

# NEWS MEDIA CONSUMPTION AMONG IDEOLOGICALLY LEANING GROUPS

Examining the use of alternative media- and mainstream media.

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## **Abstract**

- Purpose:** The purpose of this thesis is to investigate how ideologically leaning groups reason, value and perceive their news consumption.
- Theory:** The theoretical framework that underpins the analysis of this thesis consist of the public sphere theory, the conceptualization of trust and hostile media effects, and finally the uses and gratifications theory.
- Method:** The methodological approach of this thesis is qualitative and uses focus groups consisting of three ideologically leaning groups: left-wing, liberal and right-wing.
- Result:** Ideologically leaning groups use mainstream media as a base of information to build on their world view. Although the participants direct a great deal of distrust toward the mainstream media, they still turn to them because their need for information is large enough for them to compromise with the trustworthiness. The next conclusion is that ideologically leaning groups use media sources such as social networking sites, blogs, forums and alternative media websites to both gather information, and to uphold social relationships. Those two phenomenons seem to converge into each other.

## **Executive Summary**

This thesis takes its point of departure in the investigation of news consumption among ideologically leaning groups. The high choice media environment has led to people turning to multiple media choices and numerous alternative media outlets. Ideologically leaning people who are politically interested turn to alternative media outlets to confirm and deepen their political beliefs and opinions. The consumption of alternative news has been discussed from different perspectives and is often examined from critical angles. The research field lacks a more holistic approach to reviewing ideologically leaning group's consumption of their news diet as a whole and in a combination of different types of news media content. The conventional groups that have been of interest in the research field have always been left-wing and right-wing people. Apart from these two groups, this thesis attempts to incorporate people with liberal beliefs as alternative media consumers.

Furthermore, this thesis focuses on how and why ideologically leaning people consume mainstream media news separately- and in combination with alternative media sources. This thesis's theoretical framework consists of three main concepts: the public sphere theory, the conceptualization of trust, and the uses and gratifications theory. These theories underpin the thematical analysis of the empirical result. The chosen method of this thesis is qualitative focus groups. There are three focus groups; one left-wing, one liberal, and one right-wing group (N=9). The results show that the ideologically leaning groups consume mainstream media outlets as a base of news. All the participants showed some distrust towards some specific mainstream media outlets, which is the evening papers. The outlet Aftonbladet was given as an example by all of the participants. However, they still continuously consume the outlet, even though they showed distrust towards it. The groups have different approaches to managing the distrust; the liberal group explained that they carefully double-checked the information by going back to the articles' primary source of information. The alternative media sources are used as a complement to their daily media diet to read more credible news. For instance, the right-wing group wanted information about criminals' ethnic background, pictures, and names to build on their already existing world view where different types of immigrants commit different types of crimes found in the right-wing alternative media outlets. Finally, the liberal group showed great distrust and hostile media perceptions when encountered with content, unlike their own opinions and beliefs. This shows the importance of investigating this group in studies regarding media trust and alternative media even further.

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# 1. Introduction

Rapid changes in the media landscape have characterized the past decades. The amplified media content and choices through the Internet have allowed people to select and sort out political information of their liking (Vowe & Henn, 2016). Hence the rise of the Internet and increased access to digital alternatives, people still turn to traditional news media sources such as printed newspapers, TV, and radio as a complement. Chadwick (2013) describes the intertwined relationship between “old media” (traditional newspapers, radio, and TV) and “news media” (digital media and social network sites) and how they compete and complement each other at the same time (p. 207). Furthermore, studies have shown how people use and rely on multiple media platforms such as traditional- and new media to consume news (Ahlers 2006; Diddi & LaRose 2006; Pew Research Center, 2008). Alternative media has grown in relevance simultaneously with the high choice media environment and the easy access to information (Holt, 2018). Alternative media is a debated term characterized by a low general consensus in the research field. It is defined in various ways and is thereby highly fragmented. However, some components are often included when investigating alternative media. Scholars assert that alternative media challenges dominant beliefs and values sustained by mainstream media and that alternative media stems from smaller counter-hegemonic groups (Dowing, 2001; Atton; 2002, 2006; Fuchs, 2010). In Sweden, some conventional alternative media outlets are consumed by ideologically leaning groups of people. There are left-wing alternative media outlets such as Dagens ETC, Flamman, Arbetaren, and Dagens Arena, and on the other hand, there are right-wing anti-immigrant alternative media outlets such as Nyheter Idag, Fria Tider, and Samhällsnytt. Also, there are alternative media sources used by other ideologically leaning groups. There are some examples of liberal alternative outlets; hence it is not conventional examples in the research field, such as Liberal Debatt, Tidningen Nu, and Fri Debatt. Sweden is an interesting case to study in the question of alternative media use because of the increased polarization in the past decade. One example of the increased political polarization is the aftermath of the immigration crisis in 2015. The enhanced discourse regarding a stricter handle of immigration led to an increased media- and political coverage of negative outcomes as a product of immigration, resulting in a polarized public between pro- and anti-migrant mobilizations (Krzyżanowski, Triandafyllidou, & Ruth Wodak, 2018; Bevelander & Hellström, 2019:93).

Further, according to an examination operated by SVT Nyheter, right-wing alternative media engaged a third of the activity (number of shares, comments, likes, etcetera) among the online news media outlets on the social media platform Facebook before the national election 2018 (SVT, 2018). This indicates that alternative media outlets are growing in relevance. Questions regarding people's usage of alternative news- and political information and media behaviors arise; how do people reason around their multiple media use of alternative media sources combined with their use of mainstream media consumption? Today's research on alternative media usage is merely focused on the effects of consuming alternative media alone. However, we know that alternative media is used to complement people's overall news media consumption (Baily et al, 2008), meaning that alternative media users also consume mainstream media.

This thesis will investigate how ideologically leaning groups reason, value, and use different news media sources. The hybrid media system allows these groups to access multiple sources in order to consume news. The rapid change of the high choice media environment makes it interesting to examine how ideologically leaning groups reason, value, and use alternative media in combination with mainstream media outlets. By using a theoretical framework based on the concept of trust, the public sphere theory, and the uses and gratifications theory, this thesis will dig deeper into the phenomenon of strong ideological partisan's news consumption.

## **1.1 Purpose and Research Problem**

Studies regarding ideologically leaning group's news consumption are often related to how the consumption of alternative media affects their attitudes and opinions on an aggregated level (see, Dahlgren, Shehata & Strömbäck 2019, Theorin and Strömbäck, 2019). It is also more common to investigate the use of right-wing alternative media (see, Andersson, 2019; Holt 2016, 2017, 2020). This means that there is a research gap when it comes to investigating the remaining spectrum of alternative media sources and consumers in Sweden.

Research in the earlier era regarding news consumption mainly focused on consuming one outlet or medium exclusively (See, Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1974). The multimedia use has changed the way we perceive news media outlets' usage and challenges media scholars to investigate news consumption in a way that forces us to consider the multiple - and combined media use. In today's media environment, people use multiple outlets and mediums parallelly.



Alternative media consumers seldomly consume alternative media exclusively, but rather as a complement to their consumption of mainstream news (Baily et al, 2008) Thereby, the purpose of this study is to get more qualitative insights and a deeper understanding of reasons behind the consumption of alternative media in Sweden and aims to broaden the perspectives of alternative media consumption in the forms of news media outlets- and journals among ideologically leaning groups. This can provide the research field with a more profound understanding and insights about alternative media consumers, their incentives, reasoning, and perceptions of alternative media's usage concerning their consumption of mainstream media outlets.

To get further in the investigation regarding alternative media usage and provide cumulative growth, this study will make use of theoretical perspectives such as the public sphere, trust in media, and the uses and gratifications theory to find more insights for the research field.

## **1.2 Research Questions**

### **RQ1: How do ideologically leaning groups perceive mainstream media?**

- a) How and why do they use mainstream media?

*These questions aim is to dig deeper into how these groups utilize and perceive their use of mainstream media in Sweden. Today's research lacks this perspective, by investigating this, we could find possible underlying reasons for their attitudes and opinions.*

### **RQ2: How do ideologically leaning groups perceive alternative media?**

- a) How and why do they use alternative media sources?

*These questions aim is to find elaborative and deeper answers to the users' drivers and motives for turning to alternative media sources. We know that ideologically leaning groups are prone to turning to alternative media to confirm their world view, but what happens when they can discuss these questions freely?*

**RQ3: What are the reasons behind the ideologically leaning group's trust or distrust toward the established media?**

- a) What are the reasons for avoiding or consuming certain media outlets they trust or distrust?

*We know that trust is an important factor regarding how people choose what sources to consume. Also, strong partisans trust mainstream media more compared to others. However, what drives these groups to continuously consume mainstream media outlets that they do not trust?*

**RQ4: How do ideologically leaning groups perceive their alternative news consumption in combination to their usage of mainstream media?**

*This question aims to investigate how these groups reason around their overall diet of news in their daily life. How and why do they choose certain outlets, and for what purpose do they use one outlet before the other? Which one do they prefer and how do they value news sources differently depending on if it is an alternative media outlet or mainstream media outlet?*

### **1.3 Structure of the Thesis**

This study starts with a research review of news consumption in a broad sense and continues to provide a review of the term alternative media to provide an understanding of how the state of the research field is. Since alternative media is such a debated term, the research review will show how the term alternates depending on what type of ideological belonging the research field is dealing with. Next, the study's theory is presented to map out possible reasons behind people's consumption of alternative media sources. Here a combination of the theories about trust in news media, the public sphere, and the uses and gratifications theory is presented. Next, the methodological approach will be presented together with some explanation of collecting the sample. Finally, the result is presented together with an analysis of the result. Next comes the discussion, conclusion, and some suggestions for further research.

## 2. Research Review

This thesis investigates ideologically leaning group's consumption of news. Therefore, this research review will provide some background information regarding news consumption in different forms, the background of mainstream media, and alternative media to provide an overview of the field and to highlight important concepts of this thesis.

### 2.1 News Consumption in the Digital Age

News consumption has been investigated by many scholars in the field and can be traced back to the origin of news media such as printed newspapers, Television, and radio. In the early stages of investigating news consumption, the prospects for investigating their effects were much more manageable than today. In a time of limited choices, sources, and limited access to those alternatives, researchers could focus on the effects of consuming a very few mediums at a time (see, Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1974).

The rapid pace of the digitalization and the increased use of the Internet have contributed to the change in news consumption the past decades, which means that the view on news consumption has changed drastically in terms of how, where, when, and why people consume news. When the digitalization started to become a vital part of the change in how we use and perceive news consumption, scholars started to refer to web 2.0. Tim O'Riley (2005) established the term as a sequel to the concept of web 1.0. What distinguishes web 1.0 from web 2.0 is how the users are perceived as active and as producers of the content online. For instance, how users create or update Wikipedia-pages or collectively contribute to an aggregated conclusion about what is spam or not through e-mail products like Cloudmark. Web 2.0 is an acknowledged term referred to as a platform where prosperity is dependent on collective intelligence (Taffel, 2015:6; Donelan, Kear & Ramage, 2010:230; Kelly, 2005:67).

Purcell et al. (2010) highlight how the concept of news has changed regarding how we consume them compared to the time before the digitalization. The researchers mean that news has become "portable, personalized, and participatory" (p. 2). This means that news is no longer fixed to a specific time or place, but rather more tailored to news consumers' preferences. Another aspect of the changing news media environment is related to the lowered thresholds to consuming information, meaning that news consumption becomes less time-consuming and strengthens the possibilities for more robust personal engagement and pander connection with

one's network (Meijer & Kormelink, 2014: 675). In other words, news consumption has gone from examining a few alternatives of mediums, outlets, and other sources to examining multiple media choices simultaneously. Even though access to information has become more accessible by time, a particular group of people actively seek out information.

### **2.1.2 News Consumption and Political Engagement**

This thesis aims to investigate how ideologically leaning groups reason, value, and use news and multiple media sources, both mainstream media and alternative media. The research field this far lacks research in the aspect of news consumption; therefore, this section will provide an overview of news consumption in relation to political engagement.

There is a wide variety of research that discusses how news and journalism have a mobilizing effect on people for political action. In the context of the media effects research, the findings have varied depending on the time and age we have lived in. In the earlier stages of the research about the changing media environment in relation to political interest and engagement, scholars asserted that media use such as watching TV resulted in declining social capital and civic activities and a lowered political engagement (Gerbner et al, 1980; Putnam, 1995, 2000). Further, Milner (2002) claimed that watching TV most likely replaced newspapers' consumption, which led to a recess in civic literacy. On the other hand, many scholars have found contrary findings in the matter. Studies have shown the opposite of earlier scholars' claims that media use positively impacts political knowledge and political participation (see, de Vreese and Bloomgaarden, 2006; Eveland and Scheufele, 2000). However, this does not mean that all people seek out news because the changing media environment has allowed people to access all sorts of information and news. Research shows how different factors affect one's likeliness to consume news media. Scholars have found that political interest is an essential factor when it comes to understanding which people seek out news or avoid news (Prior, 2010; Shehata, 2016; Strömbäck, Djerf-Pierre, & Shehata, 2013). News-seekers are motivated to actively search for news and feel a civic duty to follow current affairs while news avoiders have no such interest or motivation. In other words, political interest is an essential factor when it comes to people's drive to seek out news.

## 2.2 Mainstream Media

Mainstream media is an integral part of this thesis, and therefore the following section will provide a brief definition of the term.

According to Hallin and Mancini (2004), established media have different functions and purposes depending on which media system's categorization is discussed. According to Hallin & Mancini (2004), Sweden goes under the democratic corporatist media system, which means that the degree of journalistic professionalization is high; the state intervention is quite firm, which means that the public-service broadcasting gets a significant amount of state funding. Further, the democratic corporatist media system typically protects the principles of press freedom and freedom of speech (p. 67). What defines mainstream media or the established media in the Swedish context is what we call the morning papers and the tabloids, including the public service news outlets. These outlets turn to the public mass, and they aim to cater to a greater and broader public. They aim to report in a neutral way to provide a fair picture of news and current affairs. One example of the state's interference in Sweden is the role of the media appointee (medieombudsmannen). There are some ethical press rules formulated by the media appointee like “the reporting should be reported neutrally”, “both sides of a story need to be presented”, “be careful with names and pictures of people”, etcetera. Anyone who wants to report a media source for infracting any laws can do it through the media appointee (Medieombudsmannen, n.d).

Regarding structural and organizational construction of the established media, the media is driven by what Strömbäck and Esser (2014) call the media logic. The authors mean that three mechanisms steer the news media; professionalism, commercialism, and media technology to maximize readers, viewers, or profit. In short, this means that the news media is driven by certain journalistic norms related to the journalist's news values and news selection criteria. The next mechanism is dependent on the news media to prioritize economically efficient information and cheap produce. The final mechanism refers to how communication technologies form content in production and reproduction processes, depending on the medium (p. 17-18). Even the public-service broadcast outlets are driven by the principles of the media logic of some degree. Even though they are not dependent on selling issues to function and run, they are expected to hold similar standards regarding the number of readers as their competitors being the other established media outlets. This means that all outlets, to some degree, need to

compete when it comes to the number of readers clicks on articles, shares, and comments on online social network sites.

News media outlets that are not a part of the established media- or the mainstream media are called or categorized as alternative media. The next section will provide an overview of the term and its changing definition during the years.

### **2.3 Alternative Media**

This section aims to provide a general framework of alternative media and will cover some research that describes and defines alternative media without immersing the conception of ideological orientation. The purpose is to broaden the concept and view of alternative media as we perceive it today, to be able to use the same words and concepts in a way that is possible to apply to any alternative media independently from what ideological leaning they belong to. This is necessary because this study aims to investigate alternative media user's news habits and perceptions. This chapter will highlight how the term has been used between during the years 1984 and 2019, and how the left- versus the right-wing alternative media have been perceived and described by scholars in the field.

The phenomena of alternative media have been investigated for many years; however, it is unclear when alternative media became an ocular concept. The term is highly debated among scholars in the field, which means that there is no clear consensus regarding its definition and which type of mediums, outlets, or channels can be called alternative media; it could practically mean anything. The term "alternative media" implies that there is something that deviates from the norm of how the great mass perceives the established news media as we know it, like the previous section briefly explains. Alternative media have existed before the digitalization and the Internet, in the form of journals, newspapers, radio, films, and documentaries (Dowing, 2001). When the Internet started to become popular, some scholars paid attention to how alternative media practices were enabled (Atton, 2002; Dowing, 2001). Due to the lowered thresholds because of the rise of the Internet, the lowered costs and the easy access helped alternative media sources to reach a wider public (Owns & Palmer, 2003).

Some mean that social network sites, online forums, any books, movies, or magazines could be called alternative (Lievrouw, 2011). However, this paper's focus lies on alternative media outlets and any media/medium related to their outlet. In other words, alternative outlets

whose aim is to deliver news in a way that differs from the mainstream news media outlets. The research field of alternative media is highly fragmented in terms of how the term is defined when it comes to investigating either left- or right-wing media; however, some mutual traits match both phalanxes. For example, finance at an alternative media outlet is dependent on participatory, collective, horizontal structures, and non-commercial initiatives (Sandoval & Fuchs, 2010;141). Leung & Lee (2012) suggest that alternative media producers go against the journalistic norms of objectivity and impartiality to undertake specific political views (p. 341). Holt (2017) defines alternative media as outlets that challenge the political establishment by serving alternative views and perspectives in opposition to the dominant discourse found in the mainstream media (p. 119). The author continues to explain how researchers have highlighted the relationship between mainstream media and representation, that an essential purpose of alternative media is to emphasize ideologies of those under- or misrepresented in the mainstream media channels (p. 16). Alternative media, independently from ideological belonging, often aim to represent attitudes and opinions not shown in the mainstream media. They are sort of a supplement for people to get a counter-hegemonic perspective of societal issues and go against journalistic norms of objectivity and impartiality.

The definitions above explain how the term alternative media can be used, perceived, and defined in a broader sense. This section has not gone into detail about the orientation of the alternative media outlets but instead given a broad definition of alternative media in the sense of organizational structures and democratic and representational motives. The left- and right-wing alternative media belong to two separate research traditions and differ in many ways. Therefore, the following sections will describe how right-wing versus left-wing alternative media have been dealt with in the research field.

### **2.3.1 Left-Wing Alternative Media**

The following section will highlight some research investigating left-wing alternative media and explaining the ideological background behind today's alternative left-wing news media.

When scholars refer to alternative left-wing media, they often relate the phenomena to left-wing oriented social movements. Lievrouw (2011) describes how alternative media has a history attached to the 1960s' ideologically leaning new social movements theory concerning environmentalism, animal rights, anti-nuclear, anti-globalization, and group identity or lifestyles like gay rights and the women's movement (p. 41). The new social movements are

not as concerned with materialist issues based on economy, like class, but instead focused on issues revolving around gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or professional background (p. 50). The new social movements theory is essential to have in mind when discussing today's left-wing alternative media because their existence is still based on and driven by these issues and ideas.

Dowing (1984) described in his work "Radical Media" alternative media to strengthen democracy. He gives the example of the radical press in the UK during the early 1900s'. He emphasized how citizens who belonged to community groups involved themselves in politics as a critical force toward the institutionalized and centralized press (p.17). Dowing (2001) continues to use alternative media as an equivalent term to radical media in his later works, where the author refers the term to progressive left-wing media who aim to challenge and question capitalism and corporate media power (p. 88). Scholars also refer to alternative media as amateur media and citizen media, whereas citizens with no significant professional experience can practice journalism. This is seen as an essential function in rebalancing uneven power structures, leading to increased inclusiveness in media production (Couldry, 2000; Rodríguez, 2001). Further, Couldry & Curran (2003) argue that the concept of alternative media challenges the "media power" and "media institutions" dominant representation of reality and the social world (p. 39). A substantial example is Indymedia, a left-wing alternative media organization rooted in the new social movement's theory. They originated in 1999 when anti-capitalist groups demonstrated against the WTO summit meeting in Seattle. Indymedia functioned as a voice for activists who wanted to present their views to use their web-based platform to do so. The activists acted as journalists, reporters, and media producers themselves as an oppositeness to the established media (Atton, 2007:71). Further, alternative media is not only consumed in an isolated environment. Bailey et al (2008) describe alternative media as "*...alternative media are seen as a supplement to mainstream media, or as a counter-hegemonic critique of the mainstream*" (p. 15). Here the author points out that alternative media is a counter answer against the dominant force of the established media, but at the same time is used as a complement to mainstream media outlets.

Some scholars raise left-wing alternative media as something good for a democratic society. Andersson (2012) questions the negatively charged term alternative media and aims his critique more towards the mainstream media, and highlights how capitalism has become immune to criticism and asks questions related to how alternative media could play as a



mediator of “counter-hegemonic discourse” (p. 752). Further, the author means that left-wing alternative media should be seen as an essential function in upholding a critical view of the mainstream media “Alternative sources of information, knowledge, and culture are indeed important in order to challenge the ideological standstill in the official media discourse and invoke a radical imagination.” (p. 757). Schweiger (2017) also points out how left-wing journalism provides a voice to counter political and economic elites favored by established mainstream media.

### **2.3.2 Right-Wing Alternative Media**

The right-wing alternative media can be traced back to the 1930s, where there are some devastating historical examples of how far-right alternative news outlets have played essential parts in genocides. For example, during the second world war like the Nazi paper “Völkischer Beobachter,” which held strong affiliations with the German Nazi party during the second world war (Layton, 1970). However, there is dissension revolving around these examples as being alternative media per definition. Historically, examples like Völkischer Beobacheter are more often defined and referred to as propaganda. Scholars have held a critical position when examining right-wing alternative media because of the historical attachment of the right-wing alternative media examples. Some have investigated how their community wields the right-wing alternative media. Couldry (2002) meant that right-wing alternative media was used by neo-Nazi groups to close off certain others to sustain a community away from the mass where they could ventilate their thoughts and views in a sort of private sphere. On a similar note, Atton (2006) investigated the British National Party’s website as a forum for alternative media where he found that racist and far-right groups and their culture of anti-democratic ideas where they are against notions of equality and multiculturalism, contributes to limited space for democratically sharing ideas and arguments (p. 586).

A significant amount of research in Sweden focuses more on right-wing alternative media; it might be because it is seen as more harmful to society and the lingering critical approach toward alternative media sources of right-wing character. Regarding the dissension about the term and how some scholars prefer to use other terms to describe the phenomena: Hedman & Howard (2018) refer to Swedish alternative media outlets as “junk news” and “propaganda” when referring to sources such as Samhällsnytt and Fria Tider. This shows how the view of

right-wing alternative media has a generally ingrained approach and attitude towards right-wing alternative media. Even though the views and the content of the alternative media outlets differ in many ways, especially in the sense of ideological dimming in today's outlets, the research field still holds a consensus on how they should be investigated with a critical approach.

There are not many qualitative interviews done to examine the phenomena of right-wing alternative media. However, Kristoffer Holt (2016) investigated how people who represent right-oriented alternative media view the mainstream media and their trust towards them to deepen the understanding of their point of view about their role and function. The researcher focus exclusively on the right-oriented alternative media by conducting a qualitative interview with some well-known media profiles in Sweden. The results show the importance of the established mainstream media and how they work interrelated to them. They use mainstream media to find issues to highlight but do it with their ideological approach. The different participants also show a difference in how and why they are driven to uphold their work. Some of them are keener to turn to an already persuaded audience with right-wing views, while others do it to exploit a market of perspectives, opinions, and news that is not represented on the established mainstream news agenda (p. 144). The results prove how the previous research has presented and defined the function of alternative media well. They see their function as a way of representing underrepresented ideas. This shows how the participants view their purpose and function as something similar to any other alternative media outlet. It is also important to highlight how the alternative media producers use mainstream media to gather information for their news writing. In addition, the same researcher has done extensive work on alternative media in Sweden to define and understand the term.

A recent study investigates the effect of the consumption of alternative media. Theorin & Strömbäck (2019) conducted a comparative three-wave panel survey to investigate if the increased salience of immigration issues has had a media effect on people's attitudes toward immigration. The results show that people who consume alternative media categorized as anti-immigrant or right-wing holds more negative views on all immigrant-related issues while people who consume left-wing alternative media holds more positive attitudes (p. 17). Also, Dahlgren, Shehata, & Strömbäck (2019), found that people who consume attitude consistent content got reinforcing effects, meaning that alternative media users' opinions and attitudes became stronger by time. These studies provide insights into how people on an aggregated level are somewhat affected by consuming alternative media content. However, this thesis will not

examine changing attitudes over time, but rather dig deeper into ideologically leaning group's thoughts and opinions in a broad sense when it comes to their news consumption.

## **2.4 Analysis of the Left- and Right-Wing Alternative Media Research Traditions**

One main difference is the historical attachment of the two phalanxes, how they are perceived and treated in the research field. The field is fragmented when it comes to examining alternative media, and the two opposing sides are often investigated exclusively in separate studies. This might be because of the ontological difference and how the two sides are continuously investigated in two different kinds of research traditions where their historical background and core values differ significantly. The right-wing alternative media is often associated with historical neo-Nazi movements and is, to some degree, intertwined with the conception of propaganda and fake news since the concepts are used simultaneously in research (see, Couldry, 2002; Atton, 2006; Hedman & Howard, 2018). The right-wing section showcases how scholars scrutinize the outlets and organization by highlighting their anti-democratic tone and how they historically use their platforms as space or sphere where sympathizers can air out ideas and views in a closure without receiving critique or involvement from others. Meanwhile, the left-wing alternative media arose from the new social movements whose aim was to spread awareness and make societal changes. They aimed to spread their views to the public to make a more significant change in a more open society (Dowing, 2001; Coundry, 2000; Rodriguez, 2001; Andersson, 2012).

Something that has been manifested in this chapter is how scholars use different languages and approach to characterize right-wing alternative media in contrast to left-wing. While the latter alternative media is seen as critical, progressive, and evolves around social activism, the right-wing alternative media is abdominal, harmful to democracy, and associated with neo-Nazi and racist groups and values. Historical context is something that scholars hold on to and take into consideration when examining the right-wing alternative media sources in studies up to this day. This might make it challenging to interconnect both sides' examination in one study; however, scholars have done it before (see, Dahlgren, Shehata & Strömbäck, 2019). The purpose of this thesis is not to examine ideologically leaning groups historical context or their ideological background, but rather to examine their news consumption.

In one aspect, the difference between the two research traditions seem vast, but on the other hand, there are some similarities between the left-wing and right-wing alternative media

in terms of their function. Both aim to represent the underrepresented views and ideas that are not visible in the mass media and to compete against the media hegemony. Even though they have different values and approaches to do so, they have a common opponent.

The research field shows how the alternative media sources exist in a corresponding link towards the established media and act as a complementary news source (Baily et al, 2008). The alternative media sources are a supplement for people to get a counter-hegemonic perspective of societal issues and go against journalistic norms of objectivity and impartiality.

Another insight is that even though the two phalanxes' background might look very different, today's alternative media seem to have developed to something similar to how the mass media, in terms of how they structure and organize their organizations. This will be discussed further in the section below.

#### **2.4.1 Discussion and Contextualization**

The historical context and definitions above are essential to consider when examining news media consumption among ideologically leaning groups. Alternative media concerning news consumption findings makes it clear that there are some gaps in research that need to be filled. The significance of alternative media has started to become larger by time; therefore, this needs to be further investigated in news consumption research even further. Another aspect that is lacking in the research field is how other groups than the left-wing and right-wing people behave in consuming alternative media sources. For instance, more and more liberal alternative media sources have become available in the high choice media environment. Some journals, newspapers, blogs, and podcasts cater to people with more substantial liberal views. For a long time, people with liberal views have been perceived more as a norm since their standpoint on the left-right scale has been placed in the middle. However, people with stronger liberal views would instead be placed much further to the right on the ideological scale when it comes to economic issues and how they want to lower the state's intervention from people's lives. Therefore, a group of liberal people will be included in this thesis with the argument that this group is of relevance in the context of investigating alternative media consumption.

In Sweden's case, the alternative media outlets have in some ways started to resemble the mainstream media's structure and organization, making it even more challenging to define alternative media. For instance, two of Sweden's most well-known alternative media source have a news editorial staff and a legally responsible editor. However, most mainstream media

sources strive to follow the ethical press rules as much as possible, which most of the right-wing alternative media outlets do not.

There is also a difference in the outlets regarding how strong their ideological leaning is. No research categorizes the different outlets regarding their ideological belonging, but it is fair to state that, for example, the right-wing outlet Fria Tider is more right-oriented and anti-immigrant than Nyheter Idag. The same goes for the left-wing alternative media outlets; Flamman would be placed even further to the left on the ideological scale, compared to Dagens ETC.

Concluding this chapter's content, the research field lacks qualitative insights examining individuals or groups consuming alternative media sources. Therefore, this study aims to broaden the perspective and deepen the understanding of the alternative media consumption among ideologically leaning groups, ranging from the left to the right, including a group of liberal people.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

The following chapter will present this paper's primary theoretical approach to understanding people's usage of alternative media. Different research and theories related to people's use of alternative media. The previous chapter touched upon the notion of the need for people to share ideological views and ideas at a place where they could do so freely. This chapter will cover some literature regarding the public sphere and trust in media. In this way, indicators for incentives for using alternative media sources will be traces and understanding possible reasons behind the usage. The final section covers the uses and gratifications theory to determine why people use certain types of media, what they do with them, and how it affects their attitudes and behaviors.

#### **3.1 The Public Sphere**

The notion of public spheres as a space of democratic discussions among citizens regardless of social class or position has long been perceived as an essential part of a well-functioning democracy. Jürgen Habermas (1962/1989), the father of the public sphere theory, argues in his classical work that the expansion of mass media and the increasing complexity of societies during the 20th century have altered the public sphere (p. 201). The public sphere's original idea is not a physical space where people go to communicate; instead, it is a philosophical concept separate from the state, which constitutes a form of the arena where people critically discuss economic or political matters (p. 176). This "space" is where the public engage in critical debate (p. 52). The main constituent of the theory revolves around the bourgeois public sphere, which is where a group of people conforms to a sphere where the group aims to engage public authorities in debates about the general rules for relevant issues for the public, such as commodity exchange and social labor (p. 27). Habermas' (1962/1989) concept of the public sphere has had an essential meaning for the sociological and media and communications research. Since its start, the public sphere theory has been acclaimed and criticized by many scholars in the media and communications field. Nancy Fraser (1990) asserts in her feminist critique, *Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Existing Democracy*, that Habermas' concept of the public sphere discriminates against women and others marginalized groups (p. 61). The bourgeois public sphere was criticized for only including privileged groups who dominated the public discourse, being the French salons or the

British coffeehouses during the 18th century. Habermas' (1962/1989) idea of the public sphere and equality in public debate was justified through the good argument. In this way, Habermas (1962/1989) argued for the inclusion of social cues such as gender, race, and class. However, because of the spread of inequality among many democracies, Habermas' (1962/1989) justification of the good argument have been criticized as exclusive towards women, people of color, and people of a lower class and being in favor for privileged groups like whites, males, heterosexuals and middle-class people (Felski, 1989; Fraser, 1990; Näsström, 2013:161). Fraser (1990) problematizes the definition of "public concern", where she argues that Habermas' definition excludes other groups based on gender, ethnicity, social status, and property ownership, meaning that these groups are underrepresented in term of being labeled as public concerns (p. 71-72). In reaction to the dominant discourses established by privileged social groups in society, subaltern counterpublics emerged to find a place to discuss interests and needs. Fraser (1990) highlights how the marginalized groups in response to the misrepresentation in the public sphere have created subaltern counterpublics: "*subaltern counterpublics in order to signal that they are parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter-discourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs.*" (p. 67).

Furthermore, Fraser (1990) explains two functions of the counter publics: "*On the one hand, they function as spaces of withdrawal and regroupment; on the other hand, they also function as bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed toward wider publics*" (p. 68). The subaltern counterpublics also target and oppose the dominant public discourse through their collective mobilization to limit powerful actors and hold them accountable (Young, 2000:174). Also, feminist subaltern counterpublics aim to take issues forward and challenge the status quo. The problem with the theory about counterpublics is that the original concept exclusively includes progressive movements such as feminist and anti-racist movements. However, some scholars have attempted to broaden the concept of counterpublics to neutralize the concept concerning their structural position (Asen, 2000; Warner, 2002).

The next section will elaborate on some studies examining counterpublics in an online environment. The concept of counterpublics will be held in a broad sense to include right-wing counterpublics, which is the point of this thesis.

### 3.1.1 Counterpublics and the Internet

Fraser (1990) did not only lay the ground for a more inclusive way of perceiving and utilizing the public sphere theory, but the critique also widened the concept of the public sphere in a high choice- and digital environment where counterpublics naturally emerged. Scholars have built upon Fraser's (1990) original idea of the subaltern public sphere and used it as a point of departure to in their research on counterpublic engaging online (Eckert and Chadha 2013; Jackson and Foucault Welles, 2015, 2016; Renninger, 2015; Toepfl & Piwoni, 2015). The lowered thresholds to democratic discussions online through forums, social network sites, and blogs have contributed a lot to the public sphere and counterpublics (Gillespe, 2017:254). Due to web 2.0 and the advances of software tools, access to information and deliberative discussions became more accessible for anyone to take part in, or even produce themselves (Manovich, 2009:319). Scholars have recently discussed the structure of online platforms for communicating through social network sites, comments sections in news media outlets and blogs are shaping counterpublic dynamics among both traditionally marginalized groups and other counterpublics online (see, Jackson & Foucalut Welles, 2015; Kaiser, 2017; Renninger, 2015). For instance, a social networking site such as Twitter can be used as "a platform to generate and promote counterpublic narratives" (Jackson & Foucault Welles, 2015:932). Counterpublics online use many sorts of online functions in order to communicate with their groups. According to Toepfl & Piwoni (2015), except for social networking sites such as Twitter, comment sections of news websites are commonly used as communicative spaces that enable these groups. When it comes to a broader definition of how counterpublics use online functions, Benkler et al. (2013) define online public spheres activity as "*...an alternative arena for public discourse and political debate, an arena that is less dominated by large media entitles, less subject to government control, and open to wider participation. This digital space provides an alternative structure for citizen voices and minority viewpoints and highlights stories and sources based on relevance and credibility*" (p. 8).

The research field's most focus has merely been directed towards how these online platforms have empowered progressive social movements (see, Palczewski, 2001; Renninger, 2015). However, even though this definition does not apply entirely to all individuals in this thesis's focus groups, this theoretical framework will help understand online behaviors among these ideologically leaning groups.



### 3.2 Media Trust

Trust is a broad concept that has been investigated across many academic disciplines where the area of communication is one of them (Shankar et al., 2002:327). Trust is a critical component to build credibility in social or economic contexts; according to Gambetta et al. (2009) higher level of trust can, by the use of informal agreements, reduce transaction costs (p. 749). The basic concept of trust is by some scholars described as a relationship over time between two parts, one side where the trust lies (trustor) and the other side being trusted (trustee). A trustworthy trustee is someone who does something that is expected by the trustor (Barr, 2003; Gambetta, 1988). In addition, according to Zhang et al. (2014), trust can be divided into three core elements; affective, cognitive, and conative. The cognitive element is related to rational characteristics such as reliability and competence, the affective element refers to social- and emotional skills, and the conative element is related to behavioral intentions where the intentions are dependent on other parties (p. 252). Scholars stress that mistrust occurs when there is no evidence of the trustor to verify the trustee's intentions. Trust is built when the expectations on the trustee are fulfilled adequately and that the interaction with the trustee leads to gains rather than losses for the trustor, meaning that a person who does not trust a media source is more likely to avoid that source (Coleman, 1990; Tsfaty & Cappella, 2003:508).

Most scholars within media and communication have historically employed the term credibility to describe the concept of trust or mistrust towards media (see, Hovland et al. 1959; Kioussis, 2002; Tsfaty & Capella, 2003, 2005). Trust/credibility is vital for understanding human behavior, affecting many aspects of human life (Tsafy & Capella, 2003). Also, the term is an essential factor when it comes to an understanding of how people select or avoid news sources within the field of media and communication (ibid). However, it is vital to highlight various reasons for avoiding or seeking certain news; this will be discussed later in this section. High credibility is a crucial factor in understanding how news consumers choose their sources (Bucy, 2003). An individual's general trust applies to the probability of them trusting- or mistrusting specific news sources. According to Kohring & Matthes (2007), skepticism towards media is the perception that journalists do not report in an objective or fair way and thereby do not live up to their professional standards. Scholars have studied credibility and trust in media ever since the printed paper. Hovland et al. (1959) were the founders of investigating credibility towards news media. The researchers divided two components of credibility, which is expertise

and trustworthiness. The first components refer to how well informed and intelligent the sender of the message is perceived. Trustworthiness refers to the level of clear intentions and impartiality (p. 21). Their research about credibility became essential for further research investigating the concept of credibility towards news media. Further, secondary factors affect credibility perceptions, such as source attractiveness and dynamism (O'Keefe, 2002).

Today's media and communication studies concern media credibility because of the rise of the Internet and digitalization technologies. The high choice media environment and the increased access to information, and the lack of traditional authority (i.e. responsible editor) make up for increased perceptions of unsureness when evaluating information online. Scholars assert that the absence of a universal standard for publishing information online may lead to altered, plagiarized, misrepresented, or created anonymously under pretenses, which in turn affects people's perceived credibility (Fritch & Cromwell, 2002; Johnson & Kaye, 2000; Metzger et al., 2003; Rieh, 2002). Several factors can influence a person's trust in the mainstream- or established news media. The feeling of trust in news media is often based on people's general trust. For example, scholars have found that factors such as partisanship, trust in the government and fellow citizens, and one's view of the economy can significantly affect their trust in news media (Jones, 2004; Lee, 2010). According to Tsfati & Peri (2006) mainstream media is used as a way for people to satisfy their need for orientation, but only if they trust the outlet to provide useful political information. Distrust towards mainstream news media motivates people to be nonmainstream or alternative media sources. Furthermore, Kohring & Matthes (2007) describe how trust in media consists of four dimensions; trust in the selectivity of topics, trust in the selectivity of facts, trust in the accuracy of depictions, and trust in the journalistic assessment. They mean that people take a particular risk when trusting news media because of how journalists can frame the content and thereby choose some information over the other when writing news articles (p. 239).

There is a complexity in the relation between media use and media trust, meaning that it is challenging to evince exactly why people avoid specific media sources. Scholars have found that news media consumption is formed by structural and semi-structural factors as well as situational factors (see, Althaus et al., 2009; Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Hartmann, 2009; Norris, 2002; Shehata & Strömbäck, 2011; Webster, 2014; Wonneberger et al., 2011). People's news media consumption depends on the context, for instance, the obtained media system in a country, the variety of media types, platforms, and content in which people use news media.

Further, scholars have found that media consumption is often connected to people's need to get informed (see, Blumler, Katz and Gurevitch, 1974) and their need for cognition (Tsfati & Capella, 2005), meaning that news consumers with ideological preferences turn to attitude consistent content rather than avoiding news sources they distrust. Also, the level of trust is connected to one's political views.

Sweden is one example of modern democracy with a high level of trust towards public authorities and the established media (Andersson; 2017; Homberg and Rothstein, 2016). However, even Sweden has mainstream media skeptics. Party choice is an essential factor that explains the level of trust. For instance, people who vote for the Sweden Democrats trust mainstream news media, least in Sweden (Andersson, 2019.) According to Ulrika Andersson (2019), the trust toward the mass media is developing into a polarized issue where people who are right-wing trust in a much less degree, while people in the center and to the left still hold a relatively high trust. The least trusting people sympathize with the Sweden Democrats, where only 15% trust the morning papers (p. 5). This means that party-identification is an essential factor in Sweden when examining trust toward public institutions and the government and the mass media.

### **3.2.1 The Hostile Media Effect**

Another theory connected to the concept of trust is the hostile media effect (HME). The theory was originated by Vallone, Ross, and Lepper (1985), who found that people perceived information that supported and went in line with their personal opinions as balanced or neutral while information rejecting their opinions as biased. Their empirical examined how pro-Israeli and pro-Arabs perceived TV coverage of the Beirut massacre. Their findings show that both groups perceive bias in favor of the other side.

### **3.2.2 Psychological Mechanisms**

It is difficult to define what is biased since it is a highly subjective sense. However, researchers have made some attempts to explain why the HME presents itself in people.

Researchers within the psychological field have identified that selective recall, selective categorization, and different standards play an essential role (Ginder-Sorolla and Chaiken, 1994; Schmitt et al., 2004; Vallone et al., 1985). The first factor, selective recall, explains how partisans pay more attention to- and remembers unfavorable content, which contradicts their

views to a more considerable extent. Selective categorization refers to how partisans are more prone to categorize pieces of information as contrary to their views. Next, different standards refer to that even though partisans perceive the information as fair; they still think that the news report is biased because they stem from thinking that their views are more accurate than the other side's view.

Selective recall, selective categorization, and different standards have been empirically tested. However, researchers have only found convincing support for selective categorization (Gunther & Liebhart, 2006; Schmitt et al., 1994; Vallone et al., 1985).

Further, recent research has found more support for selective categorization. Arpan and Raney (2003) suggest that people value or perceive neutral content as biased if it contradicts their beliefs (p. 266). Perloff (2015) provides a similar definition: “...*the tendency for individuals with a strong pre-existing attitude on an issue to perceive that ostensibly neutral, even-handed media coverage of the topic is biased against their side and in favor of their antagonists' point of view*” (p. 707). Perloff (2015) highlights how the theory focuses on how the users and their perceptions and how their perceptions can influence subsequent communication behavior rather than focusing on the media effect (p. 703). Many scholars in the field have also found that people who identify as conservative or right-wing are more prone to experiencing the hostile media effect, while people in the center or to the left of the ideological left-right scale are less likely to experience the effect (Lee, 2005; Lee, Kim & Coe, 2018; Morris, 2007; Shin & Thorson, 2017).

### **3.3 Uses and Gratifications**

The uses and gratifications theory (U&G theory) is the final theory that will underpin this thesis's analysis to get insights into the participant's use of mainstream media- and alternative media sources. The following section will provide some critical components from the theory.

#### **3.3.1 Conscious Choices**

The early studies of news consumption were merely based on the uses and gratifications theory. News media was delimited to traditional printed newspapers, radio, and TV, which meant it was easier to investigate separate news media consumption. News was consumed at specific times when the newspaper was printed, or the radio- or TV-news aired. The uses and gratifications theory seek to understand which social and psychological needs that motivate and

drive people to consume certain types of media and media content. The theory aims to detect media consumption consequences and how it affects the consumers' attitudes and behaviors (Blumler, Katz & Gurevitch, 1974:20).

The U&G theory explains how people go about choosing media to gratify their needs. This makes it possible for the individual to actualize gratification like knowledge enhancement, entertainment, relaxation, social interaction, and reward (Ko, Cho & Roberts, 2005). The U&G theory was one of the first theories that considered the audience as active and disconfirmed a passive audience's idea. This perspective acknowledges that consumers actively search and identify with, and utilize media to gratify their needs (Ku, Chu & Tseng, 2013). According to the theory, the user makes active choices; they choose information according to their desires and interests. This means that the active choice builds a base for the individual to form personal comprehensions (Ruggerio, 2000:15).

### **3.3.2 Motives Behind Media Use**

There are different explanations of how people make up their mind when they select media content. Blumler, Katz, & Gurevich (1974) mean that their users' needs stem from three sources; media content, media exposure, and the social context in the situation the individual gets exposed to media content. The theory builds on five fundamental assumptions regarding the users' motives: (1) The user of media must be active and make conscious choices. (2) The users' media choices are based on their needs. (3) Media is in a constant battle against other factors that can affect an individual's satisfaction and needs. (4) Individuals are self-conscious regarding their interests and needs when it comes to media use. (5) Audience orientation should be examined in its context (Blumler, Katz, & Gurevich, 1974:21-24). McQuail (2010) has listed and concretized what these five fundamental assumptions mean. According to the researcher, the theory is used to understand how users fulfill different needs and wishes such as collecting information, relaxation, entertainment, company, distraction, and escaping reality:

**Distraction:** Flee from daily routines or problems, emotional release.

**Personal relations:** Company and social socializing.

**Personal identity:** Seeking a personal identity and values.

**Observing:** Different types of information seeking/collecting.

(McQuail, 2010:423)

For instance, media is used out of curiosity to satisfy a need for information; here, the user collects information about general knowledge about society; the reason for this might be because the user is about to decide any kind. Another reason for consuming media content is when the individual feels a need for social interaction, meaning that the user senses a desire to connect with and feel a sense of belonging. This means that the user sometimes replaces media with real social relations. The next motive behind media use is also connected to the latter motive: to create or reinforce the individual's values and interpretations of reality. Individuals also use media to flee from daily boredom by fulfilling a need to feel entertained by a cultural and a fictional world. This can help the individual feel some satisfaction and forget about everyday problems (McQuail, 1987:73).

Scholars have further investigated motives behind media use where there are two types of routines; the ritualized and instrumental media use. The first motive means that the individual chooses to consume media content during a specific period. This motive is related to habits rather than to the content the individual chooses. This type of media use leads to a significant amount of media exposure without a conscious media choice from the individual's side, which means that the individual is perceived as less active and goal-oriented in its media use. Next, the instrumental media use regards the individual's conscious media selection where they pick out what media content they think can provide relevant information at the moment, for instance, searching about something on Google to get an instant answer. This type of behavior is more selective and goal-oriented, and the purpose is to collect useful information (Lozanoviski & Wadbring, 2013; Rubin, 2002:534-535). Some of the most common critiques of the U&G theory regards the core purpose. Some scholars mean that media consumption does not have a real meaning most of the time and does not have to be motivated. Therefore, the theory is best suited for investigating areas where consumption is truly meaningful, such as information seeking and news consumption. The society is in a constant and rapid change, and so are the different media/mediums, so when the media change, the public changes too (Rubin, 2009:155).

### **3.3.3 Social Needs and Belonging**

According to McQuail (1994), one of the most critical motives in the U&G theory is to keep updated and informed about things concerned with one's sphere. Here media use is considered conscious choices that build on individual motives connected to the desire to feel social

confirmation and belonging (p. 318). The U&G theory indicates that media use is often practiced learning more about society to create a foundation for interaction and connect with other people (p.313, 320). This behavior's motive stems from the individual's desire for a reasonable satisfaction for media as a base for social interaction, meaning that the individual uses the information as a base for the topic of conversation (p. 308-309). The motive builds on the individual's drive to uphold expected knowledge levels by consuming media content. This behavior leads to enforced and maintained social contacts in a specific context (McQuail & Gurevich, 1974:291).

### **3.3.4 Uses and Gratifications in a High Choice Media Environment**

Until the era of digitalization, the U&G theory has been used to understand why people choose a particular medium before another with a point of departure in that people make conscious choices when deciding what type of content, they want to consume. The U&G theory's original idea is to investigate how people one specific type of media/medium. For example, why do people read newspapers rather than watching TV? Why do some individuals prefer one TV-program before another program? However, the rapid growth of the internet and digitalization have settled for a new media environment where consumers can make increasing choices (Ruggerio, 2000; Sunstein, 2007; Webster, 2005). There is no longer a delimited choice between newspapers and TV, the smartphone, social media platforms, and endless amounts of online-based outlets and forums are now available for anyone who have access to the internet.

### **3.4 Operationalization of Theory**

This study will take its point of departure from the themes identified in this chapter; Counter publics, trust in media, and the U&G theory. This section will briefly demonstrate how the theoretical framework will be applied to the empirical material.

The public sphere theory and, in particular, Fraser's (1990) idea of subaltern counter publics will be employed in this thesis on all three focus groups. Most research that utilizes the concept of Felski's (1989) and Fraser's (1990) subaltern public sphere theory merely focus on left-wing or progressive groups media habits, or other marginalized groups (see, Jackson & Foucault Welles, 2015). However, this thesis applies this theory to all three groups hence the absence of the labeled as marginalized per se.

Next, the concept of trust will be applied to examine how the level of trust, credibility, or distrust relates to the participant's willingness or unwillingness to consume certain mainstream

media outlets. How do the participants behave, think, or react when consuming different types of mainstream media sources, how does it relate to their continuous consumption of them? Frequent alternative media users turn to alternative news outlets to read about current issues consistent with their views. The HME theory is useful in investigating the view of biased apprehensions among the users. Therefore, the study can contribute to a deeper understanding of the biased perceptions and why the reactions appear, rather than just stating that perceptions of bias are experienced among certain groups.

Finally, the U&G theory will be continuously applied to investigate how the participants use and reason around their news consumption. In what purpose do they turn to mainstream media outlets versus alternative media outlets? How do the different types of sources come into the participant's daily use? What media choices are ritualized, and which are consciously made?

Together these theories complement each other to find out about a more in-depth and broader perspective on how ideologically leaning groups elaborate on their own news media consumption. The following chapter will deliberate around this study's methodological approach and include a section about the semi-structured interview guide. The interview guide will be underpinned by the identified themes found in chapters two and three.



## **4. Method**

The following chapter will present the chosen method of this study and explain the methodological and analytical approach and the procedure of finding and recruiting participants. Further, this chapter will include a critical discussion regarding the selection of methods, the formation of the focus groups, and possible obstacles encountered.

### **4.1 Selection of Method**

This study uses a qualitative approach to answer the research questions and provide the research field with new and deeper insights into a complex issue. The qualitative interview approach is a popular social science method to collect information to understand better people's perspectives (Kvale, 2006; Wiess, 2004). According to Wiess (2004), the purpose of a qualitative interview is to capture the event's full course. This can in turn manifest underlying information about an individual's thoughts, motives, and emotions that affected them to act in a certain way (p. 45). This thesis's approach is inductive, meaning that the process of gathering and analyzing the empirical material involves drawing generalizable inferences of observations (Bryman, 2012, p. 26). Because of the lack of research on alternative media users, a qualitative interview approach is suiting to dig deeper into reasons behind emotions, thoughts, and motives behind their usage or attitudes toward established media sources.

Focus groups are suitable for seeing and investigating certain groups of people and finding more profound answers to people's opinions, dictums, and views of their perceived reality. The method is suitable for finding out about thoughts and attitudes, which is suitable for this study (Esaiaasson et al., 2009). The method leaves room for open discussions between people with shared views or similar backgrounds where they can trigger each other's thoughts with their dictums that might apply to the other discussants. It allows the discussants to reason about issues that revolve around what they have in common, in this case, the consumption of news and political information in established mass media and alternative media outlets. It leaves room for the discussants to find significant fields of communion where they can deliberate around their personal opinions.

#### **4.1.1 Semi-Structured Interview Guide**

To find answers to the research questions, a semi-structured interview guide was formed to outline some themes extracted from the earlier research and theoretical framework of this study.

To not disfigure the study's validity, the questions were broadly defined not to lock the discussion in a specific direction. In this way, the discussants could collectively appoint some of the most critical issues revolving around the asked questions. The semi-structured interview guide also left room for follow up questions, accommodating to help develop deeper reasoning behind the participant's opinions.

The aim was to start in a board sense to let the discussants lead the discussion direction. The questions were also formed in this way to minimize the risk to accidentally influence the discussion and the way the participants resonate.

The recorded material was then be transcribed and translated from Swedish to English. The interviews were held in Swedish because it is the language that all the participants feel most comfortable to talk in. Even though the reliability could be affected in a negative way because of possible errors in the translation, the decision was made given the risk in order to let the discussions to proceed in a satisfactory way.

#### **4.2 Pilot Study and Restrictive Circumstances**

There were some extraordinary circumstances around the time that this study was done that must be addressed. The worldwide spread of the COVID-19 virus dominated the news agenda in all sorts of news mediums. The spread of the virus was also affecting people's possibility to meet and foregather because of the recommendations from public health authorities to practice social distancing. Therefore, some shortcomings of the changed circumstances might have affected the results of this study. The focus groups were consequently held online with the help of the software Zoom, which is a video-chat device. Zoom allowed the participants to discuss together, and some functions help the disadvantage of not seeing each other in real life. For instance, there is a function for discussants to raise their hands to prevent disruption cases.

Before the actual focus groups were conducted, a pilot study was done to test some of the more general questions in the semi-structured questionnaire, but the primary purpose was to see how the discussion went about in an online video-chat setting. There was quite a good discussion, and there were no problems to moderate the discussion or get people to talk. However, because of the slight delay of picture and sound, the risk of disruption of each other became more massive than if the discussion would have been held in real life, even with the hand-raise function. This could affect the actual focus groups in a negative way. The actual focus groups consist of people who are unfamiliar with each other, unlike the people in the pilot

study. The risk might have been for people to feel hesitant to speak or accidentally disrupt someone. The advantage of this, however, is that the possibility to involve participants from cities afar. It also allowed some people that might have felt hesitant to speak in front of unknown people a bit easier since the participants could sit in an environment that was conformable and familiar for them. The advantage of this pilot study was that the obstacles using the software Zoom became visible, which means that I, as a leader of the focus groups, were aware of the problems beforehand and could manage the problems better.

### **4.3 Critical Discussion about Chosen Method**

All methods in research have their advantages and disadvantages. Therefore, some of them will be discussed in this section. There would be a mix of methods to extract more excellent reliability and validity in a definitive study. For instance, quantitative surveys or experiments could be employed to draw more general conclusions about more significant groups. However, the time-limit and the ambit of this study make it difficult to study such proportions.

The qualitative approach has been given less attention from a historical perspective (Milliken, 2001:74). Scholars mean that the skepticism towards qualitative research stems from the belief that qualitative research lacks generalizability, which is more generous with a quantitative approach (Hanson & Grimmer, 2007:66). However, according to Shah & Corley (2006) qualitative methods have contributed to research over the years which means that the view of qualitative research has improved (p. 1824-1825). Even though the view is improved, there are still some lingering ideas about qualitative research as more or less useless, directed from scholars with predominant deductive and positivist attitudes. According to Saunders (2016), positivists assess pure data and facts as crucial when it comes to conducting research (p. 135), which makes up for their critique against qualitative methods.

The weaknesses of a qualitative approach and focus groups are that the possibility of drawing general conclusions are limited because of the few participants. A quantitative approach with a more significant sample of people allows for more general conclusions and can say something about a greater public. However, a qualitative approach provides insights that a quantitative approach cannot give because of asking follow-up questions and provide some deeper reasoning. Another perk of a qualitative approach is the possibility of the participants highlighting essential things that might not have been discovered with a quantitative method because of the limited room for elaboration.

In the case of this study, the research field is dominated by quantitative assumptions. The studies conclude that people who consume news by answers in a structured questionnaire cannot elaborate on the questions they answer. Focus groups allow people who have some common factors to collectively discuss issues they think passably alike and can trigger each other's thoughts and provide insights that could not have been unraveled in a quantitative study. In the best case, this study makes up for a springboard for further research about issues related to news consumption and users of alternative media. As mentioned in the previous section, the spread of the virus COVID-19 dominated the news agenda worldwide, including Sweden. This means that issues such as crime, immigration, and welfare were not of significant interest for either news reporters or people in general. This means that the results could be affected; the participants' answers might differ from the more ordinary circumstances where there is no pandemic dominating the agenda. However, alternative media outlets report the pandemic and take an ideological perspective on the issues. So, the COVID-19 virus discussion might give insights into trust, distrust, and other implications of differences and similarities between the groups. Since the level of political interest among the groups is relatively high, they might still oversee the circumstances. In all, the biggest weakness of this type of design is the small sample, a small sample can lower the reliability of the result because of bigger risk of marginal errors. Therefore, an ideal study would either have a greater sample or simply be done quantitatively, allowing a great number of participants to fill in a structured questionnaire.

#### **4.4 Analysis of Empirical Material**

The interviews were recorded, transcribed and presented in a thematical way extracted from the empirical material. A thematical approach is suiting to provide a discussion between the empirical material, earlier research, and the theory. There is no concrete guide to form a thematical analysis, like most inductive and qualitative approaches. However, this was done in a structured and transparent way for the reader to understand. According to Braun & Clarke (2006) there are some possible risks when using a thematical approach. For instance, the presented citations lack anchoring in the fundamental theory given in the study, that the semi-structured interview questions are poorly formulated and risk a weak analysis, thereby a defective thematical analysis. A well-operated thematical analysis makes sure that the interpretation of the empirical material is coherent with the theoretical framework.

In order to conduct a well-performed thematical analysis, some exact questions anchored

in theory was written beforehand. The questions will be tested in a pilot study, and the questions was asked according to some themes detected in the previous research and theory of this study. However, the empirical material will guide how the thematical analysis in the result will look like. There might be some new insights that the current research field has not highlighted before that might be interesting to highlight.

#### **4.5 Process and Selection**

This study focuses on the consumption of news and political information based on people's ideological belonging. Therefore, three groups constitute three separate ideological belongings; left-, liberal, and right-wing. While constructing focus groups' design, it was essential to consider some representation regarding age, gender, and education. Unfortunately, no women were interested in participating in the right-wing group. It was challenging to find women firstly, and the ones asked did not reply. About 20 people were selected and contacted, but only 10 of them replied. In the end, only four of them finally participated in the booked focus group meetings.

The ambition when searching for participants was to find people who fell under the following criteria's:

1. Politically interested
2. Ideologically leaning
3. Consume news frequently
4. Consume mainstream media outlets
5. Consume alternative media sources

The main focus when recruiting people was to find people who identified with the ideological leanings that this thesis focuses on. This means that the level of ideological leaning differed a bit between the participants. This could be something that could have affected the result since the idea of a focus group is to examine homogeneous groups in order to find common attitudes, opinions, and behaviors. However, to ensure that the participants were put in the correct group, the criteria above were carefully considered when recruiting participants. All the participants were also told early in the contact that they would belong to a specific focus group with an

ideological leaning together with likeminded people. In this way, there are no mistakes in categorizing the participants in the wrong way.

To find participants for the focus groups, a mix of different approaches was employed to recruit people for every ideological group. The snowball selection was the primary approach to find participants for every group. With the help of my network, some people for every group were recruited. However, the right-wing group was difficult to form; there were a limited number of people in my network with right-wing affiliations. Therefore, some investigation was needed where the social network site Facebook was used to find readers of the right-wing alternative media outlets. Facebook was used because the detailed information people share voluntarily becomes very useful when deciding whom to select. For instance, Facebook-profiles show information about the person's hometown, gender, age, level of education, liked pages, political parties, etc. The Facebook-pages of right-wing alternative media outlets such as *Nyheter Idag*, *Fria Tider*, and *Samhällsnytt* were carefully investigated regarding their Facebook-pages' comment sections. The aim was to find people who commented in an engaged and fairly constructive way to get hold of participants who could provide some interesting answers, opinions, and insights of their usage and dictums around news media. Before contacting them, their public information was investigated, like what type of political information they share and followed openly on their Facebook-page. Their pages were examined by looking at what political parties they followed and what type of groups they follow. When the selected people were mapped out and extracted from the Facebook-groups, a message was sent to them with a short but informative message about the study. The message consisted of information about me, the thesis, and that I looked for people who could participate in the ideologically leaning focus groups. Many people did not respond to the message, but those who did seemed to be interested in the subject. The right-wing people all wanted to participate in the condition to be anonymous; some also wanted to make sure that they would be in a group with participants of similar political beliefs, which I ensured. For the liberal- and left-wing group, I used my network of people who could also help me find other participants for the groups they would be in. To ensure that everyone identified with their given ideological group, everyone was told that they would belong to the specific group beforehand. When the groupings were finally done, they all received information about the focus group interview's date and hour. They were sent a link of information about managing the program Zoom with a link to the actual meeting.

In retrospect, more in-depth work could have been done in order to find participants, especially right-wing participants. For instance, the social network site Twitter could have been employed because politically interested people often turn to Twitter to discuss current matters. The process of finding participants would be greater because of the many users of Twitter. Also, online forums such as Reddit could have been a good idea to investigate because of similar reasons. Reddit has so called threads that users can discuss political matters in a more in-depth manner compared to for instance Twitter and Facebook. In this way, the results of this thesis could have been improved.

**4.5.1 Participants and Structure of the Focus Groups**

The list below shows the final sample of the people who finally agreed to participate in the focus groups.

**Table 1 – List of participants**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Occupation</b>
<b>Left-Wing</b>		
Leyla	25	Public Servant (Anonymous)
Ali	32	Public Servant (Anonymous)
Jonathan	22	University Student
<b>Liberal/Centrist</b>		
Jimmy	25	University Student (Anonymous)
Simona	25	University Student
Sandra	20	University Student
<b>Right-Wing</b>		
Henrik	29	Economist (Anonymous)
Joakim	47	Civil engineer (Anonymous)
Anders	35	Upper Secondary teacher (Anonymous)

**4.6 Ethical Considerations**

Finally, some ethical considerations will be discussed. Since this study's focus is related to some quite sensitive issues for people to talk about openly, some ethical considerations must be addressed. To start with, researchers must act correctly when conducting a study of any sort to ensure trustworthiness (Merriam, 2009:234). Ethical considerations are also essential to strengthen the research (Bryman & Bell, 2011:128). Therefore, the first contact with the potential participants must be made in an ensuring way to build credibility between the interviewer and the interviewee.

The first concern was related to me as a leader of this project and how I would convey the participants to participate in the focus groups. The concern revolved around the background of me as a foreign person. The concern was based on the belief that it would become difficult for me to convey right-wing people and that this would affect the thesis. My prejudice was that right-wing people would direct skepticism toward me as an academic and as a foreign person. There were many considerations on how this would affect the possibility of getting people on the right-wing side to find me credible from their point of view. For instance, if the fact that my background affects the probability for people on the far-right spectrum to participate, then the result might not be representative to the whole right-wing population in Sweden. In order to avoid this, many different ideas to approach the potential participants were considered to transmit as much credibility as possible toward specifically the right-wing participants.

All the participants were contacted through either Facebook or e-mail, the message that was sent was carefully written with proper information about me and the thesis.<sup>1</sup> When the potential participants show interest, a pdf-file with further information was sent through the Facebook-chat or by e-mail.<sup>2</sup> All the participants were ensured that they could participate anonymously and that the recorded interviews would be exclusively used for the actual study and nothing else. Further, the participants were made sure that their information would be used with care and that those who wished to be anonymous would have that opportunity.

Another concern was that this thesis is focused on people's personal opinions related to politics, which is a sensitive question for many people to discuss with unknown people. This could make the participants hold back thoughts because of the taboo attached to some of the issues (e.g. migration and crime), thereby negatively affecting the study. Ideally, the focus groups' dynamic could help people open up about issues they feel uncomfortable talking about

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<sup>1</sup> See: Appendix 1 Message Sent to the Participants

<sup>2</sup> See: Appendix 2 Information Sheet



with strangers because of the formation of homogeneous focus groups where like-minded people are included in the same groups.

## 5. Findings and Analysis

The following section includes information about the participants, followed by a thematical analysis of the empirical material that consists of 35 pages of qualitative data.<sup>3</sup> The left-wing focus group lasted for 54 minutes, the liberal focus group for one hour and ten minutes and the right-wing focus group lasted for one hour and two minutes. The analysis is mostly based on the theoretical framework in chapter three and formed according to themes detected in the empirical material. This study's primary purpose is not to compare the outcome of the different groups, but rather to find a deeper understanding of alternative media consumers' views of their usage and attitudes on news media in Sweden. Therefore, the thematical analysis will include findings from the different groups mixed under each theme.

### 5.1 Information About the Participants

The participants in each group of this study are quite different regarding background, age, and occupation, but what all have in common is their interest in society and politics, which drives them to consume news. All participants consume established news media outlets as a base of news and information but use alternative media sources as a complement to get alternative views or perspectives on current events or issues. All of the participants turned to SVT Nyheter as a base of information, but they held mixed thoughts about the main established morning- and evening papers.

#### 5.1.1 Left group

Leyla is 25 years old from Stockholm and has a bachelor's degree in political science. She works as a public servant at a Swedish administrative authority. She has a history of political engagement on a local level but is currently not involved in any political party. She votes for the left party (Vänsterpartiet) and plans to do so in the coming election. Leyla consumes a broad repertoire of outlets, both established news media and alternative outlets such as Dagens ETC and Flamman, both left-wing alternative media sources. She uses social network sites such as Facebook and Twitter, where she follows news-channels and journalists.

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<sup>3</sup> Note: The citations in this thesis are translated from Swedish to English.

Ali is 32 years old and came to Sweden from Syria in 2012 and works as a public servant at a Swedish administrative authority. He has studied English literature in Syria and address himself as a Marxist and is partly engaged in a small Syrian communist party. Ali is very interested in news and politics, so he consumes as many outlets as Leyla. Because of his high level of interest in politics, he consumes an extensive repertoire of news outlets. Ali mostly uses Facebook to follow news outlets, where he also discusses with like-minded people in closed groups and forums.

Jonathan is 22 years old and lives in Gothenburg, where he took his master's degree in European studies. He is locally engaged in the social democrats and works part-time as a politician at one of the municipalities committees. In contrast to Leyla and Ali, Jonathan tries to avoid news outlets that are not constructive in his meaning, which is why he turns to public service outlets and some niche-outlets (newspapers and websites) related to his interest in foreign policy like Balkan insight, Politico and Radio Free Liberty. Jonathan is restrictive regarding consuming news via social media and tried to read from the direct source.

### **5.1.2 Liberal Group**

Simona is 25 years old and also has a background in the local district of the liberal youth organization (LUF) and studies Swedish public administration at the University of Gothenburg. She has been engaged with the liberal youth organization for several years and has a particular interest in foreign politics and Swedish national politics. She reads established news media outlets such as Dagens Nyheter, Svenska Dagbladet, SVT Nyheter, and Expressen, but she also consumes news in podcasts. Also, she reads journals such as Liberal Debatt and other journals she can access because of her involvement in LUF.

Jimmy is 25 years old and studies media and communication at the University of Gothenburg. He has been engaged in the liberal party and their student's union (LS) for almost a year and have been politically interested in several years. He consumes a broad repertoire of news outlets like Simona. He also read liberal journals such as Liberal Debatt. Jimmy uses Twitter as a primary social network site to follow opinionmakers, news outlets, and people interested in discussing and reading the news.

Sandra is 21 years old and has a background in political engagement as a local politician and is currently the president of the local district of the liberal youth organization (LUF). She studies

social science and consume a similar repertoire of news outlets as Jimmy regarding the established news media and the alternative outlets but consumes more foreign outlets because of her interest in Sweden's relation to China and Ethiopia. Sandra use Twitter as the main social network site to communicate with fellow party-colleagues and to read about current issues.

### **5.1.3 Right-Wing Group**

Joakim is 47 years old and works as a civil engineer. He consumes some of the established news media outlets, mostly SVT Nyheter and occasionally Aftonbladet. Otherwise, he consumes Nyheter Idag, which is a right-wing alternative media outlet. He uses Facebook as the primary social network site where he follows news outlets that interest him, where he sometimes participates in comment articles.

Henrik is 29 years old and works as an economist and is also involved in the share market. He consumes most of his news through his phone applications, where he reads most of his news from Omni and some other established news media sources. He occasionally consumes right-wing alternative media outlets, but his main interest lies in the economy, which is why he turns to outlets that report the world economy. He uses Twitter as the leading social media network site where he is active in writing Tweets and communicating and reading others' posts.

Anders is 35 years old and works as a teacher at an upper secondary school. He is very interested in Swedish national politics and issues of crime, migration, and economy, so he consumes a broad repertoire of news outlets. He consumes established news media outlets such as Svenska Dagbladet and Expressen and read right-wing alternative media outlets such as Nyheter Idag. He goes under an anonymous alias on his social network sites, both on Facebook and Twitter, because of his occupation.

## **5.2 Thematical Analysis**

This analysis will highlight some of the statements made by the participants from each group. The statements will be analyzed both separately and in combination with other statements from different groups when there are similarities or dissimilarities. The statements will be analyzed with the help of the theoretical framework of this thesis.

### 5.3 Counterpublics and Media Use

The public sphere theory and the feminist critique points out how marginalized groups use the Internet to find a place to ventilate their thoughts and opinions and get feedback and verification from like-minded people (Benkler et al., 2013; Fraser, 1990; Toepfl and Foucault Welles, 2015). In the context of alternative media consumers and their online activity related to news media, the theory manifests itself in different ways. This theme converges a bit into the U&G theory, whereas the participant's drive to consume specific media sources also has to do with their social needs such as online counter spheres.

Here Anders explains how he needs to use an anonymous alias to feel free to write about his thoughts and opinions online:

*I'm active in online discussions at pages related to the outlet Nyheter Idag, I use a different alias, but I engage in discussions and ask questions. And I also turn to Flashback sometimes if I need more information about for example a famous person or a football player and if they are suspected for maybe rape, I want to see if they are ahead with any information, but of course, I'm aware that all of it is not true. – Anders, 2020: right-wing*

When Anders is asked to elaborate on the fact that he involves in discussions online anonymously, he continues:

*I get to ventilate my thoughts and my questions. You get to ask questions that I believe are not okay to do in normal circumstances, for instance, at work. I work in the municipality, and when you do so you need to sit calmly and obey orders. When I'm online, I am allowed to ask such questions, I know I do it anonymously, but when I do so I feel freer ... I know many people feel offended, even though I'm not, but I believe it is important to ask uncomfortable questions.*

– Anders, 2020: right-wing

According to the research related to subaltern counterpublics, the online functions are used by counterpublics as a tool for connecting with likeminded people to deliberate about issues revolving around their interests (Jackson, Foucault Welles, 2015; Kaiser, 2017; Renninger 2015). Here, Anders explains how he does precisely this, but in this case with an anonymous alias. He feels that he would be judged so hard that he could risk his job at the municipality if he openly talked about his thoughts and opinions on political issues. Anders explains the importance of having an outlet of thoughts, feelings, and opinions online and how he feels limited to be himself in his work environment:

*If I'm at work on my coffee break with my colleagues and scroll on Twitter, then I can't really react outwards, but if I'm home and read news or comments on an article, then I might write a post about it where I state my thoughts and ideas about the issue. I can't talk about these ideas in a physical environment – if it's not among close friends – however, in a bigger company I don't talk about my opinions in the same way. – Anders, 2020: right-wing*

Concerning the subaltern public sphere theory, it becomes clear that the theory applies to groups that are not necessarily marginalized in terms of economic resources, gender, or class. Right-wing people have another type of social “inferiority” when it comes to taking place in public debates. However, this does not mean that Anders or other people within the right-wing community are marginalized in society. However, on the other hand, it does not take away the fact that people like Anders use online forums, social networking sites, and other online functions in order to outlive their thoughts, opinions, and ideas online.

In the liberal group, it seems like the participants agree when it comes to their need for online discussions to confirm each other's opinions. At the same time, they all seemed to feel a bit tiresome of their social network site's feeds:

*I feel a bit full when it comes to Twitter, maybe because the content I follow look very alike. If I scroll three times, I already know what all the youth politicians think. – Jimmy, 2020: liberal*

Here, together with a couple of other participants, Jimmy explain how they have become a bit unstimulated by their homogeneous feed on Twitter, and therefore turn to more alternative sites

or mediums to debate or collect ideas. Jimmy's strongest motive for news consumption seems to be highly connected to the desire to collect information, and it seems to converge into the need for entertainment since societal issues are one of their top interests (McQuail, 2010). On the contrary side, Simona explains how she actively use Twitter and Instagram to collect information and to debate about current issues:

*I feel weird about commenting on Aftonbladet's Twitter account, however, nowadays it is much easier to come in contact with the journalist themselves. The lowered threshold on Twitter makes it easier. I also use Instagram for this purpose. I have started to follow news channels there so that I don't have to see babies, food, and people traveling. – Simona, 2020 - liberal*

Here she mentions how the lowered thresholds have helped her contact the writers of the texts she reads. Even though she might not get a response from the journalists, she feels that her opinions have been highlighted in front of a broader public, which in the context of the counterpublics theory, makes up for an alternative arena for public debate (see, Benkler et al., 2013).

Jonathan from the left-wing group stands out from the theoretical explanations when it comes to engaging in discussions mentions how he avoids a lot of outlets and sources and also avoids getting into the discussion, even discussions about issues that he cares strongly for:

*I avoid doing it to a very high degree, even issues that I care about a lot ... I don't feel any type of motivation to comment on anything online because I don't see how it will lead to anything good. Sometimes it can be amusing to sit on the other side of the screen with a bowl of popcorn to read a discussion online, but I personally do not do it because I don't think it is constructive. – Jonathan, 2020: left-wing*

This is something that distinguishes from the subaltern public sphere theory, in this specific case, Jonathan does not feel the need to ventilate, discuss, or engage in political discussions online. However, he does mention that he gets some sort of amusement from following discussions between other people online.

## 5.4 (Dis)trust

Trust is an important factor when a person decides who or what to trust (Gambetta et al, 2009; Jones, 2004; Lee, 2010; O’Keefe, 2002). All of the groups showed some distrust in different forms toward different types of news media, but all of them held some level of specific mistrust towards the evening papers such as Aftonbladet or Expressen:

*When I read something in for example Aftonbladet, I often tend to check the main source (...) I think it is important to know the origin of the facts, like if it is a liberal source or if it has some other ideological belonging.*

– Simona, 2020: liberal

Here, Simona explains how she sometimes fact checks the information found in Aftonbladet, and that the origin or background of either the journalist or the outlet is essential when deciding to trust it. She also mentions that she thinks it is crucial to know whether the source is ideologically liberal or not and that this affects her level of trust towards the source. She also admits that she occasionally consumes Aftonbladet and all other participants, even though it is not her first choice to read news. According to previous research, high perceived credibility is essential when it comes to people deciding what type of outlets to read and trust (Bucy, 2003). However, since the participants in this thesis are all highly politically interested, there might be a greater need to seek out news and fulfill their civic duty than actually boycotting or ignoring Aftonbladet. Since Aftonbladet is one of Sweden’s most extensive evening papers, they consequently possess more considerable resources to get a hold on news in a fast manner. This might be why the participants hold on to reading this specific source hence the fact that they hold a deficient trust toward them.

The other groups show some level of mistrust toward mainstream media outlets such as Aftonbladet as well; however, the reasons vary.

*I think that the news on Dagens Nyheter and Aftonbladet are very biased. And when I find something interesting to read, it is often behind a pay-wall, and I don’t want to pay for news.*

– Joakim, 2020: right-wing



Here Joakim directly states that he thinks that the mainstream outlets Dagens Nyheter and Aftonbladet are biased. According to Lee (2010), the level of partisanship can explain someone's mistrust toward mainstream media. Joakim still indicates that he occasionally read articles from Aftonbladet; however, the most significant reason for not trusting the source is because he thinks they are biased. Like Simona mentioned in the first statement, partisans feel the need to know the intentions and the origin of the sources to trust it. Also, Joakim states that articles' payment affects his willingness to read the outlet or not. Further, Anders, who was in the same group as Joakim adds to the statement:

*These dramatic headlines make me full and uninterested. It has simply made me not trust these outlets anymore because I understand that they only want me to click the link. When I finally decide to read something, they don't even dare to tell what it actually is about. I often try to find complementary sources to get the full picture of a happening.*

– Anders, 2020: right-wing

Anders explains how a combination of dramatic and exaggerated headlines contributes to his mistrust toward mainstream media and the evening papers. He explains how he does not trust that the outlets give the full picture of a happening and that he needs to seek more information at other sources to get the full picture of an event. Here Anders explains why he turns to alternative right-wing news media to get a better understanding of current events:

*They dare to talk about immigrant groups in a different way, instead of pushing them together in one group. They dare to point out where the immigrants come from or if the issue regards a specific group of people. This is what the mainstream media is lacking where they just push different groups together as one. They dare to write the age of the criminal and sometimes even a portrait of them. This helps to understand what actually have happened regarding for example a shooting or a rape-incident.*

– Anders, 2020: right-wing

Anders mistrust also lays in his belief that journalists writing for the mainstream outlets do not dare to tell the full truth about some happenings and events and criticizes how mainstream media talk about immigrants as a homogeneous group instead of distinguishing different immigrants' groups in categories. For Anders, it is essential to showcase the criminal's picture

and name in order for him to trust the news entirely. In Anders' case, it seems like he believes that the mainstream media outlets frames or keeps important information away from the readers, meaning that he trust them less compared to the right-wing alternative media sources.

#### **6.4.1 Distrust in News Media's Selection of News**

When it comes to the left-wing group participants, the mistrust toward mainstream outlets goes in line with what the other groups have mentioned, such as unwillingness to pay for articles and tiredness of dramatic headlines. However, the participants mentioned a skepticism toward the Swedish press because of the lack of international news regarding for example, wars in the middle east. Here, Ali talks about how the Swedish press reports poorly about issues in the middle east:

*It is not that the media reports wrong facts, however, they give a twisted version of the reality (...) I follow Arabic media to read about the different angles, the Swedish press only shows one side and that is from the regime's perspective (...) I don't mean that the press needs to provide us with deeper analyses, but rather to report about what actually happens. – Ali, 2020: left-wing*

Ali points out how he perceives the Swedish press' reporting about international news. He believes that they frame international affairs in a way that we lack the whole picture of a happening, which means that Ali feels the need to seek other sources to get the full picture of wars and conflicts in the middle east.

The other participants in the left-wing groups agree and ads to Ali's statement:

*I also try to keep track of international media, I don't think that Swedish news outlets report in a good way. Specifically, about the EU-politics and that is why I read Politico. I also read Balkan Insights and sometimes Radio Free Liberty to get an understanding of the happenings in Balkan. However, Radio Free Liberty is financed by the US government in the last 50 years back in time so the news are not entirely objective. But if you cannot get the news in any other way, then I think it is better to read the news with caution than not getting any information at all.*

– Jonathan, 2020: left-wing

Here, Jonathan adds that he has to compromise with the source's trustworthiness to read the news he wants and needs. He reads the news with caution, knowing that the source stems from the US government and might affect the objectivity of the news.

When a follow-up question about what types of international media, the participants turn to when it comes to international news, Ali answers:

*Famous news agencies like BBC or even the German newspaper DW, French media and even Reuters report in a very good way. – Ali, 2020: left-wing*

Here Ali explains that there is no need to search for niched alternative outlets to fulfill the need for international news; big outlets such as BBC, Deutsche Welle, and Reuters are enough to get a better picture of international events and affairs.

The liberal group stated some similar claims regarding the Swedish press and their reporting of international news:

*I read a lot of British news such as BBC, The Telegraph. The Guardian and The Independent to follow how they report about Sweden. I read these outlets because I know the language. If I understood any other language, I would probably read other sources too. But generally, I read international news outlets during election campaigns for example the EU election. – Jimmy, 2020: liberal*

Sandra adds to Jimmy's statement by explaining her interest in specific issues and countries:

*I usually read international news to better understand relations between countries and to understand crises and how they are portrayed from different perspectives (...) I read about the relation between Sweden and Ethiopia and Eritrea. I'm interested in the incident with Martin Schibbey, but also Dawit Isak. I also like to read about the situation in China and Hong Kong and Gui Min Hai. – Sandra, 2020: liberal*

It is clear that the participants that are interested in international relations are dissatisfied with Swedish news media's reporting. All of the participants turn to international media houses, blogs, radio stations, and other sources to build on their knowledge and interest in issues, events, wars, or conflicts internationally because they do not trust that the Swedish press will provide

the full picture of international events. Now, what does this mean in the context of the conceptualization of trust? There might be many reasons for their opinions on this; however, this could be one underlying factor to their distrust toward mainstream media. A combination of having the perception that the news are framed, together with the previously discussed factors, makes up for a more considerable need to search for alternative news sources.

## 5.5 Hostile Media Perceptions Versus Curiosity

According to scholars, people with stronger ideological beliefs experience hostile perceptions against neutral content (Arpan and Raney, 2003; Perloff, 2015). Theoretically, the participants in this study would naturally experience hostile media perceptions when faced with mainstream media content or other content they disagree with politically or ideologically; however, the perceived bias seems to vary.

Here, the participants elaborate on how they react and what they feel when they read certain outlets or face news content they disagree with. The liberal group show skepticism, especially towards the evening paper Aftonbladet:

*I often continue to fact check articles I read in for example Aftonbladet to see what the original source says. When you are engaged in politics, you might be “damaged” by it, so you want to fact check the source to see if what you read is true, for example on the government’s website. - Simona, 2020: liberal*

Simona explains how she often fact checks information from Aftonbladet to make sure what she reads is true. The other participants in her group agreed that they, too, felt the need to double-check information found in Aftonbladet.

When the discussion moved towards talking about political information and news sources with other directions than their own, Simona states:

*I hate that I am so easily offended. I really remove things that I dislike or people that I dislike on social media and that I do not agree with. I really delimit what I want to see, what I think, or accept. It feels a bit annoying for me as a liberal who stand for freedom of speech and such. But on the other hand, it is also a nice thing, you can just mute people who you do not agree with, but at the same time, it actually goes against my ideology. – Simona, 2020: liberal*

Simona elaborates on the fact that she selects her sources carefully not to let cognitive peeves stand in her way in her daily life, and that she feel conflicted about not always tolerating other world views. Here she acknowledges the feeling of perceived bias; however, her ideological world view collides with perceived bias feelings.

On the other hand, one of the participants in the liberal group stood out from the handbook example when it comes to the hostile media perception theory's definition of a strong partisan:

*I have sometimes read right-wing alternative media to understand how they reason and build their arguments rather than reading them to get political information. This builds on my liberal ideology and improves it, and I also read them to enforce my personal believes (...) I read them to see how they frame problems. – Jimmy, 2020: liberal*

No one from the right-wing group showed any interest when it came to the question of facing news content with other political attitudes; however, Ali from the left-wing groups explains how he too sometimes try to understand his opponents by reading their news outlets:

*If I understand how they think, then it is easier for me to get into a debate with them. This is what many people in the left-movement are missing in the debate, they formulate their political rhetoric more towards academics and miss to represent the working class. The right-wing movements are better to formulate themselves for a broader public. When they want to criticize the left-wing, they often mention this fact, that we do not formulate texts and debates so that people understand. We talk about terms such as social contracts so that people don't want to read out texts. I am not surprised that so many people in LO vote for the Sweden Democrats. – Ali, 2020: left-wing*

Jimmy's and Ali's interest in consuming political opponents' news outlets are exceptional among their political or ideological allies. Here, Ali even explains his analysis of how his opponents are better at targeting groups in society that he believes is better suited for the left-wing movement and talk critically about his left-wing allies.

## 5.6 Uses and Gratifications in a Multimedia Environment

The final theme of this thesis regards the participant's usage of their multi news media use. Many of the citations in this chapter show some level of relation to the U&G theory regarding their feelings, incentives, and usage of news media outlets or social network sites (Blumler, Katz & Gurevich, 1974). However, this section will dig deeper into the participant's reasoning around their news media usage and how it had changed compared to earlier years when social network sites were not as prominent when it comes to news.

*On Twitter, I follow people that I believe can fill in some spots of information, for example, I follow a person called Tino Sanadanji who is a researcher who is involved in many debates that I think that media is lacking. I read Nyheter Idag in the same way here, I get a broader perspective of what could have actually happened in order to see the full picture. - Anders, 2020: right-wing*

The participants mentioned how news media sometimes did not fulfill their need for details in some issues:

*If there is a current happening such as a crime scene in my local area, I sometimes go to forums such as Flashback to see if I can find information that news media do not write about. - Joakim, 2020: right-wing*

All of the group participants agree that they need to consume a variety of news outlets, podcasts, blogs, and alternative media to get a full picture of reality. But as previously mentioned, some participants have directed an overall critique against the mainstream press and the international reporting of news:

*I am very interested in international politics and I believe that it is difficult to keep track of it by only using the Swedish press. In my case, I'd say that use different direct sources, managed by organizations, such as Save the Children or Doctors without borders. I also read blogs such as Blank Spot. – Simona, 2020: liberal*

Simona state how the news are not adequate to get the information she needs and seek more information about current issues and affairs at different organizations' platforms. Here Simona shows how her motive behind her information seeking lies on her need to inform herself.

Further, Sandra in the liberal group elaborates on how she has changed her news consumption concerning how she used to a couple of years ago. The lowered general trust toward news media outlets seems to have been the reason for decreasing the number of sources she consumes to get a full picture of reality.

*I think that mainstream media have become very prone to click bating, it becomes more and more difficult to get a full picture of reality and it makes me mad. In the past five years, I have gone from reading 10 different newspapers to only reading about one or two sources daily. I don't think that the other outlets live up to my standards. Since the alternative right-wing sources have become bigger, I think that even mainstream media follows their way of reporting and then the click bating, and the dramatic headlines appear. The news articles are not as well reasoned compared to before. Maybe it is typically liberal to feel the need to read long and well-reasoned articles? – Sandra, 2020: liberal*

On the contrary side, Simona to explains how her consumption has become more sprawling where she feels the need to consume multiple sources to read about the same issues in order to get all the information she needs:

*For me, news consumption is about building your personal puzzle. You take little information from different sources and make your own picture. You can simply not only read one source, for instance when reading about the corona pandemic. You have to read three or four different sources to get something different from the same statements or analyses. It has become more demanding for me to gather all facts. – Simona, 2020: liberal*

Both Sandra and Simona have changed their way of consuming news; however, they have different approaches to combat their decreasing trust toward the changing news media environment. While Sandra turn to sources she finds credible enough to consume on a daily

basis, Simona need to read the same type of news from many different sources to confirm and determine what is true and not.

Simona also mentions how her daily news consumption has started to appear more and more in her social network sites and also through forums like Reddit where she gets some of her news, compared to the time before:

*It is easy to comment on issues on Twitter where journalists post links to their articles. The thresholds have lowered which makes it easier to come in contact with journalists. And in later days, I think that Instagram has become much better in this way. I have started to fill my feed with news so that I don't have to see people's babies, food, and traveling, I also want my interests to be visible in my daily feed (...) I also use Reddit to get a nice overview of interesting issues and to provide me with information that I have not gotten already. – Simona, 2020: liberal*

Simona, together with several other participants from each group, explains here that she needs to gather complementary information from multiple sources to satisfy her overall needs for orientation. Here, Simona also states that it has become more demanding for her to gather all the information. Concerning the U&G theory, the strongest motives are to build on their personal identity and to uphold the expected level of knowledge in their context of youth politicians (McQuail, 1994:318).



## 6. Discussion and Further Research

This thesis has investigated how ideologically leaning- alternative media user's reason regarding their usage and valuation of their consumption of mainstream media outlets, separately- and in combination with alternative media sources. The public sphere theory, the concept of trust, and the uses and gratifications theory are the underpinning framework to investigate news media consumption among left-wing-, liberal- and right-wing groups.

This chapter will highlight and discuss the findings of this thesis, draw some conclusions, provide some suggestions for further research, and highlight some limitations of this study.

### 6.1 Answering the Research Questions

The following section will provide some answers to the research questions. The next section will discuss the questions in relation to each other and also elaborate on the theoretical framework in relation to the findings.

#### **RQ1: How do ideologically leaning groups perceive mainstream media?**

##### **a) How and why do they use mainstream media?**

One of the main questions of this thesis is to examine ideologically leaning group's perceptions of their usage of mainstream media sources. According to Baily et al. (2008), alternative media is often used as a complement to alternative media consumer's overall news consumption. The relationship between mainstream media- and alternative media consumption stands unexplored in the case of Sweden. Therefore, this question aims to dig deeper into how ideologically leaning groups reason around their usage of them and how they perceive them.

At large, all of the participants read mainstream media outlets to some extent. Here it seems like the participants use mainstream media as a base of information and then turn to a row of other sources to satisfy their need for information. The liberal and left-wing group seemed to have a broader repertoire when it came to consume mainstream media outlets. However, all of the participants showed skepticism toward at least one verbally mentioned mainstream media source. Surprisingly, those who showed the most skepticism was the liberal group who actively checked the information they got from Aftonbladet by going to the primary

source. The skepticism here seemed to stem from them thinking that their way of wringing sensational news and being very quick with publishing news, while the right-wing group purely thought that outlets such as Aftonbladet and Dagens Nyheter are biased in the favor of the ideologically left-wing sympathizers.

**RQ2: How do ideologically leaning groups perceive alternative media?**

**a) How and why do they use alternative media sources?**

The purpose of these questions is to understand better how ideologically leaning groups use and perceive their consumption of alternative media sources. This answer to this varies depending on the participant; however, the right-wing participants asserted that they sometimes read something at a source such as Aftonbladet, and then went to their alternative media sources or even the forum Flashback to read further about the happening. This because they wanted to know further details about, for example, a crime or a rape incident.

When it came to the left-wing and liberal group, they seemed to use alternative media sources to confirm their own beliefs and develop their understanding of a specific political issue. The incitements were merely the same between the groups when it came to want complementary information; however, the latter groups did not turn to alternative media sources to gather more information about incidents. On the other hand, Simona mentioned how she sometimes fact-checked information from Aftonbladet by going to Dagens Nyheter to see if they have written about the same story. The liberal group also checked primary sources such as the government's website to confirm or fact check news.

**RQ3: What are the reasons behind the ideologically leaning groups trust or distrust toward mainstream media?**

**a) What are the reasons for avoiding or consuming certain media outlets they trust or distrust?**

The purpose of these questions is to elaborate on how the factor trust can manifest itself among ideologically leaning group's reasoning around their news media consumption.

As previously discussed under RQ2, trust is something very complex when it comes to examining ideologically leaning groups. Previous research show how high trust and credibility

are important when individuals select or avoid specific news sources (Bucy, 2003). However, all the focus groups' participants show some distrust toward one or several mainstream media sources, but still seem to consume the news continuously.

The reasons behind the participant's distrust towards some specific mainstream media sources vary. As mentioned in the analysis, the main reason for continuously consuming the sources; hence the distrust seems to be their need to seek out news. For instance, the participants in the liberal group, Anders from the right-wing group and Ali and Leyla from the left-wing group, felt a need to read a lot of news to fulfill their needs. However, all of them are very interested in politics and society as a whole, which might be why they keep the source in their news diet. Another inevitable factor is the magnitude of a source such as Aftonbladet. They are one of the most frequently read papers in Sweden and deliver news quickly, which might be another reason for the participants to consume the source in order to not miss out on some news.

#### **RQ4: How do ideologically leaning groups perceive their alternative news consumption in combination to their usage of mainstream media?**

This question aims to gather an understanding of ideologically leaning groups usage of their overall news media diet, being mainstream media sources in combination with alternative media sources.

The answer to these questions varies depending on the participant. As previously discussed in RQ3, the participant's use of their whole media diet varied depending on their group. The frequency of using alternative media as a complement to the mainstream media news seemed to vary too. The high choice media environment becomes ocular here, whereas most of the participants described their news consumption as a puzzle where they had to pick and sort out information from many different places in order for them to get a full picture of the reality and the happenings in it. This meant that they used mainstream media as a base of information, then blogs, alternative media outlets, podcasts, forums, and social networking sites to get complementary information to fulfill their need for orientation.

#### **6.1.1 Final Discussion**

This section will discuss the empirical findings concerning the theoretical framework of this thesis to add some new perceptions and insight into the theories. In summary, this thesis has

examined how ideologically leaning groups reason, value, and use news media sources in a high choice media environment. The findings present how the participants from each group have a complicated relationship to mainstream media, where they all were in some way dependent on it as the base of information. However, their level of distrust towards them appeared to affect *how* they used them. Many participants searched for complementary information at other sources, such as for the liberal- and left-wing group, at other news outlets, forums, blogs, and even sources such as the government's website. There seems to be a pattern among the right-wing participants to check their information by going to their alternative news outlets and sometimes forums and blogs (Tino Sanadajis blog and Flashback) to find more information about issues regarding a crime or rape incident because they felt the need to know information such as name and maybe a picture of the suspected criminal. However, high credibility is an essential factor when it comes to people deciding what source to read or consume (Bucy, 2003; Capella & Tsifti, 2003). On the contrary, the findings show how the participants still keep consuming many mainstream media sources, although they distrust them. In particular, the participants kept referring to the evening paper Aftonbladet, which, more or less, all of the participants directed a relatively high level of skepticism. This might be because of their political interest, like Shehata (2016) states; political interest is a significant factor when it comes to a person being either information seeking- or avoiding. This shows even further how the distrust is not always an evident factor that explains one's likeliness to either consume or avoid specific news outlets, especially among politically interested people. This study shows how people with very strong ideological beliefs still consume news outlets (Aftonbladet) they distrust. No specific questions were asked about their level of trust or distrust against other specific sources; however, the participants explained that they were more skeptical towards the evening papers in general, which is not that surprising. Overall, it seemed like the participants often tried to consume news from many different mainstream media sources to get a good base of information. However; when it came to following people or outlets on their social media pages, they were more skeptical to keep that in their daily feed on for instance Twitter or Instagram. It seems like they wanted to control when, how and what to consume regarding sources they might not fully trust or agree with.

As McQuail (2010) listed the U&G theory, people are driven by creating a social identity and to fulfill their need for information. Also, people consume news in order to uphold other people's expected amount of knowledge from that person (McQuail & Gurevich, 1974). So, it

seems like people keep consuming news outlets they do not trust in order to uphold the level of knowledge that they need and feel expected to know. All of the participants kept a quite large amount of daily news consuming, whereas some even incorporated news in their social network sites such as Instagram, which is not typically a medium for consuming news, neither are forums. This development of news seeking at social network sites and forums might be something worth directing more attention to in order to investigate how the sources influence people's attitudes and opinions, especially the combination of different news sources together.

Another finding is that the participants turn to alternative media pages, forums, social networking sites (Twitter) to build on their identity as McQuail (1994) refers to in his description of media use motives. At the same time, these findings apply to the theory of counterpublics (Benkler et al, 2013; Fraser, 1990; Toepfl & Foucault Welles, 2015). Here the participants explain how they follow and read what like-minded people write, engage in political debates, gather information, learn about societal issues, and at the same time find a place to belong and to confirm their world views. Also, it seems from the empirical findings of this thesis that all groups more or less were applicable to the counterpublics theory. However, as discussed earlier in this thesis; the theory is more suitable for left-wing groups/movements because of the epistemological attachment to the theory. On the contrary side, several examples from the right-wing focus group was manifested in the result which showed how their need for a safe space to express common interest was quite big. The question is how we can examine groups that are counter but not necessarily attached to a left-wing movement in a similar way?

Overall, there is a need for a more extensive investigation of alternative media usage with focus on different types of ideological leanings. The rapid change of technologies and the way we use social media contributes to changed news media habits which might change how alternative media users are affected by the media content. This study has contributed with some insights on how ideologically leaning groups reason around their own usage of mainstream- and alternative media sources and can be used as a springboard for further research on the area.

## **6.2 Conclusions**

In conclusion, this thesis has found a couple of implications. Ideologically leaning groups, including people with liberal beliefs, use mainstream media as a base of information to build on their world view. Although the participants direct a great deal of distrust toward the mainstream media and in particular the evening papers, they still turn to them because of their

large need for information, this in turn makes the participants compromise with the trustworthiness. The next conclusion is that ideologically leaning groups use media sources such as social networking sites, blogs, forums, and alternative media websites to gather information and uphold social relationships. Those two phenomena seem to converge into each other. Another conclusion is that all three groups were applicable to the counterpublics theory; however, in different ways. The left-wing and liberal groups which from a general perspective are more accepted by society seem to need the space and community online as a way to express their opinions while confirming them to fellow like-minded people. The right-wing group needed the space and community online because they felt that they could not do this in their daily life, meaning that the online community was the only way for them to really express their true opinions. The final conclusion is that the assumption that liberal people as a group should be included when investigating news consumption and in particular alternative media, this group showed the most perceived bias against encountered dissident information. In all, there is a need for more investigation in this particular area to establish these findings, and to draw proper conclusions by having bigger and better samples of these groups.

### **6.3 Limitations**

This thesis has some limitations that can affect the reliability of the results and will, therefore, be discussed in this section. The first limitation regards the sample of the participants in this study. This thesis aims to investigate ideologically leaning groups who consume alternative media sources, which make the recruitment of participants difficult. The sample of participants (N=9); is quite low, larger groups or more focus groups would provide a more reliable result. However, the difficulty of finding willing participants for focus groups is generally challenging, with people being ambivalent in the willingness to participate and finding people of the same attitudes and opinions. An ideal study would have larger groups in a real-life setting. However, a better investigation could have been done by going through for instance Twitter where people with ideological sympathies can be found easily, making it easier to contact a larger number of potential people for this type of study. Another weakness is that the participants were not entirely on the same level of ideological conviction, meaning that the result of their discussion sometimes varied depending on the participant's level of conviction. It sometimes resulted in the participants not entirely agreeing on all levels. This was only the case in the left-wing focus-

group, where one of the participants (Jonathan) sometimes tended to not agree with Leyla and Ali in some questions. On the other hand, having a varied mix of participants on the ideological group might also be apposite because of the reality's complexity where individuals within the same groups can be very different from each other, even though they have some joint interests.

The final limitation of this thesis that needs to be addressed regards the methodological approach. A qualitative study like this one cannot evince anything on a general level because of the small sample of participants. There are also some limitations when it comes to the chosen method, focus groups might not provide as in-depth answers compared to individual interviews. Also, due to this study's limitation, there might be theoretical aspects that are missing to find other or more profound answers to some of the questions. A quantitative study with a larger sample could minimize the risk for marginal errors to affect a larger part of the result of a study. For instance, a structured questionnaire could be sent out to a larger sample of people who are active in different types of organizations with ideological orientation or such.

#### **6.4 Further Research**

Alternative media outlets are becoming more and more significant; this is evident by looking at the increasing alternative media consumers among people in Sweden. The growing interest of alternative media and people's demand for alternative media sources do have underlying reasons. Whether those reasons are based on mistrust, hostile media perceptions, or a need for a counterpublic spheres, the area of research needs more investigation. This study could be used as a springboard for further research with other methodological approaches such as quantitative surveys or experiments. For instance, one could further investigate the relationship between the counterpublics theory and the uses and gratifications theory. These two separate theories converged when the empirical material was analyzed. The next suggestion is to examine even closer how ideologically leaning groups reason when they consume outlets that they do not trust. Is it really because of their high level of political interest, or can other factors come to play an important part? Another thing that could be investigated is other alternative media sources connected to other ideological groups except for the usual left- and right-wing groups alternative media, like liberal/libertarian groups. Also, other theoretical perspectives should be employed in order to find other insights that might have been missed out in this thesis.

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## Appendix 1 – First Message to Participants

Hej! Jag skriver till dig för att jag söker kandidater till en fokusgrupp för mitt masterarbete om nyhetskonsumtion. Jag har noterat att du kommenterat på en nyhetsartikel här på Facebook och tycker utifrån din profil att du verkar som en god kandidat för en diskussionsgrupperna. Jag undrar därför om du har möjlighet och intresse att delta i studien? Mitt mål med studien är att nyansera bilden av människors resonemang bakom bland annat nyhetsvärdering och nyhetskonsumtion. Du är välkommen att kontakta mig här om du har några frågor eller rent av vill medverka. Allt gott - Marigona

### **Translation from Swedish to English:**

Hello! I am contacting you because I am looking for participants for a focus group I am arranging for my master thesis regarding news consumption. I noticed that you have commented on a news article here on Facebook and figured that you might be a good candidate for one of the focus groups. I wonder if you have any interest in participating in my study? The aim is to elaborate on the image of people reasoning behind their news consumption. You are welcome to contact me here if you have any questions or if you simply want to participate. Kind regards – Marigona



## Appendix 2 – Information Sheet to Participants



**Vill du bidra till forskning?  
- Delta i fokusgrupp**

**Sökes:**  
Politiskt intresserade som gärna deltar i diskussioner. Du konsumerar nyheter och/eller politisk information i exempelvis tidningar, nyhets sajter/ appar, politiska bloggar, alternativa medier, radio, poddar m.m. Fokus kommer att ligga på ditt användande, dina resonemang och åsikter.

**Hur?**  
Fokusgrupper om tre till fyra personer kommer att delas in separat utefter din ideologiska tillhörighet. Alltså; du kommer att diskutera med likasinnade. Fokusgrupperna kommer att ske digitalt via programmet Zoom.  
Du kan givetvis delta anonymt.

**Låter det intressant?**  
Kontakta mig om du är intresserad av att delta eller har några frågor. Närmare information om tid och datum ges vid intresse.

  
Med vänlig hälsning,  
Marigona Marniku  
Masterstudent i politisk kommunikation  
gusamma@student.gu.se

### Translation from Swedish to English:

Seeking politically interested people who like to participate in discussions. You consume news and/or political information in newspapers, news websites, applications, blogs, alternative media, radio, podcasts and so on. The focus lays on your usage, reasoning and your opinions.

How? – Focus groups of three to four people will be divided separately according to your ideological leaning. With other words; you will discuss together with likeminded people. The focus groups will be held digitally through the software Zoom. You can participate anonymously.

Does it sound interesting? – Contact me if you are interested in participating or if you have any questions. More information about time and date will be given when you announce your interest.

## **Appendix 3 – Interview Guide**

This semi-structured questionnaire is based on three themes extracted from the theory. The questions are formulated in a way that can provide insights and answers to the research questions of this study. The interview guide will start with a broader introduction to the topic to start of a conversation which will then lead into the three specific themes. Every theme is represented by around five questions.

The purpose is to ask broad questions but still in a way that can lead to answers to the research questions. Alternative media will not be directly mentioned in the first part of the interview guide, the aim is to try to get the participants to talk about them without mentioning them directly.

### **Introduction**

In the introduction of the study, I will ask the participants to introduce themselves (Name, age, occupation) so that they all know a little bit about each other. I will say that they are all in this specific focus group because of their political leanings and that they all have that in common. This is so that they hopefully can feel more comfortable with speaking their mind about questions that might be uncomfortable to talk about in a group with new people, and to make them comfortable to talk about politically charged issues. I will also tell them briefly about how the interview is structured and other formalities like how they go about answering questions. I also leave room for them to ask me questions about the study or if they wonder anything else related to the interview.

### **Uses and gratification**

The U&G theory is simultaneously converged in many of the questions below because I seek answers of how the participants make use of the news sources. I do not intend to have the U&G theory as a separate theme, because I want the groups to actively reflect about their usage while discussing the matters of news media sources. Questions in the character of “how, why and when?” are used to find out the participants intentions of using certain news sources in different ways.

### **Part I - General news consumption**

The first part regards broad and general questions about the participants news consumption to introduce the subject and get the conversation going and for the participants to get to know each other.

1. What type of outlets do you read most frequently to consume news?
2. Why do you turn to these outlets?
3. What kind of news do you prefer to read about?

4. Why do you consume these type of news?

### **Part II - Trust in media**

The next part is related to question four in part one. The questions are based on research about trust in media. People with stronger attitudes/opinions tend to trust the mainstream media less, especially right-wing people and specifically people who sympathize with the Sweden Democrats. This is what the quantitative research have shown. By digging deeper into the question of trust, this study can highlight and arouse unknown reasons behind the trust in itself.

5. How often do you read mainstream media outlets? (*Here I mean meainstream media news media outlets like Aftonblandet/Expressen, Dagens Nyheter/Svenska Dagbladet*)

- What do you think about these outlets?
- What do you think about their reporting regarding issues that you think are important?

6. Do you ever consume other news sources except from the ones we have talked about?

7. Which outlet would you say is the best for consuming news of your interest, and why?

### **Part III - Counterpublics**

The third theme regards the communion around the consumption of news/alternative media sources. Here I aim to find answers to if they fill any needs around exchange of any kind, like airing opinions with like-minded people etc.

8. Do you follow or participate in commenting, forums, or any type of groups on the internet that belong to any of the news media sources you consume?

9. If so, what do you usually/typically comment on?

- What are your motives for doing this?

### **Rounding of the interview**

At this point, I will ask possible follow up questions or let the conversation develop naturally if needed. I will ask if they have anything they have anything that they want to discuss related to the topic and round of when I feel like I have gotten the material that I wanted.