could be described as a 'lack of vision' (Vobic, 2011) on both sides of the proverbial gate-to-be-kept. Indeed, if journalists adhere to traditional norms and schemes, and audience members do the same, referring to user contributions in the online journalistic context as 'John Doe fussing about' (Hujanen and Pietikainen, 2004: 396, see also Bergström, 2008), we should not expect the relationship between journalists and readers to be altered dramatically anytime soon. Similarly, in the political context, both involved parties appear as slightly reluctant and as involved in a 'trial-and-error process of adopting the new media' (Vaccari, 2008c: 2), indicating a careful approach to potential structural amendment.

Given the insights to be gathered from previous studies employing structuration theory, the levels of non-use as opposed to use found in the empirical studies reported in here should not come as much of a revelation or surprise. In the aforementioned interview with Scharmer (1999), Orlikowski indeed suggests that '[...] most people don't do things very differently. Most of my studies, if you look at them, are more about people doing more of the same'. This perhaps somewhat glum observation appears to hold true also for the topics placed under study here, as most agents involved in the journalistic or political contexts tend to reproduce established structures rather faithfully, thereby further strengthening the 'bite into time and space' (Giddens, 1984: 171) enjoyed by what can be referred to as the institutions of journalism and parliamentary politics respectively – arguably social practices that have been fashioned in similar ways for extended periods of time.

The combined results of more than a decade of research into online journalism-reader interaction and online political communication with constituents paint a mostly rather austere picture to those who champion the idea that readers and voters alike necessarily want to be further involved in the processes that shape their everyday news provision and political realities, and that journalists and politicians alike would be able to easily adapt to the new possibilities for interaction offered to them through the Internet. Taking the audience side into consideration, Roscoe argues that 'we are so used to conceiving of ourselves as consumers and audiences that we tend to impose that identity ourselves onto a new medium without considering the other possibilities it offers.' (1999: 681). Indeed, similar views are discernable when assessing the institutional side of things, as made evident by the results presented in this thesis. The claims made by Roscoe regarding the supposed potential for audience activation made available by the Internet in 1999 seem equally valid today, more than a decade later.

Nevertheless - the research performed here as well as elsewhere has also indicated some potential for structural change at the hands of agents in both contexts. As mentioned previously, the interactive features cannot be under-

stood solely as being ‘rejected bits of program code’ (Orlikowski, 2000: 410), as tendencies for certain agents, be they journalists or readers, politicians or citizens to employ these features at higher degrees were also discerned.

Three types of enactment

By now it should be clear that the results presented in this thesis, as well as the results from previous, similar research efforts, does not fully support the repeatedly heard claims that various web design rationales would bring forth further audience interaction in the contexts under examination here – allowing for more audience control over online content, as well as the supposed amended reproduction of structure. However, while approaching these results theoretically using the three modalities of facilities, norms and interpretative schemes as analytical tools allows us to identify specific areas of interest, such an analysis does not provide us with a more overarching theoretical abstraction of how societal institutions make use of their online presences with regard to interactivity.

For these purposes, Orlikowski (2000: 421-425) identifies what she labels as three types of enactment as evident from how the modalities specified above play out in specific empirical contexts. These enactments, labeled *Inertia*, *Application* and *Change*, represent different modes or levels of use of specific technologies in different settings. Again, while Orlikowski originally derived the terminology employed here in the setting of organizational research, the argument made in this thesis is that these concepts can be useful also in other settings, such as those dealt with here. In what follows, the three types of enactment are presented in combination with a discussion regarding how they can be understood in the context of the thesis.

While the particular names of the enactment types provide some indication as to what they entail, the terms under discussion here need to explicitly specified. First, *Inertia* is described by Orlikowski as a type of enactment ‘where users choose to use technology to retain their existing ways of doing things’ (Orlikowski, 2000: 421), utilizing the technologies with which they work in order to do more of the same, thereby reinforcing and preserving a structural status quo. Such conservative use of ICTs can indeed be distinguished in the studies presented here – we can point to the fairly traditional use of the web by political parties as identified in Study III, or similar patterns of use as exhibited by newspaper organizations in Study I. However, as made clear earlier, we can also discern other, more innovative, modes of usage in the presented empirical material.

The second type of enactment identified by Orlikowski is labeled *Application* – ‘where people choose to use the new technology to augment or refine their existing ways of doing things’ (2000: 422). By exhibiting tendencies of what could be labeled as more creative or innovative uses of the technologies at hand, users reinforce and enhance the structural status quo, challenging certain norms and taken-for-granted routines, while at the same time retaining other aspects of structure. Examples of application are undeniably prevailing in the results presented here – consider, for example, the more active user types that were identified in Study II, or the denizens who took to Twitter in order to engage in political discussions as identified in Study IV. Be that as it may; we are still, this thesis argues, a long way away from more exhaustive structural transformation.

Such patterns of more overwhelming structural change is identified by Orlikowski in the final and third type of enactment, which she appropriately labels as *Change*. Compared to the two previously presented types, the Change variety entails rather dramatic modes of ‘drawing on and transforming existing institutional, interpretive, and technological conditions over time, and, in this way, significantly changing the organizational status quo’ (Orlikowski, 2000: 423). As such, a more active and thoroughly innovative agent appears to be a prerequisite for this particular mode of enactment to come into play. While the results presented here have indeed indicated some rather apparent challenges to the institutional structural status quo, with examples of practitioners and public taking on new roles in both cases covered being present, these examples are arguably not abundant, consistent or systematic enough to be easily classified as examples of change as defined by Orlikowski.

Employing a trichotomy such as the one used here will entail some rather tricky delimitory definitions. Orlikowski herself acknowledges this problem, clarifying that ‘the three types of enactment characterized here are not comprehensive or exhaustive, but suggestive of the kinds of comparisons that may be made across the conditions and consequences associated with people’s use of technologies’ (2000: 423). Where, for example, should the line be drawn between enactment as application and enactment as change? Arguably, the latter of these should entail some almost revolutionizing aspect, giving way to structural change. While the inertia type of enactment is perhaps more easily defined and identified, delimitations between the other two types are perhaps not as clear-cut as one might want them to be.

While we can find examples of both inertia and application in the empirical studies included here, examples of outright change are arguably few and far between. This is perhaps not very surprising. Considering the previously discussed need for ontological security, the suggestion that we as human agents need somewhat stable routines in order to make sense of our respec-

tive environments, this could entail that the structures under scrutiny here would undergo change in a rather gradual manner. Again, consider further the fact that the newspaper industry and organized politics have both functioned in pretty much the same way for considerable amounts of time. These modes of human activity should be considered as stable, strong structures, and to expect an enactment of change simply because a new technology enters into the fray of everyday work and leisure life would be simplistic.

The empirical findings identified agents that took the step beyond the recognized structures, agents that through their actions in relation to online newspapers and political actors started to challenge and amend the established ways of doing things. Consider, for example, audience members like “The Prosumer” in the context of online newspapers (Study II), or a comparably active Twitter user (a “Sender-Receiver” or a “Networker” in the context of political Twitter use, see Study IV). I am also referring to the actors on what could be called the “supply side” – agents that, from their perspective, are amending and challenging the established ways of managing, for example, an online newspaper by letting the readers have more say in a variety of ways (as shown in Study I), or those professionals responsible for the web sites of political parties who choose to employ mobilizing and involving features even though no election campaign is under way (see Study III). These users, found among both practitioners and their respective audiences, can thus be considered “power users”, as discussed earlier, and merit further research in this area.

The results of this thesis indicate that audience interaction in the professional contexts under inquiry here is perhaps not all that contemporary hype sometimes make it out to be. Indeed, as the title of this final chapter reads, most people don’t do things very differently.

In closing, however, one could very well argue that we are at a very early stage when attempting to fathom the more overarching societal consequences of interacting with these technologies. To illustrate, the urge to paraphrase Nietzsche is indulged upon - ‘The press, the machine, the railway, the telegraph are premises whose thousand-year conclusion no one has yet dared to draw’ (1996: 378). By applying such a historical perspective on more recent developments, we can, over time, gain insights regarding the *longue durée* of social institutions like those of journalism and parliamentary politics – institutions that, as this thesis has shown, are not that easily amended.

Conclusions

This thesis has studied the use and the non-use of what has been described as one of the key features of the Internet - interactivity. As discussed in the introductory literature review, and as dealt with in the individual studies included, the supposed relevance of this interactive potential has been revitalized by notions of "Web 2.0" modes of web design – harnessing user participation in various ways, shapes and forms. This thesis has shown that such activities – at the hands of both audience members and their practitioner counterparts – are perhaps not as easily integrated into established notions of conduct, into the structures guiding everyday activity, as one might be led to believe.

To reiterate, the aim of this thesis was formulated as follows:

How do practitioners working within societal institutions and their respective audiences make use of the interactive features made available by the Internet?

For practical reasons, this aim was broken down into two related research questions: one relating to practitioners working within societal institutions, and one concerning to their audiences:

RQ1: How do practitioners within societal institutions make use of online interactivity?

RQ2: How do their respective audiences make use of the interactive features offered to them?

By keeping an analytical distinction between audiences and practitioners, the thesis has been able to trace patterns of structural conduct in both groups of agents. As discussed in the previous section, these patterns mostly resemble what Orlikowski (2000) has labeled an *application* form of structural enactment. This form of enactment ‘results in the reinforcement and enhancement of the structural status quo’ (2000: 422), with traces of novel modes of use woven into the mesh of mostly traditional modes of use (or non-use, for that matter).

As such, while both practitioners and audiences appear mostly latent with regard to online opportunities for interaction in the contexts under study, we are also seeing ‘power users’ (Orlikowski, 2000: 406) at play, who draw on ‘existing institutional, interpretive, and technological conditions over time and reproduc[e] them in an enhanced or improved form’ (Orlikowski, 2000: 423). Such power users could be interesting for future research efforts to

study closely. This suggestion for future research, along with five others, are further elaborated on in the following, final section of the thesis.

Limitations and suggestions for future research

While the individual studies included in this thesis all feature their respective sections dealing with limitations and recommendations for future research endeavors, this final section of the final chapter of the thesis will present some of the research ideas that have grown out of the empirical work performed or dawned on the author during the process of writing. Indeed, more insights are required in order to increase our understanding of the identified processes of ongoing, incremental structural change. Gauging these matters should be of interest to scholars working in a variety of disciplines, as well as to practitioners in the identified contexts. For interested researchers, six suggestions for future research efforts are provided below.

First, the need for longitudinal studies in the research contexts touched upon in this thesis should be stressed. While two of the papers included here make such longitudinal efforts (Studies III and IV), future research looking into online behavior and trends should attempt to more clearly adopt such a perspective for data collection and analysis.

This suggestion could be acted upon in a number of different ways. For example, the empirical case in Study IV was the 2010 Swedish election. Future research could be well advised to choose the approach presented in Study IV (or something akin to it) and attempt to analyze political Twitter use in other, similar or dissimilar countries. By employing similar means of data collection and analysis, researchers will be able to move beyond the “snapshot in time” characteristic that could be said to distinguish many current studies.

Second, such longitudinal studies should be performed with careful recognition of previous research. By following in the footsteps of previous scholars with similar interests, we can hone our research questions and data collection rationales so as to build a cumulative, collective body of work. In times and contexts characterized by rapid developments, such as the online milieu, adhering to previous work can appear rather difficult. While Twitter and Facebook are currently arguably two of the more popular online phenomena in western Europe and the US (e.g. Bruns, 2011), this condition is obviously subject to change. A lot of attention is geared towards these two platforms – from the general public as well as from academia. However, five years from now, it is unclear whether or not these services will still be enjoying the popularity we are seeing today – given the recent history of the Internet, it is

likely that they will have been replaced with some other, novel services. History, as it unfolds, might prove us wrong regarding this particular prediction.

Still, such a premonition should be enough for researchers to place their analytical focus not on the platforms *per se*, but rather on the behavioral patterns that are expressed on and through them. For example, Study IV in this thesis detailed the political uses of Twitter by focusing on the more active users during the 2010 Swedish parliamentary elections. It did so in a manner that focused more on user's basic communicative behavior rather than on the specifics of the Twitter service. The terminology and means of analysis used here should be feasible also for future studies, looking into the uses of other Internet services. Just to clarify: while there is certainly a place for studies that delve more deeply into the inner workings of specific online services, researchers should also make sure that their research questions are "stress-tested" for future iterations.

Third, this thesis has focused on use of online interactivity by societal institutions, exemplified by online newspapers and online political actors. While these are arguably areas of human activity that are often believed to have been especially affected by the Internet, there are of course many other areas that should be studied in this regard as well. While there certainly is a need to "stay on target" for future research efforts, focusing on the coming developments in the specified areas, the need to branch out and focus on other areas of similar interest should also be acknowledged.

Such broadening of research scope might entail looking into what could be described as sub-parts of the identified areas – for example, local and regional government use of interactivity should be of interest. This broadening of scope could also entail looking into other areas of business and civil society, focusing on their ongoing efforts to utilize of the online possibilities for interaction. Furthermore, international comparisons would also be feasible. By comparing results from different geographical contexts, researchers will hopefully be able to speak with more confidence about the matters dealt with here.

Fourth, 'power users' (Orlikowski, 2000: 406) or 'early adopters' (Rogers, 2003) could be expected to function as opinion leaders or 'intermediaries' (Orlikowski, et al., 1995; Woolgar, 1996), providing different "readings" of the technologies, taking the lead in augmenting their respective uses of it. In so doing, they can be said to provide examples of enhanced use, paving the way for challenging established relationships between audiences and practitioners, thus reproducing differently the structures pertaining to these relationships. While we are far away from seeing a clear "structure of prosumerism" in the contexts reviewed here, studying such power users more closely could provide the research community with additional insights regarding such practices and the agents who undertake them.

Fifth, while the thesis has provided theoretical insights as to why limited amounts of online interaction in institutional contexts take place, it has done so in a somewhat unconventional manner. In other words, structuration theory has not been painstakingly appropriated to a specific empirical context and assessed thereafter. While this was not the goal with the thesis, the suggestion is made that future research look into opportunities to test structuration theory in a more direct, empirical research setting.

As already mentioned, Giddens' apparent 'neglect of the technological artifact' (Jones and Karsten, 2008: 128) has resulted in some disagreement as to how the theory could be put to use. Indeed, structuration theory has been described as a 'sensitizing device to view the world in a certain way' (Klein and Myers, 1999: 75) and thus as hard to operationalize and test empirically. The insights presented here, particularly with regard to the appropriation of the modalities (*facilities, norms and interpretative schemes*), could prove helpful for future attempts at operationalization.

Sixth, and finally, while the theoretical perspective employed in this thesis proved useful in assessing the empirical results achieved, the topic at hand could certainly be approached with a number of different theoretical perspectives. As such, it is not unreasonable to imagine that Habermasian public sphere theory (1989), perhaps one of the more popular theoretical perspectives employed while studying online political action, could serve as a suitable starting point for future research efforts. Similarly, insights from the original texts as well as the appropriations of texts by theorists like Pierre Bourdieu (e.g. Johnson, 2006; Russell, 2007) and Michel Foucault (e.g. Shankar, Cherrier and Canniford, 2006; Willcocks, 2006) have proven useful for analytical purposes, as has the use of actor-network theory (e.g. Latour, 1991; Rose, Jones and Truex, 2005; Schmitz Weiss and Domingo, 2010; Zhang, 2010).

Different conceptual tools, derived from different theories, can assist researchers in interpreting empirical results in different ways, thereby providing different views on the same empirical material. Discussing the study of online news, Mitchelstein and Boczkowski state that researchers should '[broaden] the aspects of the phenomena that deserve examination, the tools utilized to learn about them, and the analytical perspectives that explain the resulting findings' (2010: 1094). The suggestion is made here that such broadening should be of relevance also for other fields of inquiry.

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