Chapter 1

Introduction
A Nordic model for political communication?

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Abstract
The Nordic countries have been termed a supermodel for political and economic governance. This anthology explores how and why the political communication systems contribute to explaining and understanding why the Nordic countries stand out as stable, democratic welfare states. The state and nation-building processes of these small European countries were not at all identical, but the ensuing political systems show many similarities. Yet, there are also considerable differences. Part One of the anthology explores developments in the media structure and relationship between media and politics in the five Nordic countries. The chapters are co-authored by scholars from political communication, media, and journalism from each country and emphasise particular national traits. Part Two studies and compares political communication across the Nordic countries within particular domains, such as political journalism, local journalism, lobbyism, elections, and the spread of fake news, with a specific eye for similarities and differences between the Nordic countries. We conclude with the argument that Nordic political communication is and should be international and comparative. Still we want to highlight the need to also continue with in-depth national or Nordic comparative studies.

Keywords: Nordic political communication, Nordic media model, hybrid media system, welfare state, political communication

Introduction

This anthology is about political communication in the Nordic countries – Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden – taking as its starting point that the political systems and media and communication systems in this region stand out as quite similar. The notion of the "Nordic model(s)" (Knutsen, 2017) has been heavily discussed in political science and economy. In media studies, the five Nordic countries have, by some authors (Syvertsen et al., 2014), been subsumed under the label of a media welfare state model and by others noted to share characteristics with other Northern European countries and termed

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democratic corporatist media systems (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, 2016), or even North American media systems (Ohlsson, 2015). This anthology adds to these ongoing debates by focusing specifically on the characteristics, if there are any, of Nordic political communication. The anthology applies two overall perspectives: first, it urges the importance of, on the one hand, international comparison between and beyond the Nordic realm, and, on the other, in-depth national studies; second, it points to the need for taking both changes and continuities into consideration when analysing political communication, rather than focusing on *either* change *or* continuity. Part One explores developments in the media structure and relationship between media and politics in each of the five Nordic countries. The chapters are co-authored by political communication scholars, media scholars, and journalism scholars from each country, emphasising particular national traits. Part Two studies and compares political communication across the Nordic countries within particular domains, such as political journalism, local journalism, lobbyism, elections, and the spread of fake news, with a specific eye for similarities and differences between the Nordic countries. These themed chapters emphasise the interplay of new and old types of political actors such as governments, lobbyists, bureaucracies, political parties, and journalists, and various arenas for political communication, including institutionalised news media, alternative media, social media platforms, election campaigns, local media, cultural political communication, and political rhetoric. In the concluding chapter, we sum up and draw conclusions on the status of political communication in the Nordic countries, whether we can actually speak of a Nordic political communication model today, and if so: What is it? And how does it impact the political, economic, social, and cultural development and resilience of the Nordic countries? The last question became particularly relevant when this anthology was about to be finished, as the final production phase collided with the Covid-19 pandemic in the spring of 2020.

The Nordic region

The Nordic region consists of five small states – Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden – and four territories with different types of home rule: Greenland and the Faroe Islands (Denmark), Åland (Finland), and Svalbard (Norway) (Hilson, 2008). The Finnish, Norwegian, and Swedish states have also allocated some degree (not identical) of self-determination to the indigenous Sámi populations through the Sámi Parliaments (read more in Part One; Josefsen & Skogerbø, Chapter 10). The Nordic countries have a reputation of being generous welfare states with widespread gender equality and high social equality. Indeed, they have been labelled a "supermodel" for political and economic governance (The Economist, 2013). The countries

generally have high scores on measures of citizen happiness and democratic governance – in the 2019 *World Happiness Report* (Helliwell et al., 2019), Finland ranked first, Denmark second, Norway third, Iceland fourth, and Sweden seventh. These accounts tell stories of a region in which state- and nation-building processes were not at all identical, but where the ensuing political systems show many similarities (Brandal et al., 2013; Heidar, 2004), though also considerable differences (Bengtsson et al., 2013; Piketty, 2014). Yet, there are many reasons for questioning this somewhat idyllic image, as, for instance, Teigen and Skjeie (2017) do in their analysis of the Nordic gender equality model. In a set of analyses, they show that although Nordic women have succeeded in entering the highest levels of politics and organised society, they have been much less successful in the business sector. Jónsson (2014) questions the applicability of a Nordic consensual model to Iceland, arguing that Icelandic politics are more adversarial than the other Nordic countries, whereas Ólafsson (2020) points to the importance of size to explain why Iceland is often left out of comparative analyses, even in the Nordic context (see also Ólafsson & Jóhannsdóttir, Chapter 3). The observant reader will find that this is also a relevant point for this anthology: only a few of the chapters include Iceland in the comparisons, and few include all five Nordic countries, thereby underlining both the differences between the countries and the need for increased Nordic comparative research.

Further, crises and changes take place even in the peaceful corners of the world and make up, as Davis (2019) has discussed extensively, particular challenges for political communication – the key focus of this anthology. The global tendencies of increasing economic and social differences (Piketty, 2014) have also reached the Nordic region (Nordic Co-operation, 2018). Over the past decades, they have been through the same global upheavals as other regions, including the financial crisis from 2008 onwards and following lasting high numbers of unemployment in some social groups, reductions in public income and taxes, increasing climate challenges, and, most recently, the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020. These challenges, however, have not had the same effects in each of the countries. Iceland (see Ólafsson & Jóhannsdóttir, Chapter 3) suffered substantially more from the financial crisis and the collapse of the banking system than did Norway, whose huge tax income from the oil industry worked as a buffer. In Sweden, the reductions in public incomes have had more severe effects on the funding of the extensive welfare state than in Denmark and Norway.

The similarities in terms of culture, politics, and communications between the countries are nevertheless notable, as the following chapters show. Suffice to say that Denmark, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden have majority languages that are closely related and, to some degree, mutually understandable. The majority language in Finland is fundamentally different, but Finnish is spoken by national minorities in Norway and Sweden, and Swedish is the largest

minority language in Finland. Other historical minority languages are spoken across some of the countries, such as Sámi, Romani, and Yiddish. Over the past decades, all the Nordic countries have changed demographically both in terms of an aging population and immigration. Since the mid-1990s, all five countries have been part of the free movement of European Union citizens, opening up for (relatively) free labour migration in Europe. These policies, combined with increased immigration from other parts of the world, have made the countries markedly more multicultural than two generations ago. Having noted this as a change in all five countries, there are also major differences between Sweden – which over the past decades had liberal immigration policies – and its Nordic neighbours, that in the same period had strict restrictions on immigration regions outside of the European Union.

These economic and demographic changes have also given rise to new conflicts, shifted political power among the parties in parliament, and made for the creation of new political parties and new media outlets (see Part One; Herkman & Jungar, Chapter 12; Ihlebæk & Nygaard, Chapter 13). They have also given rise to new media genres that – to some extent – have addressed social and cultural challenges and gained Nordic perspectives international attention beyond the political context. Popular culture offerings such as bestseller novels, films, and quality television series have become global phenomena, including Nordic Noir, political fiction, and teen drama (e.g., Hansen & Waade, 2017; Sundet, 2020), with titles such as *Wallander*, *The Bridge*, and *Trapped* (crime fiction and film adaptations), *Borgen, Invisible Heroes* (television series), and *Skam* [*Shame*] (multiplatform and web-series). Successful Nordic television series, for example, have pointed to the role of public service media in fostering quality drama for a broad audience, but also in showcasing the ideals of the welfare state ideology. The political drama series *Borgen*, produced by the Danish public service broadcasting company (DR) and running for three seasons (2010–2013) with a fourth season scheduled for 2022, is an interesting case in point. The series' portrayal of how a fictional female prime minister, Birgitte Nyborg, navigates political powerplays and everyday life in Denmark and paints a quite different – progressive and positive – picture of the political scene than does American television series such as *The West Wing* (1999–2006) and *House of Cards* (2013–2018). Andersen and colleagues (forthcoming) argue that such popular culture expressions may keep alive "the myth of the utopian Nordic welfare model". Bondebjerg and colleagues (2017: 230) find that the international appeal of cultural expressions, such as Nordic Noir, relates to them coming "from modern welfare states with a lifestyle, social system and importantly gender equality that critics and audiences abroad found to be intriguing to explore through fiction". At the same time, these fictional universes also criticise some of the social and political realities of the very same welfare systems (Bondebjerg et al., 2017). Such international successes within popular culture have added to

the international attention devoted to the Nordic context during the past decade, also within political communication.

The Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 highlighted the critical importance of studying and reflecting on political communication in times of crisis. Indeed, Davis (2019) argues that crisis is defining the "fourth age of communication", echoing the revised version of the periodisation of political communication set out by Blumler and Kavanagh (Blumler, 2016: 28; Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999). Blumler (2016: 28) argued that "the bifurcated political communication system of the fourth age is quite different from its predecessors. Where a relative uniformity, coherence and simplicity once prevailed, now everything seems to be laced with complexity, multiplicity, variety and cross-currents". At the bottom of these changes lies digitalisation as the transformative technological driving force, which is also the starting point for Davis's rather grim analysis of the state of politics and political communication in 2019. Along with Davis, Bennett and Pfetsch (2018) point to factors such as increasing complexity of politics, fragmentation of audiences, information overload, and weakening of state institutions as indications of crisis. Another and particularly relevant factor, highlighted by the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic, is the problems caused by the spread of unreliable news and the problems of verifying sources, a concern that is also pointed out in this anthology (Kalsnes et al., Chapter 14). Nevertheless, as much as we admit that global crises are highly relevant, this anthology also shows that the Nordic countries – individually and regionally – differ from Davis's account of crisis on important indicators. The level of trust in the news media and political institutions are, for instance, high in all the Nordic countries (Newman et al., 2019), and despite major transformations of news production and a massive increase in the number of digital channels, public media institutions have retained solid positions. Whereas voter volatility has increased and party systems started fragmenting decades ago – two of Davis's crisis indicators – the Nordic democratic systems have remained stable (see Part One; Hopmann & Karlsen, Chapter 11). Although right-wing parties have gained considerable attention in all Nordic countries except Iceland, the nationalist challenges are less pronounced than elsewhere (see Herkman & Jungar, Chapter 12).

Power, communication, and politics in the digital age

What exactly do we refer to when we say we study political communication? The literature is abundant with definitions, as Jamieson and Kenski (2014) show when they differentiate between old and new ones and discuss which elements need to be present. Their approach is to include work that discusses exchange and interpretation of symbols tied to "shared exercise of power". Davis (2019: 9) takes McNair's (2017: 4) definition of political communication as "purposeful

communication about politics" as a "starting point as good as any", but draws attention to the limitations concerning which actors count as political – typically political parties, politicians, governments, and media and their coverage of elections – and what types of communication or messages count as political. Ihlen and colleagues (2015: 12–13) also discuss the variety of definitions found in previous works and the limitations as a starting point for their own definition, which we also follow here: "politics is about the governance of society and the handling of cooperation and conflict, values and interests. Any use of symbols and any attempts at influencing the outcome of political processes, we will call political communication". The benefits of using a wide definition are that it allows, first, for political communication to have many forms. The main focus in this anthology is on mediated political communication in news media, social media, and other platforms, yet we recognise that politics has many expressions and symbols, among them cultural expressions such as music, clothing, and drama (see Kristensen & Roosvall, Chapter 9; Josefsen & Skogerbø, Chapter 10). Second, and in line with most other recent defintions (McNair, 2017; Jamieson & Kenski, 2014; Strömbäck et al., 2008), we emphasise that political communication has at its roots that it is shared and communicated. Third, this anthology also draws attention to the fact that political communication is not only about communicating true and rational information about politics and political governance. On the one hand, there is also a need for knowledge about how "fake news" and mis- and disinformation thrive on social media (see Kalsnes et al., Chapter 14). On the other hand, we recognise that political communication is structured by both constitutional and regulatory measures, as well as social and cultural characteristics, which provide social groups with different and unequal opportunities for voicing their interests (see, e.g., Ihlen et al., Chapter 15; Josefsen & Skogerbø, Chapter 10). Fourth, similar to, among others, Norris (2000) and Norris and colleagues (2008), we apply a broad and inclusive definition of political actors, seeing them as anyone – individual, group, or organisation – that seeks to influence political decision-making. Although much attention, also in this anthology, is centred on the communication between the "usual suspects" – in other words, political parties, politicians, and voters (Hopmann & Karlsen Chapter 11; Herkman & Jungar Chapter 12; Beyer et al., Chapter 17) and news media and journalists (Allern et al., Chapter 7; Lindén et al., Chapter 8), we also include other actors who seek to influence outcomes or are concerned by the outcome of political processes. Such actors include alternative media (Ólafsson & Jóhannsdóttir, Chapter 3), indigenous people (Josefsen & Skogerbø, Chapter 10), cultural actors (Hopmann & Karlsen, Chapter 11), bureaucracies (Figenschou et al., Chapter 16), and lobbyists (Ihlen et al., Chapter 15). More importantly, we do not argue that this is an exhaustive list.

Following from our definition is the fact that power and influence, or the lack thereof, are always at the centre of political communication, whether we

research elections and election campaigns, perhaps the most classical theme of political communication studies (see Hopmann & Karlsen, Chapter 11), or whether we seek to understand the dynamics of political rhetoric (see Kjeldsen et al., Chapter 18). Whatever the specific issue at focus, political communication research in the Nordic countries analyses how different groups, movements, organisations, and sometimes individuals, benefit – or not – from having access to channels of influence; manage to influence public opinion or voters; or use particular techniques, forms, or strategies to obtain influence.

Nordic political communication research – looking back in brief

Nordic communication research as a regional field can be dated back to the first Nordic conference in Oslo in 1973, at that time gathering about 80 scholars, many of whom were involved in what we today would term political communication studies (Nordenstreng et al., 2014). Many leading Nordic scholars among these could be highlighted, but one of the most marked participants was Karen Siune. She was not only one of the very few women in the field at the time but also a leading scholar of Danish (Siune, 1991) and European comparative political communication and media policy for several decades (Bakke & Siune, 1972; McQuail & Siune, 1998; Siune et al., 1984). As has been the case with many scholars working in Nordic political communication, Siune's work always slid between studies of political communication and studies of the changing media structures and media policies making up shifting structural conditions for the communication of politics (Truetzschler & Siune, 1992). This approach has been exemplary but, as shown by Kristensen and Blach-Ørsten in Chapter 2, not necessarily a path followed by later political communication scholars in Denmark.

We find the same preoccupation with media systems as a framework for political communication research in later publications. One anthology has been particularly important as a forerunner for the current one. In 2008, Jesper Strömbäck, Mark Ørsten, and Toril Aalberg published *Communicating Politics: Political Communication in the Nordic Countries*, a collection of chapters on Nordic media systems and political communication that has been highly influential for well over a decade. As with the current anthology, the 2008 anthology held both country overviews and a collection of themed articles. It placed Nordic perspectives within international political communication research, replying to the increasing demands for comparative research, for highlighting some specific themes such as "mediatisation" of politics, and for more cooperation among Nordic researchers (Strömbäck et al., 2008). Although the anthology did not really come through as a collection of comparative studies – as only the

introduction and conclusion compared the Nordic countries – the collection brought strong ambitions to the field and, moreover, the editors have, over the following decade, contributed markedly to European comparative research projects (Aalberg et al., 2012; Benson et al., 2012; Pollack et al., 2018; Reinemann et al., 2017).

Communicating Politics took as its main starting point Hallin and Mancini's now seminal book *Comparing Media Systems* (2004), which suggested that the media systems of the Nordic countries could be categorised as belonging to one particular type of system, the "democratic corporatist" media systems model. Hallin and Mancini set out to compare media systems to uncover patterns and clusters and explain differences and similarities. They did so by launching an analysis of Western countries based on a holistic theoretical approach and a historical perspective, reviewing existing literature, drawing on a plethora of methods and analyses, and proposing four key analytical dimensions: the degree of political parallelism, the degree of journalistic professionalism, the role of the state, and the structure of the media market. In the opening chapter of their book, Hallin and Mancini argued for the need for comparative studies in media research, as they found that few studies of media systems at the time took on a comparative approach. Rather, the field was dominated by empirical studies originating from one country only, or by volumes mainly presenting country studies, such as the studies of the Euromedia Group. Strömbäck and colleagues' (2008) book was a first take on testing whether Hallin and Mancini's classification of media systems worked in the Nordic context. *Communicating Politics* systematically applied the framework for the democratic corporatist model to each of the five Nordic states – in different chapters – and found that there was no "perfect match" (e.g., Esmark & Ørsten, 2008; Moring, 2008). As could be expected, when tested closely, none of the countries actually fitted the ideal type. Furthermore, as Ørsten and colleagues (2008) noted in the concluding chapter, not only were there notable differences between the Nordic countries, the systems were rapidly changing as the Internet, new media, and other technological changes made inroads into advertising and audience markets, user habits, and journalistic production and distribution. In other words, the systems that Hallin and Mancini described and classified had already changed fundamentally in relation to the dimensions they used for classification – an observation that many authors, including those of this anthology, have made.

Despite these shortcomings, which have been noted time and again by many different authors both within and beyond the Nordic context (e.g., Flensburg, 2020; Ohlsson, 2015), Hallin and Mancini's typology has, as noted, thoroughly influenced Nordic research on media systems and political communication. This is evident also in this anthology. Hardly any of the chapters avoid a reference to the book – and particularly to the democratic corporatist model – although there is scant consensus on the validity of the typology. Still, the models seem

to retain their face-value relevance as they point to some systematic similarities, albeit that some are historic more than contemporary. It may, to some extent, be a matter of convenience that Hallin and Mancini retain some of their popularity, but it may also be that the model is flexible and adaptable enough to cater to both changes and continuities, at least to some degree. The argument that Nordic media policy-formation relies on a cooperative and corporatist political system is still, to quite a large extent, true, even if new and international market actors, such as the global tech companies, do not take part in these processes. However, the relevance of Hallin and Mancini's models is highly contested, and so is the discussion on whether the Nordic media systems have specific characteristics or not.

In the mid-2010s, two significant Nordic publications drew quite opposing conclusions about the state of the Nordic model, emphasising its resilience and instability, or even decline, respectively. In their book *The Media Welfare State*, Syvertsen and colleagues (2014) argued that the Nordic media systems are strongly anchored in the welfare state systems in the region, and that this explains the continued survival of the key pillars of the Nordic media model, both at the level of media policy and in empirical reality. In line with this, they criticised Hallin and Mancini's democratic corporatist model for being too broadly defined, thereby disregarding the distinct Nordic characteristics. Instead, Syvertsen and colleagues argued that policy values such as universalism, equality, strong editorial freedom, close links between media and cultural policy, and cooperation or consensus in media policy-making continued to distinguish the Nordic countries. This was supported empirically, as diversity continued to characterise the content of print and digital newspapers and public service media in the Nordic region. Further, news and information provided by such media institutions continued to be part of many peoples' media repertoire, even at a time of increasingly fragmentated media use. These empirical trends suggested that public service media and national newspapers upheld a strong position among Nordic populations. Several historical and empirically based publications have supported this argument (e.g., Brüggemann et al., 2014; Enli et al., 2018).

At approximately the same time as Syvertsen and colleagues' work was published, Ohlsson (2015) published a distinctly different analysis which concluded that the Nordic media systems were not converging towards each other but towards a global system. In his report, *The Nordic Media Market*, he pointed to increasing differences between the Nordic countries, and thus to a destabilisation of the Nordic media market. One evidence was the steady decline of newspaper circulation and advertising revenues, another the weakening of political parallelism between newspapers and political parties with the fall of the party press during the twentieth century. Changes in Nordic public service funding during the past decade, such as conversion from licence fees to taxation, was a third example of the weakening not only of the Nordic model

but also of the relevance of Hallin and Mancini's models. These two publications testify to the continued importance of comparing the many dimensions of political communication within in the Nordic region with an eye to both similarities and differences, and changes and continuities.

Communicating Politics was published just as social media disrupted the (Nordic) media systems and made their way into political communication, turning them into "hybrid media systems" (Chadwick, 2017). Although digitisation was addressed, in 2008 no one could quite foresee the impact that Facebook, Twitter, and eventually a range of other channels would have on campaigning, journalism, and political communication at large over the next decade. Further, since 2008, the Nordic countries – along with the rest of the world – have, as indicated, been through major crises and changes that have had, and continue to have, long-lasting impact on political and economic systems. To mention only some of the major events: the financial crisis in 2008 onwards; the rise of populist and anti-democratic politicians, parties, and movements in many countries, among them Sweden, the US, Brazil, and Hungary; Brexit 2016–2020; the 2015–2016 migration crises; reinforced climate protests, spectacularly led by Swedish teenager Greta Thunberg since 2018 and coupled with an increasing number of natural catastrophes on a global level; and, concerning digitalisation, the Cambridge Analytica scandal and the ensuing raised attention on surveillance and market control by a few global actors. Latest, the Covid-19 pandemic has ravaged the globe since the winter of 2019 and spring of 2020. These events have had immense impact on politics, on the practices of political communication, and on the power relations that are always present in political communication.

What we can conclude so far from the different analyses – as many of the chapters in the current anthology will also show – is that there are observable path dependencies in the way Nordic media systems continue to develop: public service broadcasters remain important – particularly so in crisis situations. Further, cooperative and corporatist systems are still instrumental in media regulation and policy-making. Despite the many arguments that media systems are disrupted and totally changing because of digitalisation, market upheavals, and entrance of the giants in the global media industries, the current systems are hybrid (Chadwick, 2017). They carry traits of the news media system of previous decades that Hallin and Mancini built their analysis on, and of a new and transformed digital communication system (Flensburg, 2020). The digital system offers new and old media actors, political players, and industries, an array of platforms for political communication. Former gatekeepers, such as journalists and editors, have lost some of their power, while new ones, such as Facebook, have become very powerful. New producers of content – of all qualities and kinds – have entered the digital media market, but at the cost of a fragmented public space, where it is increasingly difficult to attract attention. At

the same time, in 2020, reinforced by the Covid-19 crisis, the already shattered business models of many media houses continue to be undermined. Political actors – such as parties, politicians, voters, and journalists, to mention only some – operate on many platforms, traditional as well as newer ones. Hybridity is a descriptive more than an analytical model, and it is more of a political communication model than a media systems model. For the Nordic countries, it fits quite well. In this anthology, however, the important question is not so much whether we can pin down exactly what makes up the Nordic model or models as it is to understand whether – and if so, how and why – political communication patterns contribute to maintaining sustainable Nordic democracies.

The Covid-19 crisis

Before concluding this chapter, let us briefly return to the Covid-19 pandemic, as this crisis highlighted some of the tensions in the Nordic media model. The production of this anthology was in its final phase in the spring of 2020 as the Covid-19 crisis swept the globe. The pandemic, caused by the rapid and seemingly uncontrollable spread of the virus SARS-CoV-2, disrupted society as we know it, causing not only a global health crisis but also political, financial, and social turmoil. Governments and populations responded differently to the crisis and at varying speeds. This was the case in the Nordic region, too. At a relative early stage, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, and Norway introduced strict measures to curb the spread of the virus. The measures varied somewhat between the countries, but included closing of borders and public institutions, social and physical distancing, and rigorous restrictions on populations' free mobility and basic rights for the sake of public health. Sweden applied a more moderate and pending strategy from the start: instead of lockdown, the Swedish government issued recommendations and trusted citizens, businesses, and civil society to act responsibly. The crisis thus revealed the same pattern in the Nordic region as elsewhere: the measures taken were largely national – not regional or global – and the recommendations from the World Health Organisation were, somewhat unexpectedly, not implemented identically in the Nordic countries (Strang, 2020).

From a Nordic political communication perspective, the crisis points to at least two important debates: the role of publicist media and the role of information technology and digital communication infrastructures in times of crises. The Covid-19 crisis was, not surprisingly, very high on the agenda of all national news media in the Nordic region. They served as key components in the crisis communication by reporting from the governments' nearly daily press conferences and broadcasting healthcare guidelines from authorities in a top-down, almost paternalistic manner, known from the time of public service monopolies. Simultaneously, the news media sought to exercise critical journal-

ism and hold politicians, decision-makers, and experts accountable by questioning their strategies and motives; and they aimed to provide trustworthy facts, at a time when mis- and disinformation spread almost as quickly as the virus (Brennen et al., 2020); they provided space for the public to raise their concerns and ask questions from the bottom up; and they tried to gather the nation by organising singalongs, concerts, and live television shows. At the same time, many media institutions and journalists experienced the financial consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic up-front, as advertising revenues vanished instantly due to the crisis, forcing media to reduce staff.

Advanced information technology and solid digital media infrastructures also played key roles during the crisis, as physical and social distancing became the new normal. Though pressure was put on these technologies and infrastructures, they quickly helped the restructuring and rethinking of many professional and mundane activities that had to be moved online. Furthermore, digital media platforms served as fora for sharing everyday experiences in the lockdown, for testimonials and appeals from healthcare workers, and heated debates about political decisions, the heroes and villains of the pandemic, and human, social, and economic co-responsibility, or the lack thereof.

The 2020 Covid-19 crisis amplified and put to the test many of the characteristics typically associated with the Nordic welfare societies, and for our purpose specifically, the Nordic media model, where a versatile news media landscape, anchored in a public service ethos and a professional, critical watchdog approach, and strong (digital) communication infrastructures are considered public goods. In that sense, the Covid-19 crisis put a spotlight on the resilience of the Nordic model – a point that we will return to in the concluding chapter.

Conclusion

This anthology does two main things. First, it updates and showcases Nordic political communication as a vivid and internationally recognised field of scholarship. Within that framework, the chapters of the anthology show that Nordic researchers apply a diversity of approaches and topics. Second, the anthology urges us to not forget the continued importance of in-depth national or Nordic comparative studies. In 2008, Strömbäck and colleagues called for more comparative political communication research within and beyond the Nordic context in order to flesh out the specificities of the Nordic political communication model in a broader international perspective, which resonated well with the comparative political communication research agenda emerging internationally at the time (de Vreese, 2017). Since then, this agenda has fostered numerous descriptive and explanatory comparisons of political

communication beyond the nation-state, focusing not only on comparing media systems at macro- and meso-levels, but also on comparing news coverage of national elections, European Union elections, political journalists, political actors, and political communication cultures (for overviews see, e.g., Pfetsch & Esser, 2014; de Vreese, 2017). As part of this comparative turn, Nordic political communication scholars have focused less on national and Nordic specificities and differences and more on the Nordic in a Western or global context. The internationalisation of Nordic media research has clearly been beneficial to the development of the field, yet, if we want to avoid reproducing potential myths about the homogeneity of the Nordic region, we need to flesh out the conditions and characteristics that describe and explain the continued resilience and possible increasing differences of the Nordic political communication model or models, which is exactly what this anthology is about.

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