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Foreign Policy Involvement Matters: Towards an Analytical Framework Examining the Role of the Media in the Making of Foreign Policy

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Abstract: Foreign policy processes have long played a minor role in the study of political communication. There is a broad consensus that the media is the central mediating actor and primary conduit between political decision-makers and the public. However, the media's influence on foreign policy remains contingent across various processes and phases of foreign policy making; it is dynamic and multi-directional. Considering that the public sphere is essential for the legitimacy of foreign policy making, there is a demand for further research on the media's performance in the making of foreign policy. Based on secondary research, this paper proposes an analytical framework for the systematic analysis of media–foreign policy relations by integrating foreign-policy context conditions as a research variable. The framework is based on the assumption that the role of the media varies across diverse foreign policy contexts depending on the intensity of governmental involvement in foreign affairs. The intensity is distinguished according to three dimensions: *no involvement*, *indirect involvement* and *direct involvement*. Finally, a case study is suggested in order to demonstrate the framework's explanatory power: the German media coverage of Russia.

Keywords: media–state relations, foreign policy, context conditions, involvement, Russia

Introduction

The interrelationship between the mass media and political decision-makers in the formulation and implementation of foreign policy has changed enormously over the last few decades, not least as a result of substantial progress in communication technologies and significant developments in the international political arena (Bloch-Elkon, 2007; Gilboa, 2002; Koch-Baumgarten & Voltmer, 2009). The analysis of their interrelation and interdependence has evolved into one of the most significant and complex branches of research in the study of media–state relations (Bloch-Elkon, 2007, p. 20, Bloch & Lehman-Wilzig, 2002, p. 153). A

considerable number of studies have investigated media–foreign policy relations and provided various conceptual frameworks for their analysis (Bennett, 1990; Robinson, 2001; Soroka, 2003; Wolfsfeld, 1997). A consensus "as to the nature of such a relationship", however, has not yet been developed (Bloch & Lehman-Wilzig, 2002, p. 153).

The challenge of developing a coherent model of media–foreign policy relations is grounded in the difficulty of conceptualising it with regard to cause and effect. Since both foreign policy making and mass media communication remain highly complex processes, which are affected by numerous factors, it is difficult to analytically isolate intervening variables as part of an attempt to determine directions and conditions of influence. The research field was initially characterised by rather rigid assumptions concerning influence and power potentials, either on the side of the media or the one of political actors. More recent approaches, however, are based on the premise that causal links in media–foreign policy relations are contingent, multidirectional and dynamic.

Though increasing academic attention has been devoted over the last decade to the conceptualisation of integrative models that consider the mass media and foreign policy actors in one coherent approach (Entman, 2004; Nacos, Shapiro & Isernia, 2000; Powlick & Katz, 1998; Robinson, 2001), scholars criticise the fact that analytical approaches in the study of international relations (IR) still underestimate the role of the media in their analysis of foreign policy. At the same time, political communication scholars advocate devoting more academic attention to foreign policy processes. Only recently scholars like Sarcinelli and Menzel have proposed that the systematic analysis of the media's influence on German foreign policy remains "remarkably deficient" (Sarcinelli & Menzel, 2007, p. 326, own translation). In political communication studies, these authors argue, foreign policy still plays a subordinate role. So far, analytical instruments for investigating media–foreign policy relations often do not sufficiently capture the complexity of bilateral and international relations and their portrayal in the media – therefore missing to understand the media's diverse roles.

The goal of this paper is to shift the focus onto the foreign policy context, under which the media operates. While proposing an analytical framework of media–foreign policy relations that integrates political context conditions as a research variable, the paper aims to provide explanatory power to the media's contingent roles. The analytical framework is based on the assumption that media performance varies across diverse foreign policy contexts which differ in their intensity of foreign policy involvement. In doing so, the paper argues that the integrative consideration of political context conditions for the analysis of the media's role in foreign policy processes provides explanatory power to its contingency.

After outlining the theoretical starting point of the paper, influential theories and empirical findings in the study of media–foreign policy relations will be briefly

reviewed, while stressing the necessity to consider political context conditions for respective research. Based on these arguments, the analytical framework will be developed and its main components defined. It is beyond the scope of this paper to provide self-collected empirical data on the basis of the analytical framework. Secondary empirical evidence, however, will be presented in support of the proposed analytical framework. In order to demonstrate the framework's practicability, the paper will finally suggest a case study for future research: the German media coverage of Russia.

Theoretical starting point and basic assumptions

The analytical framework is based on various assumptions which constitute the theoretical starting point and justifies the relevance of studies investigating media–foreign policy relations. Both are grounded in the conviction that the public sphere is of constitutive significance for democratic societies. The analysis of the interrelationship between media and foreign policy allows one to estimate the "appropriate closeness or distance [...] or balance between autonomy and interdependence" of the media and its political environment both from an institutional and a normative perspective (Sarcinelli, 2011, p. 92, own translation). Normatively, scholars in particular aim to assess the media's function to control and criticise democratic political systems (Sarcinelli, 2011, p. 92).

The vast majority of respective research designs are at least implicitly based on theoretically derived normative assumptions regarding the public sphere in democratic societies, which are again essentially shaped by an underlying notion of democracy. Since the research field on democratic theory is characterised by enormous plurality, there are consequently conflicting notions of normative demands for the analysis and evaluation of democratic public spheres (Martinsen, 2009, p. 44.). Despite this variety, and although this rather ideal perception of public sphere is repeatedly questioned among scholars, there is a broad consensus that in liberal democracies the public sphere is indispensable for its legitimacy. Nevertheless, the necessity of governmental decision-making competence remains. Democratic quality is not only measured according to the decision-making power of elected political actors, but through the public sphere. Following Sarcinelli, political communication is a "conditio sine qua non" of democratic legitimacy (Sarcinelli, 2011, p. 91).

The demand for public debates is equally relevant for *foreign* policy issues. As the public is often excluded from executive or elite-centred debates on political key issues in Western democracies, decisions on foreign policy are often "enforced against the will of the majority of the population", Sarcinelli and Menzel note down for the situation in Germany for instance (Sarcinelli & Menzel, 2007, p. 327, own translation). Moreover, due to the lack of direct political experience and knowledge about foreign countries, their image and the foreign policy towards them are even

more exclusively constituted by the mass media than in domestic politics (Sarcinelli & Menzel, 2007, p. 328). It therefore becomes even more relevant to create a public sphere independently and autonomously deliberating on foreign policy issues.

Among political communication scholars, a consensus has emerged that in the public sphere the media are the most important public forum and central mediating actor between political decision-makers and the public (Eilders, 2008, p. 32; Gerhards & Neidhardt, 1993, p. 66; Soroka, 2003, p. 27). They are considered "highly important agents in the construction or denial of legitimacy" of foreign policy (Eilders & Lüter, 2000, p. 416). The media enables public deliberation, examination and control of politically negotiated and agreed-upon issues. An independent and autonomous media is therefore essential and conditional for the quality of democracy. As even the assumption of media influence on politics has consequences on policy making processes, the media becomes an integral part of the decision-making process (Pfetsch & Adam, 2008, p. 10). Political actors are aware of media selection mechanisms and rules in their formulation of policies. According to O'Heffernan both actors incorporate "each other into their own existence, sometimes for mutual benefit, sometimes for mutual injury, often both at the same time" (1993, p. 188).

Current state of research

The literature examining media–foreign policy relations "is divided as to the degree and manner of influence of the media on formulation of government policy" (Auerbach & Bloch-Elkon, 2005, p. 83) and can be divided, in simplified terms, into two schools of thought: one claiming the existence of a strong and active media, the other arguing for a weak and passive media performance. Instead of reviewing established theories and models in detail according to their chronological development, the current state of research will be presented with regard to these two research paradigms.

Advocates of one research tradition attribute enormous power to the media in policy-making processes (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Page, 1996; Soroka, 2003). Such notions of the media performance have found clearest expression in the CNN effect (Robinson, 2001, p. 523). These perspectives on the media argue that the media has become the dominating actor in the formulation of foreign policy during times of international conflict and crisis, while elected and appointed policy-makers are replaced (Robinson, 2001). With regard to the aftermath of the Cold War, Entman (2004) stresses the media's interpretational power in shaping public opinion in times where policy definitions were lacking. This vacuum, he argues, was filled by the media while increasing their independence and simultaneously decreasing the influence of decision-makers on public opinion (Entman 2004). The media is perceived as an independent actor that claims foreign policy actions.

Scholarly findings on the CNN effect, though, present contradictory and mixed results. Doubts have been consequently expressed concerning its validity: while Shaw (1996) and Cohen (1994) for instance provided empirical evidence in support of the CNN effect and proved that media coverage highly influenced the 1991 US intervention of Northern Iraq and the 1992 intervention in Somalia, Gowing (1994) and Strobel (1997) reasoned – based on interviews with policy-makers – that there has been a resistance towards the conclusion of exclusively acting in response to the media coverage (see also Gilboa, 2002, p. 734).

Various studies indeed question the popular notion of decision-makers losing control to the media (Gilboa, 2002, p. 735). The most prominent theory, in contrast to the notion of a highly influential media role, is presumably Bennett's indexing hypothesis, which stresses the media's passive role. He notes: "mass media news professionals […] tend to 'index' the range of voices and viewpoints in both news and editorials according to the range of views expressed in mainstream government debate" (Bennett, 1990, p. 106). At its core, the hypothesis argues that media coverage of political issues would follow the conditions of political elite debate. In times of political elite agreement, the media would reflect the consensus within their coverage; on the other hand, when political elites disagree on certain issues, Bennett argues, their coverage in the media would decline. The indexing hypothesis equally found empirical evidence in numerous studies, both in US-centred research (Brown, Bybee, Wearden & Straughan, 1987; Cook, 1994) as well as in research on the German political and media system (Maurer, Vogelsang, Weiß & Weiß, 2008, p. 164; Pohr, 2005, p. 274).

Both research paradigms may therefore claim plausibility and demand further empirical verification in diverse political contexts (Sarcinelli & Menzel, 2007, p. 331). Finally, one needs to critically note that a vast majority of these empirically-based theories have been developed in US-centred research, thereby often focusing on the use of force, military interventions and terrorism. Since the US-political system is constituted as a two-party system, their generality and applicability to other Western democracies have to be called into question. The dividing line of diverse positions obviously is less complicated to assess when they are expressed in a two party system than in a multiparty democracy (Pohr, 2005, p. 264). Similarly, diverse political cultures and media systems need to be considered. Moreover, research on media–foreign policy relations aims at critically examining the media's performance with regard to its autonomy and independence. It is essential to note that both the CNN effect and the indexing hypothesis do not sufficiently develop a benchmark for these examinations (Pohr, 2005, p. 266). For this reason, the evaluation of the media is largely based on the individual interpretation of researchers. Such differences and shortcomings are not necessarily obstacles for the application of these theories. However, they need to be reflected upon and modified, if required, for empirical analyses.

In summary, the complexity of the research field is reflected in the diversity of its starting points, its approaches, and consequently its empirical findings. Even attention-grabbing theoretical approaches have proven themselves only to a limited extent. Interim results for research on media–foreign policy relations thus were critical: While some authors refer to "diverse and dispersed" (Gilboa, 2002, p. 732) literature on the subject, others metaphorically compare the field of research to an "academic large construction site" (Koch-Baumgarten & Mez, 2007, p. 9). Equally Löffelholz concludes that the scholarly field is far from a systematic analysis of diverse forms and contents of the role of the media, and demands a systematic and differentiated secondary analysis, in which already conducted studies are described, evaluated and compared (Löffelholz, 2004, p. 38). Other authors warn against categorical perspectives (Sarcinelli, 1998, p. 275; see also Sarcinelli & Schatz 2002) and "overly naive actor-theoretical reflections of political media roles" (Pfetsch & Adam, 2008, p. 10, own translation), which long characterised the research field. Ultimately, the impression of an initially fragmented and inconsistent field of research long seemed obvious.

For more than a decade now scholars have demanded a more differentiated reflection of media–foreign policy relations and the field's "reconceptualisation" (Koch-Baumgarten & Voltmer, 2009, p. 299). Rather rigid attributions are now denied for the benefit of systematic and differentiated research approaches (Baumgarten & Voltmer, p. 299; Pfetsch & Adam, 2008, p. 16). As some authors argue, an approach that assumes a homogenous role of the media in the making of foreign policy would be too narrow (Pfetsch & Adam, 2008; Sarcinelli & Menzel, 2007). Generalised assumptions on the media's performance in policy processes would consequently undermine the media's complexity and diversity (Koch-Baumgarten & Voltmer, 2009, p. 302; Pfetsch & Adam, 2008, p. 19). More recent research designs therefore develop a more profound perspective on the "interaction and interdependence", and "symbiotic" relationship between media and foreign policy (Schulz, 2010, p. 309, own translation). They are based on the premise that the role of the media varies in diverse issue areas (Koch-Baumgarten & Voltmer, 2009; Voltmer, 2007) and processes and phases (Bloch & Lehman-Wilzig, 2002) of foreign policy. Additionally, diverse media formats have an equal but different effect on the role of the media.

In a nutshell, there is a diverse and to some extent contradictory debate on media–foreign policy relations that still remains inconclusive. In order to capture the obvious complexity of media–foreign policy relations, new approaches are demanded that consider specific media constellations and foreign policy context conditions (Sarcinelli & Menzel, 2007, p. 331).

Introducing an analytical framework: Foreign policy involvement

Following this demand, the paper aims to shift the research focus onto *foreign policy context conditions*, in which the media operates. Considering empirical

findings, an analytical approach is proposed, which systematically integrates context conditions into its conceptual framework. The latter is implicitly based on the question, whether and to what extent the role of the media varies in diverse foreign policy contexts. Due to the high complexity and diversity of media–foreign policy relations, it remains highly complicated, if not illusionary, to comprehensively mirror underlying causal mechanisms within a single analytical framework. It therefore seems more promising to concentrate on partial mechanisms. Whereas some authors stress the necessity of considering diverse phases of foreign policy (Bloch & Lehman-Wilzig, 2002), the paper introduces another research variable: The analytical framework is based on the assumption that the media performance varies across diverse foreign policy contexts depending on the intensity of foreign policy involvement. This observation of a functional coherence between the media performance and the intensity of *foreign policy involvement* in foreign affairs will serve as a research hypothesis, as will be outlined on the basis of secondary empirical data in the subsequent paragraph.

When proposing his theory of foreign correspondence – applied on a quantitative long-term study and qualitative case studies concerning the image of the Middle East and Islam in the German national press – Hafez refers to an initially similar contradictory observation outlined in the state of research: analysing the media coverage of the oil crisis in 1973, Hafez provides empirical evidence for a close orientation of the media towards national political and societal interests (Hafez, 2002b, p. 288) – a result in support of Bennett's indexing thesis. Even so, the comparative analysis of the Algeria crisis 1991/92 does not show any evident indication of a similar orientation (Hafez, 2002b, p. 289). Aiming for explanatory power to the variation in the media's autonomy, Hafez draws attention to the political context factors and notes that the crucial political difference between these two case studies is the intensity of foreign policy involvement: "The case of the Algeria crisis differs from the oil crisis in particular in the way that German foreign policy and the Federal Republic of Germany were only very limitedly involved" (Hafez, 2002b, p. 290, own translation). Whereas the potential impact of "national documents and the political and economic systems on the Middle East coverage" is rather high in the case of the oil crisis, as he points out, the case of Algeria on the contrary offered preconditions for autonomous media coverage (Hafez, 2002b, p. 290, own translation). The author argues that "the interrelation between the media content and the type of conflict […] cannot be generalised from the perspective of system theory, instead [the interrelation] depends on to what extent the media feels compelled to 'align to its environment', in particular to its national system environment […]" (Hafez, 2002a, p. 157, own translation). Based on his empirical observation, Hafez concludes: "the existence of a functional coherence between the self-involvement of the media's surrounding societal system and the partiality of their foreign correspondence is […] a veritable research hypothesis for empirical case study analyses" (Hafez 2002b, p. 158, own translation).

Other authors also empirically support the thesis of a functional coherence between the involvement of societal systems and the partiality of the media coverage, even though not explicitly discussed under the perspective of political context conditions or diverse contexts of foreign policy involvement. Maurer, Vogelsang, Weiß, and Weiß (2008), for instance, comparatively investigate the German media's autonomy in their coverage of the Kosovo 1999, Afghanistan 2001 and Iraq 2003 conflicts and provide empirical evidence for Bennett's indexing hypothesis. Even though the authors do not explicitly refer to the degree of diverse foreign policy involvement as explanatory variable, they further discuss the political context conditions of each of their cases (Maurer et. al, 2008, p. 162) and implicitly demonstrate that the German government was differently involved in these conflicts. Nohrstedt, Kaitatzi-Whitlock, Ottosen, and Riegert (2000) on the other hand conducted a comparative „combined discourse and propaganda analysis" of four daily newspapers in Greece, Norway, Sweden and the UK regarding the question "how the various national/local contexts influenced the media discourse's relationship to the propaganda discourse in the [Kosovo] conflict" (Nohrstedt et al., 2000, p. 383). The differing intensities of both the NATO- and EU-membership served as an indicator for the foreign and security political context and thus as a selection criterion for the countries included into the sample. The authors regard the assumption "that these variations of national political-historical contexts will significantly influence the media coverage" (Nohrstedt et al., 2000, p. 383) as largely empirically proven: "The general conclusion is that 'national' variations are clearly visible in the material" (Nohrstedt et al., 2000, p. 400). Nohrstedt et al. propose that countries that were involved in the conflict displayed a more critical attitude towards the Kosovo conflict than countries not engaged in the civil war: "[...] the 'Swedish' discourse takes a more critical position than the Norwegian and British newspapers, but less than the 'Greek' discourse" (Nohrstedt et al., 2000, p. 401).

The underlying assumption of the analytical framework therefore follows the empirical observation of a nexus between a societal system's involvement in foreign affairs and the media's partiality. In order to advance this empirical observation for future systematic and comparative research, the term *foreign policy involvement* demands further definition.

Though in different contexts, the term *involvement* has unfolded diverse working definitions in the study of political communication. In the field of research on media effects in particular, scholars have undertaken various attempts to operationalise *involvement* and to make it empirically measurable (Gabriel & Brettschneider, 2002, p. 285; Rössler, 2009, p. 486). Since these definitions have been mostly shaped under the perspective of micro-analytical approaches focusing on the individual level, they are not directly compatible with the analytical framework proposed in this paper, even though they resemble the very core of the meaning of the term 'involvement'. In this paper, involvement is comprehended politically: *foreign policy involvement* is understood as an expression for political

concern of one government towards another.

For the purpose of comparative research considering diverse nuances of foreign policy involvement, the paper proposes to classify involvement into three dimensions: *no involvement*, *indirect involvement* and *direct involvement*. Essential for the terms' operational definition is a widely accepted understanding of foreign policy, which is located in the political science sub-discipline of IR. Despite divergent definitions, which emphasise different elements of foreign policy, most of them are based on a common core: Foreign policy is understood as the *entirety* of governmental actions that a state undertakes in order to "realise its fundamental interests [...] with respect to its international environment" (Gareis, 2006, p. 9, own translation). Other authors also stress the *entirety* of governmental actions as the subject area of foreign policy (von Bredow, 2006, p. 38). This notion of foreign policy emphasizes long-term decision-making processes, which ideally are based on a "consistent common strategy, integrating various policy areas as framework of orientation" (Gareis, 2006, p. 9, own translation; see also Lauth & Zimmerling, 1994, p. 145).

As stated above, the underlying notion of foreign policy becomes relevant when defining the diverse dimensions of foreign policy for the analytical framework:

Table 1: *Analytical Framework*

Involvement in geopolitical context	Case Study
No involvement (Foreign dimension)	C1
Indirect involvement (International dimension)	C2
Direct involvement (Bilateral/Multilateral dimension)	C3

(1) *Direct involvement* is understood as involvement on either bilateral or/and multilateral basis between at least two (or more) states, e.g. conflicts, bilateral/multilateral agreements or common economic projects. (2) *Indirect involvement* encompasses events where the respective government is not directly involved as a conflict party, but affected by its political dimension, such as geographically close conflicts or actions in which important political partners are directly involved. (3) The so-called *foreign dimension* is characterised by *no involvement* of the respective government into foreign affairs. This definition encompasses foreign policy events, in which a government is neither directly nor indirectly involved, but affected for its sphere of foreign policy responsibility.

Whereas the definitions of both *direct* and *indirect involvement* are rather obvious, the analytical distinction of the foreign policy dimension *no involvement* might demand further explanation: This dimension ties in the notion of foreign policy offered by authors as Lauth and Zimmerling (1994, p.145), who explicitly include refrained political actions to the options of action of foreign policy. The classification is also supported by Haftendorn's definition of foreign policy, in which she differentiates between fundamental goals and values that a state attempts to realise (Haftendorn, 2002, p. 13). Human rights issues or natural disasters, for instance, fulfil these criterions and illustrate the subject area of that dimension: Occurrences as human rights issues in one state neither directly nor indirectly influence the interests of another state. According to Haftendorn, however, violations of human rights concern a foreign government's sphere of foreign policy responsibility, since its subject area explicitly includes values. Since a number of foreign policy partnerships in fact are explicitly based on common interests and values, violations of these values are likewise relevant as bilateral agreements for instance.

Principally the analytical framework allows two research perspectives. Firstly, it is conceivable for the comparative analysis to examine *diverse states* concerning one *single issue* (e.g. a comparative media content analysis on the Iraq war 2003 in three different countries). Secondly, the framework could be applied to *one state's foreign policy* towards another concerning *diverse issues (*e.g. a comparative media content analysis of the German foreign policy towards Russia concerning examining diverse foreign policy events, as will be proposed in the paper). Whereas the former might provide explanatory power to diversely portraying one international event across diverse states, the second approach might help to understand under which conditions and to what extent one media system emphasises diverse aspects or adopts a certain attitude concerning another country in diverse contexts.

Applying the analytical framework, two aspects need to be taken into account. Firstly, it would be important to support the selection of the case studies with an objective indicator of the degree of involvement. This objective indicator would have to be individually defined with regard to the specific case study under investigation, so that the following indicators only serve as examples. The intensity of memberships of international political organisations, as in the study of Nohrstedt et al. (2000), the frequency of respective parliamentary debates, or simply the number of documents published on governmental level are conceivable indicators. Secondly, when selecting the case studies with regard to their diverse involvement, they will most likely differ through various intervening variables that are complicated to analytically isolate. Consequently, for the purpose of valid comparability, in both perspectives the selection of case studies has to ensure further constant parameters: either by similar political and media systems, or – in the second research perspective – by similar news values, for instance.

Proposing a conceivable case study for future research: The German media coverage of Russia

Though it is beyond the scope of this paper to present self-selected empirical data, one case study shall be exemplarily introduced to demonstrate the analytical framework's explanatory potential.

The relevance of investigating the coverage of Russia in German media starts in the political significance of both actors – Russia and Germany. Their relevance is grounded in Germany's and Russia's strongly interlinked, ambiguous and contradictory history as well as their political and economic relations. Nowadays their relation is sealed with a strategic partnership, including political, economic as well as civil society issues, whereas the economy and energy sectors indeed play a key role in their bilateral relations. Economically, as well as politically, Germany evolved into one of Russia's most important Western partners. Germany, on the other hand, has likewise signalised its strong interest in Russia's further integration into European and world economic structures.

Though considerable academic attention has been devoted to the study of the perception of Russia in German media discourse (Ahrens & Weiß, 2012; Daniliouk, 2006; Gavrilova, 2005; Seifert, 2003), most studies approach the German media coverage of Russia from a descriptive research perspective; only very few propose a normative one (Crudopf, 2000). The insights of previous studies undoubtedly provide relevant insights on images, stereotypes and issue agendas in the German media coverage of Russia. Their comparability – and therewith the development of a cumulative research agenda – however, is complicated for a number of reasons: Focusing on diverse time periods and media sectors, the results they provide are highly fragmented. Moreover, they are presented through the lens of various disciplinary and methodological approaches. To date in the study of political communication, there has been no attempt to conduct a systematic, long-term analysis of the German perception of Russia, which is striking if one considers how pivotal actors perceive the image of Russia in the German media. In 2008, for instance, Mikhail Gorbachev openly criticised the media for its coverage of Russia, comparing it to negative campaigning (Gorbachev, 2008). His criticism is shared by a number of state as well as non-state actors. They, too, affirm that the once extensive and predominantly positive media exposure "has transformed into a relatively extensive and rather negative media exposure – with the degree of media exposure currently decreasing" (Oldag & Galperin, 2005, p. 13, own translation). Empirical data of descriptive research approve this observation of "several changes, even discontinuities, in the image of Russia in the German media" (Ahrens & Weiß, 2012, p. 18) as well as "findings by communication researchers that German newspaper comments tend to be more critical than supportive, focusing primarily on negative evaluations" (Ahrens & Weiß, 2012, p. 19). The complexity of German-Russian history and relations is inevitably mirrored in the media coverage of Russia. Normative approaches on the image of Russia in the

German media and attempts to explore under what political conditions the media operates in a certain role are still missing. Whether the aforementioned criticism concerning the media's negative portrayal of Russia is appropriate or linked to the German government's position towards its foreign policy partner remains unanswered.

Established theoretical instruments which would enable normative research perspectives, however, so far were based on rather rigid assumptions concerning the role of the media, as has been outlined throughout the paper. If applied, they surely would shed light on specific case studies under investigation, but not sufficiently capture the complexity and dynamic of both the image of Russia as well as the media's performance. Against this background the analytical framework promises to allow both an inductive and unbiased analysis of the diverse roles of the media in various political contexts and therefore measures up with complex and ambiguous foreign policy relations, such as the ones between Germany and Russia.

Concluding remarks

The contribution of this paper is a theoretical one: Its aim was to propose an analytical framework for the analysis of media–foreign policy relations, *which systematically integrates and conceptualises political context conditions into its framework*. It therefore sheds light on the implicit research question under which the role of the media varies. The framework is based on the current state of research and ties in repeatedly expressed demands for more systematic approaches (Bloch & Lehman-Wilzig, 2002; Wolfsfeld, 1997) and a "nuanced, two-way understanding of the direction of influence" (Robinson, 2001, p. 541).

The benefit of the proposed analytical framework emerges in the first instance from the limited explanatory power of established theoretical instruments: Though meanwhile a number of respective theories have been introduced, approaches which propose a specific role of the media – either overall active or passive – still seem to gain predominant attention. Empirically, these theories have not been sufficiently verified, thus signalling a dead end in the attempt of investigating causal mechanisms from a dichotomous perspective. One crucial reason for the limited explanatory power of these theories traces back to the context of their development. A vast majority of them has been generated in the political context of crises and conflicts, which bears difficulties for a more general research agenda: Crises and conflicts are unique political situations, which represent a very limited section of foreign policy sectors and differ in their features from other foreign policy contexts as routine or planning decision making processes. Several well-established theories therefore were generated within *specific* political contexts, which, however, often remained *theoretically insufficiently reflected and defined*. The omission of their theoretical conceptualising results in political context

conditions often falling into a theoretical black box. This complicates the reasonable comparison and reflection of respective studies – a step, which is indispensable for a systematic advancement of these theories and a cumulative research agenda.

The significance of sufficiently defining and conceptualising political context conditions for respective research so far appeared to be underestimated to a great extent. The paper therefore ties in the demand for theories and analytical frameworks which integrally consider not only the media's contingent role but also diverse political contexts, the environment surrounding the media system.

Any comparative framework and typology requires variation in its cases. As for the complexity of political contexts, a number of causal mechanisms and consequently typology attempts are conceivable. This paper proposed a typology based on a veritable empirical observation: As has been demonstrated in this paper on the basis of secondary empirical data, *foreign policy involvement* proves to be an evident research variable for future systematic research. Foreign policy involvement evidently matters. A number of studies have both explicitly or implicitly shown that the media's autonomy varies under diverse degrees of foreign policy involvement. Research designs based on this analytical framework therefore enable the exploration of the media's performance without implying and testing for a certain role a priori.

The necessity and practicability of the analytical framework were demonstrated on Russia as a conceivable case study for respective research. Foreign policy relations are too complex and dynamic to be reduced to generalised and one-sided evaluations. This applies in particular to states that have historically deep-rooted and ambiguous relations, such as Germany and Russia do. Dichotomous assumptions would neither capture the dynamics and complexity of German-Russian relations or their portrayal in the media. Previous studies on the German media coverage of Russia primarily followed descriptive research questions, which unquestionably provided relevant empirical data on the image of Russia in different time periods, but could not sufficiently evaluate the media from a normative perspective or explain the media's ambiguous and contingent assessment of Russia. The analytical framework allows for the consideration of the complexity of German-Russian relations and comparatively explores the diverse media roles in various political contexts.

The proposed framework faces some analytical challenges which demand theoretical reflections. To begin, the model adopts an ideal-typical approach. Many interstate relations would be placed in grey zones between two conceptualised dimensions of involvement. In addition, foreign policy processes are influenced by numerous factors, which are analytically difficult to isolate, if not even complicated to detect. As indicated earlier, if the selection of case studies significantly depends on the degree of involvement, it cannot be neglected that they may differ in terms

of other aspects. This analytical challenge can be faced by selecting case studies which are comparable by further constant parameters, as similar media or political systems.

In conclusion, the proposed analytical framework represents a modest attempt to contribute to theory-building of a strongly empirically-dominated research field, while introducing an analytical framework based on a research variable which is empirically verified in secondary analyses. The advantage of the proposed analytical framework therefore lies in its *integration of conceptualised political context conditions and systematic typology of an evident research variable*. Therefore, it provides an analytical instrument for systematic and comparative research, a benefit which has repeatedly been expressed by political communication scholars (Fröhlich, Scherer & Scheufele, 2007; Sarcinelli & Menzel, 2007). It is to be regarded as one of many analytical jigsaw pieces, which enables an understanding of the diverse roles of the media in foreign policy processes.

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