



Political campaign communication in Sweden: Change, but not too much



Lars Nord

MID SWEDEN UNIVERSITY IN SUNDSVALL, SWEDEN

ABSTRACT: This article discusses the development of election campaign communications in Sweden. The article analyzes whether political campaign communication in Sweden is heavily influenced by international trends, and if some distinctive national features still prevail. The mixture of liberal and social responsibility media system traditions in the Swedish society is used as a theoretical point of departure. Additionally, empirical data from the latest Swedish national elections on party communication, media coverage and web communication are presented and new communication trends are analyzed.

KEYWORDS: campaign communication, political marketing, news commentary, party selectors, professionalization, hybridization



INTRODUCTION

The latest Swedish national election in September 2006 was truly remarkable. Not only because the dominating political power in the country, the Social Democrats, lost the election, but more so because they lost their power after an election campaign with very surprising elements. Historically, the Social Democrats had been in power for the past 12 years (and for 65 of the past 74 years) and the party had been positively associated with the principles of the welfare state, economic growth and outstanding political leadership. At the same time, the non-socialistic opposition parties had been fragmented and mostly out of touch with voter preferences.

However, this time the four centre-right parties launched a long-perspective campaign as an alliance on a single policy platform. Fredrik Reinfeldt, the leader of the biggest opposition party, the conservative Moderates, pushed the Alliance to the centre of the political landscape by promising the Swedish voters change – but not too much. He never challenged Sweden’s fabled welfare state model, but he promised net job creation. On Election Day, the Alliance ended up with 48% of the vote, the Social Democrats and their supporting parties got 46%. Sweden got its first





Lars Nord

majority government since 1979. The scenario of the election campaign also raised a lot of questions about the new perceptions of the Alliance and the Social Democrats. Mr. Reinfeldt claimed to be the leader of the New Moderates and even described it as the new workers' party. Unlike any election in Swedish history, this campaign was closely fought among uncertain voters in the centre.

Thus, the latest Swedish election may be regarded as an explorative example of the political communication changes taking place in most modern democracies today (Blumler, Kavanagh, 1999). Obviously, a more volatile electorate has encouraged the market orientation of the parties and the professionalization of campaigning (Negrine et al. (eds.), 2007). At the same time, issue-oriented campaign coverage in newspapers and public service broadcast media has to a considerable extent been replaced by game frame stories and scandal coverage in more commercialized media systems (Hallin, Mancini, 2004; Gulati et al., 2004). However, it still remains an open question whether political campaign communication in Sweden is completely influenced by international trends, or if some distinctive national features prevail within the campaign context.

Therefore, this article focuses on the two latest national elections in Sweden 2002 and 2006, and introduces different perspectives on recent changes in party and media communication during election campaigns. The article discusses different aspects of political communication changes in Sweden. Additionally, the article is intended to cast new light upon general questions of how global campaign practices influence national election contexts, how national political systems and media systems adapt to professionalization and market orientation and how possible "hybrid" political communication systems are formed.

The article is divided into three different sections. In the first section, some basic preconditions for political communication in Sweden are discussed. The discussion focuses both on the mixture of liberal and social responsibility traditions in the Swedish society and on some national distinctive political communication features. In the second section, empirical data from the latest elections on party communication, media coverage and web communication are presented and new communication trends are analyzed. In the third and last section, the role of global campaign diffusion and national political culture in shaping campaign contexts are discussed.

A "MIDDLE WAY" DEMOCRACY (BUT SOME EXTREME CAMPAIGN CONDITIONS)

Sweden is one of the oldest democracies in the world with a Freedom of Information Act in its constitution since 1766. The Swedish democracy is based on a multi-party parliamentary system since the 1920s, where political party positions traditionally have been more important than candidate statements during election campaigns. The election system is strictly proportional, even if recent political re-



forms have offered voters the option of choosing a single candidate on the party ballot. Furthermore, national, regional and local elections are all held on the same day every fourth year, which, in essence, means fewer elections where campaign strategies can be developed and practices can be improved. In fact, Sweden stands out as the single country in Europe where elections are held least frequently.

Some important campaign regulations also exist, which obstruct the production of party campaign messages in the broadcast media. First and foremost, political advertising in television has always been prohibited in the main terrestrial national TV channels. Thus, one of the most distinctive features of modern political campaigns does not exist in Sweden. It is also unlikely that it will exist in the foreseeable future as the political majority in parliament supports the belief that political ads reduce the quality of campaign discourse by offering overwhelmingly emotional, personal and negative messages without substance. Both left wing and centre-right wing politicians in the parliament have supported the critical standpoint on political advertising in main broadcast media – in public as well as in private media, even since digital terrestrial television was implemented worldwide in autumn 2007 (Nord, 2008).

Of course, political ads do reach Swedish viewers through cables and satellites from TV stations based abroad, but they play only a marginal role in political communication by different reasons. Firstly, because their share of the national television market in Sweden has been rather modest compared to domestic terrestrial channels. Secondly, because the foreign-based channels have a focus on entertainment programs, thus not being perceived by the political parties as the most natural platforms for political messages (Grusell, Nord, 2008).

Furthermore, no free broadcasting time is made available to political parties on either television or radio during the election campaign. The fact that not even public service companies allow such political party presentations is unique to Sweden. Instead, the tradition in public service media is to have journalist-led questioning and special programs with party leaders during the final weeks before the elections and a final debate between the party leaders two days before the actual election.

However, these infrequent election campaigns and restricted possibilities for party campaigning have not stopped dramatic opinion changes within the Swedish electorate.

Consequently, figures of party identification are dropping and voting behavior is far less predictable with more voters making their decisions late during the campaign (Holmberg, Oscarsson, 2008). A huge majority of the political parties have reached historical “drops or tops” in voting results during the five most recent elections in Sweden: 1998 (national parliament), 1999 (EU parliament), 2002 (national parliament), 2004 (EU parliament) and 2006 (national parliament). Thus, Sweden’s former political stability, regarded as an important part of the “Swedish Model”, is to some extent challenged by a more volatile public opinion (Nord, 2007).



Lars Nord

If the political system has gone from stability to volatility, the same can be said about the media system. Swedish traditions are mixed between classical liberal ideas on the press as a fourth estate and social responsibility ideas of necessary relationships between the political system and the media system. Thus, the Swedish media system can broadly be described as a democratic-corporatist model, with a party-press system and public service broadcast media system as distinctive features, at least until the deregulation and liberalization era of the 1990s. In recent decades, deregulations and technological advances, as well as a more liberal media policy, have introduced more market-oriented broadcast media companies (Papathanassopoulos, 2002; Hallin, Mancini, 2004; Nord, 2008).

In terms of citizen communication behavior, Sweden is undoubtedly a media-centred democracy. According to recent national surveys, about 80% of the population relies primarily on the media, and particularly television, for their political information. Personal information and personal experiences play only a marginal role in this aspect (Nord, 2008). As the most effective direct channels of communication with citizens, as political advertising in TV, are excluded from political campaigns in Sweden, PR consultants will probably not proliferate very quickly (Gibson, Römmele, 2001). This leaves the political parties with a dilemma, and they have to try other strategies to set the agenda. Television is felt to be necessary to achieve this, but the parties have no guaranteed access to it and cannot rely on any set conditions. However, news management strategies become extremely important.

Successful TV strategies thus require careful media management and the ability to achieve publicity. Without TV ads and party programs it is vital for political parties to appear favorable in both the TV news and more soft news programs. Thus, there is a constant battle within the news, where political parties and other organizations are busy trying to create newsworthy political stories and the media companies are as busy trying to evaluate the real newsworthiness of these stories (Nord, Strömbäck, 2003). This obviously gives plenty of room for dramatic and superficial political news focusing on the political game, scandals and interpretative journalism, as confirmed in recent content analyses of national political news in Sweden (Strömbäck, 2008). So even if political parties cannot be involved in direct communication activities in television, they certainly need both professional skills and financial resources in the field of news management. The need to utilize free media to maintain voters' support then becomes a daily priority for government and party officials during election campaigns.

To conclude, the increasing volatility of public opinion in Sweden should probably be regarded as a key factor in explaining changing campaign communication practices. When election outcomes obviously are more unpredictable, election campaigns become more important and the interest in election-winning strategies will presumably be more articulated. Even if the electoral and legal framework to some extent still curbs the speed of the transformation process, there are certainly huge



areas where modernization of the election campaign can be further developed. In the next section three different aspects of this transformation process in Swedish election campaigns will be further examined: the efforts by political parties to set the agenda by trying to identify voter needs and influence news media, the counter-measures from the media resulting in more interpretative reporting in order to frame the election campaign in other ways and the voters' increased interest in party choice guidance on the Internet.

PARTIES DESPERATELY LOOKING FOR VOTERS (MOSTLY IN THE MIDDLE)

For the purpose of this article, it is first of all necessary to define the terms political marketing and market-orientation. As is often the case, several definitions can be found in the existing literature (see, for example, Newman, 1994, 1999; Kotler, Kotler, 1999; Wring, 2002; Henneberg, 2002; Maarek, 1995). In the first issue of *Journal of Political Marketing*, the editor Bruce I. Newman (2002, p. 1) offered the following definition:

Political marketing can be defined as “the application of marketing principles and procedures in political campaigns by various individuals and organizations.” The procedures involved include the analysis, development, execution, and management of strategic campaigns by candidates, political parties, governments, lobbyists and interest groups that seek to drive public opinion, advance their own ideologies, win elections, and pass legislation and referenda in response to the needs and wants of selected people and groups in a society.

What is crucial in this definition is that the processes should be “in response to the needs and wants” of people or groups targeted by the campaigns. In terms of politics, then, market-orientation is characterized by its use of market intelligence to identify the wants and needs of target groups, and the use of the results of that market intelligence when formulating and communicating the policies as well as the images of the political organizations. Looking specifically at political parties, a market-oriented party could be distinguished from a product- and sales-oriented party by looking at their defining characteristics and their reactions to electoral failures (see Table 1. See also Strömbäck, 2005; Henneberg, 2002).

The data in this study are based on structured interviews with Party Secretaries and Campaign Officials in all seven parties with seats in the Swedish Parliament 2002 and 2006. The interviews took place in October 2002 and in October 2006, respectively. The total number of people responsible for election campaign strategies is very limited. The sample of interviewees covered the total population extensively.

Generally, the results of the interviews confirm a growing interest in the concept of political marketing, but the Party Secretaries interviewed here still argue that “classic” party strategies are much more important and both the government party and opposition parties stress the need for ideological identification and recognition



Lars Nord

Table 1. Defining characteristics of product-, sales- and market-oriented parties

	Product-oriented party	Sales-oriented party	Market-oriented party
Defining characteristic	Argues for its own ideas and policies; assumes that voters will realize that its ideas are the best one and therefore vote for it.	Believes in its own ideas and policies, but realizes that they must be “sold” to the public; does not change its behavior or policies to give people what they want, but tries to make people want what the party offers.	Uses market intelligence to identify voter needs and demands, and design its policies, candidates and behavior to provide voter satisfaction; does not try to change what people want, but give people what they want.
If the party does not succeed in elections	Believes that the voters just do not realize that the party’s policies are the best ones; refuses to change policies.	Tries to make better use of market intelligence and persuasion techniques, i.e become more professionalized in its campaigning.	Use market intelligence to re-design the product, so that it becomes more suited to the wants and needs of targeted people.

within the electorate. The danger of losing party identity in a marketing orientation process is addressed by a majority of the interviewees.

We know today that it is very important for our party members and supporters to recognize the party and see the connections between the party congress, party manifestos and party leader debates. If they don’t see the connections here, the party will face difficult problems. The professionalization of politics could thus be dangerous as it reinforces a development where you are distancing yourself from voters and partisans. (Party Secretary, The Social Democrats)

A general theme in the interviews is the close attention to regular internal party work and the risk of being too focused on campaign strategies, thus neglecting party democracy and the collective interests of party members. However, most party secretaries admit a growing tension between different party goals and they are afraid of a development where a focus on election-winning strategies affects political interest and political trust in a negative way. It is considered to be better to keep in touch with internal party opinion or to keep fighting for your own ideas against public opinion.

As parties become more campaign-focused, important party decisions are taken more rapidly and by fewer people in top of the party organization. You have to be aware of this development and try to build-up the internal party structure in order to maintain a grass root-level influence in party affairs. This definitely reflects an internal party problem for us. (Party Secretary, The Christian Democrats)

In spite of the questioning of political marketing strategies, the use of political marketing practices is confirmed to a remarkable extent in the interviews. Political marketing does not seem to be anything you talk about in public, even if marketing techniques have been used by a majority of the parties for a long time. There are



more people working with such activities than previously and there are now more opinion polls and focus groups conducted. In general, all the political parties now behave in a similar manner. About 15 years ago, only the biggest parties with huge resources admitted to some use of opinion polls and media strategies, while the other parties denied any use of such communication practices (Table 2).

Table 2. Use of political marketing tools in Sweden 1993 and 2003

Party	1993				2003			
	Polls	Focus groups	Voter segment	Opp. mapping	Polls	Focus groups	Voter segment	Opp. mapping
Social Democrats	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Moderates	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
Centre Party	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Liberals	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Christian Democrats	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No
Leftist Party	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
The Greens	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No

Note: The Party Officials were asked about their own party's use of internal opinions polls, focus groups, voter segmentation analysis and mapping of political opponents/oppositional parties.

Most political parties use opinion polls every year, even if they are more common in election years. However, there are different levels of interest in opinion polls. While the Social Democrats and the Non-Socialist Alliance each conduct a number of polls annually and have at least one person employed to prepare and analyze the polls, the Leftist Party and the Greens only buy a few questions in an external survey.

Another important tool used to gain greater understanding of opinion formation and attitude change is the focus group. Most parties use this method, particularly the Social Democrats and the Centre Party, who both conduct focus groups five or more times annually. The focus groups are mainly used to complement the opinions polls. Thus, the parties most engaged in polling are also the ones most interested in setting up focus groups. These parties are also the only ones to pay attention to voter segment analysis or to the mapping of political opponents during election campaigns.

Party officials not only analyze internal polls and focus groups, but they are also responsible for the evaluation of official statistics and other surveys conducted by universities, institutes or marketing firms. There is no doubt that the analysis of such data is discussed very seriously in leading circles within the political parties. It does, however, remain unclear as to what extent polling data are actually considered



Lars Nord

in a marketing perspective, when election platforms or media strategies are decided. In the interviews only two of seven party secretaries openly admitted the importance of this polling. Accordingly, the data obtained by marketing tools do not play a part in the implementation of a political marketing approach in general. On the contrary, most party officials are downplaying such practices for several different reasons, including reference to the inability of the electorate to understand “the true objectives” of opinion analyses.

I don't want to tell you exactly how much money we spend on internal opinions polls and how many we conduct every year. For once in a while, openness can be counterproductive for democracy, as people would think that we are not only measuring public opinion but also try to influence public opinion by presenting these polls. (Party Secretary, The Social Democrats)

To conclude, the interview study referred to here is of course too limited to give a complete picture of political marketing in contemporary Swedish party politics. However, some tendencies are obvious, both with regard to marketing orientation in general and the use of professional marketing tools in the last two national elections. Accordingly, none of the parties in Sweden can be described as completely market-oriented. Compared to their American and British counterparts, they are all more sales-oriented and product-oriented. The only Swedish party that could be described as partly influenced by market-oriented perspectives in the last elections was the biggest one, the Social Democratic Party, which also had the largest campaign budget. Furthermore, the internal arena still seems to be of significant importance for most party secretaries. In spite of general heavy losses of party members during the last decades, the idea of the party as a “popular movement” is still alive as a norm. Party history and social alignments thus still seem to explain party strategies to some extent.

THE INTERPRETATIVE MEDIA POWER

The remarkable expansion of interpretative journalism has been one of the most noted, and also most criticized, aspects of contemporary political journalism (McNair, 2000). This tendency can be observed in the growing prominence of “commentary” or “analysis” within mainstream journalism – even within articles and news features that seemingly appear to be straight reporting (Kovach, Rosenstiel, 1999; McNair, 2000).

Political journalism is increasingly relying on polls, which contributes to more reporting about possible winners or losers and speculations about the political future. Reporting and commenting on polls is a fairly easy type of political journalism, not too expansive and with great possibilities to dramatize the stories and attract the audience. One main explanation for this coverage is that focus on the “horse race” and comments on polls often avoid the accusations of being biased, as the polls reflect a constructed picture of reality interpretations can be drawn from.



One of the main driving forces for this development is the rise of the twenty-four-hour news cycle that has increased the demand for media content dramatically. But newsworthy events are not occurring on a schedule. Thus, there is use for interpretations, speculations, analyses and commentaries to fill the void. The “news hole” of the information revolution has expanded the delivery of information, but at the same time the budget for information gathering has not expanded proportionally (Kovach, Rosenstiel, 1999). The media industry has always been commercial, but has probably not been as market-driven and governed by economic imperatives as today. There is a lot media research confirming the influences of business considerations in the newsroom and the flourishing “commercial media logic” (Hamilton, 2004). Journalism has to be profitable and attentive in the competitive media environment.

In a recent content analysis of national leading media in the two latest elections four national daily newspapers (*Aftonbladet*, *Dagens Nyheter*, *Expressen* and *Svenska Dagbladet*) and four broadcast news programs (*Aktuellt*, *Ekot*, *Rapport* and *Nyheterna*) were studied during the last four weeks of the campaign (Asp, 2006). In this article the content analysis is followed by an interview study with Swedish political commentators and political party officials, conducted in 2002.

The main results indicate that the number of news items within an interpretative framework generally increased during the last the election campaign in Sweden while the number of other news items was reduced (Asp, 2006). This was particularly true for the two national tabloids, where the number of news items within a basic interpretative framework approximately doubled between 2002 and 2006. The number of news articles and news features with interpretative elements increased in the same period in national media in general (Table 3).

Analyzing the table below, it is important to note that the share of news varies in the different types of national media. They are much more frequent in the tabloids

than in the morning papers. However there are not so huge differences between privately owned and public service broadcast media. At least to some extent, the occurrence of interpretations appears to be based on institutional factors such as common newsroom practices and journalistic ideals, rather than structural factors as media ownership and media market segmentation.

When asked about this development and its driving forces, Swedish political journalists themselves underline the importance of explaining what is going on in the society and simplifying complex issues.

Table 3. Political news commentaries in the two latest Swedish elections (percentage)

Media	2002	2006
<i>Rapport</i> (public service TV)	1	8
<i>Aktuellt</i> (public service TV)	4	8
<i>Nyheterna</i> (private TV)	1	5
<i>Ekot</i> (public service radio)	4	1
<i>Svenska Dagbladet</i> (press)	7	9
<i>Dagens Nyheter</i> (press)	5	8
<i>Aftonbladet</i> (tabloid)	9	18
<i>Expressen</i> (tabloid)	13	21

Source: (Asp, 2006).



Lars Nord

The following quote illustrates some of the basic perceptions of the journalists working in tabloid media:

The news analysis is some kind of commentary; it is not a news article. There is no intention to balance different views or actors. It is a kind of opinion piece and it should basically be an orientation map for the reader. (Political journalist, tabloid *Aftonbladet*)

The role is somewhat different for journalists working for TV news. News commentaries have long been a distinctive feature of TV news programs, but there are also newer formats, including the so-called “fake interviews” where one journalist is asking another journalist why things are happening and how they could be explained. The orientation argument is also repeated among TV journalists.

A dialogue about politics between two journalists in television is educational in its nature. Of course, there is a risk that people would perceive me as “conservative” or “socialist” but as long as I receive both judgments after the same program I am not worried at all. (Political journalist, commercial TV 4)

Another argument for the increased use of news analyses is based on the increased competition with other media. When news is being constantly produced on-line, newspapers, in particular, face new challenges. Thus, there is an instant pressure on such news organizations to follow-up, give more in-depth and analyze news stories.

Very often the news text in the paper is only reflecting what has already been reported many times on television during the previous evening. Thus, it is essential for us to develop the story in some way; try to tell more and explain more to the reader about what is really going on. Then, there is a risk that the article becomes too interpretative. (Political journalist, morning paper *Dagens Nyheter*)

When representatives of the political parties were asked about interpretative journalism in media coverage of the election campaign they all considered this development to be a sign of increased media power in setting the agenda and influencing the electorate. The general complaint from party officials interviewed concerns the conformism in interpretative journalism during the election campaign and its possible effects on voting behavior.

There is an inability within media to scrutinize each other and offer alternative points of view. The established frame in news becomes a norm. Political journalists are afraid of deviating. This is the main reason why success stories in political news are followed by electoral success and why negative frames are followed by defeats. (Party secretary, Social Democrats)

Another critical point is the perceived narrow base for news analysts. In contrast to editorial writers with open declarations of their policy positions there are no guidelines informing the public about the basic assumptions for the interpretation of current events. Finally, there is some criticism of the fact that the news analysis can be difficult to identify when embedded in other news articles. It may be difficult for citizens interested in politics to discover, and even more confusing for the less politically aware segments of the public.



The news analysis on news pages is somewhat of a “grey-zone,” where different views suddenly appear. Readers can’t be really sure what they are reading. It is perhaps a bit entertaining but nothing more. (Party secretary, Centre Party)

To conclude, interpretative journalism in different forms seems to become more common in political news during election campaigns in Sweden. The trend is most obvious in the tabloid media, but also to a lesser extent in other media formats. As data exist only for the two latest elections, the result should be analyzed carefully.

The political journalists in the study focus on the advantage of the news analysis as a unique tool for explaining and enabling people to understand what is happening in politics. In their perspective, journalistic interpretations contribute to public discourse and fill a void between hard political news and often-predictable editorials in the press or party programs in broadcast media. In addition to this democratic argument, some journalists acknowledge that one of the main reasons for an increased use of news analyses is the more intense competition in daily news production, where “slow media” such as newspapers have no other opportunity than to be the first to comment or analyze second-hand news.

On the other hand, the political party officials in the study express mixed emotions about contemporary political journalism in Sweden. However, they were basically critical of the various forms of interpretations in journalism. They generally criticized conformism in interpretative journalism, where dominating frames are often repeated in all media and alternative interpretations are absent. There is a common belief amongst high-ranking party people that the media framing of possible winners and losers during the election campaign influences the voters. Furthermore, party officials expressed some concerns about unnecessary labelling of interpretative journalism and the lack of open declarations of values essential for news analyses and commentaries.

Consequently, interpretative political journalism gradually becomes a more common feature in contemporary election communication in Sweden. The rise of this kind of journalism is probably partly explained by the increasing commercialization and competition within the media system, and partly by a journalistic intention to frame political news without being accused of taking partisan positions in an overwhelmingly non-partisan political environment.

THE WEB AS “VOTING MACHINE”

The rapid changes of the Swedish media landscape are also followed by the appearance of new formats and genres, not least on the Internet. Blogs are now important campaign tools for politicians and political commentators, as well as a new forum for civic engagement (Kerbel, Bloom, 2005). Particularly interesting here are the party selectors or candidate selectors on the Internet that are offered to the increas-



Lars Nord

ing numbers of uncertain voters, advising citizens how to vote in the forthcoming elections with regard to their declared preferences in the web selector.

The party selector can broadly be defined as a web-based tool that compares visiting voter's answers to a set of topical questions with those given by the different political parties (Strandberg, 2006). The selectors then suggest to the voters a selection of parties who are the likeliest to share their opinions. The party selectors have become more popular in recent Swedish elections and were distinctive features of all main news media web sites during the latest election campaign in 2006. They attracted a substantial public. Thus, the Swedish party selectors have become an important part of the election-related information provided by news media web sites.

To be an effective political tool, the Internet needs a well-developed communication infrastructure. Sweden has a relatively long history of Internet penetration and still ranks among the leading countries in the world in this respect. Public use of the Internet has increased steadily, and in 2005 almost three quarters of the Swedish population reported that they had a personal computer with Internet access in their homes. The figures for 2005 showed that, on an average day, 42% of the population used the Internet and spent an average of 75 minutes online. Young people were over-represented among the users, as well as men and more highly educated persons. However, these differences seem to have diminished over the past years due to the higher penetration of the Internet (Harrie, 2006).

The empirical portion of the study of party selectors was based on a national survey conducted by the Centre for Political Communication Research at Mid Sweden University. 2,000 Swedish citizens participated in fall of 2006. The response rate was 51%. The survey asked about the use of party selectors in different segments of the population. It also asked what voters thought about the information value and general utility of these selectors, as well as how influential the selectors were in the respondents' party choice.

The results of the survey suggested that heavier selector users tended to be young (under 25) and more educated than the general public (Table 4). Furthermore, those who used selectors most frequently displayed the highest level of party certainty. In other words, the data suggested that the most frequent users were *not* "shopping around," but that they already had clear ideas about their own preferences. They also tended to be more socially/politically active than the general population and displayed greater faith and optimism in Swedish political institutions. Those who used selectors were slightly more positive about their general utility than the rest of the population, but on the whole the differences were not large.

The overall finding was that almost a quarter of the population had tried selectors at some point, however, 48% of the youngest voters had tried them during the election campaign. The data suggested that users in general – and more frequent users in particular – tended to be politically engaged, educated and certain about their party choice. They were more optimistic and trusting of political life than the



Table 4. Web Party Selector Use in Different Segments of the Population (percentage)

	Yes ¹	No, never	Total <i>N</i>
Gender			
Female	119 (23.9%)	358 (71.7%)	499
Male	90 (21.2%)	325 (76.7%)	424
Age*			
55+	45 (13.1%)	298 (86.9%)	343
35–54	69 (22.2%)	242 (77.8%)	311
25–34	52 (34.9%)	97 (65.1%)	149
18–24	43 (48.3%)	46 (51.7%)	89
Education**			
Grammar school	19 (10.4%)	152 (83.1%)	171
High school	75 (19.8%)	293 (77.5%)	368
College	111 (31.5%)	235 (66.6%)	346

¹ Responses “yes, often” and “yes, sometimes” have been collapsed into a single “yes” category.

* Significant correlation at the 0.01 level.

** Significant correlation at the 0.05 level.

non-users, and appeared to be quite highly mobilized. This would suggest that selectors do not have a mobilizing effect, but rather that they reach and reinforce existing participation patterns.

In summation, new trends are affecting the election campaign communication context in Sweden. In this section, three different developments have been further discussed: the increased tendency to political marketing approaches within political parties, the growing number of interpretative news commentaries in political journalism during election campaigns and the new attraction of party selectors appearing on news media web sites. Taken together, all these trends can be perceived as structural changes encouraged by a more volatile electorate. Thus, political parties need to identify voters’ needs more carefully, news media tend to replace objective and balanced reporting and voters themselves enjoy to check their own opinions with party standpoints on the web.

In the last section of this article, the driving forces behind changing campaign communications are further analyzed.

CAMPAIGN BUSINESS AS USUAL – UNTIL NOW?

In times of globalization and modernization there are definitely good reasons to believe that advanced communication practices are adopted in most countries usu-



Lars Nord

ally referred to as the most well established democracies in the world (Swanson, Nimmo, 1990; Bennett, Entman, 2001). Nevertheless, international trends probably do not explain everything when it comes to political communication practices in a nation. Distinct features in individual countries such as the nature of political systems, media structures or public opinion still matter, which is why it is productive to consider the interplay between international trends and national traditions in this field (Swanson, Mancini, 1996; Plasser, Plasser, 2002).

Accordingly, the general impression of Swedish political campaign communication is that of a process of transformation. On the surface, there are many indications of “business as usual”: Political parties are still to a large extent closely associated with diverging interests in society, voter turnout is remarkably high compared to most other countries and elections campaigns mobilize voters and increase public interest in politics (Holmberg, Oscarsson, 2008). However, the electorate is obviously much more volatile than previously, and in order to target voters professional campaign tools are used to a considerable extent. Gradually, Swedish party campaigning is also characterized by political marketing approaches, based on identifying and meeting voter needs. The transformation process is, however, rather slow. Some party activities are centralized, more polls are used and more people are working with media and public relations, but parties still spend more resources on internal organizational affairs than on voter mobilization and opinion formation.

Furthermore, election news coverage in Sweden may look quite traditional in an international comparison. The issue-orientation of political journalism is still the basic feature of public service broadcast news and morning newspaper news during the campaign. However, increasing media competition and the professionalization of politics have encouraged a more interpretative political journalism where images, personalities, speculations and scandals are nearly as common criteria as substance and significance. Mass media is becoming more important both as an arena and an actor in the political communication process.

Thus, the main conclusion when analyzing recent Swedish election campaign communications is that international trends in terms of professionalization of politics and commercialization of media affect the national campaign context. However, changes are taking place gradually and the pace of the transformation process is definitely conditioned by existing regulations and deep-rooting political traditions and political culture. Party system, electoral system, laws and regulations and the political culture form the campaign communication framework within which external influences may occur. Consequently, national characteristics and international influences interact with each other and new campaign contexts are developed. For example, the conditions of political marketing are adapted to a multi-party-based political system and the rise of interpretative journalism is more explained by leading politicians’ news appearances than by their political ad messages.



Notwithstanding, it seems reasonable to describe Sweden as a country where a degree of modernization of campaign communication has taken place, but in a rather “lighter” manner than in other comparable countries. The campaign party has not as yet replaced the party of ideas or the issue party, but all parties are gradually becoming more market-oriented and more professionalized.

The idea of a one-sided Americanization or adoption process where US-inspired campaign practices prevail at a global level nowadays seems quite obsolete, and is generally rejected by international scholars in this field. “It conveys a false impression of an unchanging US system, to which the rest of the world is inexorably adapting” (Blumler, Gurevitch, 2001, p. 400). On the contrary, most studies suggest national election campaigns to be a mixture of global campaign influences and national contexts. The variations can be explained by a series of environmental factors such as media structure, party system, electoral law and regulations. This theory of modernization assumes a process of non-directional convergence in communication practices (Kaid, Holtz-Bacha, 1995; Blumler, Gurevitch, 2001; Plasser, Plasser, 2002; Hallin, Mancini, 2004).

An opposite term proposed for this process used here is “hybridization” meaning a development in political communication where traditional national campaign practices exist together with select transnational features of postmodern campaign based on marketing logic (Plasser, Plasser, 2002, pp. 348–351).

To sum up, the hybridization of political communication practices in Sweden is thus characterized by a growing use of global campaign practices in general. Marketing tools are used for opinion analyses even if it is sometimes unclear whether this leads to a more comprehensive marketing idea of campaigning. Substantial obstacles still appear to exist for a complete implementation of modern practices. To some extent this can be explained by existing laws and regulations, but above all in public perceptions about parties, politics and elections. Sweden is a country with a structural framework where global campaign features can be transformed to a large extent. However, a political culture more influenced by a national campaign context puts a brake on this transformation process.

REFERENCES

- Asp, K. (2006). *Rättvisa nyhetsmedier – partiskheten under 2006 års valrörelse*. Göteborg: JMG, Arbetssrapport nr 42.
- Bennett, W.L., Entman, R.M. (eds.) (2001). *Mediated Politics – Communication in the Future of Democracy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Blumler, J.G., Gurevitch, M. (2001). ‘Americanization’ reconsidered: U.K.-U.S. campaign communication comparisons across time. In: Bennett, W.L., Entman, R.M. (eds.). *Mediated Politics – Communication in the Future of Democracy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 380–406.
- Blumler, J.G., Kavanagh, D. (1999). The third age of political communication: Influences and features. *Political Communication*, 16 (3), pp. 209–230.



Lars Nord

- Gibson, R., Römmele, A. (2001). Changing campaign communications: A party-centered theory of professionalized campaigning. *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* Vol. 6 (4), pp. 31–43.
- Gulati, G.J., Just M.R., Crigler A.N., (2004). News coverage of political campaigns. In: Kaid, L.L. (ed.). *Handbook of Political Communication Research*. Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum, pp. 237–256.
- Grusell, M., Nord, L.W. (2008). *No Political Ads Please, We are Swedish! A Study of Public Opinions on Emerging Political Advertising in Television*. Paper presented at the IAMCR Conference, Stockholm.
- Hallin, D.C., Mancini, P. (2004). *Comparing Media Systems. Three Models of Media and Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hamilton, J.T. (2004). *All the News That's Fit to Sell. How the Market Transforms Information into News*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Harrie, E. (2006). *Media Trends 2006*. Göteborg: Nordicom.
- Henneberg, S.C.M. (2002). Understanding political marketing. In: O'Shaughnessy, N.J., Henneberg, S.C.M. (eds.). *The Idea of Political Marketing*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Holmberg, S., Oscarsson, H. (2008). *Regeringsskifte. Väljarna och valet 2006*. Stockholm: Norstedts Juridik.
- Kaid, L.L., Holtz-Bacha, C. (1995). *Political Advertising in Western Democracies*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Kerbel, M.R., Bloom, J.D. (2005). Blog for America and civic involvement. *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, 10 (4), pp. 3–27.
- Kotler, P., Kotler, N. (1999). Political marketing: Generating effective candidates, campaigns, and causes. In: Newman, B.I. (ed.). *Handbook of Political Marketing*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Kovach, B., Rosenstiel, T. (1999). *Warp Speed. America in the Age of Mixed Media*. New York: The Century Foundation Press.
- Maarek, P.J. (1995). *Political Marketing and Communication*. London: John Libbey.
- McNair, B. (2000). *Journalism and Democracy. An Evaluation of the Political Public Sphere*. London: Routledge.
- Negrine, R. et al. (eds.) (2007). *The Professionalisation of Political Communication*. Bristol: Intellect.
- Newman, B.I. (1994). *The Marketing of the President. Political Marketing as Campaign Strategy*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Newman, B.I. (1999). *The Mass Marketing of Politics*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Newman, B.I. (2002). The role of marketing in politics. *Journal of Political Marketing*, 1 (1).
- Nord, L.W. (2007). The Swedish model becomes less Swedish. In: Negrine, R. et al. (eds.). *The Professionalisation of Political Communication*. Bristol: Intellect, pp. 81–96.
- Nord, L.W. (2008). *Medier utan politik. De svenska riksdagspartiernas syn på dagspress, radio och TV*. Stockholm: Santérus.
- Nord, L.W., Strömbäck, J. (2003). *Valfeber och nyhetsfrossa. Politisk kommunikation i valrörelsen 2002*. Stockholm: Sellin.
- Papathanassopoulos, S. (2002). *European Television in the Digital Age*. London: Polity.
- Plasser, F., Plasser, G. (2002). *Global Political Campaigning. A Worldwide Analysis of Campaign Professionals and Their Practices*. Westport: Praeger.
- Strandberg, K. (2006). *Parties, Candidates and Citizens On-Line. Studies of Politics on the Internet*. Åbo: Åbo Akademi University Press.
- Strömbäck, J. (2005). In search for a standard. four models of democracy and their normative implications for journalism. *Journalism Studies*, 4 (6), pp. 331–345.
- Strömbäck, J. (2008). Swedish election news coverage: Towards increasing mediatisation. In: Strömbäck, J., Kaid, L.L. (eds.). *The Handbook of Election News Coverage around the World*. New York: Routledge, pp. 160–174.



Political campaign communication in Sweden

- Swanson, D.L., Mancini, P. (1996). Politics, media and modern democracy: Introduction, In: Swanson, D.L., Mancini, P. (eds.). *Politics, Media and Democracy – An International Study of Innovations in Electoral Campaigning and Their Consequences*. Westport: Praeger.
- Swanson, D.L., Nimmo, D. (1990). *New Directions in Political Communication*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Wring, D. (2002). Conceptualising political marketing: A framework for election-campaign analysis. In: O’Shaughnessy, N.J., Henneberg, S.C.M. (eds.). *The Idea of Political Marketing*. Westport, CT: Praeger.