

DIFFERENT ACTORS, DIFFERENT FACTORS?

A comparison of the news value orientation between newspaper journalists and civil-society actors

Introduction

Previous research has shown that the mass media do not simply reflect reality. News organizations and journalists are confronted with a huge amount of information and limited space and time within which to disseminate it; they must therefore select "newsworthy" events (Bennett, 2011; Tuchman, 1978). Different approaches have attempted to explain the selection processes applied by traditional mass media (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). One of the most prominent of these is the news value approach. In their seminal study, Galtung and Ruge (1965) stated that specific criteria, such as elite-persons and an event's level of conflict or damage, influence the newsworthiness of events and whether they gain mass media attention. Several studies have confirmed the validity of at least some news factors for traditional mass media and thereby for the selection routines of professional journalists (i.e., Östgaard, 1965; Harcup & O'Neill, 2001; Staab, 1990; Peterson, 1979; 1981).

But today, in times of a hybrid media system (Chadwick, 2006), there are much more channels to communicate with a wider audience than traditional mass media. Especially the development of the Internet has provided other actors (e.g. civil-society organizations or laypersons) than professional journalists with a new tool to reach their relevant publics (cf. Baringhorst et al., 2009; Lester & Hutchins, 2009).

However, within the concept of news factors and previous research regarding it is still unclear to what degree news factors also apply to the communication of these other non-professional actor types. Is the concept also valid for the communication of less established actors? And how do actors with varying degrees of professionalization employ news factors in their communication? Our study attempts to widen the applicability of the news value approach by examining whether the approach is also valid for actor types outside traditional mass media.

To answer our research questions, we conduct a quantitative content analysis of the manner a specific issue (climate change) is presented. We seek to understand how strongly news factors structure communication of “non-professional-actors”. We thereby compare the communication of professional journalists in traditional mass media content with the communication of other non-professional actors (e.g. civil-society actors or laypersons) which becomes visible (and accessible) on their websites.

The Relevance of News Factors for Different Actors

As early as 1922, Lippmann stated that, due to its complexity, media could not represent reality in an objective way. At the same time, journalistic representations of reality are not arbitrary; rather they follow certain patterns and routines. Therefore, journalists need a standard for selecting newsworthy events. In their seminal studies Östgaard (1965) and Galtung and Ruge (1965) identify some of these patterns as “news factors”, i.e. as those attributes of events which make it newsworthy. The unexpectedness of an event, for instance, and the degree to which it is driven by actors belonging to the elite, the more extensive the coverage will be. According to this logic, the more news factors apply to an event, the greater its overall news value (Galtung & Ruge, 1965). The obvious downside of this view is that news factors appear as predetermined, invariant givens of a reported event: “The different news factors are regarded as causes (independent variable), the reporting of journalists is seen as an effect (dependent variable)” (Staab, 1990: 427). This problem was addressed by the subsequent development of the concept as it experienced a constructivist turn: News factors were now no longer seen as genuine attributes of events but as journalistic hypotheses of reality (Schulz, 1976; Strömbäck, Karlsson, & Hopmann, 2012). Thus, the decision to publish a news story is based on the journalist's perception of an event; that is, journalists do not so much reflect reality as they construct it. This extends from the decision to report an event to how the story is presented – which actors are

cited in which order and which aspects of an issue are emphasized (“functional model of news factors”; Staab, 1990: 437; see also Westerståhl & Johansson, 1994).

Following the constructivist approach, Shoemaker and Reese (1996: 106) define news factors as "audience-oriented routines". Journalists, they suggest, select the news that is most relevant to the audience. In doing so, news value theory helps to predict what the audience will like and directs gatekeepers to make consistent story selections (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996: 106). From this perspective, news factors are conceptualized as psychological mechanisms for selection, serving as collective anthropologic relevance indicators (Shoemaker, 1996; Shoemaker et al., 1987; Shoemaker et al., 1992; see also Eilders, 2006). Nevertheless, there might still be differences between journalists and above all various types of news outlets in the relative importance they ascribe to single factors. Depending on their institutional setting, their professional background, their role and the target group they have in mind, journalists will select different issue and/or emphasize different aspects of them.

Based on what we know from the existing studies it is especially the degree of professionalization that influences to what extent an actor’s communication is oriented towards news factors: The more established the communicator is and the more organized and professional his/her communication, the more likely the communication will follow the logic of news factors.

Political parties for instance or those actors that occupy the top positions in online engine rankings (which we know favor well-established actors) follow a similar logic to that of mass media. A case in point is Gerhard and Schäfer’s (2010) study in which they compared newspaper articles with the most important websites of a variety of actors, which they identified through search engine results. They found little difference between the actors mentioned and their frames. In particular, civil society actors, as actors with little political influence, were not mentioned more often online than offline (see also Koopmans & Zimmermann, 2003). With regard to news factors this means that the actors' influence is online as important as offline, and

there are no differences concerning the news factor elite-persons. Schweitzer (2005, 2008) analyzed the online campaigns of German parties for the national elections and concluded that the content on party websites was geared toward the mass media; thus, these websites strongly mirror the idea of news factors.

In contrast to this, Eilders et al. (2010) showed that while political bloggers (as non-professional actors) often refer to traditional media, they write about additional issues (see also Wall, 2005). Compared to traditional mass media, blogs present reports that are often one-sided, not bound to objectivity, and that reflect the blogger's own position (see also Peer & Ksiazek, 2011, for YouTube Videos). Some news factors such as "benefit", "facticity", "prominence", and "conflict" appear to be less relevant in political blogs than in professional journalism, whereas others such as "damage", "continuity", and "personalization" are equally important (Eilders et al., 2010). In addition to this and as a consequence of their non-professional status citizen journalists heavily rely on ordinary citizens as sources in their articles as they usually lack the access to established (political) actors as Reich (2008) shows. Necessarily therefore, the news factor "elite-persons" is less central in their reporting than in traditional media.

On the whole, there exists on the one hand an extensive corpus of research on news factors in the context of journalists and on the other a growing body of studies which investigate the still relatively new forms and new roles of public communication, above all bloggers, afforded by the Internet. With respect to the latter, however, we do know only very little about the communicative structure of all those actors – i.e. bloggers, NGOs, social movements – that together constitute an issue field, and connected by their hyperlinks, span a discursive space. The present study thus takes up the existing findings but goes one step further in that we compare the communication of professional mass media journalists with that of less-established actors – the "challengers" – who do not necessarily follow the news factor logic.

In this study, challengers are those who have no institutionalized access to political power—for example, non-profit-organizations, social movements, and bloggers (Kriesi, 2004). We focus

on their Internet presence as this has become one of the most important means of their communication with the public (cf. Baringhorst et al., 2007; Lester & Hutchins, 2009). Furthermore, from a pragmatic perspective, this channel makes their communication visible and easily accessible.

The comparatively low costs and the fact that challengers do not have to adapt their communication to jump the threshold of traditional gatekeepers makes the Internet an ideal platform for them. On this view, we would expect their online communication to contrast and extend that of traditional mass media and therefore not to conform to the same extent to the logic of news factors.

Based on the above mentioned considerations we will differentiate the actors according to their degree of professionalization as this has been shown to be the main explanation for their news factor orientation. Our general hypothesis is that the more professionalized an actor is, the more important are news factors in its communication. Professionalization in this context means that communicative efforts are strategically directed toward the mass media through press releases or separate, dedicated media sections on the websites. In our study we distinguish between four actor types:

1. professional journalists working for mass media
2. professional challengers: organized challengers with professional communication toward the mass media (e.g., professional non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as Greenpeace). These organizations often have the resources to finance a highly professionalized communications department with public relations specialists working to spread their aims and messages.
3. semi-professional challengers: organized challengers but without a professional communication toward the mass media (e.g., a small activist group) and
4. single citizens/laypersons: not organized and without professional communication toward the mass media (e.g., a single blogger)

Generally, research has found proof of the basic assumptions about news value theory for traditional mass media content. However, as every study includes a slightly different set of news factors, the results are difficult to compare, and an empirically tested "standardized list" of factors does not exist. In fact, there are many different but essentially similar lists of news factors (see Allern, 2002; Bell, 1991; Harcup & O'Neill, 2009; Hetherington, 1985; Eilders, 2006; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). We included in our study those news factors most common among the different lists: elite-persons, elite-nations, proximity, damage, and aggression/conflict.

Methods and Measurement

Selection of the Issue: The Discussion about Climate Change in Germany

To answer our research questions, we selected the issue of climate change, which fulfils important prerequisites: challengers play an active role, and the issue is of interest to a broad public. The discussion in Germany is dominated by the position of climate advocates; that is, that climate change is mostly human-induced. In 2007, a special Eurobarometer study was conducted, wherein 69% of Germans mentioned climate change among their top five environmental concerns (European Commission, 2008). We analyze the discussion offline and online from 1 June to 31 August 2012. Within these three months, there were no specific events related to climate change.

We analyze the applied news factors in documents about the issue climate change and do not compare the selection of different events. We follow thereby the constructivist interpretation of news value theory (see above) and assume that news factors also structure how an issue is presented. As Kepplinger (2008) states: "The term 'news factors' denotes characteristics in news reports, with respect to the events covered." This idea is also formulated by Staab (1990: 437) in his functional model of news factors in news selections. He states, that the journalists decide which events to cover as well as in which certain aspects of an event he/she is interested. This interest can be read off in the emphasized news factors in a document. Our aim is to compare

those characteristics of the communication between different actor types. Therefore we keep the issue (=climate change) constant. Otherwise it would have been very difficult to limit the “issue-universe” of interest – especially online – and would have included the risk to compare apples and oranges.

Sample: Offline and Online

Our offline sample consists of 10 German national newspapers and five magazines (*BILD*, *BILD Sunday edition*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *Die Welt*, *Welt Sunday edition*, *Der Spiegel*, *taz*, *Focus*, *Die Zeit*, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, *GEO*, *Stern*, *FAZ*, *FAZ Sunday edition*, *Financial Times Deutschland*, and *Handelsblatt*). The aim was to include the most important news outlets with nationwide circulations in terms of their role as opinion leaders on the topic of climate change. Out of all the articles containing the keywords "climate change" or "global warming" (in German: *Klimawandel* or *globale Erwärmung*), we drew a random sample monthly of 50 articles for further analysis (total off articles containing the keywords: June: $n=157$; July: $n=171$, August $n=184$). So the present study includes 150 articles on climate change.

The online sample originally contained 150 articles spread over the three month. How did we draw this sample of web pages out of the abundance of information available on the web? The most often used strategy utilizes Google's hit-ranking feature: sampling the most prominently listed actors. However, this procedure is problematic, as the Google algorithm favors elite and professionalized actors. Consequently, we follow another sampling strategy using hyperlinks as the constitutive architectural component of the Internet to generate an online sample of challengers' web pages.

To do so, we first defined the eight most important online challengers in the climate change issue, four climate skeptics and four climate advocates, through clean Google searches (keywords: *Klimawandel* and *globale Erwärmung*, including inflections), reviews of the relevant literature, and expert interviews. From each of the identified challengers, we fed the web page

that most centrally dealt with climate change (see Appendix A) into a web-crawling software: Govcom.org's Issue Crawler (<https://www.issuecrawler.net/>; pre-tests showed that higher numbers of source seeds resulted in networks that were too large to be processed further.)

The web-crawler then follows all URLs that are internal to the website and no more than two steps away from the source seed. From the internal web pages, the crawler first collects all outlinks (i.e., hyperlinks that point to external web pages) and then performs a final analysis to see which of the webpages that are now part of the network have hyperlinks running between them.

This snowballing technique creates an online network in which the actors are the nodes and the hyperlinks connecting them are the edges. It is, however, not yet an issue network, as the web crawler follows hyperlinks irrespective of the target to which they point. In other words, a hyperlink network generated by the snowballing procedure always contains a substantial amount of noise; that is, websites that have nothing to do with climate change. In order to eliminate the actors that are unrelated to the issue, all web pages were passed through scraping software, the Visual Web Spider, which performed a keyword search (*Klimawandel* or *globale Erwärmung* plus their English equivalents, climate change and global warming) and discarded all those that did not match. This second step generates a hyperlink issue network in which all actors and their web pages are engaged in the climate change debate. The networks were produced on a monthly basis from June–August 2012. It is important to note that the networks generated in this way were not confined to German actors but, in line with the boundless structure of the Internet, were only delimited linguistically.

On these issue-specific networks, we used a sampling technique similar to Kalton's (1990) probability proportional to size sampling. The sampling had two steps. First, we drew a sample of 50 domains out of each monthly network. The domains were weighted by their inlinks so that more important sites had a greater chance sample inclusion. As most domains in the networks included several web pages, in the second step we randomly selected and coded one page for

each of the domains from step one. As a last step, only those pages that originated from challengers (i.e., blogs, non-governmental organizations, social movements, or scientific actors/universities) were included. Our final online sample consists of 79 challenger documents: 20 of professional challengers (e.g., a professional NGO), 20 of semi-professional challengers (e.g., a small group of activist) and 39 of single citizens/laypersons (e.g., a single blogger). As mentioned above, we assume that the more organized a challenger and the more professionalized the communication with the media, the more its communication follows the logic of news factors.

Quantitative Content Analysis

To answer our research questions, we conducted a quantitative content analysis of the newspaper articles and online documents. The same codebook was used to analyze offline and online content. The coding took place on two levels: First, there were several variables on the document level (name of the newspaper/URL, date, etc.). Second, the coder identified the three most important actors (MIAs) who took a position on climate change based on the length of their contribution (average number of cited MIAs: professional journalists: 1,48; professional challengers: 1,45; semi-professional challengers: 1,60; single citizens/laypersons: 2,26).

These actors were coded with regard to actor type, scope, and country of origin. Their utterances were then analyzed with respect to mentioned addresses, their position on climate change, and other content-based aspects of climate change (e.g., whether they mentioned positive or negative consequences). The position on climate changes was measured with two variables: The first variable asked whether the MIA expressed that climate change occurs (yes, no, not identifiable) and if yes, if the MIA perceived climate change as a problem (yes, no, not identifiable). Climate advocates and skeptics were defined in combination of the two variables (Table 1).

Table 1: Measurement of the position on climate change

Occurrence of Climate Change	Climate Change as a Problem	Position
yes	yes	Advocates
yes	no	Skeptics
yes	both positions are discussed equally	Skeptics
yes	not identifiable	Skeptics
no	-	Skeptics

The unit of analysis was the actor-sequence in a specific document; as mentioned above, up to three actors (MIAs) were coded in each document (offline $n = 222$; online $n = 149$; professional challengers = 29 ; semi-professional challengers = 32 and single citizens/laypersons= 88). Three trained coders completed the coding. Krippendorff's alpha for the actor variables was .89 and for the content variables was .71.

The news factors were measured as follows:

- *Elite-persons*: This factor describes the political (or economical) influence of people—the higher the political influence, the more newsworthy that actor (cf. Maier et al., 2009; Eilders, 1997). To measure the influence of actors according to Eilders (1997), two different dimensions are relevant: their degree of organization/institutionalization and their scope (national vs. international). We adopted the measurement of Eilders (1997). This results in three degrees of influence: actors with the lowest influence (1) are private persons/citizens, the public or bloggers (independent from their scope). Actors in the middle category (2) are political actors/institutions and companies on the regional and national levels, NGOs on the regional and national levels, universities, and countries. Actors with the highest influence (3) were political actors/institutions and companies and NGOs on the international level.
- *Elite-nations*: In our study we refer to elite-nation as an attribute (their country of origin) of an actor who express their opinion in a document. The status of a nation is the result of its political and economic power (from 1 = lowest status up to 4 = highest status). We used the country classification list developed by Maier et al. (2009). This news factor was

only measured for individual actors (offline $n = 175$ and online $n = 123$) as it was difficult to decide the status of an international organization (for example, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change).

- *Proximity*: Proximity is defined as the geographical distance between the country from which the actor comes and the country where the newspaper/document is published. We assume that the most distant are other countries, the closest is the actor's own country, and in the middle are supranational institutions (1 = other countries, 2 = supranational, and 3 = own country). For example, for Germany, the European Union is closer than the U.S. We argued that supranational institutions are closer than other countries because, in our example, Germany is a member of the EU and therefore has a higher proximity to that institution than to another foreign country.
- *Damage*: Damage refers to the negative consequences of climate change. Damage was measured by the mentioned negative consequences (1 = mentioned and 0 = not mentioned).
- *Aggression/conflict*: This factor describes the controversial nature of an issue; that is, to what degree conflicts are mentioned. In the study, we measured this news factor in two ways: First, the subdimension *actor criticism* refers to an actor's criticism of another actor, or "addressee" (1 = addressee criticized and 0 = no [criticized] addressee mentioned). Second, we measured how controversial the cited standpoints were in a document (*controversy*). In the case of climate change, this means that a document is controversial (1) in the case that climate advocates and skeptical voices are cited. No controversy (0) occurs when only climate advocates or only skeptics express their viewpoints.

Results

Our research question was how the degree of professionalization influences the orientation towards news factors of different actor types. We included in our study actor- (elite-persons, elite-nations, proximity) and content-based news factors (damage, actor criticism, and controversy).

To answer our research question, we first consider the actor-based news factors. We conducted three separate ANOVAs with the three news factors (elite-persons, elite-nations, and proximity) as dependent variables and the different actor types (professional journalists working for the mass media, professional challengers, semi-professional challengers and single citizens/laypersons) as the grouping variable (Table 2).

Table 2: Actor-based news factors

	Elite-Persons ¹	Elite-Nations ²	Proximity ³
Professional journalists*	2.01 ^a	3.10	2.40
Professional challengers	2.00	3.16	2.45
Semi-professional challengers	1.78	3.22	2.37
Single citizens/laypersons	1.74 ^b	3.24	2.43

1. $F(367/3)=8.88, p<.001$, post-hoc-tests: Scheffé ($p<.05$)

2. $F(294/3)=0.90$, n.s.

3. $F(336/3)=0.06$, n.s.

a, b, c: different letters indicate significant differences between subgroups $p<.05$

Elite-persons: from 1 = lowest influence to 3 = highest influence / Elite-nations: from 1 = lowest status to 4 = highest status / Proximity: 1 = other countries, 2 = supranational, 3 = own country

*For all news factors there are no significant differences between the newspapers and magazines

For the news factor elite-persons we see the expected pattern: The more professionalized the actor's communication, the more important the news factor elite-persons, which represents political or economic influence. Laypersons cite mostly non-influential civil-society actors (i.e., bloggers), whereas the most professionalized challengers (i.e., big NGOs) show a similar citing pattern as traditional mass media concerning influential actors (i.e., politicians). They seem to adapt the mass media logic. Politicians are mainly cited in the traditional mass media and in the documents of the most professionalized challengers. The elite bias of the mass media (Bennett, 1990; Adam, 2007) is thus replicated by those challengers who are more closely connected with political power.

Surprisingly, there are no differences between the actor types concerning elite-nations and proximity. The status of the nation is similarly important for all actors. They all cite mainly actors from influential countries (most cited MIAs are from Germany [46%] followed by the U.S. [22%]) and the UK [4%]; overall, 26 different countries were coded). Proximity is important for all actor types, who all cite mainly actors from their own countries or from the same language region (German websites mainly cite German MIAs [66%], English websites cite mostly MIAs from English-speaking countries [69%], and the German newspapers mainly cite German MIAs [71%]).

To sum up, our results confirm our hypotheses for the news factor elite-persons. But the news factors elite-nations and proximity are equally important for all actor-types regardless how professionalized their communication is.

The second block of news factors consists of the content-based factors. To analyze differences between the content-based news factors, we conducted three separate ANOVAs with the news factors damage, aggression/conflict, and controversy as dependent variables and the actor type as the grouping variable.

Table 3 shows that if consequences (news factor damage) are mentioned by journalists, they are mostly negative; challengers discuss the consequences in a more neutral or positive manner. The pattern here is as expected: The more professionalized the actor's communication, the more relevant is the news factor damage for the presentation of the issue.

Table 3: Content-based news factors

	Damage ¹	Aggression/ Conflict: Actor Criticism ²	Position of the cited MIAs ³	Aggression/ Conflict: Controversy ⁴
Professional journalists*	.46 ^a	.11 ^a	.70 ^a	.12 ^a
Professional challengers	.31	.17	.97	.00
Semi-professional challengers	.31	.25	.65 ^{b,c}	.05 ^b
Single citizens/lay- persons	.22 ^b	.24 ^b	.51 ^c	.29

1. $F(367/3)=3.31, p<.05$, post-hoc-tests: Scheffé ($p<.05$)

2. $F(367/3)=5.74, p<.005$, post-hoc-tests: Scheffé ($p<.05$)

3. $F(346/3)=7.86, p<.001$, post-hoc-tests: Scheffé ($p<.05$)

4. $F(221/3)=4.28, p<.005$, post-hoc-tests: Scheffé ($p<.05$)

a, b, c: different letters indicate significant differences between subgroups $p<.05$

Damage: 1 = negative consequences mentioned by the MIA, 0 = no negative consequences mentioned by the MIA; Actor criticism: 1 = addressee criticized by the MIA, 0 = no (criticized) addressee mentioned by the MIA; Position of the cited MIA: 0 = skeptical position; 1 = climate advocates; Controversy (coded on the document level): 1 = controversy, 0 = no controversy.

*For all news factors there are no significant differences between the newspapers and magazines

But when interpreting these results, we have to take the particularities of the climate change issue into account. Damage was measured as the mentioning of negative consequences. Therefore, the result showing that damage is more important for professional journalists and professional challengers (mainly the big NGOs), could be explained partly by the positions toward climate change. German newspapers and most of the NGOs mainly support the alarmist view concerning global warming and therefore mention the negative consequences of climate change. In contrast, the online sample reveals several skeptics, especially among bloggers (single citizens/laypersons). As they deny the occurrence of climate change or its possible impacts, they do not mention negative consequences very often. To illustrate these findings we included in table 3 the position of the cited MIAs towards climate change (table 3, third column) – the lower the value the more skeptical is the position towards the occurrence of climate change and its impacts of the cited MIAs in the coded documents.

However, the position does not explain everything. As shown in Table 3, professional and semi-professional challengers have the same value concerning the news factor damage (.31), although the semi-professional challengers cite more MIAs with a climate advocate-position. If

the value of the news factor damage only depended on the position on the issue, the news factor would be much more important for the professional challengers than it actually is.

Criticizing an actor (news factor aggression/conflict) seems to be specific to challengers' communication. In traditional offline media, we find significantly less criticism. Less professionalized actors are particularly critical of other actors. In contrast, journalists in traditional mass media mention other actors in a more neutral (or polite) way, as they follow professional guidelines such as objectivity or balanced reporting. In addition, the position on climate change is relevant. The skeptics, who are a minority in Germany, mainly criticize other actors, as they have to deal with the mainstream position of the climate advocates to take part in the discourse.

We see a similar pattern concerning the news factor controversy. Controversy was measured on the document level. A document was considered controversial if MIAs with different positions on climate change (climate advocates versus skeptics) were cited within. We find the most controversy in the debates on the websites of laypersons, very little controversy in documents from semi-professional and professional Challenger Types, and little controversy in the traditional mass media. The higher value of controversy for traditional offline media compared to the more professionalized challengers could be explained by their working routines. They are bound to objectivity and to debating the climate change issue, so they also deal with the skeptical position. Semi-professional and professional challengers simply promote their position, which is typically one-sided. They have no need to give room to skeptical voices.

To sum up, the results concerning the news factor aggression/conflict contradict our earlier expectations. The less organized and professionalized the communication of an actor, the more important is the news factor aggression/conflict.

Discussion

Although anyone can publish on the Internet without time or space limitations, our results show that even non-established, less professionalized actors have (at least partly) adopted the classical selection logic of the mass media. It seems that the online world has not completely abandoned the logic of news factors. The reason might be twofold: First, if we consider news factors as general psychological mechanisms or audience-oriented routines (Shoemaker, 1996; Eilders, 2006), these factors should be relevant not only to journalists but also to other actors (Scherer et al., 2012) who seek to reach a wider audience. Second, those actors who can freely publish their opinions on the web (i.e., challengers) still strongly depend on the uptake by traditional media to achieve visibility and resonance beyond their own base (see for example Bakardjieva, 2011). To facilitate this uptake, they must ensure that their communication is interesting and relevant to journalists, which means that the content must accommodate the working logic of the traditional mass media to a certain degree.

Although the online world is not the end of the importance of news factors, our study reveals differences in the usage of news factors among actor types. Contrary to our hypotheses, it is not the professional journalist and the more professionalized challengers that always emphasize more strongly news factors. Only the results for the news factors elite-persons and damage show the expected pattern. For actors such as bloggers, who tend to have a less organized and professionalized communication, these two factors have the lowest importance, whereas we find professional journalists highly valued elite-persons and damage. In contrast, results for the factor aggression (actor criticism and controversy) are opposite. Aggression is most important to the less professionalized actors, who criticize other actors and enable controversy on their web pages. There are no differences between the actor types concerning the factors elite-nation and proximity. From these results, the question emerges why non-professionalized actors score higher in the news factors aggression and conflict.

We offer three explanations, all of which we expect to partially explain this surprising result. First, the higher importance of aggression and conflict for non-influential actors could mean that they need this kind of "loud" communication to be heard. As they have no access to influential actors whom they can cite, they may perceive controversy as their best option for gaining visibility in the discourse. This is exactly Bennett's (1990) claim in the indexing hypothesis: non-elite actors need spectacular, often negative, actions to penetrate the elite focus of the mass media. Second, online communication provides more freedom than offline coverage. Challengers such as bloggers write their own opinions online concerning climate change and criticize actors with whom they do not agree. They perceive no need to investigate or check all the facts as do professional journalists. Furthermore, these challengers are not bound by norms of objectivity or balanced reporting. Instead, they can freely articulate their opinions. This leads to a higher emphasis on conflict and criticism in their online communication. Third, the higher importance of aggression and conflict for the less professionalized challengers might be due to an actor's respective position on the issue of climate change. In this field, the mainstream position in Germany follows the scientific consensus that climate change is (at least partly) human-induced and has severe consequences. Those who challenge this mainstream position are mainly found on the webpages of single-citizens/laypersons. It is here that we find actors who are skeptical of climate change, either denying its existence or its impacts. To take part in the discussion, the skeptical challengers must deal with the criticism of the mainstream, which automatically boosts conflict and controversy.

Our research shows that news value theory also applies to the online world and to different actors. However, our study also challenges a core assumption of news value theory. So far, the theory claims validity for all types of issues without taking specific issue characteristics into account. Our study clearly shows that characteristics of the climate change issue influence the news factors employed by different actors. It seems that the role of an actor and the specifics of an issue field determine which news factors are employed. It could be argued that this is

inconsequential in news value theory on a general issue level. However, at least for cross-country comparative research, this has sound consequences for selection processes. If, for example, events dealing with climate change are selected in Germany and the US (a country where we find elites divided on climate change), the role of the actor and the issue specifics might boost the news factor of conflict to a greater extent in the US than in Germany. A result we would so far take as indicator of different reporting logics neglecting differences stemming from the issue field.

In conclusion, this study reveals that news value theory is valid for different types of actors. Our data makes it clear that to further the understanding of news value research, we must disaggregate our analysis, going beyond studying news factors attached to the overall issue agenda. Instead, the usage of news factors must be recognized as strategic and role-bound, and thus varying according to the actors and issue fields analyzed. This is the perspective new studies should incorporate.

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Appendix A

Starting URLs (source seeds) used for the issue crawler:

Climate skeptical online actors:

- <http://www.eike-klima-energie.eu>
- <http://astrologieklassisch.wordpress.com/tag/klimawandel>
- <http://www.klima-ueberraschung.de>
- <http://www.klimaskeptiker.info>

Climate advocates:

- <http://www.greenpeace.de/themen/klima/nachrichten>
- http://www.pik-potsdam.de/aktuelles?set_language=de
- <http://www.wwf.de/themen-projekte/klima-energie>
- <http://klima-der-gerechtigkeit.boellblog.org>