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“They Say One Thing and Mean Another”

How Differences in In-Group Understandings of Key Goals Shape Political Knowledge

*An International Comparison of Politicians and Journalists*¹

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Abstract

Journalists and politicians play different roles in the functional structure of the Habermasian public sphere; as such, they might be expected to have different understandings of what knowledge production and transmission might mean. This difference of understanding is more than a conflict over definitions; it is an epistemic divergence à la Fuller (2002:220), where already defined groups hold divergent understandings of what constitutes understanding. While a substantial body of work has been based on the idea of epistemic communities in the context of science and expert organizations in general, little empirical research exists to demonstrate the validity and adaptability of the concept of epistemic communities in comparative political communication research. Here, we show the cross-national validity of the concept of epistemic communities in the context of professional groups of politicians and political journalists in Austria, Finland, France, Denmark, Germany, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland.

Keywords: group epistemology, epistemic community, political communication, social psychology of knowledge, public sphere, Habermas, confirmatory factor analysis.

Introduction

Journalists and politicians play different roles in the functional structure of the Habermasian public sphere; as such, they might be expected to have different understandings of what knowledge production and transmission might mean (Habermas 1962; 1998). This difference of understanding is more than a conflict over definitions; it is an epistemic divergence à la Fuller (2002:220), where already defined groups hold divergent understandings of what constitutes understanding. While a substantial body of work has been based on the idea of epistemic communities in the context of science and expert organizations in general (e.g. Knorr-Cetina 1999, Haas 1992) little empirical research exists to demonstrate the validity and adaptability of the concept of epistemic communities in comparative political communication research. Here, we show the cross-national validity of the concept of epistemic communities in the context of professional groups of politicians and political journalists. We treat these empirical findings as an aspect of the functions of the public sphere as conceptualized by Habermas and others.

While it is expected and even necessary that political journalists and politicians perceive each other's goals in antagonist and oppositional manner to some degree (Pfetsch et al. 2014:80), the international extent and robustness of these differences is unclear. It is unclear if the actors of political communication even understand the same key concepts relating to political communication in similar way. Consequently, Moring and Pfetsch (2014:296-297) propose that the issue of mutual recognition of each other's goals should be connected to the discussion on the democratic function of the public sphere. The reason for that connection is the potential difficulties that may result if politicians' and political journalists' goal perceptions are too far apart – thinking that they know the “truth” of political communication and the outgroup does not – may be ruinous to meaningful dialogue.

Indeed, if politicians and political journalists have little awareness of each other's goals they may approach political knowledge from vantage points so different to one another that the respective viewpoints do not make much sense to the other party – they may be just talking cross purposes. In such a scenario antagonism between politicians and political journalists would merely maintain confusion rather than political dialogue across two mutually recognized epistemic communities (Karppinen et al. 2008).

Review

A Public-Sphere Conceptualization of Journalists and Politicians

The notion of the political journalist is a modern one, arising in the U.S. context, to some extent based on the experience of the war between the Confederate States and the United States (Sloan & Parcell 2002). The outcome of these forces were journalists whose motivations led to institutional policies inimical to those of their government (see, for example, Riskey 1999).

In the European context, the notion of a political journalist is typically tied to the French revolution and the strong arousal of an egalitarian ideal of a variety of political opinions competing on a political arena (Chalaby 1996). The best argument was conceptualized to win in a Miltonian marketplace of ideas, and the journalist hence had a specific function: to deliver objective political information to the public. Both European and North American developments created a historical matrix out of which emerged the modern configuration of social structures leading to what we now consider the journalist.

Today, we argue, the journalist is understood as an independent storyteller and a journeyman, whose body of work is her entrée into new jobs, and whose allegiance is not to any specific employer but rather to a set of ethical codes and journalistic norms (Jacobs & Townsley 2011). In the modern age, the goal of the politician is to conceal information pursuant to the implementation of governmental policy, while the journalist sees herself as a whistle-blower (Sloan & Parcell 2002). In the big picture, both the concept of a political journalist and that of a politician are necessary for the functioning of the public sphere.² Indeed, we argue that *only* armed with the conceptualizations of a political journalist and a politician, with goals that are to some extent inimical, does the idea of a fully functioning public sphere (die Öffentlichkeit) become feasible. Importantly, these concepts carry with them the understanding that both of these roles are teleological, in the sense that they have inherent *goals*.

The Difficulties of Rational-Critical Debate

The emergence of a nascent public sphere in the salons of the eighteenth century, where diverse classes (with some serious limitations, *pace* Fraser 1990) discussed public issues and devised solutions, was the precursor of the modern public sphere, in which a mass public has at least some access to accurate information concerning public affairs, and public opinion (conceptualized as the decisions the public arrives at concerning public affairs) then drives the actions of politicians (Benson 2009; Benhabib 1992).

In such a conceptualization, the public sphere is seen as a functional entity in which journalists and politicians both serve to maintain the homeostasis of the public welfare. Despite these important functions, the role of public thought or public opinion has been downplayed in sociology (Manza & Brooks 2012; Dogan & Higley 1998), partially leading to a situation in which there is less research on the social structures that give rise to the public opinion. One such structural viewpoint is our thesis of group epistemologies of politicians and political journalists. By group epistemologies we mean the intuitively understood and idiosyncratic goals of professional communication that are obvious and easily understood for the in-group. For the outgroup, however, the same goals are less obvious since they are latent drivers behind the politicians’ and political journalists’ efforts in political communication. As a consequence, due to socialization and ingroup interactions politicians and political journalists come to understand the goals of political publicity differently.

As argued, the professional antagonism would require that politicians and political journalists fully understand the opposing positions of one another. Plurality of political thought and public opinion cannot really thrive if the function of different epistemologies driving politicians and political journalists are not better understood. In the realm of public debate, research suggests, journalists and politicians use a common language but employ words such as “competence“ and “public“ in very different ways (Apel 2001; Mendieta 2002). These differing definitions arise from different group epistemologies.

Group epistemologies, on their part, emerge due to the necessity of collective meaning in in-group communication (Tajfel 1982). In order to make sense of anything, communicators must agree on the meanings of the terms in use. This basic demand of human understanding is a necessary prerequisite of a large-scale public sphere. Following Adut (2012), we understand the public sphere as the semiotic domain in which topics have their *salience raised*, such that consideration can take place concerning their resolution. Yet a discourse in any meaningful sense can not follow the raising of salience of topics if there is disagreement about the definitions of topics (Adut 2012)³ Therefore, rational-critical debate must begin with agreement on definitions; and that, we argue, is what does not exist between journalists and politicians (Habermas 2006:411-426).

Epistemic Communities

We defined group epistemology as the intuitively understood goals of professional communication that are obvious and easily understood for the in-group. As such, group epistemologies are extensions of personal epistemologies defined as a “common-sense theory of knowledge present in the average person,” as posited by King and Kitchener (2002). A group epistemology, then, is a common-sense theory of knowledge present in the average group member. These types of professional epistemologies can be the sort

of “everyone says so” models of knowledge present in everyday life, or more complex models of knowledge constructed through individuals’ need for group acceptance and credibility, need to be perceived as a rational group member as well as the need to maintain personally satisfying and positive social interactions within a news organization and political groups (Vähämaa 2013:14).

Group epistemologies enable the fluid interactions within the professional communities. Another way to conceptualize the meaning of group epistemologies is to define professional groups as epistemic communities. Appropriately to our cross-cultural approach, the context of international organizations, Haas (1992:3) defines an epistemic community as:

a network of professionals with recognised expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to policy relevant knowledge within that domain or issue-area.

Such a group, following Zito (2001), then, would have special educational and professional training and competence – and be able to establish policy or procedure within that domain. Their claims to competence (“I can do this better than others, and I have a right to do this”) would be understood as a right to entry into the profession. Epistemic community is both a means to maintain professional knowledge and a means to structure the ingroup interactions via emotional and social rules. Although the importance of specific knowledge is recognized as expertise, the in-group authoritative claims build on the acceptance, self-esteem and trust circulated within the epistemic community (Hogg & McGarty 1990). Thus, when it comes to politicians and political journalists, we really have a case of social psychology of knowledge construction.

Journalists and Politicians

Journalists and politicians, like all other professionals, undergo a set of processes of socialization by which they learn to be professionals. Whether these professional standards are national or transnational is a matter of contention; some research has argued for the existence of national standards for newsworthiness and news cultures. One well-known European study (Van Dalen et al. 2012), for example, found that national cultures were greater forces influencing journalists’ work than were organizational pressures. Van Dalen et al. (2012:912) summarized: “...we find that the country level has more influence on role conceptions than organizational or individual factors” (see also Reese 2001).

On the contrary, a broad consensus seems to be emerging in support of the notion that a set of cross-national factors, embedded in the very nature of journalism, shape journalistic standards in much the same way in most modern pluralistic democracies (Hallin & Mancini 2004). For instance, journalists are constrained, and entrained, by a variety of organizational forces, found across countries, which the study by Hanitzsch defines as the inner standards of the newsroom and the rivalry among colleagues (Hanitzsch *et al.* 2010). Commonly, outside pressures – commercial or political pressures – are cited as primary influences on journalists, but journalists themselves, in multiple surveys, have reported internal pressures to be the most significant in shaping their roles.

These pressures can be substantial. As Hanitzsch suggests (Hanitzsch et al. 2010:16-17):

While [journalists] struggle for autonomy alerts and to some extent protects journalists from certain external influences, such as politics and business, it leaves them fairly defenseless against organizational forces.

Similar influences are cited for journalistic professional routines, editorial procedures, and socialization processes in countries as diverse as Brazil (Herscovitz 2004), Germany (Weischenberg et al. 2006), Indonesia (Hanitzsch 2005; 2007), Tanzania (Ramaprasad 2001), and the United States (Weaver *et al.* 2007).

Some research has examined the influences on the actual news content journalists produce (Benson & Hallin 2007; Esser & Umbricht 2013); other research has looked at the attitudes of journalists as they themselves describe their own view of standard political communication (Hanitzsch et al. 2010; Hanitzsch et al. 2011; Mellado & Hanusch 2011; Pfetsch 2014). Importantly, membership in these groups, while leading to substantial, if informal, coercion, is voluntary, and thus the beliefs the groups hold are also voluntary (Meijers 2002). People join these groups willingly. Doing so, members focus their attention willingly on given social beliefs and standards, pursue acceptance from the group and develop trust in the group (Vähämaa 2013:14; West 2014:41-42).

Interestingly, a substantial body of research suggests that politicians and journalists think of their fields as converging; they imagine a past in which the two domains were substantially removed from one another and a present in which journalism and politics have become virtually the same enterprise. The canonical reference for such understandings of the two fields is Blumler and Gurevitch (1981) whose findings have found support in some recent large-scale studies in the U.K. context by Davis (2002, 2010) and in the Swedish context (Larsson, 2002). Such studies suggest that these communities at once see themselves as negotiating power relationships within what might be defined as interpretive communities (Berkowitz & TerKeurst, 1999). However, such interpretations and negotiations would require that politicians and political journalists (a) understand the key concepts of communication in similar fashion while (b) they maintain enough professional distance that enables critical dialogue.

Both of the above conditions are critical in terms of functional political public sphere. Therefore it is critical, in this study at hand, to use a probative statistical technique to examine whether *differences of thought* still occur on some key variables between politicians and journalists regarding their professional goals. If they understand same goals in different manners, then we contend that these two groups form two separate epistemic communities. If they concur on the key goals and understand them similarly, then they only form one singular epistemic community of thought. Using a confirmatory statistical model, we can empirically test how similar or different politicians and journalists really are in their thinking about the same professional goals. It is well possible, we suppose, that politicians and journalists *believe* they think in similar manner, but that they *in fact* do not, as can be shown in a large-scale statistical analysis. If this is the case, we have at once a demonstration of the validity of Haas’ (1992:3) and Vähämaa’s (2013:14) thesis concerning epistemic communities, and a troubling example of the pathologies of the public sphere; how can rational-critical discourse occur when the very terms necessary for that discourse are up for debate?

Conceptually Demonstrating the Existence of Epistemic Communities

As Cross (2013) suggests, the empirical study of epistemic communities has suffered from several difficulties. It has focused primarily on the scientific realm (see, for example, Knorr-Cetina 1999), and the studies have most often focused on environmental topics (see, for example, Meijerink 2005.) Such studies, of a single nation's policy decisions, are informative but do not deal with pathologies of the public sphere: *How do the entities who comprise the public sphere come to misunderstand one another at the most fundamental levels?*

Methods

Empirically demonstrating the existence of epistemic communities

To empirically demonstrate that in-group understandings of what critical terms “mean“ differ more between politicians and journalists than across nations, we need to operationalize the following conceptual tasks.

- Gather data from politicians and journalists from different nations, asking them about what journalistic norms might mean to them.
- Analyze that data in such a manner that we can statistically determine whether there was:
 - A) Greater statistical coherence within the journalist group across nations VERSUS the politician group across nations OR
 - B) Greater statistical coherence within the national groups.

If there is greater statistical coherence within the journalist group and the politician group, then we can argue for the existence of a trans-national epistemic community of journalists, and a trans-national epistemic community of politicians. They then “say the same things, but mean something different“ based on their group membership.

The data analysis consists of two sets of confirmatory factor analysis in the structural equation model framework, in which a hypothesis of epistemic difference between journalists and politicians is supported if the two-factor solution is statistically superior to the one-factor structure positing no epistemic difference between the two groups.⁴ Thereafter, we statistically proceed to compare these two solutions for the model. If we find that the two models differed significantly, we take that as a demonstration that the two groups understand the concepts in manners that are so at odds that they may say the same thing, but mean something different. Thus, they form separate group epistemologies.

The Survey

The analysis presented here is based on a unique large-scale comparative study, Political Communication Cultures in Western Europe, which included some 2,100 political journalists and national-level politicians in nine European countries between 2007 and 2010. Political journalists' and politicians' perceptions of journalism were compared. A book on the study was published recently, and although it did not focus directly on the aspect of group epistemologies, it established the assumption that group processes play a significant role in achieving *any* mutual understanding between political journalists

and politicians (Maurer & Vähämaa 2014:59). Results of the study also hinted that role perceptions of the self and the “outgroup” differ more strongly across professional communities than across countries (Moring & Pfetsch 2014:296-297). The primary focus of the analysis presented here is to model the key elements that make up the professional groups of politicians and political journalists across countries.

Research Questions

The two following hypotheses serve as the research questions:

1. Hypothesis 1: (null hypothesis) Groups of journalists understand the same goals in the same way as politicians do. Thus, there is no separate “group epistemology” and there is mutual understanding of the terminology of goals among politicians and political journalists. However, if the two groups *do not* share the same understanding regarding their goals, then they *do not* share an epistemology.
2. Hypothesis 2: If politicians and political journalists understand their goals in a different way they do so because they have different group memberships – they do not understand the terminology in the same way. Therefore, they *do not* show similarity in the quantitative measures and they *do not* do so because of their membership in the journalist or politician group, respectively.

Data Collection

The data analyzed in this study are from surveys conducted in nine Western European countries, including Austria, Finland, France, Denmark, Germany, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. These countries are all Western European societies and were selected for the survey based on the idea that, although they have obvious cultural differences starting from their different languages, they have important similarities with regard to the organization of society at large (for a discussion see, Przeworski & Teune 1970; Mair 1996).

The measures used in the “*Political Communication Cultures in Western Europe*” research project were jointly developed by the principal investigators from each of the targeted countries in an attempt to achieve maximum cultural equivalence. A standardized questionnaire was developed in English and then translated into the native languages of the respondents in each country. Translation was facilitated by back-translation. Most of the data were collected from January to October 2008; the surveys were administered in France in early 2010. The survey included a total of 73 questions. The analysis reported here is based on nine questions directly focusing on political communication goals and perceptions of political media (Maurer & Vähämaa 2014: 60-66).

The selection of journalists and politicians and data collection were led by the principal investigators in each country. Interviews were conducted using a combination of telephone (CATI) and Internet-based questionnaires to obtain nationally representative samples of both political journalists and politicians. As an exception, in Finland some of the interviews were conducted personally to ensure a higher response rate. All of the interviews were carried out in the native language of the interviewees.

Sample

In each country, the sampling was based on the selection of 150 political journalists in each country who routinely cover the national political scene and 150 politicians or political spokespersons who are either elected members of their national parliaments or members of the government.

The aim of sampling was not *only* to yield representative samples, but ultimately to isolate internationally similar samples, as posited by Weaver and Wilhoit (1986:168). Quite obviously, the ideal sampling scheme of 150 politicians and 150 political journalists was not achieved everywhere due to the busy schedules of the interviewees. That fact was even more apparent in the case of politicians. The average response rate for politicians across the nine countries was 33% (N=860). The average number of politicians interviewed in each country was 96 (SD = 32). The average response rate for the political journalists across the nine countries was 40% (N = 1,230); the average number of journalists per country in the sample was 136 (SD = 36). Importantly, though, the response rates for both the journalist and politician samples fall between the common average response rates for e-mail surveys (30%) and mail surveys (42%) according to a large-scale meta-analysis (Macias et al. 2008).

Of the 2,090 respondents, 1,230 (58.9%) were journalists and 860 were politicians (41.1%). The gender distribution was the same among the journalists and politicians – both samples were 69% male and 31% female.⁵ The mean age of the political journalists was 48.1 (SD = 9.7 years); the mean age of the politicians was 50.9 (SD = 10.9).

Limitations

The comparative design we employed here is able to show cross-national differences, but does not automatically provide a rigid test for causal relations (Donsbach 2012). In our case, however, the large sample makes up for this deficiency, as posited by Smelser (1976:157-158). Smelser (1976) speaks of systematic comparative *illustration* rather than of comparative analysis. We want to see, or to *illustrate*, whether our hypotheses of group-based standards for knowledge manifest themselves in cross-national and multiple group analyses.

Measures

Nine survey questions, formulated on a 5-point Likert scale, measured perceptions of the importance of political journalists' and politicians' key communication goals. For instance, political journalists were asked: "When covering politics, how important is it to you to give equal voice to all sides? Please tell me on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means 'not important at all' and 5 'very important.'" The phrasing for politicians mirrored the same question and read, for instance: "Please tell me on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means you 'strongly disagree' and 5 means you 'strongly agree': "When covering politics, journalists aim to give equal voice to all sides."

Results

All of the included questionnaire items and ANOVA results are presented below in Table 1. As Table 1 shows, the political journalists and politicians differ from each other on at the group level. ANOVAs show that group membership predicts the response patterns significantly ($p < .001$) for the importance of all but one question about the goals and ideals of political journalism. These differences suggest that further analysis is warranted.

Table 1. Questionnaire Items for Politicians and Political Journalists

Item	Journalists		Politicians		ANOVA	
	M	SD	M	SD	df	F
1. How important is it to investigate government claims and serve as a watchdog of political elites?	4.60	.66	3.21	1.03	1	1358.86***
2. When covering politics, how important is it to you to give equal voice to all sides?	4.33	.92	2.64	.96	1	1586.24***
3. How important is it to you to provide citizens with information they need to make informed decisions about politics?	4.58	.73	2.66	.95	1	2626.95***
4. How important is it to you to produce content of interest to a large audience?	4.11	.97	3.87	.85	1	33.79***
5. How important is it to you to get information to the public fast?	4.06	1.02	3.79	.93	1	34.38***
6. Politicians primarily appear in the media to deliver information to the public.	3.05	1.10	4.44	.73	1	1003.21***
7. Politicians mainly communicate through the media to influence political decision-making.	4.12	.78	3.99	.97	1	10,63***
8. How strongly would you agree that politicians primarily appear in the media to promote their party's political position?	4.04	.82	4.18	.89	1	14.04***
9. Politicians mainly appear in the media to demonstrate personal knowledge and experience.	3.84	1.09	3.79	1.10	1	.993

Note. * $p < .05$, *** $p < .001$. For all items the item wordings were changed to suit both politicians and political journalists to enable the groups to evaluate each others' goals and to provide a self-perception.

Findings

Analysis

The following CFA models study whether political journalists and politicians are driven by different or similar latent and knowledge-constructing factors across countries. For the null hypothesis to be unsupported, the model fit indices for single group CFAs should be lower than for a multiple group CFA (Kim & Yoon 2011) model that includes both politicians and journalists.

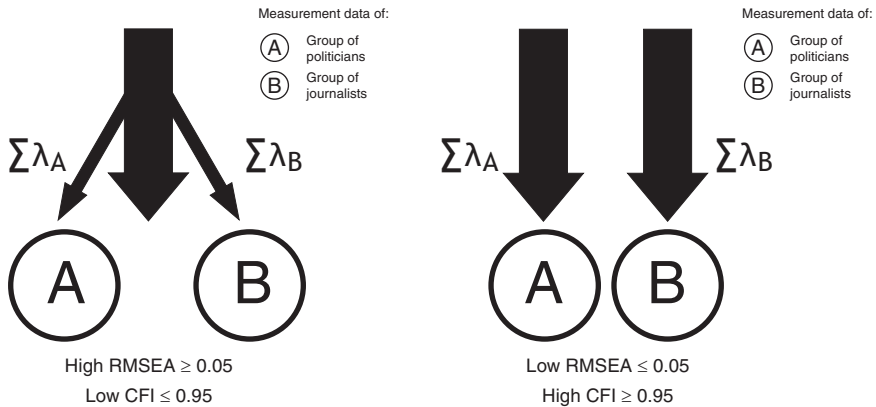
Modeling in the SEM Framework

To test the two presented hypotheses, both a single and a multiple group confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) were run. All the analyses were done using *Mplus* software, which enabled factor analysis of categorical, non-continuous, variables in the structural equation modeling (SEM) framework.

CFA models require multiple steps. At first, all of the nine questions and their responses were constrained to be a single factor for both groups. Such a singular model did not fit the data well so, in step two the model was constrained to two factors: one for communication goal questions focusing on politicians and one focusing on political journalists. The following diagrams, 1 and 2, show this procedure in visual terms. Diagram 1 “Model does not fit to data“ shows a single-factor solution. This means that the two groups, politicians and political journalists, have different common latent factors. The latent factors that guide the responses, were so at odds that it is highly unlikely that they are constituents of similar communities. Diagram 2 shows how different latent factors drive the responses of politicians and political journalists.

Diagram 1 and 2 depicting the confirmatory factor analysis for single and multiple groups.

Diagram 1. “Model does not fit to data” – with a single common factor **Diagram 2.** “Model fits to data” – with two separate factors A’ and B’



Note: A single common factor taps poorly into measurement data.

Note: Models parameters – factor variances, error variances, intercepts and thresholds – are allowed to differ. As a result two emerging separate factors A’ and B’ tap strongly into measurements data A and B.

As seen in Diagram 2, the two groups appear to be driven by different factors associated with other idiosyncratic model parameters. When model parameters were allowed to differ, we were able to see two statistically coherent confirmatory factors, A’ and B’, influencing the response patterns of the two different groups, A (politicians) and B (political journalists). In practice, this means differing response patterns with similar types of variances to the same questions for the respective groups. Therefore, we have a statistically significant argument for two groups with different types of mental constructs regarding the same survey objects.

Summaries of Analytic Results

The analytic summaries in tables 2 and 3 show the primary characteristics, or goodness-of-fit statistics, of these models as seen in practice. CFA factor models were constructed of the survey questions we observed in Table 1. In both models, politicians and journalists were asked to evaluate the other group’s role, in addition to evaluating their own role.

The first row in Table 2 presents a model with journalists only, and therefore, the model fits the data well. CFI value approaches a perfect fit, with the goodness of fit index being 0.986, while RMSEA approaches zero (0.039). This indicates a clear common factor for the journalists. Similarly, the second row shows how fit indices present a clear common factor for the group of only politicians (CFI 0.982 and RMSEA 0.064). Finally, the last row in Table 2 shows *poor* fit indices for a model where similar confirmatory parameter estimates are generated for both groups. In this scenario, we see that both journalists and politicians are not driven by a similar common factor – fit indices being very poor (CFI 0.795 and RMSEA 0.095).

Table 2. CFA Multiple Group Model of Primary Goals of Political Journalists Factor

Model	χ^2 (df)	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	Summary Goodness-of-Fit
Journalists only (N=1182)	11.1(4)	0.986	0.964	0.039	Good
Politicians only (N=833)	17.4(4)	0.982	0.956	0.064	Good
Journalists and politicians (N=2015)	282.0(28)	0.795	0.854	0.095	Poor

Note: The same model parameter estimates (e.g., error variances and factor mean) do not hold for both groups (i.e., CFI 0.795). However, when parameter estimates are set free across groups the model fits both groups well. The models fit well when politician and journalist epistemologies are modeled separately; poorly when modeled together, and factor means differ for journalist and politician models, indicating different factor structures for the two groups.

In sum, Table 2 shows that, statistically, the only robust solution occurs by setting parameter estimates free across the two groups. Thus, group membership per se functions as a latent factor, as shown by the confirmatory model.

Another set of models shows how political journalists and politicians relate to questions about the primary goals of politicians. Again, the phenomenon of two factors emerges. The model characteristics presented in Table 3 show that the best model fit is achieved when the model assumes that politicians and journalists are two separate conceptual groups.

The first row in Table 3 presents a model with journalists only. The CFI value approaches a perfect fit, with the goodness of fit index at 0.997, while RMSEA approaches zero. This indicates a clear common factor for the group “journalists only.” Similarly, the second row shows how fit indices present a clear common factor for the group of politicians as well (CFI 0.995 and RMSEA 0.047). Finally, the last row in Table 3 shows poor fit indices for a model where the same parameter estimates are confirmed for both groups. In this scenario, we see that both journalists and politicians are not driven by a similar common factor – fit indices being very poor (CFI 0.266 and RMSEA 0.204).

Table 3. CFA Multiple Group Models on Factor “Primary Goals of Politicians”

Model	χ^2 (df)	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	Summary Goodness-of-Fit
Journalists only (N=1212)	3.2(2)	0.997	0.990	0.022	Good
Politicians only (N=822)	5.6(2)	0.995	0.985	0.047	Good
Journalists and politicians (N=2034)	824.6(19)	0.266	0.537	0.204	Poor

Note: Same model parameter estimates (e.g., error variances and factor mean) do not hold for both groups (CFI 0.266 and RMSEA 0.204). The models fit well when politician and journalist epistemologies are modeled separately; poorly when modeled together, and factor means differ for journalist and politician models, indicating different factor structures for the two groups.

The findings presented in Table 3 confirm that the two professional groups are influenced by different latent factors connected to group membership. Together with the findings posited in Table 2, our results prove our second hypothesis to be correct: Politicians and political journalists *do not* show similarity on the quantitative measures. Journalists and politicians don’t think the same way; they act like politicians or journalists, and respond like politicians or journalists, not like Austrians or Swedes, on a survey instrument. Thus, again, the null hypothesis presented in Hypothesis 1 is proven incorrect. In Table 2 and 3, we confirm how politicians and political journalists form independent and internationally coherent groups divided by professional group membership.

The following summary of the two hypotheses formalizes our findings:

Hypothesis 1: The null hypothesis is the following: Groups of journalists agree with the same goal standards as politicians do, so there is no separate “group epistemology.” If the two groups *do not* share the same standards, then they *do not* share an epistemology.

The null hypothesis in Hypothesis 1 is falsified. The two groups share a group-based epistemology.

Hypothesis 2: If politicians and political journalists *do not* show similarity on the quantitative measures, they *do not* because of their membership in the journalist or politician group, respectively.

Hypothesis 2 was confirmed. The sample does not show similarity in quantitative measures across groups. In contrast, the two groups show international in-group similarity in quantitative measures. The models fit well when politician and journalist epistemologies are modeled separately. The models fit poorly when they are modeled together. Also, the factor means differ for journalist and politician models, indicating different factor structures for the two groups.

Considered together, these results suggest that similarity of thought is driven by membership in the political journalist or politician group.

Conclusion and Discussion

The present paper began with the assumption that collective knowledge in the form of shared goals is an international phenomenon within the communities of politicians and

political journalists. We were able to use quantitative measures to confirm this view. Indeed, across nine European countries politicians and political journalists shared common meanings. *Different* but strong common latent factors were found for the two professional groups. We see this as a proof of internationally coherent professional goals that create epistemic communities. The principal goals of professional communication constitute the foundation of political knowledge. Thus, the division of group-specific communication goals are the makings of a group epistemology that is idiosyncratic to politicians and political journalists, respectively.

When it comes to politics, our way of knowing is connected to our reference groups – imaginary or physical. We believe political communication is a type of social interaction that is practical and goal-oriented. From this viewpoint, we expected the standards of political and media epistemologies to emerge by examining the factor structures of politicians and journalists.

Politicians and political journalists were seemingly at odds when evaluating their professional goals and reflecting the meanings of same concepts to their out-group, politicians or political journalists, respectively. Different understandings of the key communication goals give rise to different epistemologies. We saw that the two groups understand the concepts in manners that are so at odds that they may say the same thing, but mean something different.

Our findings show that the output of the political media is strongly driven by two different sets of goals and, thus, two types of criteria regarding knowledge. Consequently, the two groups can easily assess the importance and knowledge-value of a given political issue differently. They may also genuinely pursue collaboration and understanding of each other, but find this hard to do due to their different ways of understanding the key concepts driving their professional communication, leading each of them to think that the out-group is “talking nonsense” instead of communicating knowledge.

The differences of thought in our findings also suggest that politicians and political journalists have not converged to become a singular entity. Our factor analyses showed that the two groups have not merged to become some sort of chimerical “politician-journalist;” each group still has its own coherent and idiosyncratic belief structure in the Western European context. They thus have no need to proselytize the out-group – or, for that matter, to spread their epistemology to any other group. Journalists and politicians are firm in their epistemologies, which give them a way of knowing the world. Our findings suggest that both politicians’ and political journalists’ way of thought is manifest with their professional communities – after all, they confirm one another through in-group communication in a myriad of ways. In turn, they can see out-groups as acting irrationally, as “not making sense” or “not being reasonable.” Group consensus – or the lack of it – matters when rendering things understandable within the group.

The present research studied level of agreement regarding the communication goals of two interdependent groups: political journalists and politicians. Our finding is that these groups form epistemic groups that differ in their understanding of similar terms concerning the goals of political journalism. Due to these differences, they have their own group-driven ways of understanding what constitutes knowledge. As a result, they potentially misunderstand each other, thus creating obstacles to rational-critical debate. As we believe we have demonstrated statistically, when they speak to each other in good faith “they say one thing, and they mean another.”

Notes

1. The data analyzed herein were collected by Political Communication Cultures in Western Europe, a comparative study group that aims at analyzing the relationship between political elites and the media in nine Western European countries. The project was carried out under the auspices of the *EUROCORES ECRP 2006 Programme*. Funding was provided by the respective national research councils of the participating countries.
2. The public sphere as a social realm in which an informed citizenry can discuss and resolve issues of concern was first advanced by Jürgen Habermas in his Habilitationsschrift, later published as *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*. Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft (1962).
3. Our approach towards group epistemologies comes to very close the common sense psycho-logic posited by Jan Smedslund (1988). According to Smedslund (1988: 5): "...concept of common sense refers to consensual agreement on what follows from what. However, the agreement is normally only tacit, that is, people are not aware of what they take for granted. In order to use commonsense knowledge, it must be explicated."
4. In the context of CFA the SEM means multivariate statistical framework that is used to model complex relationships between directly and indirectly observed (latent) variables.
5. This is an interesting finding that may deserve further investigation. The distributions among genders were highly unlikely to be identical.

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