The Journalist-NGO Relationship: A Social Exchange Theory Perspective

Exploring motivations, contextual influences, and trust building processes shaping the journalist-NGO relationship in Sweden

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Abstract
This study explores the relationship between journalists and NGOs in news making from a social exchange theory perspective. Drawing on semi-structured reconstruction interviews with journalists from Swedish media and representatives from the communications departments of Swedish NGOs, it examines motivations, contextual influences, and trust building processes that shape the relationship. The findings from the thematic analysis suggest three main characteristics of the journalist-NGO relationship. Firstly, the actors are motivated to interact due to a mutual dependency despite having separate goals. Secondly, the interactions are marked by an initiative imbalance caused by the contextual norm of a ruling media logic. Thirdly, trustworthiness is established between the actors through successful social exchanges which tend to reoccur and rationalize professional processes, ergo long-term relations lead to trust and efficacy. This thesis further concludes that journalists hold an upper hand in the news making process which NGOs accommodate to be recognized by media. Simultaneously, the NGOs play an important part in supplementing and substituting journalistic shortages which enhances their influence on news content. This leads to a relationship of mutual dependency which is sustained through reciprocal social exchanges that build trust and enable efficiency on both an interpersonal micro level, and an organizational meso level.

Key words: advocacy, journalism, journalistic autonomy, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), relationship building, social exchange theory.
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1. Introduction

For decades, the relationship between journalists and their sources has been at the center of academic discussions considering who holds the power over news content (Ekman 2019, p. 157). The relationship between journalists and their news sources is fundamental for journalistic news making. By building trustworthy relations with sources, the sources can give valuable information, contextualization and legitimization to the news (Carlson, Matt 2009, pp. 530–2). At the same time, journalists must perform a balancing act to ensure journalistic legitimacy. Letting source relations become too personal and intimate constitutes a risk of allowing influence and bias in the news process (Ekman 2019, p. 166). The balance work of this relationship is in constant negotiation due to practical circumstances, but also over time as the media landscape is transforming (Broersma, den Herder & Schohaus 2013). Ultimately, professional ethics play an important role for this balancing act. Ethical guidelines provide the premises for how relationships can be developed without diminishing the professional legitimacy of journalists (Ekman 2019, p. 166). Against this background, the emergence of sourcing nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in news production provides an interesting dynamic to further explore the underlying processes of the journalist-source relationship.

NGOs have gone from being social movements to becoming more and more institutionalized as organizations with a meaningful position in the field of political communication and media. As a result of globalization and digitalization of the media scape, NGOs have come to supplement classic state diplomacy through their engagement in parallel public diplomacy and advocacy (Hafez 2007, p. 17). Consequently, the NGOs’ expanding group of stakeholders, there among journalists, demand more and new types of information to keep them informed (Powers 2018, p. 7). Further, NGOs, particularly those working with human rights and humanitarian issues, have developed international capacity of reporting and covering international affairs that rival the resources of news organizations. This has increased the importance of NGOs in international news, leading to query the degree of which journalist-NGO relations are antagonistic or complementary (Powers 2016).

From previous research it is difficult to find a singular answer to the question of who holds power over the influence of news between journalists and sources. This is much because social actors themselves often have different appreciations of their potential to influence news content (Schlesinger & Tumber 1994). To contribute with conclusive insights of the underlying tradeoffs within the journalist-NGO dynamic, this thesis is based on interviews with both journalists and NGOs.
In a summary of the main finding of the emerging academic field of journalist-NGO relations, communication and media scholar Matthew Powers (2015) established that NGOs continue to struggle for media publicity and therefore adapt to, rather than challenge, media norms to enhance their chances of media recognition. However, another tendency of NGOs increasingly using digital tools to circumvent traditional media and become their own news source was also noted. From these insights it is fair to question which actor hold the upper hand in the reporting of civil society matters – the journalists as gate keepers and norm setters of the media system, or the NGOs who through strategic communication efforts to increase their ability to influence news making?

The journalist-NGO relationship in news making relates to issue of journalistic professional autonomy, meaning the journalists’ ability to operate without interference of others (Hallin & Mancini 2004, p. 34). The journalistic profession is by default not capable of ensuring complete autonomy due to its source-based nature (ibid. p. 35). However, the degree of autonomy can vary and where the autonomy is highly influenced by external actors, such as social groups and movements seeking political influence, the journalistic guardianship of the public trust is challenged by serving particular interests (ibid. p. 38). In addition, the discussion about journalistic autonomy can be extended to the normative ideal, dominant in most developed democracies, of media as a function to monitor and hold governments accountable. From this perspective, a decrease in journalistic autonomy signals a crack in the democratic society (Hanitzsch, Ramaprasad, et al. 2019, p. 110).

According to media and communications scholar Mattias Ekman (2019, p. 166), journalists in a free media system or national context are more likely to control the news process and hold the upper hand in the journalist-source relationship. Therefore, Sweden provides an interesting setting to examine the motivations for interacting among journalists and NGO-PR-professionals, due to Sweden’s significant context of a high level of press and media freedom. Sweden is placed at number four in Reporters Without Borders’ 2020 World Press Freedom Index (Reporters Without Borders 2021) and is among the top 20 countries in the Worlds of Journalism Study’s (Hamada et al. 2019, p. 147) list of journalists’ perceived editorial autonomy around the world.

By exploring the relationship between Swedish journalists and Swedish human rights and humanitarian NGOs, this thesis uncovers underlying motifs, tradeoffs and contextual influences affecting the relationship formation. In turn, the characteristics of the relationship give insights to the degree of influence and power each party holds over news content.

The context of Sweden has moderately been the object of previous studies of the
A recent study explored Swedish journalists’ conceptions of NGOs for climate journalism in the context of reporting on COP25 in Madrid. With a theoretical approach of boundary work, meaning the way journalists legitimize their profession through conceptualizing boundaries for their practice (Carlsson 2015, pp. 7–9), the study concluded four roles that NGOs can play for climate journalism. The roles were based on the theme’s dependency, established source, partnering watchdog and agenda-driven player. Further, the author stated that the boundaries between the two actors were blurred in the context of climate issues and COP25 (Fahlström 2020).

Two main takeaways from the previous studies in a Swedish context constitutes the aim of this study. Firstly, NGOs within the field of human rights and humanitarian issues will be the object of this study to counterbalance the previous focus on environmental organizations. Secondly, despite a noted common understanding of journalistic frameworks, the professional boundaries of journalism are known to lack rigidity and are at times even arbitrary (Hanitzsch, Vos, et al. 2019, p. 195). Therefore, this study will explore the individual and contextual influences of the journalist-NGO relationship, rather than the professional boundaries, that impact evaluations and decision making in the interplay of journalists and NGOs. This calls for an interdisciplinary approach, applying relation-oriented theories.

This thesis does not only aim to fill the research gap in the Swedish context, but also to contribute to the academic field through an interdisciplinary approach. This has been called for by Powers (2015) who claims that research of the journalist-NGO relationship could benefit from applying a sociological approach due to the existing media centricity in previous research. Hence, this thesis applies the social exchange theory which is a psychological and sociological theory. This enables exploration of, and new academic insights to, both the interpersonal micro level and the organizational meso level of the journalist-NGO relation. This study will further give a snapshot of the current state of the journalist-NGO relationship in Sweden which is fruitful since previous research indicates that the institutional contexts of NGOs and journalism is in change.
2. Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The aim of this study is to explore the journalist-source relationship between journalists and human rights and humanitarian NGOs in Sweden from a social exchange perspective. The study has been based on qualitative interviews with journalists and PR professionals working for NGOs in a Swedish setting.

The main research question of this thesis is:

What are the main characteristics of the journalist-NGO relationship in Sweden?

To answer the main research question, the empirical evidence will be analyzed guided by the following research questions:

RQ 1: What are the motivations to interact for journalists and NGOs?

RQ 2: What are the costs and benefits of the interactions between journalists and NGOs?

RQ 3: What are the conditions of the social context in which the journalist-NGO relationship take place?

RQ 4: How is the reciprocity between journalists and NGOs structured, and how does that structure affect trust building between the parties?

By identifying the main characteristics of the journalist-NGO relationship in Sweden, this study contributes with insights to the journalistic research of the journalist-source relationship. Further it gives new insights to the role of NGOs in news making which relates to the research field of journalistic professionalization and autonomy. The study provides a snapshot of the current state of the journalist-NGO relationship in Sweden which is of relevance since previous research point to a continuous transformation of the institutional context of NGOs and journalism.

The research questions that was applied to analyze the empirical collection are directly derived from the theoretical framework of social exchange theory. These questions help uncover the motifs, tradeoffs and contextual factors that influence the relationship and trust building process of journalists and NGOs are uncovered.
3. Background

3.1. Journalism in Sweden

Since this study is set in Sweden, it is fruitful to understand the Swedish media landscape and the context in which the Swedish journalists operate. The Swedish media landscape is marked by high levels of press freedom and professional autonomy (Hamada et al. 2019, p. 147; Reporters Without Borders 2021). The importance of autonomy is also to be seen in the Swedish journalists’ conception of their professional role which journalists themselves claim to be a detached observer who hold a strong watch dog ideal and at the same time account for different people’s views to be expressed (Nilsson 2016, p. 1).

In the Worlds of Journalism Study’s country report on journalists in Sweden, Swedish journalists agreed that the strongest influence comes from journalism ethics. Simultaneously, they express a unison stand point that all journalists should adhere to codes of professional ethics in any situation or context (ibid. pp. 2–3). The codes of professional ethics in Sweden is provided by the Swedish Union of Journalists through 13 rules of professional conduct (Journalistförbundet 2020a). The first six rules refer to maintaining the journalist’s integrity in favor of trustworthiness. These rules include not accepting commitments or gifts that may compromise one’s position as free and independent, and not giving in to pressure from external parties to create publicity that is not journalistically motivated (Journalistförbundet 2020b). The other seven rules regard acquisition of material. These rules include to allow interviewees to take part of how their statements will be presented before publishing, and to state the source when a published article build on their information (ibid.).

Lastly, the tendencies of a challenged media system of economic issues and less resources (Blumler 2010, p. 243) can also be noted in Sweden. Within the last 15 years, Swedish newsrooms have shrunk significantly. Between the years 2004 and 2014 the amount of journalists at daily newspapers declined with 25 percent (Nygren & Wiik 2016, p. 268). Swedish journalists attest to transitions in their field by noticing a decrease in time available for researching stories, along with increased competition, audience involvement in news production, and profit making pressure (Nilsson 2016, p. 4).

3.2. Definition of Human Rights and Humanitarian NGOs

The term nongovernmental organizations, commonly referred to through the abbreviation NGO, generally refers to any organization that is independent from governments (Nationalencyklopedin 2021). The term encompasses a broad range of organizations including
charities, research institutions, trade unions, churches, and professional associations (Leverty 2008). Historically in Sweden, NGOs in terms of civil society organizations have had a strong position in the democratic system. Unions, cooperative movements and employer’s organization have played a crucial part in constituting a deliberative democracy through close collaborations with the state (Trägårdh & Trägårdh 2007, pp. 2–3). In current times, there are hundreds of different NGOs in Sweden advocating for matters of significance both within national borders and in other parts of the world. The NGOs with international advocacy usually have a key function of creating public opinion to make an impact for their matters of interest. For international NGOs, the activity to impact is not least prominent in relation to international summits and conventions involving political leaders (Myndigheten för sammhällsskydd och beredskap 2013).

To clarify which NGOs this thesis is focused on, this study primarily concerns NGOs as they are traditionally defined in international settings according to American Psychological Association (Leverty 2008): “NGOs are value-based organizations that depend in whole or in part, on charitable donations and voluntary service”. The Outreach Division in the United Nations Department of Global Communications adds to the definition by describing NGOs and civil society organizations synonymously as “any non-profit, voluntary citizens’ group which is organized on a local, national or international level. Task-oriented and driven by people with a common interest, civil society organizations (CSOs) perform a variety of services and humanitarian functions, bring citizens’ concerns to Governments, monitor policies, and encourage political participation at the community level”.

Further, the focus of this thesis is on NGOs within the field of human rights and humanitarian issues. Since there are no universally established definitions of these organization, it is of important to stress that the following definitions apply when referring to human rights and humanitarian NGOs in this thesis.

Political scientist Laurie S. Wiseberg (1991, p. 529) defines human rights NGOs as private associations which devote significant resources to the promotion and protection of human rights by for instance holding governments accountable. They are independent from governments and political groups seeking direct power. Further, University of California Berkeley Library (UC Berkeley Library 2020) defines humanitarian organizations as having the purpose of aiding people who are suffering, especially victims of armed conflict, natural disasters or famines.

A further definition of the specific NGOs that are included in this study is provided in the methodological section about sampling in chapter 6.1.
4. Literature Review

This chapter provides an overview of previous research of the journalist-source relationship and the journalist-NGO relationship. The previous research that is presented was derived from a comprehensive literature review and has been included on the basis of its relevance to the purpose of this thesis. In section 5.5, previous research using the theoretical framework of SET will be presented. Since it is of importance to understand the SET framework in order to gauge the insights from those studies, they are presented subsequent to this thesis’ theoretical framework instead of in this section.

4.1. Overview of the Journalist-Source Relationship

The journalistic research field focusing on the journalist-source relationship is mainly concerned with understanding the power dynamics between journalists and sources and their degree of influence on the news content (Ekman 2019, p. 157). Ekman (ibid. pp. 157–8) concludes two major research interests: to understand the intersecting power dynamics of the relation between the sources and the journalists, and to explore the hierarchies of sources and how they are valued in news production. The sources have academically been distinguished in two groups (McManus 1994, p. 73). One group represent organizations and are referred to as official sources. They usually have a vested interest in the media participation. The other group are made up of sources speaking in the capacity of their civil selves (ibid.).

One way for sources to influence journalists is through what communications scholar Oscar H. Gandy (1982) conceptualizes as “information subsidies”. The concept refers to information that is strategically packaged to increase its possibility to be picked up by journalists by simplifying the journalists’ job by reducing the resources needed to comprehend the information (ibid.). In relation to a media system which is heavily challenged by structurally economic issues and less resources (Blumler 2010, p. 243), the information subsidies can give the sources an upper hand (Allern 2001). Other perspectives emphasize the sources’ potential for influence as primary definers, referring to when official sources gain interpretative prerogative in news by being continually cited due to their institutionalized status and legitimacy (Hall 2013). Additionally, the “official dominance” model points to journalists’ restricted objectivity towards official sources due to power structures within the news organization (Lawrence 2000). On the contrary, the theory of media logic points to actors outside of the media sphere adapting their operational ways to news media’s tempo and way to work. This theory emphasizes media’s independence and indicates an institutional upper hand of the media and journalists (Ekman 2019, pp. 161–2).
The relationship between journalists and sources have also been researched through a media sociological perspective focusing on the social aspect of the relation. This literature gives insights on the relationship being based on mutual expectations (Gans 2004), and mutual dependency to gain control over news content (Broersma, den Herder & Schohaus 2013, p. 393). Journalists develop strategies to control their stories, yet sources still make sure to be noticed by providing information constituting the “building blocks” for the journalists’ stories (ibid.).

4.2. Previous Research of the Journalist-NGO Relationship

As mentioned in the introduction, previous research on the journalist-NGO relationship point to three themes. Firstly, NGOs face an uphill battle in the struggle for publicity as journalists tend to primarily turn to government officials as sources. Secondly, NGOs adapt to, rather than challenge, the established news norms to enhance their chances of being recognized by journalists. Thirdly, an increased usage of digital tools is used by NGOs to bypass the news media and instead become their own outlets of information (Powers 2015).

A study of the shaping factors of NGO publicity shows that NGOs with large proportions of project funding, neutral government relations, organizational dynamics in favor of marketing and an audience of potential donors primarily opt for gaining publicity through news media (Powers 2014, p. 103). Meanwhile, NGOs struggle for media recognition due to a competitive media landscape caused by conditions such as an increasingly crowded field of NGOs (Cottle & Nolan 2007) or a journalistic preference of official sources which does not account for the politically marginalized (Kwenda 2013).

To increase the prospect of media coverage, the NGOs apply strategies of adaptation to the media logic in order to position themselves as a fruitful source (Cottle & Nolan 2007; Kwenda 2013). However, as concluded from studies of communications efforts of environmental NGOs in South Africa (ibid.) and research of some of the world’s major aid agencies (Cottle & Nolan 2007), adapting to journalistic norms indicates a consequence of struggling with achieving or prioritizing the political or social goals of the NGO. Powers (2017) adds to this perspective by identifying four normative roles that NGOs are tasked to play in the media field: experts of their field on the basis of accuracy and transparency, advocates emphasizing public awareness, facilitators of exchange between diverse social groups, and critics focusing on exposing systematic injustice. However, noting that the latter two roles, which exposes more advocacy of the NGOs, are less achieved.
The combination of NGOs adapting to the media logic at the same time as their means for communication efforts are increasing, and the decrease of journalistic resources, has indicated an ability for NGOs’ to both circumvent and overlap news media (Powers 2016). Previous research suggest that the guiding values of NGOs of accuracy and pluralism correspond with journalistic key values. Henceforth, this enables some NGOs to provide information and news that the resource lacking news organizations to a degree struggle to provide (ibid.). Nonetheless, the NGOs’ preferred type of format for information and their purpose of advocacy strictly diverge from journalistic norms and inhibits NGO information to be equal to products of journalism (ibid. p. 413).

Much of the previous research of the journalist-NGO relationship is done from an NGO-perspective or tends to be media centric. Consequently, the research including a journalistic perspective, none the less a mutual perspective, is quite scarce. However, from a thorough literature review, it can be seen that different contextual factors and individual mechanisms are claimed to be impacting the interplay between journalists and NGOs. Media sociologist Ella McPherson (2016) presents the individual mechanism of source credibility as being a form of “information subsidy”, as conceptualized by Gandy (1982). Source credibility enhances NGOs’ potential to become a source for journalist. McPherson argues that source credibility is achieved through interpersonal relationships with journalists, authority with human rights leaders, and association with NGO networks. In the transnational setting of intense political negotiations during the annual UN Climate Change Conference, research show that specific cognitive and social preconditions, for instance perceptions of target audiences of specific long-standing source networks, were of significance in determining the level and type of collaboration between NGOs and journalists (Lück, Wozniak & Wessler 2016). Another study declared that the collaborative efforts between journalists and NGOs in news production is a result of each party renegotiating their practice, purpose and boundaries in order to justify cooperation activities that match their respective goals in the news production (Wright 2016).

In sum, previous research shows how a competitive media landscape has led to NGOs developing strategies to adapt to the media logic for the purpose of enhancing their chance of gaining media attention. Consequently, studies show potential for NGOs to increase their position in the media sphere through international networks and resources. Simultaneously, some NGOs claim strong media positions come at a prize of deprioritizing organizational values. Lastly, the relationship formation and potential collaborations between journalists show dependency of several contextual and individual evaluations that can be further
examined by deviating from the media central approach and instead focus on the relational interplay between journalists and NGOs.
5. Theoretical Framework

When examining the relationship between journalists and NGOs, the context provided is professional. Despite the actors not belonging to the same organization, the behavior that is examined is occurring in a work-place setting. Social exchange theory has been described as “one of the most influential conceptual paradigms for understanding workplace behavior” (Cropanzano & Mitchell 2005, p. 874) and is therefore fruitful to apply to this study in order to understand influences shaping the relationship between the journalists and NGO representatives in Sweden. It is important to mention that SET is one of many theories that the journalist-NGO relationship could be analyzed through. However, since the SET framework has been scarcely applied when examining the journalist-NGO relationship, this thesis will explore and reflect on its viability within the field of study. This chapter will provide an overview of the core elements of the theory, present relevant concepts, and give empirical examples of recent studies of relevance that have been conducted through the theoretical perspective of social exchange theory.

5.1. Overview: Social Exchange Theory

Social exchange theory (SET) was introduced to the field of psychology by behavioral sociologist George C. Homans in 1958. Based on economic theory, SET present the idea that every interpersonal interaction entails an exchange of goods, material or non-material (Homans 1958, p. 597). To remain engaged in a relationship, the participants behavior must be reinforced by getting the feeling of receiving at least the same amount of value as oneself is emitting in the relationship. In other words, the social exchange must result in a break even between the costs and values of the participants in order to be sustained. Once person A gives value to person B in an interaction, person B is immediately under pressure to return the value to person A in order to sustain a balanced exchange and not make person A feel like the exchange is more costly than valuable (ibid. p. 604).

Despite the cruciality of reaching balance in social exchange, Homans (1958) points out that each actor always strive to maximize their own (social) profit from the interaction. In 1964, sociologist Peter M. Blau (1986) connected to Homans’ conclusions and further emphasizes the cruciality of the social give-and-take-pattern, the reciprocity, by claiming it to enable individuals to develop loyalty and trust (ibid. pp. 92–7). He also argues that despite the initial self-interest being the main motivation of reciprocity, the exchange process tend to develop to a structure that at times require individuals to set aside some of their personal
interests to benefit the collectivity (ibid. pp. 92–3).

The strive for creating balance in social exchange, whether it is done consciously or not, is centered around the concept of reciprocity. Reciprocity refers to the expectation that people will help those who have helped them. In other words, we invest in others and expect dividends (Myers, Abell & Sani 2014, p. 404). In the process of evaluating the reciprocity of interpersonal relationships, people have certain standards that their evaluation of social costs and rewards are influenced by. One way of evaluating is through *comparison level*, meaning the level of expectations about what individual believe they deserve or expect to get out of a relationship. Someone with a high level of comparison expects much from their interactions (Gilovich, Keltner, Chen & Nisbett 2016, p. 353). Another variation of this is *comparison level for alternatives*, which refers to the outcomes people think they can get from alternative relationships. A low comparison level for alternatives may play out in abusive relationships where the abused part choose to stay due to their perception of the alternatives being worse than the current relationship (ibid. p. 354).

By examining the costs and benefits in the exchange between journalists and NGOs, there is potential to uncover their respective motives for initially connecting, and later, what will motivate them to remain connected with each other.

### 5.2. The Social Context of Social Exchange

Soon after being introduced by Homans and Blau, sociologist Thomas Burnes (1973) developed SET by pointing to the importance of accounting for the context in which the social exchanges occur and, hence, connecting it to the field of sociology. He outlined four main point of what “Exchange Theory” in sociology assumes (ibid. pp. 188–9):

1. Social behavior can be explained in terms of rewards, where rewards are goods or services, tangible or intangible, that satisfy a person’s needs or goals.
2. Individuals attempt to maximize rewards and minimize losses or punishments.
3. Social interaction results from the fact that others control valuables or necessities and can therefore reward a person. In order to induce another to reward him, a person has to provide rewards to the other in return.
4. Social interaction is thus viewed as an exchange of mutually rewarding activities in which the receipt of a needed valuable (good or service) is contingent on the supply of a favor in return (usually immediate).
The context of social exchange provides rules and norms of the exchange that constitute guidelines of the exchange process (Cropanzano & Mitchell 2005, p. 875). Burns (1973, p. 189) make a distinction between two different contexts in which social exchange can occur based on different conditions that affect how an actor chooses to engage in a social interaction. The first is conditions of *exogenous constraints* (ibid. p. 204), also called institutionalized forms of exchange, where social constraint provides a framework of “rules” that the actors who are socializing are guided by. For instance, an interaction between a doctor and their patient will play out according to the expectations that are enforced by previous notions of how these actors should engage with each other (ibid. p. 192). The second classification present conditions of *endogenous constraints*, where the social exchange and the limits of it are organically established by the actors themselves in a self-regulatory manner (ibid. p. 204).

Social psychology scholar Linda Molm and colleagues (Molm, Peterson & Takahashi 1999, p. 877) further studied the different conditions of the social exchange, providing a distinction between two types of exchanges: *negotiated exchanges* and *reciprocal exchanges*. In negotiated exchanges the participating parties agree upon the terms of the exchanges, meaning both parties know what is expected from them and what they are expected to contribute with. In reciprocal exchanges the terms are not negotiated, hence the engagement in these exchanges are voluntary and there are no terms of what the participants should contribute with, or can expect from the interaction (ibid.).

Just as Blau claimed reciprocity to generate loyalty and trust (1986, pp. 92–7), studies of reciprocal exchange show greater possibilities for equality, lower levels of power use as well as higher levels of trust and commitment between the involved actors (Mitchell, Cropanzano & Quisenberry 2012, p. 102). Negotiated exchanges, on the other hand, encompasses assurance of what is expected from the exchange, and thereby the dimension and evaluation of trust is unnecessary (ibid.). However, negotiated exchanges may develop into reciprocal exchanges if the involved actors display trustworthy characteristics, according to studies by organizational behavior scholars Lawler and Yoon (1993, 1996).

Even though reciprocity enables possibilities for equality, Blau (1986) points out that power imbalance can occur, and be sustained, through reciprocal exchanges (ibid. pp. 30–32). This happens when there is a lack of social alternatives for the engaged parties and there is a competition for scarce goods (ibid. p. 32;141). Difference in power arise through imbalance of obligation among the different actors engaged in a social exchange (ibid. p. 140). Acceptance of the power imbalance can occur when the subordinate actor agrees to the demands of the
superior actor, and consider them fair in relation to the benefits provided in return through the reciprocal actions of the superior (ibid. p. 30). This will further reproduce the power imbalance, especially if the superior actor’s reciprocal actions are perceived as greater than what the subordinate actor consider enough (ibid. p. 228). The legitimization of power is ultimately guided by the superior’s definition of what their power entail, and the subordinate’s definition of what is reasonable to demand from them (ibid. p. 204).

Conclusively, the social context of social exchange provides different explicit or implicit conditions that affect the evaluations and choices made by the engaged parties. Identifying these in the examination of the journalist-NGO relationship will be of importance to understand their choices in the interaction.

5.3. Trust and the Structure of Reciprocity
As previously mentioned, trust and solidarity are considered an outcome of reciprocal relationships. It is, though, fair to question how that come to be? Molm (2010) addresses this question by developing the structure of reciprocity. She argues that the structure of reciprocity, meaning how the exchange of mutual benefits are carried out, effects the possibility of trust and solidarity to be develop between the engaged parties. This possibility is dependent on a set of individual risk and conflict based processes (ibid. p. 119).

According to Molm, the structure of reciprocity describes “how actors’ exchange behaviors and exchange benefits are connected to one another” (ibid. p. 121). To distinguish different forms of exchange two key dimensions of structure is distinguished. The first dimension refers to the two types of exchanges defined above, reciprocal or negotiated exchange. The second dimension accounts for how the benefits that are exchanged are reciprocated, distinguishing between direct and indirect reciprocity. Direct reciprocity means that the reciprocity for the benefits person A has given person B is dependent on person B. Meaning, the exchange happens between the same two actors, whether occurring in a reciprocal or negotiated exchange. Indirect reciprocity, on the other hand, refers to when the benefits given by person A to person B is reciprocated by person C, D or a group of persons. The exchange happens within a network, and not simply between two actors (ibid. pp. 120–2).

When brought together, these dimensions result in three forms of exchanges who provide different conditions for trust and solidarity to be fostered (ibid. p. 121):

A) Direct reciprocity in reciprocal exchange. This setting leaves the participants in the exchange unknowing of whether or not their exchange of benefit will be reciprocated, due to the lack of assuring agreements beforehand. Consequently, engaging in these
exchanges entails uncertainty and a risk of loss. In turn, this requires provision of trustworthiness in the other part, and as the reciprocal act is done - even if not immediate – trust will be fostered.

B) Direct reciprocity in negotiated exchange. This setting informs the participant of the terms and conditions of the exchange and what is expected from both parties. This leads to trust not needing to be established, which in turn may result in short lived relations.

C) Indirect reciprocity in reciprocal exchanges, also known as generalized exchanges. In generalized exchanges it is unclear who the reciprocal actor will be, hence, there is no possibility of negotiated exchange in this setting. The degree of uncertainty and risk is higher than either of the other two forms, requiring a lot of trust by the participants. Studies of the outcomes of this form of exchange has also shown that the high level of uncertainty fosters solidarity, unity and trust among the participants.

The latter form of exchange has become more and more relevant as of modern day’s context of growing online communities and business organizations (ibid. p. 122). Molm further emphasizes that the structure of reciprocity not only matters for interpersonal relationships on a micro level, but also can have consequences for organizations and communities on a meso level (ibid. p. 126). Reciprocal structures can explain behavioral patterns that enable strong bonds and reciprocity within organizational settings or across different organizational units, even in absence of personal relationships (ibid. pp. 125–6).

Exploring the structure of reciprocity for the journalist-NGO relationship will give interesting insights to how trust is built in the relationship and if it is perceived in a similar manner by both actors.

5.4. Criticism and Three Paradigms of Social Exchange Theory
Management scholar Marie Mitchell and colleagues (2012, p. 99) summarize the development of SET and point out that the term “social exchange theory” is a bit misleading as there is not one comprehensive conceptual model of the theory. Instead they argue SET to be constructed by a family of related theoretical frameworks. In general, SET researchers agree on the reciprocal nature of social exchange patterns. However, they have different views on how resources are perceived and the principles of them. Therefore, Mitchell and colleagues (ibid. p. 101) present three broad conceptual paradigms from the literature on social exchange
theory models that encompasses influence from the fields of psychology, sociology, and anthropology.

The first paradigm consists of theories with an emphasis on relationship formation. The second paradigm has a focus on attributes of the relationship as resources to be exchanged. Finally, the third paradigm entails a view of relationship as a social context that changes the rule by which exchanges are conducted. Despite their distinct nature, Mitchell and colleagues emphasizes that they are by no means contradictory (ibid. p. 114).

For the purpose of this study of the relationship between journalists and NGOs the first paradigm, of relationship-formation, is applied. This paradigm highlights the interpersonal dimension of how close relationships are developed based on reciprocity of beneficial exchanges (ibid. p. 101). The theories included stem from the original theorists, such as Blau and Homans that took inspiration from economic theories of exchange. Further, these theories emphasize that giving social exchange commodity should generate an obligation in the other to return a similar commodity at some point. With the addition of contemporary theorists, such as Molm, this paradigm has become very influential in organizational science (ibid.).

The social exchange theory has been criticized for its assumption of economical exchange and social exchange sharing more similarities than plausible, which thereby reduces human interaction to rational processes (Zafirovski 2005, p. 19). Critics question SET’s idea of individuals making rational cost-benefit calculations in their relationship (ibid. pp. 19; 23). They claim that such calculations do not occur in social interactions, partially because the value of social benefits is highly subjective as opposed the value of benefits in economic exchange (ibid. p. 20). Further, criticism has been expressed to SET due to its presentation of relationships as occurring in a linear structure, whereas the reality of relationships might be much more irregular by overleaping steps or regressing (Miller 2005). This critique also relates to the limitation of SET overlooking the possibility that the exchange of benefits may not be the end goal of the interaction. Instead, critical theorists point to the idea of social exchange only being an intermediate step to ultimately gaining social capital or ability to influence (Zafirovski 2005, p. 22).

The first paradigm of SET, claiming that social exchange is driven by personal maximization of benefits and minimal loss is also criticized for excluding many sociological and anthropological ideas. The sociological and anthropological approaches hold ideas such as social exchange having a symbolical value that is determined through the cultural context (Mauss 1967; Zafirovski 2005, p. 16). They also point to the importance of considering the cultural context that may affect the norms which regulate the social exchange (Cook 2000, p.
Thereof, a limitation to SET is its lack of attention to the possibility of macro structures, such as culture, influencing individual behavior on a micro level. Instead the first paradigm of SET sees macro level structures primarily as an outcome of micro level structures stemming from interpersonal interactions (Zafirovski 2005, pp. 18–9).

As a response to the presented critique, social exchange theory has been developed within the field of sociology and anthropology resulting in the second and third paradigm. As mentioned previously, the second so called relational-attribute paradigm, highlights that the *qualities* of the relationship can become resources for exchange. In other words, the relationship itself is something to be exchanged rather than, or in addition to, being the outcome of an exchange (Mitchell, Cropanzano & Quisenberry 2012, pp. 110, 114). One of the more influential theoretical models of this paradigm is Foa & Foa’s classifications of six different classes of resources, such as *love* and *respect* (commodity, materialistic or symbolic). The model serves understanding of different kinds of resources that can be exchanged in interpersonal behavior (ibid. p. 106). Further, approaches based on gift giving are included in this paradigm. Presented by anthropological theorists, this approach accounted for all exchanges as concrete exchange objects, like gifts (Malinowski 1922, 1932; Mauss 1967). The message and symbolism of the particular gift could vary depending on the setting in which is exchanged. One example is the gift of an engagement ring. The ring holds a certain economic value, but also holds the symbolic value of love and romance (Mitchell, Cropanzano & Quisenberry 2012, p. 108). What the anthropological theorists underline is the *indirect* communications of feelings and intentions through exchange of concrete goods which hold a culturally understood symbolism that is constituted on a macro level (ibid. p. 109).

Lastly, the third relationship-context paradigm, takes a lot of inspiration from anthropology by focusing on the context of a relationship by suggesting that exchanges takes place *within* different types of relationships. This is for instance manifested through generosity of benefits, but also forgiveness, if the exchanging individuals are in a relationship of high quality (ibid. p. 110). Further, it highlights the role of feelings and their ability to moderate how goods are exchanged as well as how people respond to these transactions (ibid. p. 114).

### 5.5. Empirical Examples of Previous Studies Based on SET
Social Exchange Theory is, as mentioned, sprung from psychology, sociology and anthropology. With time, SET has become one of the most influential conceptual paradigms in organizational behavior to understand workplace behavior (Cropanzano & Mitchell 2005,
p. 874) and has been used in many studies related to business ethics, human resources and management. It has, though, been sparingly applied to the field of journalism. However, when reviewing previous studies in which SET has been applied, it becomes evident that the way SET is used to examine organizational behavior can provide interesting insights of the professional relations within journalism. Especially, since both the organizational setting and the media setting entails a range of different stakeholders. The following empirical examples will show how SET have been used to understand or identify factors that enable or hinder reciprocity in different settings, and what the consequences of that may be to the context in question.

To illustrate how SET have been applies in the field of organizational behavior, researcher Gospel O. Oparachoa’s (2016, p. 534) conceptual study of how intra-organizational social interaction is of significance to drive innovation in organization provides an interesting example. This study derives from previous studies of SET to develop insights of how social networking and interpersonal exchange in organizations shape organizational cultures that may influence employee’s attitudes towards knowledge sharing. Knowledge sharing could in turn lead to greater innovations and improved competitive advantages. The study emphasizes the function of Human Recourse Management in creating organizational architecture that promotes reciprocal or contractual exchanges for the organization to reach its full potential. The conclusion presented by Oparachoa argues that integrating reciprocal interactions in organizational behavior is essential for organizational performance (ibid. p. 549).

Moving on from the context of organization behavior, journalism scholar Stephenson Waters (2020) provides one of the few applications of SET in a journalistic context. He examined the relationship between journalists and whistleblowers by using SET to identify and organize factors that influence their interactions. By interviewing journalists experienced in working with whistle blowers and publishing stories based on their information, Waters examined the considerations of ethics and procedure that the journalists took into account when presented with sensitive information from whistleblowers. Hence, the SET framework provided guidance in uncovering the individual costs and benefits of the journalist and the whistleblower. The result of the study concluded that despite the different individual goals of journalists and whistleblowers in the initial stage of the interaction, they could achieve their respective ambitions through mutual exchange of information. By exposing exclusive information about their sources, work processes and perceived risks they engaged in a reciprocal relationship which established trust.

The concept of reciprocity has also been applied in journalism studies to examine the
relationship between journalists and their audience. Journalism and communications scientists Seth C. Lewis and colleagues (Lewis, Holton & Coddington 2014) introduced the framework of reciprocal journalism. Through conceptual research, the authors build on Molm’s (2010) work on reciprocity to explore how journalists can develop more mutually beneficial relationships with their audience through reciprocity. Lewis and colleagues (2014) conceptualizes reciprocal journalism by adding a third category of reciprocity to Molm’s categories of direct reciprocity and indirect reciprocity, namely sustained reciprocity. Sustained reciprocity was developed when examining the reciprocity between journalists and their audiences and refers to a repeated form of reciprocity that is argued to create trust, connectiveness and social capital. The concept was introduced in the context of community journalism, mainly in online settings, but is also discussed for journalism broadly. Despite the self-proclaimed idealistic approach of the framework, the authors argue reciprocal journalism to be able to give useful insights to larger social dynamics such as power dynamics or different motivations for media use (ibid.).

In 2018 the reciprocal journalism framework was tested (Coddington, Lewis & Holton 2018) in a study of American journalists’ interaction with their audiences online. The study developed measures based on reciprocal journalism that were tested through surveying US journalists to measure their reciprocal attitudes and behaviors in journalistic practices. The measures consisted by scales for personal reciprocity and reciprocal journalism, as well as scales for direct, indirect and sustained reciprocity. The latter three scales proved to be difficult to measure, as the underlying factors of the study did not seem to fully correspond to these concepts. However, the measures of personal reciprocity and reciprocal journalism proved to be reliable and helpful in predicting forms of audience interaction. When examined through the survey, the results showed that journalists’ reciprocal beliefs and behavior play a significant role in engaging with audiences online. Positive reciprocity showed to be meaningful when translated into a journalistic setting as it has the potential to help predict audience interaction.

To summarize, the previous studies applying SET show how SET provides a fruitful framework to explore individual driving factors for participating in reciprocal interactions. Further, these studies argue that interpersonal reciprocity often lead to mutual benefit and, hence, a perception of greater achievements in general.
6. Methodology

Given the research purpose of examining interpretations and personal experiences of the journalist and NGO representatives, this study is conducted qualitatively through an interpretivist epistemology and a constructivist ontology (Bryman 2016, p. 32). By applying a cross-sectional research design, a sample of cases are explored at a single point in time, using qualitative data to establish variation between cases by finding patterns of association, which provides a snapshot of the current situation (ibid. pp. 52–3). To collect empirical evidence, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a sample of professionals from both NGOs and the Swedish media, partially using the reconstruction method (Brüggermann 2012; Reich & Barnoy 2020). In this chapter, the method and criteria for sampling the interviewees and the articles for reconstruction will be explained. Further, the methodological procedure and the basis of methodological choices will be presented. Lastly, the analytical framework of thematic analysis used to process the empirical evidence will be explained, followed by a methodological reflection of ethical and quality considerations.

6.1. Sampling

*Purposive sampling* was applied to select the journalists and NGO representatives that were to be interviewed. Not only is purposive sampling recommended by most authors of qualitative literature, but it is also based on the principle of finding interviewees that are the most relevant and has good correspondence to the research question (Bryman 2016, p. 410). This is suitable for this study’s narrow aim of examining a specific feature of the media sphere, namely the journalist-NGO relationship in Sweden. As the research questions were based on exploring the journalist-NGO relationship through the social exchange theory, which involves the perceptions of both parties of the interaction, the sample had to involve interviewees from both the journalistic side and the NGO side.

As the name of purposive sampling reveals, it is crucial for this method to clarify what the purpose of the sample is by determining clear criteria for choosing the sample interviewees (ibid.). The criteria for the NGO representatives was that they had to be employed in Sweden for an NGO focusing on human rights or humanitarian issues. The limitation to NGOs with a human rights and humanitarian focus was based on the research gap found in a Swedish context, where previous studies primarily had been focused on environmental NGOs. The criteria for the sample of journalists were that they had to have published a news item in
Swedish media within recent time, specifically within the last five months, citing a representative of an NGO in line with the criteria of this study.

The first step of limiting the sample was to find relevant NGOs and then search for quotes from their representatives in news publications within the given timeframe. The platform CONCORD, which is a nonprofit organization made up of 81 Swedish NGOs working for a just and sustainable world through impacting development issues and international affairs within the Swedish and EU political system (CONCORD 2021), was used as a register. From this register ten NGOs were selected based on their human rights or humanitarian focus. The names of these ten organizations were searched for in the media archive Retriever (Retriever 2021), within the time span of 2020-11-15 to 2021-04-15. The timeframe was based on Reich and Barnoy’s (2020, p. 972) guidelines for conducting reconstruction interviews. The guidelines point to selecting articles that are as recently published as possible to make it easier for the interviewee to remember, and that are in accordance to items available in relation to the research purpose.

From the search result, articles by 19 different journalists were drafted. As purposive sampling also involves the opportunity to establish variety among the sample members by consciously choosing interviewees with varying key characteristics (Bryman 2016, p. 408), only 12 journalists were inquired to participate in the study. The 12 inquired journalists were chosen with an intention of achieving diversity of new outlets and NGOs written about.

Seven journalists offered to participate. In favor of diversity, five journalists were selected to be interviewed based on their employment with either branch specific outlets focused on development issues or daily news providers. Two journalists published for the specialized media outlets Global Bar Magazine and OmVärlden. The remaining three journalists wrote articles for the daily news providers TT, a Swedish news agency with articles featured in many national and local news outlets, or Ystad Allehanda which is a local daily newspaper.

To sample the NGO interviewees, representatives from the press and media departments of the ten selected organizations from the CONCORD register were contacted through e-mail. Three NGOs responded and were able to partake in a zoom-interview. However, due to scares replies from the remaining NGOs, an additional e-mail was sent with an offer to answer the interview questions in writing instead, through what Alan Bryman calls an online personal interview (ibid. p. 490). This option was decided on as other inquired NGO representatives had declined participation due to scheduling difficulties. Since online personal interviews in an asynchronous mode allows the interviewee to fit their participation into their own schedule (ibid. pp. 490; 515–6), it was a suitable option instead of having to modify the criterions of
the sampling to include NGOs outside the human rights or humanitarian field. As a result, the final two NGO representatives participated through written responses by e-mail. The online personal interviews were conducted by sending out a shortened version of the interview guide, to further accommodate the NGOs’ tight schedule (see appendix I). Follow up questions through e-mail were welcomed by the participants but turned out not to be needed. From this sampling procedure, the NGOs which the communications professionals represent the Swedish branches of are Amnesty International, Civil Rights Defenders, IM (Individuell Människohjälp), Oxfam, and Plan International.

In regard to the scope of this paper, as well as the time limit within which it should be conducted, elements of theoretical sampling was included to determine the number of sampling members. In practice, this means that sampling of interviewees will be done continuously, without a pre-determined number in mind, up until the sample provides enough information to support a convincing conclusion in the analysis (ibid. pp. 410–11). In other words, the sampling is done until theoretical saturation is achieved (ibid. p. 412). In the case of this study, interviews with five journalists and five NGO representatives were done for starters. After reviewing the material against the theoretical framework, those ten interviewees were concluded to make up enough empirical evidence to reach theoretical saturation.

6.2. Semi-Structured Interviews
As the aim of this study is to examine the relationship between journalists and NGOs representatives based on their personal perceptions and interpretations, the interview method was applied as it is suitable when exploring people’s opinions, ideas and attitudes (Stokes 2003, p. 114). The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner, meaning the interviews were based on a pre-decided set of themes and questions but allowed for elaboration and reasoning through follow up questions about certain topics that may surface during the interview (Bryman 2016, p. 468). Given the social psychological theoretical framework of this paper, this form of qualitative interviewing is argued to be a feasible way to study the meanings attached to specific experiences and encompass the richness and complexity of the human psychology (Myers, Abell & Sani 2014, p. 27). Further, this is in line with the aim of exploring the different contextual factors affecting the choices and evaluations of the journalists and NGO professionals.

The interview guide, meaning the set of questions and themes of the semi-structured interview, is crucial to provide the direction for the interview. However, it must allow flexibility and not include too many preconceptions of the matter that is being examined
In accordance to what Bryman (ibid. pp. 470–2) suggests, the interview guide for this study was derived from the research questions which, in turn, were derived from themes of the theoretical framework. Bryman (ibid.) also emphasize to make the interview guide comprehensible and easy to understand. This was done by formulating the questions based on a familiarity of the settings in which the interviewees operate which was gained from the literature review. Additionally, the questions were formulated in a simple language that translated the academic issues and theoretical concepts to colloquial terms.

Since the objects of this study were both journalists and NGO representatives, the interview guide was slightly adjusted in order to target the questions to the specific groups, yet still based on the same structure and overall themes (see appendix II and III).

The interviews were conducted in three parts. The first part recording so called “facesheet” information, such as how long the journalist had been working as a journalist, for the purpose of enabling contextualization of the answers when analyzing them (ibid. p. 471). The second part focused on a specific article, using reconstruction method which will be presented further in the next section, to initiate a deeper discussion and get a glimpse of the interviewees’ thoughts in relation to a specific context. Lastly, the third part entailed questions about the interviewees’ experiences of the journalist-NGO relationship on a general level. All participants had a chance to look at the interview guide before the interview took place.

The questions were asked in an open-ended manner, meaning the respondent could answer in any way they wished without having to conform to a specific set of alternatives (Stokes 2003, p. 143). In order to collect answers that helped answering the research questions, some of the interviewees answers were followed by follow-up questions to make the respondent elaborate the answer (Bryman 2016, p. 473), specifying questions to acquire more detailed information (ibid.), and interpretation questions to clarify the understanding of the respondents reasoning (ibid. p. 475). After the interviews were done and quotes were extracted to be included in the analysis, the journalists were offered a chance to review their quotes to ensure accuracy.

At the time of the interviews in April and May of 2021, Swedish COVID-19 guidelines of restrictions were in place. The guidelines included restricting physical interactions with new contacts, working and studying from home to the extent possible, and limiting traveling to the bare minimum (Folkhälsomyndigheten 2021). According to Stokes (2003, p. 118) one should try to match the interview means with what the interview subjects are most comfortable with. Hence, the interviews were conducted in a remote setting through video-call using the communication service Zoom (Zoom 2021). The video-call allowed features of the face-to-
face interaction such as body language, that can have a significance in interpreting the way respondents answer the questions (Bryman 2016, p. 485).

As qualitative interviews entail detailed attention to how the respondents are answering, not only what they are answering, recording and transcribing the interviews are recommended to ease the analysis of the empirical collection (ibid. p. 479). The interviewees were asked for consent of the recording at the occasion of the interview, but also beforehand by receiving and agreeing to the terms and conditions of the study and the collection of personal data (see appendix IV).

6.3. Reconstruction Method

Reconstruction method is an interview method where journalists are asked to recreate the process of a particular news item in a systematic manner, to give a detailed mapping of how the news article came to be (Reich & Barnoy 2020, pp. 966–7). This method subscribes to the idea of news making being socially constructed through the practice of journalists (Brüggermann 2012, p. 401). It also recognizes that there is a wide range of factors influencing the strategies and priorities of the journalist which are to be uncovered through the in-depth reconstruction interviews with an ambition to avoid prior definitions of practice theory (Reich & Barnoy 2020, p. 966). Through this in-depth approach, reconstruction has the potential to uncover unexpected connections between different factors in the news production process (ibid. p. 974) and reveal personal considerations and influences of journalists and NGOs that may go unnoticed in a more generally approached interview.

The methodology of reconstruction has become a frequently applied method within the field of journalism studies following the increased complexity and transformation of the news environment (ibid. p. 966). One of the underlying premises that make up the basis for reconstruction theory is that journalists and reporters are the only actors with an overview of the full news process, unlike sources, editors and other involved actors (ibid. pp. 969–970). Nonetheless, there is still potential for blind spots in their view of the process. Further, reconstruction recognizes that news processes are both simple and complex. There is a simplicity in the journalist being involved from start to finish, translating an event into a news story. However, the reality is much more complex with parameters like technology, time, credibility, access and social environment that can have an impact on the final story (ibid.). By applying the reconstruction method, the complexity of the news process surrounding the journalist-NGO relationship can be dissected and explored in detail.
Since the aim of this study is to explore personal interpretations and perceptions of journalists and NGO representatives, the reconstruction method is suitable as it enables examination of aspects such as personal judgements and evaluations that are hard to detect by examining their output or observing them (ibid. p. 967). Further, reconstruction has the ability to uncover (ibid. p. 968) “meta-data”, which is the disguised – but important – data in news production such as anonymous sources, interplay with PR, and plagiarism. By accessing the meta-data, qualitative reconstruction has the potential to adequately evaluate the authority of news and the agents behind them (ibid.) as well as reveal unforeseen connections between different factors and the journalistic process (ibid. p. 974). Thereof, this method helps shedding light on implicit matters in relation to the particular article that is being reconstructed; matters that may not have come forth in a more general discussion such as potential ethical dilemmas of the journalist-NGO relationship.

Reconstruction studies can be divided into five strands, signified by the area of interest for the study. In this study, the sourcing strand will be applied as it includes examination of reliance on experts, source strategies, trust in sources and the logic of source selection. It is therefore a suitable method to look at the interplay between journalism and PR in the news making (ibid. p. 917) and henceforth, the interplay between journalists and the communication efforts of NGOs.

For the reconstruction part of the interviews conducted with journalists and NGO representatives, the questions were based on a model presented by communications scholar Brüggermann (2012, p. 404), consisting of the four stages of generating the idea for a news article. The first stage, the occurrence, refers to the event that sparks the idea of carrying out a news article. The second stage, the trigger source, encompasses the interaction with a source of information about the event. The third stage, the evaluation, touches upon the evaluations and decision-making in the newsroom regarding the newsworthiness of the happening. The fourth and final stage, the editorial context, accounts for practicalities and circumstantial factors that plays a role in whether or not to proceed in turning the occurrence in to an article, such as availability of resources (ibid.). The questions for the journalists were constructed in a manner that captured the process and evaluations of journalists when writing their particular item. As for the reconstruction questions to the NGOs, the same questions were flipped and adjusted to NGOs, and the news item was used as a starting point to discuss their involvement in the process and perceived influence in the making of the article.
6.4. Thematic Analysis of the Interviews

To analyze the interviews the analytical method of thematic analysis was carried out through the framework approach. Bryman (2016, p. 584) concluded that this approach aims at identifying themes in the empirical evidence by defining themes as:

- A category identified by the analyst through his/her data;
- that relates to his/her research focus (and quite possibly the research questions);
- that builds on codes identified in transcripts and/or field notes;
- and that provides the researcher with the basis for a theoretical understanding of his or her data that can make a theoretical contribution to the literature relating to the research focus.

The process for the thematic analysis of the interviews with journalists and NGOs followed the generic qualitative data analysis process proposed by Bryman (ibid. pp. 587–8), which is based on guiding principles of thematic analysis. In addition, it was combined with elements of the theory-driven approach to thematizing (Boyatzis 1998, p. 33) since the research questions guiding the analysis was formulated based on the theoretical framework of SET.

Through the analysis, the themes were identified from the transcripts of the interviews with journalists and NGOs by applying the framework approach (Bryman 2016, p. 586).

At the initial stage of the analysis, a matrix was constructed in accordance to the framework approach (ibid. p. 585) to provide an efficient way to order and synthesize the data (see table 1). Initially, the matrix displayed cases and variables, but as themes and codes were found by thorough reading of the interview transcripts, the matrix were filled out to organizing the data in to core themes and subthemes (ibid.).

| Interviewee 1 | “Quote, quote.” |  |  |
| Interviewee 2 |  | “Quote, quote.” | “Quote, quote.” |
| Interviewee 3 |  | “Quote, quote.” |  |

Table 1. Matrix format used to code and thematize the interview transcripts. Based on the framework approach to thematic analysis (Bryman 2016, pp. 585–7).
The analysis process started by briefly reading through the transcriptions to get an overview of the content, followed by a thorough read from which the material was coded through open coding (ibid. pp. 588; 574). The open coding broke down, examined and conceptualized the data from the transcripts based on as few preconceptions as possible coding, and yielded a large number of codes.

The thematic analysis approach can be divided into *inductive thematic analysis*, which refers to themes emerging from the data itself, or *theoretical thematic analysis*, which is applied in this study and refers to themes emerging from the theoretical stance (Gray 2014, p. 609). As the coding had been done, the codes were elaborated into themes in a theory driven manner. According to Boyatzis (1998, p. 33) theory driven coding means the researcher formulates indicators and signals of evidence that support the theory which are the basis of the coding of the material. While the research questions guiding the analysis were directly derived from the theoretical framework of SET, the initial coding was not in direct relation to the theories. The reason being an attempt to not inhibit the initial interpretation process and avoid potential blind spots that may be the result of developing codes before familiarizing with the material. That would entail a risk of developing codes that are unproportionate or untargeted to the specific empirical item. Instead, Boyatzis’ principles for theory driven coding was applied after the initial coding of the material to elaborate the codes into themes.

To identify the themes, Boyatzis’ principles of a thematic coding (ibid.) and Ryan and Bernard’s (2003) recommendations of factors to look for in the identifying process guided the identification process. The elements that were looked for was: *theory-related material* in terms of codes that captures elements of conceptualizations derived from social exchange theory, *repetition* of certain topics, and *similarities and differences* of how interviewees discuss certain topics (Boyatzis 1998, p. 33; Ryan & Bernard 2003).

Up until this point of the coding and thematizing, the analysis could be conducted parallel to the empirical collection by transcribing the interviews as soon as they were done and starting the coding there after. However, for the last stage of thematizing higher order themes (Bryman 2016, p. 588), all the themes from the complete collection of material was revised to seek out connections and links between them. This final thematization was primarily based on the theory driven strategy of finding theory-related indicators that either confirm or refute social exchange theory (Boyatzis 1998, p. 36), which resulted in three main themes that are presented in the analysis (chapter 7).
6.5. Methodological Discussion and Reflection

6.5.1. Limitations of the study

An important issue to account for when conducting interviews is that the interviewee may give answers that are in line with what is expected of them, rather than reflective of their actual practice or true interpretations of the matter (Stokes 2003, p. 120). Such answers may include potential biases or upholding of certain professional expectations (Reich & Barnoy 2020, p. 978). For this reason, the reconstruction method was applied due to its potential to grasp both explicit and implicit factors impacting news making on a micro level. But it also has limitations of missing out on routines and reasons that are not item specific through the in-depth interview style about one particular article that has been published (Reich & Barnoy 2020, p. 978). However, the semi-structured interview design allows for follow-up questions and reasoning that can circumvent these tendencies. Additionally, the second part of the interviews had a more general focus in order to broaden the perspective and invite reflections beyond the set context of the particular article which promotes the purpose of this thesis.

Another element of uncertainty relates to holding the interviews via video-call as the dependency on technology also means a risk of it malfunctioning (Bryman 2016, p. 481). Technical difficulty was experienced at two times due to camera malfunction. One of the times the interviewee was not able to see me (the interviewer) and the other time nor the interviewee or I could see each other. This entailed a risk of losing elements of body language which holds certain importance of interpreting the way a respondent is expressing themselves (ibid. p. 479). Since the audio was intact, as well as the audio recording, I evaluated the harm of these malfunction to be tolerable without any significant negative impact on the study.

Because two of the NGO interviews were conducted through online personal interviews with written answers and no face-to-face interaction, the interpersonal element was lost. This poses an issue for the quality of the qualitative interview as it undermines the purpose of not only regarding the content of the answers, but also how the answers are being delivered since body language or certain intonation can reveal indications about the interviewees feelings of the matter (ibid. pp. 479; 485). These shortcomings were considered in the evaluations of the answers. The written responses supported much of the themes that were identified in the interactive interviews with the other three NGO representatives. Therefore, the written responses were evaluated to provide enough information to support a convincing conclusion in the analysis and achieve theoretical saturation (ibid. p. 412).
6.5.2. **Validity and reliability**

When discussing validity and reliability, it is important to keep in mind that these are concepts primarily developed for quantitative research (ibid. p. 376). Therefore, this section will involve reflection of the quality of this paper partially based on the concepts of validity and reliability, but also based on alternative criteria for evaluating qualitative research.

To provide valid results the researcher need to make sure to measure what was intended to be measured (Gray 2014, p. 388). One way of securing this is by providing generalizable findings through *external validity* (Bryman 2016, p. 383). To get a result that can be generalized, the sample of the study must entail similar or identical traits as the population it represents (Gray 2014, p. 146). However, because this study is based on a purposive sample the results may not be generalized to a population (Bryman 2016, p. 408). The selection of journalists from different types of news outlets provide a degree of nuance to the sample, yet the sample only include journalists who *have* interacted with NGOs which excludes the viewpoints from journalists who have not. Further, the sample of NGO representatives is rather homogenous as they all represent some of the largest human rights and humanitarian NGOs in Sweden. This empathizes the non-generalizability of the results since it does not include smaller or local NGOs among others. Nonetheless, providing generalizable results is not a main concern nor the purpose of qualitative studies with a focus on the interviewees’ experiences (Myers, Abell & Sani 2014, p. 40). A feasible way to instead estimate the quality of purposive sampling is through its *transferability*. Ensuring transferability means giving a rich description of the contextual uniqueness from which the sample has been derived. By doing so, the reader themselves can determine if the study’s results can be transferred to other contexts (Guba 1985; Guba & Lincoln 1994). This has been accounted for throughout the entire thesis.

The quality indicator of reliability refers to the stability of the findings (Gray 2014, p. 184). A way to measure this is through *external reliability* which refers to the degree of which the study can be replicated (Bryman 2016, p. 383). Given the cross-sectional design applied in this study, the primary aim is not to provide replicable results but to show an in-depth snapshot of the specific circumstance of the journalist-NGO relations in Sweden. Using the method of qualitative interviewing through semi-structured interviews entails a contextual and circumstantial focus on the individual viewpoints. Thereby, the method naturally lack reliability as it is hard to replicate (Myers, Abell & Sani 2014, p. 41; Bryman 2016, pp. 466–7). Guba and Lincoln (1985; 1994) presents the criteria of *dependability* to parallel replicability in qualitative research. This criteria was applied in this thesis by ensuring
thorough description of how the study was carried out though detailed information about the procedures and the conditions of the study (Bryman 2016, pp. 384–6). Conditions of the study such as timing and sampling criteria are mainly described in the previous sections of the methodological chapter (see chapter 6.1).

It was also crucial to provide a detailed description of the thematic analysis as it lacks a distinct definition and therefore can be a challenge to apply (ibid. p. 584). For instance, the thematic analysis is not defined enough to withhold a determined set of rules on how to identify themes which often leads to unclarity of how the themes have emerged in research using thematic analysis (ibid. p. 587). In turn, this can affect the reliability of the study if there are no consequent measures applied. To prevent lacking reliability, the section about the application of thematic analysis provides a clear definition of the criteria of which the thematizing was based on to enhance this thesis’ dependability (see chapter 6.4).

It is important to note that a requisite to present stability of the findings as reliability demands a mutual understanding of the concepts discussed (Gray 2014, p. 184). On two occasions during the interviews, the question of what this study considers the definition of an NGO to be was raised by the interviewees. The interviewees were given the definition as described in section 3.2. However, this raises a question of mutual understanding in the remaining interviews where the definition of NGOs was never explicitly discussed. However, based on the reasoning of the interviewees, and the fact that all interviews included reconstruction of an article citing an NGO in line with the definition of this thesis, it is fair to assume that a mutual understanding of the NGO concept was in place.

Lastly, a remark should be made about the fact that the interviews were conducted in Swedish and translated to English when presented in the analysis. To ensure accuracy the translation was carried out with assistance of the online Swedish-English dictionary tyda.se (Tyda.se 2021). Nonetheless, translation processes entail a risk of altering the meaning of certain words or formulations.

6.5.3. Ethical considerations
The ethical considerations for this study primarily regarded complying to the GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) requirements. Much consideration also regarded not causing disturbance to the individual participants or their relation to the environment they operate in, as carelessness of these aspects an cause harm to the subjects of the study (Bryman 2016, pp. 125–6). Together with my supervisor I concluded that personal data was necessary to process for the arrangement of interviews. However, no sensitive data was needed to fulfill the
purpose of this study. Nonetheless, the interviewees identities were kept anonymous by using pseudonyms when quoting them in the analysis and through the collection of empirical material. This was done as a precautionary measure to account for the possibility of sensitive data being exposed by the interviewees through the flexible semi-structured interview format. Another reason, was to avoid the potential harm of their professional relationships if their testimonies were disapproved by significant actors in their environment (ibid. p. 127). Despite disclosing the organizations that the interviewees work for, their professional titles and other significant details about their professional lives were not disclosed to further ensure their privacy. Records of contact information, correspondence, interview recordings and transcripts can reveal the identities of the participants (ibid.). Therefore, the interviews were conducted through a computer-based platform, Zoom (2021), belonging to Södertörn university who is responsible for the processing of personal data of this thesis. Further, these records were stored locally during the writing process, kept confidential and only available to my supervisor and I during the writing process, and ultimately destroyed after the completion of the thesis to account for the participants’ unidentifiability and eliminate external parties’ possibility to access the information.

One of the main principles of ethics in social research and the GDPR guidelines is to provide the participants with as much information as possible about the study to enable them to make an informed decision of whether they want to participate or not. This installs informed consent (Bryman 2016, pp. 129–130). In the initial e-mail asking potential interviewees if they wanted to participate in the study, the aim to examine the relationship between journalists and NGOs was declared. The journalists and NGO representatives who showed interest were then sent the interview guide and a document with detailed information about the study and processing of their personal data (see appendix IV). Noteworthily, this study did not include processing of any sensitive personal data.

The document clearly stated that participation was voluntary and that the participant could withdraw from the study at any point without needing to specify the reason. The information also stated that the participant would be pseudonymized, but their employing organization would be named, to emphasize the degree of anonymity that would be provided. The process of storying (and later destroying) all records of personal data in accordance to the GDPR guidelines was declared along with contact information to Södertörns university as liable for the personal data protection. The information document also stated that the participants consent to the terms stated would be given by responding to the e-mail. By providing written information the participants had a substantial ground to base their decision
of participation on. Further, the written consent is advantageous if any concern is raised later on (ibid. p. 131).

An ethical issue of deception can arise if the researcher present the purpose of the study to the participants as something other than it actually is (ibid. p. 133). To prevent this, the information document included the study’s aim to explore the relationship between journalists and NGOs. It was also explained that interviewees from both groups would be interviewed. It is seldom feasible to give a complete account of what the research encompasses (ibid. p. 134). Therefore, no account for the theoretical framework or underlying issues guiding the thesis was declared. Mainly to avoid too much theoretical knowledge from influencing the interviewees’ answers.
7. Analysis and Results

This chapter presents the result of three general themes that were identified from the thematic analysis of the interviews with journalists and NGO representatives through the perspective of social exchange theory. The general themes represent the main characteristics of the Swedish journalist-NGO relationship and the main influences shaping their interaction. The characteristic of a mutual dependency despite having separate goals explain each party’s motivation to interact. The characteristic of the initiative imbalance explains the contextual influences of the relationship. Lastly, the characteristic of long-term relations leading to trust and efficiency uncovers how trust emerge among the involved actors.

7.1. Mutual Dependency Despite Having Separate Goals

This study finds that the journalists and NGOs have different motivations for interacting. Journalists see benefits of NGOs substituting the journalistic resources which they themselves lack, and NGOs find interactions with journalists beneficial as media inclusion lead to authorization to impact. Since both parties desire the benefits that the other is control of, the analysis show a mutual dependency between journalists and NGOs. Further, the dependency is acted upon through actions of reciprocity. According to SET, benefits are exchanged through costs (Homans 1958, p. 597). From this perspective, the findings suggest that the costs in the journalist-NGO relationship is represented by loss of control.

7.1.1. NGOs substituting the journalistic resource shortage

From the interviews with the journalists, three main benefits of interacting with NGOs emerged. Firstly, they mention the benefit of adding expertise to the news story through the NGOs’ deep knowledge of their field such as juridical commentary on a current event within human rights or humanitarian issues. NGOs can also provide updates on a current event even of which the NGO is specialized in and follows carefully. Secondly, the capacity of independence from state and value driven purpose was described as a benefit for nuancing reporting, primarily in relation to actions and statements from state actors. Thirdly, the NGOs’ international network of local affiliations provide the journalistic benefit of gaining access to international sources in crisis or conflict zones.

Whereas the two first points are in line with the nature of news sourcing in terms of informing and contextualizing news in their organizational capacity (Carlson, Matt 2009, pp. 530–2), the third point present a role of NGOs as facilitators of resources that enable
journalistic delivery. This is further pointed out by emphasizing that the decision of which NGO to include is primarily based on the journalistic value they can add rather than which organization it is. This was for instance talked of by one respondent who pointed out how NGOs help journalists reaching an inside perspective that the journalists lack due to having no local correspondents on sight:

We always want to report an inside perspective and find voices that can tell us about specific questions from within. That often leads to a situation where turning to NGOs is the easiest option. They become a kind of accommodator and give us the possibility to get in touch with people who are affected on site. (…) Obviously we could have dispatched correspondents in different parts of the world. But since we don’t have that, NGOs are a very good way to reach people who are situated in very specific places. (Journalist 5)

The theme of NGOs substituting some of the journalistic shortcomings is recognized by both journalists and NGOs. Journalists mention being able to “order” interviewees based on the news angle they are applying or by getting physical access to crisis or conflict zones through the NGO operations on location. The NGOs are accustomed to these journalistic needs and have developed rigid systems to cater to the journalistic wishes. NGOs mention activities such as facilitating interviews, providing communications and media coaching to the experts within the organization to prepare for media interaction, and formatting their communication to be easily understood and picked up by journalists as a part of their operations. One NGO representative specifically noted how the journalistic appreciation for material provided by NGOs correlated to the inability for journalists to be present at a location:

Journalists often want a case that they can interview. It is pretty interesting and has been especially significant during the pandemic when many reporters haven’t been able to travel. It has been valuable when we can provide images, videos and quotes from people or staff within our programs who can give insights about the issue the journalist is reporting about. Fairly often the journalists include the material directly in their news pieces to complement their story. Or they interview our spokesperson and use the images we have sent them. It usually works pretty well. (NGO 4)

The SET framework claim the motivation of interacting to be based on one part’s desire for benefits provided by the other part (Homans 1958; Blau 1986). From this perspective, the testimonies from journalists and NGO representatives highlights that journalists’ motivation to interact is to gain the benefits of expertise and access to international affiliation held by the NGOs. Whereas expertise is a resource which journalists by professional nature lack and use sourcing to provide commentary and nuance to their reporting (Carlson, Matt 2009, pp. 530–
2), interacting with NGOs due to the lack of access is in line with previous research’s noting of decreased resources in journalism (Blumler 2010, p. 243). The NGOs recognizes the journalistic needs and work to provide the benefits through different operational activities, which benefits the interests of the journalists. The following section will further explain the motivations for their reciprocal actions.

7.1.2. Journalistic recognition endorses organizational authority to impact

The NGO representatives are united in pointing to media’s important role in the NGOs’ purpose of creating political and social impact. The benefits that NGOs get from journalists are authorization as a legitimate actor for their cause. The benefits of interacting with journalists are dual. Firstly, since all the participating NGOs fully, or to a great extent, rely on private funding, the increased notion of their activities through media coverage ultimately benefit their funding operations, as described by one NGO representative:

We are an organization who is dependent on private funding. Therefore, it is important for us to be visible to the general public and a voice in humanitarian crises to establish how our work is helping people, what we do, why we do it and give insight to what is going on. Thereby, we show that we are active in the worst of crises and that the money of our funders actually makes a difference. It is a very important part of our press and media work. (NGO 2)

Secondly, the advocacy of the NGOs is greatly amplified by journalists writing about their cause as it increases the possibility of impacting crucial decisionmakers. Another NGO representative emphasized how media enables impact on significant decision-makers:

The reason for our existence is the will to make a change and to ensure human rights apply to all, always and everywhere. (…) In this, media plays a very big role in giving attention to these matters to make politicians aware – nationally, locally and globally. Not only politicians, but also other organizations and companies so that they can base their decisions on it and be responsible for their production and their choices. Ergo, media is very, very important. (NGO 1)

The benefits of interacting with journalists are perceived by the NGO representatives to be the vast outreach which installs authorization of the organization in the public eye. Consequently, the NGOs gain credibility to be trusted with private donations and gain mandate to be a substantial voice in the advocacy they carry out. Moreover, this reasoning indicates the NGOs’ prescription to the agenda setting theory. This theory argues for mass media’s function of shaping the political reality through their choice of which news to display, namely through inclusion in the agenda they are setting (McCombs & Shaw 1972).
The journalistic interviewees show awareness and consideration of the motives driving NGOs to interact with them by addressing the need to always keep their private interests in mind during the exchange. This leads to an evaluation of trust, which will be further developed in section 7.3. Much attention is brought on ensuring factual accuracy. NGOs are welcome to check their quotes, as they often request, with allowance to correct factual defects but not formulation. Further, routines like fact checking the information through a third party or reviewing other media publications of the matter is mentioned. Another way of ensuring journalistic integrity is to clearly state the NGO as the source of the facts presented to direct accountability to them. As one journalist mentioned, it is especially important when not the NGO information is not verifiable:

When I couldn’t verify [the fact presented by an NGO not willing to name their source] through other parties I talked to the editor. They work with foreign affairs all the time, as opposed to me, and made the evaluation of counting this NGO as a sufficiently credible source on the condition of clearly stating that the NGO is the one claiming it. (Journalist 4)

The benefits of gaining authority for societal impact through journalistic recognition constitute the motivation for NGOs to interact with journalists. The journalistic testimonies of their reciprocal actions towards NGOs shows a more conditional approach, that accounts for journalistic integrity, compared to the reciprocal actions from the NGOs. This points to journalists evaluating the reciprocity through the so called comparison level, meaning the level of what they believe themselves to deserve out of the relationship (Gilovich et al. 2016, p. 353). This can be claimed since journalists are cautious of the NGOs’ private interests that motivate their interaction. Consequently, the journalists consider it to be fair to expect their journalistic integrity to be accounted for in the social exchange through actions of trust evaluation and fact checking. Hence, the journalists’ high demands indicate that the journalists have a high comparison level.

7.1.3. Control as a currency
The previous two sections have outlined a give-and-take-pattern of benefits by the journalists and NGOs. In accordance to Blau (1986, pp. 92–7), this pattern indicates reciprocity. Importantly, reciprocity is established by both parties perceiving that they receive an equal amount of values, or benefits, as they are giving away (ibid.). This means that there is an underlying process of investment of costs that each party base their expectations of dividends on (Myers, Abell & Sani 2014, p. 404). This section will present the idea of control being the
common denominator of the perceived costs in the journalist-NGO relationship. However, the type of control that is lost in the interaction differ between journalists and NGOs.

As previously mentioned, the loss of journalistic integrity is a potential cost which according to the journalists is accounted for through ensuring routines. However, one inevitable cost, that was specifically significant among the journalists who specialize in foreign reporting, is the loss of control of a free choice in parts of the news making process. As one of the journalists states about an interview they wrote citing a foreign NGO representative, the lack of possibility to freely choose interviewee resulted in a format of the news piece that would have been different if the journalist did not have to rely on the NGO:

“There are no children or parents quoted because that is difficult to achieve in a remote setting. I would have had to ask the organization representative from the head quarter to ask some of their field workers to be on site to interview and translate. That is a possibility, but it would be very time consuming for all involved parties and it is difficult to organize. But, if I would have been there myself, the article would have looked different. (Journalist 1)

The quote show evaluations based on comparison level for alternatives. This means that the journalist accepts the costs of losing control over the journalistic process on the basis of lack of other feasible alternatives (Gilovich et al. 2016, p. 354). As the quote show, receiving quotes from the preferred choice of interviewees (children and parents) was perceived as a worse alternative than quoting the NGO representative due to the efficiency aspect which evidently was primary for the journalist. Similar ways to reason was brought up by other journalists. For instance, referring to a situation where the only way to get information about a conflict was through the only NGO who had access to the conflict zone. Despite the journalist being critical of using the source, it was done anyway due to the lack of other alternatives.

Another pattern that emerged from the journalists’ responses were the use of NGOs to access a human perspective beyond the NGO expertise. The idea of NGOs preferably wanting to highlight information and statistics, while journalists mainly are interested in the human perspective, was especially noted among the journalists specializing in humanitarian reporting. Theoretically, this means using an official source with private interests to access a civil source speaking on the behalf of themselves (McManus 1994, p. 73), or at least a combination of the two. When looking for a civil perspective through facilitation of NGOs, an issue of determining to what degree interviewees represent themselves versus the organization arises. This matter was not discussed in detail, but it can be assumed that it is a concern of the journalists based on their united emphasizing of having no obligation to cite the NGOs even
when receiving benefits from them. Once again, this shows regards to the journalistic integrity. One journalist further mentioned the possibility to circumvent the NGO entirely:

> Usually the NGOs provide inspiration which makes you think in a certain way. There after you may call the affected person directly and ignore the involvement of the NGO. It is not the NGO that you talk to primarily, it is the ones they tip about. (Journalist 3)

Yet again, the affiliation between the NGO and the “affected person” can be questioned. Noteworthily, none of the NGOs mentioned nor showed discontent of journalists using their resources without giving credit. Instead, they showed general contentment with their interactions with journalists.

The answers form the journalists indicate a cost of losing control over the journalistic process when enjoying the benefit of NGOs. It is especially significant when NGOs facilitate interviews, as the free choice of choosing the interviewee is lost, and further, the differentiation of whether the interviewee speaks in the capacity of the organization or their civil self may be hard to determine.

Even though, all the NGO representatives display a general contentment with their interaction with journalists, a collective expression of occasionally wishing for another news angle or hoping for the issue to be written about in another manner was detected. This indicates the cost of lost control over the framing of their information. Together with the statements of this puzzling opinion, the NGOs made sure to additionally remark that trying to change a journalist’s framing is out of their interest due to their understanding and respect of the journalistic integrity, as mentioned by one NGO representative:

> Strategically speaking, I can think that another angle of a certain news story would have been more beneficial for us. (…) But that is nothing I blame the journalists for, more so ourselves and our evaluation process of which news are worth sending out – because we cannot choose news angles when sending out our information. In general, I’m very impressed by how quickly journalists manage to create interesting texts from our information despite the rather technical and factual level of our texts. (NGO 2)

The lost control over how the NGOs’ information is being used and portrayed when picked up by media seem to be accepted by the NGOs due evaluations of their expectations through a low comparison level (Gilovich et al. 2016, p. 353). As seen in the NGOs’ answers, their expectations of the reciprocal exchange are based on acceptance of the journalists’ condition of sustained journalistic autonomy, which in turn sets a high comparison level of the journalists. The costs of not controlling the news frames regarding the NGO information can
be related to previous research showing that conforming to the media format involves a risk of struggling to achieve organizational goals (Cottle & Nolan 2007; Kwenda 2013). This was not explicitly discussed by the NGO representatives. However, indications of this was briefly mentioned while discussing efforts of media training of juridical experts that are assigned the duty of being spokes persons of certain matters:

We talk about the importance of speaking in simple terms and keep in mind that they are talking to a person with no prior knowledge of the issue to make sure everyone understands. That is a hard task when discussing complicated issues. Many of the experts enjoy talking about their subjects to the media. But the time limit provides a bit of a difficulty and it is easy to feel like you never get the opportunity to talk as much as you would have liked to about the subject matter. (NGO 1)

The issue of not getting the chance to fulfill organizational goals due to the media frames, yet accepting these conditions, indicate an evaluation of reciprocity based on comparison level of alternatives (Gilovich et al. 2016, p. 354). Simply put, there are no alternatives to letting the media frames impact the way NGO information is disseminated except not participating in media at all.

7.1.4. Summary
From the analysis of the interviews with the journalists and NGO representatives it can be concluded that there is a mutual motivation to interact based on wanting to acquire benefits that they themselves lack and the other party is in control of. For journalists, NGO can provide substitutes for journalistic shortcomings through benefits of expertise, ability to nuance news through their independent stand, and facilitation of resources through their international network of affiliations. For the NGOs, journalists offer extensive outreach which authorizes the NGO in the public eye and consequently provides benefits in for making societal impact and ensure fundraising.

In accordance to SET, the exchange of benefits also involves costs (Homans 1958, p. 597). The cost of the exchange for both parties in terms of lost control. Control becomes the currency that is traded for the benefits. Journalists lose control over parts of their news making process by not having a free choice or full insight of the resources that are facilitated by the NGOs. The NGOs, on the other hand, loose control over the presentation of their message by giving journalists the freedom to frame information in their desired way.

This exchange of costs and benefits shows that a reciprocal exchange occurs (ibid.), especially since the testimony from both parties show general content from their experienced
interaction. In addition, one important influence of the social context has emerged, namely the condition of sustaining journalistic integrity. This, among other factors of the social context will be further developed in the next section.

### 7.2. The Initiative Imbalance

An important factor in determining how social exchange takes place is by accounting for the social context in which it occurs (1973, p. 188). This chapter shows that the conditions of the social context for the journalist-NGO relationship is based on no formal rules or negotiations which indicates that the interactions occur through reciprocal exchanges. Implicit norms and rules apply, indicating an imbalance between the journalists and NGOs where NGOs willingly adapt to the conditions set by the journalists based on a ruling media logic. This affects the evaluations and choices made when interacting. The NGOs follow the journalistic tempo in terms of accommodating journalists with efficiency when journalists initiate interaction. In contrast, NGOs show patience in getting a response from journalist when initiating interaction - if getting any response at all.

#### 7.2.1. Following the journalistic tempo

The social context of social exchange provides the rules and norms that impact the exchange process and the way the interactions are shaped (Cropanzano & Mitchell 2005, p. 875). As noted in the previous section, sustaining journalistic integrity and autonomy emerges as a contextual condition affecting the way the reciprocal exchange between journalists and NGOs is carried out. In other words, sustaining journalistic autonomy constitutes a norm that both parties take into consideration when interacting. To broaden the perspective in relation to prior research, this shows signs of a ruling media logic since the NGOs, being actors outside of the media sphere, accept to media’s independence and adapt their operational efforts to the news media’s tempo and way to work (Ekman 2019, pp. 161–2).

An adjacent notion of the ruling media logic is to be seen in the interviewee’s commentary regarding the rate they respond to each other’s interaction initiative. Both NGOs and journalists verify the abundance of information overflowing the inboxes of journalists. When asked about who initiate interaction most, one journalist pointed out that there is an incoming information overload from the NGOs which most often does not lead to a published article:
We have access to the inbox for incoming e-mails regarding domestic and public affairs and the government departments and it is overflowing. 90% does not lead anywhere. On most occasions we decide ourselves who we want to contact and call for information. It happens that the initiative is synonymous because they often know when we need something. (Journalist 2)

Many of the journalists say they don’t have time to read all and that only a small fraction of the incoming information directly leads to published articles. The NGOs are used to their outgoing communication efforts not always gaining recognition and express understanding for the journalists’ pressured work conditions. This pattern indicates the social context of the social exchanges of journalists and NGOs to be carried out through reciprocal exchanges, meaning there are no pre-set terms establishing what the NGOs can expect from their outreach, nor what the journalists should contribute with in the interaction (Molm, Peterson & Takahashi 1999, p. 877).

On the basis of the journalists’ conditions of time pressure in combination with information overload, the NGOs adapt to the journalistic tempo. One method applied is to precede the release of an NGO report by providing the journalists with information in advance, through what is called “embargoed information”. One NGO further described the process for “embargo information”:

A couple of days before a report is released, I send it in advance, as so-called embargo information, to media and the largest newsrooms and foreign affairs desks where I have the names of key contacts. (NGO 1)

The same NGO representative later added that this procedure gives journalists the benefit to process the information and prepare the publishing of it on their own terms:

Then the journalists have time to process the information themselves. Even if we know that it is true and relevant, as a journalist you want to ensure what kind of report it is and not just rely on the press release. Even if the press release has pointed to a certain aspect of the report, perhaps an ongoing scrutinizing of something completely different makes the report interesting to the journalist for other reasons. The report can be 100 pages, the press release is just one. Therefore, the journalists get a chance to do their own read through and find their own angles. (NGO 1)

The quote adds an interesting aspect of targeting the embargo information to a selected group of journalists on the basis of time efficiency. This could be analyzed through SET as a way of increasing the stakes on a micro level by accounting to the contextual conditions of time pressure. Adding the benefit of exclusivity and time efficiency could lead to journalists evaluating the benefits of the interaction higher than usual. In turn, the chances of retrieving
reciprocal actions from the journalists may increase. Noteworthy, the procedures of embargo information were reoccurring in the NGO-interviews, but not at all mentioned by journalists.

It should also be noted that some of the NGO interviewees mentioned instances of institutionalization of the embargo procedure by attempts to institutionalize the exchange (Burns 1973, p. 204) through negotiated exchanges (Molm, Peterson & Takahashi 1999, p. 877). On these occasions agreements of exclusivity had been negotiated with a specific news outlet or journalist. However, these instances seemed uncommon and was not a general theme extracted in this analysis.

Another example of how adapting to the tempo of journalists constitutes a contextual condition that affect the journalist-NGO interaction is shown in the journalistic lack of patience. Not only is this noted by the preparatory work put in by NGOs in order to be ready for a media opportunity when it arrives. Examples of these activities are assigning dedicated spokes persons or coordinate with potential international experts through the international network in advance. It is also noted through the pattern noted among journalists of having a high level of comparison for alternatives (Gilovich et al. 2016, p. 354) regarding timeliness. As it appears, some evaluations on which NGO to source is dependent on their efficiency. Further, this adds to previous research of a competitive media landscape for NGOs (Cottle & Nolan 2007; Blumler 2010; Powers 2015) since the journalists have other options to turn to if one NGO cannot deliver according to the journalistic need of efficiency. This was further emphasized by one journalist:

I said ’I would like this and this, can you help me? In that case I need it promptly’. If they would have responded that they can give an answer next week I would have said that I will move on to request someone else instead. (Journalist 1)

In sum, the social context of the ruling norm of following the journalistic tempo provides evidence showing how social exchange between journalists and NGOs happen through reciprocal exchanges. There are no formal negotiations providing a basis to hold each other accountable for delivery, instead the actions in the interactions and evaluations of the outcome are done based on the implicit condition to consider the high paced deadlines in journalism.

7.2.2. Acceptance of the “hit or miss” principle

The NGOs show acceptance of their disseminated information often not leading to published articles, with regard to the journalists’ received information overflow and pressured work conditions. The process of sending out information unknowingly of if it will “hit” the target of
media publication, or “miss” in terms of not gaining any recognition, is what further on will be referred to as the “hit or miss” principle.

The information overflow from the NGOs and the journalists’ inability to process it all is recognized by both journalists and NGOs. Nonetheless, several NGO representatives argue that the applied resources for sending out information that may not get picked up by media is worthwhile due to the possibility of being within the small fraction that actually sparks a news story:

You never know if the preparation will be profitable and if the journalist will take the bait. But you keep on trying because the matter is important to highlight and give attention to. (NGO 3)

This reveals a pattern of the NGOs being willing to employ their resources despite the risk of not receiving any benefits at all in return. Against the backdrop of the reactive action that is demanded from the NGOs to achieve the benefit of inclusion in media, this pattern also indicates a context of difference in power. According to Blau (1986, p. 140) difference in power is produced when there is an imbalance of obligations incurred in social transactions. As previously determined, the type of exchange between journalists and NGOs is reciprocal exchange where no formally negotiated obligations has been put in place (Molm, Peterson & Takahashi 1999, p. 877). From this, the contextual of a ruling media logic could be seen as constituting an obligatory condition for the NGOs to confirm to in order to be included in media by journalists.

However, the NGOs’ acceptance of the “hit or miss” principle also relies on a long-term strategical motif of establishing themselves as a source within their field. One NGO representative describes that the information sent out without getting published still fulfills the purpose of noting the journalists about the NGOs’ expertise that may be of relevance for future news publications:

At times I send out press releases without them being super news-worthy just to establish a knowledge of our working areas. One example is our work in Yemen, one of the greatest humanitarian catastrophes right now, which we have a lot of material about and good spokes persons. I have sent out a lot about that which has resulted in journalists getting in touch with me if they want a comment on something, ask a question, get in touch with someone in the country or if they are about to travel there and wants tips. (NGO 2)

The strategy seems to be fruitful to an extent. Some journalists explicitly mention the NGO information as a good way to gain tips and inspiration. From discussions about how a news story come about, most of them emphasize that their stories including NGO sources primarily
is a result from their own initiative and initiation. However, the analysis show implications for the NGOs’ activities of position themselves as a relevant source within their field of expertise to show results. When the journalists are asked about their choices of NGOs, they claim to be aware of the NGOs’ area of expertise, insight on a specific matter, or connection to a newsworthy area. The journalists state that these notions are acquired through experience or research, but also through the information sent by the NGOs. One journalist pointed out that the choice of which NGO to source for the article that was reconstructed in the interview, was a result of being notified about the NGOs’ engagement in the matter through e-mail:

My colleagues and I saw that the material released from the state needed to be commented by a nongovernmental source who follows the case. Another way to go about is by contacting a political instance or call a legal expert to ask about the accuracy. But the NGO we choose had notified us about this case through e-mail and that they had an opinion about it. (Journalist 2)

As the quote reveals, the NGOs’ disseminated information reduced resources needed for the journalist to find a suitable source for the matter. Because the NGO had managed to establish themselves as a suitable source, the journalist saved time in terms of having to research which NGO to pick. In accordance to the context of reciprocal exchanges (Molm, Peterson & Takahashi 1999), the NGO provided benefits without knowing if they would be reciprocated but resulted in reciprocity thanks to the circumstances of aligned timing of the journalists’ need. Once again, this instance shows how the journalistic context of time pressure affects the actions taken on by NGOs as they adapt their strategies to accommodate to the journalists’ conditions.

In sum, the NGOs provide benefits of consistent information through their long-term acceptance of the “hit or miss” principle, which the journalists reciprocate through media inclusion when the journalistic need aligns with what the NGO has provided. These activities in the social exchange show to be influenced by the condition of imbalance of power due to the context of the ruling media logic. Since the ruling norm of media logic make NGOs accept the superiority of the journalists, they confirm to their conditions by having low expectations of reciprocity in their interactions. Consequently, they accept the “hit or miss” principle. Partially because they evaluate the imbalanced conditions to be fair based on their acceptance of the media logic. And partially because of their long-term strategy of information activities establishing them as a profiled source. A strategy that this analysis show indications of being successful.
7.2.3. Summary

The context of the social exchange between journalists and NGOs are not based on pre-negotiated agreements of what to expect or contribute with in the interaction. From a SET perspective, these conditions indicate that the social exchange occur through reciprocal exchanges (ibid. p. 877). In reciprocal relations the context is made up what Burns (1973, p. 204) calls endogenous constraints, meaning rules and norms that are organically established and self-regulated by the exchanging parties. The norms and rules that emerge as significant for the journalist-NGO relation is related to a ruling media logic since the NGOs are adapting to the journalistic demands. This plays out through the norm of following the journalistic tempo and accepting the “hit or miss” principle. Essentially this is shown through NGO agreement of the demands of reactiveness, adaption and unreciprocated benefits due to the conditions of journalism’s information overflow and lack of time. This further indicates the NGOs being subordinate to the demands of the superior journalists which signifies a power imbalance (Blau 1986, p. 30).

Importantly, reciprocity is still fully possible in power imbalance (ibid. pp. 30–2). However, this analysis declares that NGOs as subordinates demand less than the superior journalists. To link this finding to a broader perspective, Blau (ibid. p. 228) claims that if the benefits supplied by a superior actor exceeds the expectations of the subordinate, subordinates will consider their position advantageous and consequently approve of the power imbalance. This can henceforth reproduce the superior power of the ruling group, which fortifies their superiority and legitimizes their authority (ibid.). In other words, if the NGOs’ acceptance of the contextual conditions that are indicated in this analysis, the advantageous position of the media will remain.

7.3. Long Term Relations Lead to Trust and Efficiency

This final section presents the analysis of the journalist-NGO relationship through the structure of reciprocity. According to Molm, the structure of reciprocity uncovers how the exchange of mutual benefits are carried out and how that affects the possibility of trust to be developed between the parties (Molm 2010, p. 119). The analysis indicate that the dominating reciprocity structure is direct reciprocity in reciprocal exchange, which is further extended into sustained reciprocity (Lewis, Holton & Coddington 2014). This structure of reciprocity involves uncertainties of whether or not the exchange of benefits will be reciprocated. Thereof, the social exchange between the journalists and NGOs occur on the basis of trusting the other party to reciprocate the benefits that have been given (Molm 2010, p. 121). The
analysis show that the actors base their trust evaluations on previous experiences of their interactions. On a meso level, this means that trust is established when the mutual risk of losing credibility in the public eye is accounted for in the reciprocal actions. On a micro level, the individual journalists and NGOs develop from positive previous experiences of either the organization of which the other party work for, or their own direct experience of previous exchanges. Further, the analysis show indications of reoccurring interactions through sustained reciprocity. These reoccurring exchanges lead to personal networks of the journalists and NGO representatives, where trustworthy relationships to provide benefits of efficiency. Lastly, signs of indirect reciprocity were detected and further discussed.

### 7.3.1. Mutual risk as a foundation for trust building

Despite the different goals motivating the journalists and NGOs to interact, a mutual perception of the risk for damaged credibility in the public eye emerges from the interviews. The testimonies from journalists show that they account for their journalistic integrity and professional autonomy to sustain their public credibility. Therefore, they want to make sure the NGO information included in their work provides news value and is not solely profiting the NGO’s private interest. Journalists also display a preference for using NGOs with a more diplomatic approach, as opposed to NGOs that are more radical. This underlines the journalistic concern of avoiding being perceived as engaging in campaign journalism. One journalist described that the diplomatic traits of sticking to rules and regulations installs more trust in an NGO than alternative NGOs with a more radical agenda:

*There is a quality aspect. I trust Save the Children than [a specific activist group with a more radical agenda] since their campaigning strategies are vastly different. Save the Children are factual and stick to rules and laws even if they have an agenda. That increases their trustworthiness. (Journalist 3)*

The NGOs, on the other hand, express a risk of journalists undermining their organizational goals and advocacy purposes if the media publishes faulty or factually misquoted information. This may stain their public credibility.

The testimonies also show that journalists and NGOs primarily expect the same actor who receives the benefit to reciprocate them. This points to the exchanges occurring in direct reciprocity, between solely two parties (ibid. pp. 120–2). The journalists’ and NGOs’ risk evaluation that emerges from the analysis once again indicate that the social exchanges occur through reciprocal exchanges, as they involve uncertainty regarding if their exchange of benefit will be reciprocated (ibid. p. 121). What is further shown in the analysis is that the
mutual risk of losing credibility in the public eye constitutes a foundation for the trust building between the actors. This is in line with the reciprocity structure that Molm (ibid.) calls direct reciprocity in reciprocal exchange. This structure’s uncertain conditions of whether the provided benefits will be reciprocated demands the exchanges to be based on trust, since there are no agreements done beforehand. In the case of journalists and NGOs, they thrust the other party to account for the risk of losing credibility. When the reciprocal action does occur, the trustworthiness provided is confirmed to be valid which fosters more trust. One journalist captures this interplay by referring to it as a mutual trust based on a “dual control” mechanism:

We have had mutual trust where they know my competence and I know that they cannot run their race in the wrong direction because that affects the trust on their behalf. So, it is mutual. (…) If there is no ‘dual control’, as we call it, where no one check-reads and there’s no legally responsible publisher, then all sorts of strange things can be the outcome. (Journalist 2)

Further, it can be noted that the individual risk factors are respected through reciprocal exchanges that provides opportunities for each party to evaluate their risks. The journalists allow NGOs to fact check their figures and quotes before publication. The NGOs mention clearly displaying their sources and methodology to ensure transparency for the journalists. The journalists pointed out that NGOs often want to check their quotes before publication, some said they had seen an increase of these requests in the later years. The desire to see the quotes before publication is motivated by one NGO as wanting to make sure no misunderstandings of the NGO information has occurred in the transmission:

We usually ask to see our quotes before publications. Early in the process, we are also particular about asking how the interview will be conducted, when the article will be published and if the journalist needs any background information from us. We make sure to have a good dialogue with the journalist and thereby ensure that there have been no misunderstandings and they we or our quotes are described correctly. (NGO 5)

Some journalists also point out the need to monitor and scrutinize the NGOs occasionally. Despite varied commentary on this matter from the NGOs, where some claim to not having been the object of scrutinization, others express appreciation of constructive criticism based on the principle of being granted the opportunity to answer to it publicly.

The measures carried out by both journalists and NGOs to respect each other’s need for general credibility shows that reciprocal exchanges occur. Ultimately, this relation installs trust between the actors on a meso level, as the benefits regard not only the individual NGO
representatives and journalists, but the credibility for the organizations they represent. In relation to Molm’s conceptualization of structure of reciprocity, this further indicates a structure of direct reciprocity in reciprocal exchange (ibid.).

From the interviews, it is noted that the individual trust evaluations on a micro level involves consideration of the experience of the organizations’ success or failure of achieving trustworthiness on a meso level. This is shown as some interviewees mention that their perception of the NGO’s or media outlet’s credibility play a role in the choice of who to source or give embargo information to. With good credibility, chances are higher for the exchange to reoccur. Hence, it can be concluded that when the risk of losing public credibility is respected and accounted for by both parties, the direct exchange lead to what Lewis and colleagues (2014) calls sustained reciprocity, which in turn reproduce the trust between the engaged parties even more.

The meso level discussion could be further extended by including the public as an influential actor in this interplay. As stated, both journalists and NGOs base their interactions with a regard to their public credibility. However, organizations public appeal, in SET terms the benefit, is ultimately granted by the public. This relates to Molm’s notion of indirect reciprocity which refers to the process of benefits being reciprocated by another actor than the one receiving it (A benefits B but is reciprocated by another actor than the one receiving it (A benefits B but is reciprocated by C) (Molm 2010, pp. 120–2). Through this perspective, journalists and NGOs simply become a vessel for each other’s aim of giving the public news of their liking. For NGOs, it would be reciprocated by the public’s support for their work, and for journalists it would be reciprocated though contentment of their news production. How the reciprocal exchanges between the public and the media or NGOs are formed is, though, a subject matter beyond the empirical limitations and theoretical frames of this study as it is based on the first paradigm of SET. Interestingly, this indicates a justification for the critique and limitation of the first paradigm of SET. The critique claims SET to overlook the possibility that exchange of benefits may not be the end goal of the social exchange but an intermediate step towards gaining social capital (Zafirovski 2005, p. 22). The question of gaining social capital from approval of the public involves processes on a macro level, meaning the abstract collective or cultural level. Analyzing the macro level is not done in this study as the theoretical framework only regards the micro and meso level. However, it could be further explored by applying the anthropological theories of SET that account for the cultural context (Mauss 1967; Mitchell, Cropanzano & Quisenberry 2012, pp. 108–9). Those theories are a part of the so called second and third paradigms of SET. In other words, applying the anthropological theories of SET could give further insights regarding the
question of if, or to what extent, the journalists and NGOs exchanges are not the end goal of the interactions, but a part of longer processes of gaining public credibility.

7.3.2. Personal experience paves the way for sustained relations

Sustained reciprocity based on previous direct reciprocity in reciprocal exchanges is also noted on a micro level through the individual experiences of NGO representatives and journalists. For journalists, their previous personal experience is mentioned as an influencing factor in their trust evaluation of the NGOs. They point to their impressions from interacting with NGOs in the field while being on traveling duty, previous professional interactions with NGO representatives, and a general knowledge of the NGOs from having followed their engagements over time.

From the previous experiences, some journalists mentioned having established a personal network of NGO representatives from reoccurring interactions. These networks were claimed to be beneficial in terms of evaluating trust since trustworthiness already has been installed through sustained reciprocity. One way of benefitting from the personal networks was mentioned as the possibility to rationalize the news process by communicating through informal communication channels:

To get in touch with [the NGO] I often use Messenger or WhatsApp, because people answer faster there than through e-mail. It also enables sending requests outside office hours instead of having to wait for them to read their e-mails the day after. On Messenger and WhatsApp I can also see if they have opened and read my message. So, that is an easier way to work. (Journalist 1)

The NGO representatives also referred to personalized networks that had been established through previous experience of successful reciprocal exchanges through direct reciprocity. The main benefit of the personalized networks emerged as being efficiency. For instance, in the process of targeting information since aiming it to journalists who previously reciprocated the benefits provided rationalizes the process of evaluating who to contact to have the best chances of getting published. The NGOs entertain the relations through targeted activities such as providing embargo information or specific insights in relation to the journalists’ specialization. Many NGO representatives talk of making a conscious effort to preserve and build up substantial networks by monitoring journalists who show interest and write about the field of matter in which the NGO operates. One NGO representative described these efforts to be rather systematized within the communications department:
Each of our press and communications officers has elaborate and established connections with for instance correspondents in different regions or journalists monitoring certain issues that are relevant for the press and communications officer’s field of responsibility. This means that we relatively often are in touch with the same reoccurring journalists. (NGO 5)

Further, the aim of personalizing the information is mentioned by the NGOs to be the possibility to stand out in the information overload received by journalists. The hope is to provide distinction, based on positive prior personal experiences, in the information overload. As a result of the established networks, the NGO professionals talk of reciprocal relations with journalists reaching out when in need of insights on specific matter.

From this, we can establish that trust between the actors on a micro level also is fostered through reciprocal exchanges with direct reciprocity between journalists and NGO representatives. From positive experience of interacting recurringly, the parties are more prone to engage in social exchange again based on trust, which further signals that the direct reciprocity further occur through sustained relations (Lewis, Holton & Coddington 2014).

Even if direct reciprocity in reciprocal or sustained exchanges emerge as the generally dominating structure of reciprocity of the micro level relations between journalists and NGOs, the interviews also indicates some opportunity for indirect reciprocity to occur consecutively. Some NGOs talk about ways to gain endorsement from good relations with a journalist that may establish them among other journalists through the grape vine. From the interviews, the NGO representatives mention of making use of personal connections with journalists to get help with facilitation of their matter to another journalist who might be more interested or have time to cover the issue. Another NGO talked of the aim of getting on the editorial “short-lists” based on their interpersonal credibility, referring to a register of suitable sources for different subject matters held by news organizations.

Both instances provide a way for the NGO to enhance their possibility for indirect reciprocity. The indirect reciprocity would then play out by the NGO representative (A) giving benefits to a journalist (B). That journalist (B) would in turn establish the NGO representative within the journalist’s network by including them on the shortlist or giving recommendations to colleagues. Ultimately, the NGOs’ provided benefit would be reciprocated by another journalist (C) who find the NGO to be a suitable source based on the credibility given from the first journalists (B) endorsement.

Nor the short-list or the grape vines are mentioned by the journalists. However, one journalist interviewee, who was relatively new to the profession and not specialized in
humanitarian issues or foreign affairs, talked of how the cited NGO was more or less assigned from the editor:

I was about to say ‘I do what I’m told’, but for this article it was clear that the NGO was claiming something but they couldn’t, or didn’t want to, reveal where the information was coming from. Still, we forwarded the information, and that is because the editor has decided that [the NGO in question] is a secure and good source with good connections to the case. (Journalist 4)

Despite the remark “I do what I’m told” was made with an ironic undertone, this quote shows manifestation of indirect reciprocity of an NGO based on a high level of trustworthiness established with the editor in question.

A similar process can be seen in the NGOs’ targeting efforts where they list specific journalists based on their specialization or the profile of the media outlet they are reporting for. These efforts are not necessarily based on interpersonal experiences, but on journalists giving attention and benefitting a subject matter which also is relevant to the NGOs’ operations. In turn, these journalists receive benefits provided by the NGOs, a third party in this case, through specialized and targeted information that is of relevance to the journalist’s interest.

In conclusion, looking at the interplay and trust building processes on a micro level adds to the notion of the journalist-NGO relationship taking place in the reciprocal structure of direct reciprocity in reciprocal exchange (Molm 2010, p. 121). This is because most of the reciprocal interactions occur between two parties. It is also through interpersonal relations between two parties that trustworthiness grows into sustained relations through the personal networks talked of by both journalists and NGO representative. Further, the interviews reveal glimpses into how the interpersonal relations through direct reciprocity may lead to instances of indirect reciprocity, by personal establishment within the separate internal networks within the separate NGO organizations or media organizations.

7.3.3. Summary

This section accounts for how reciprocal exchanges between journalists and NGOs are carried out and affect trust building. The findings suggest that journalists and NGOs interact through direct reciprocity, meaning that the same two actors are the ones providing each other benefits and reciprocal action (ibid. pp. 120–1). Together with the prior conclusion of the journalist-NGO relationship occur within a context of reciprocal exchange (see chapter 7.2), this
indicates a structure of reciprocity of direct reciprocity in reciprocal exchange (ibid. p. 121). This structure helps the uncovering of how trust between NGOs and journalists is established.

A mutual risk of losing organizational credibility in the public eye on a meso level is identified to constitute a foundation for the actors to establish trust. By respecting and helping prevent the risk of losing public credibility in the public eye, reciprocal exchanges are carried out based on trust. As positive previous reciprocal exchanges lead to trust for the other party. Further, the analysis show that reciprocal exchanges tend to reoccur which signifies that sustained reciprocity is achieved (Lewis, Holton & Coddington 2014). The same pattern is seen on a micro level. There, the positive previous experiences of exchanges between the journalists and NGO representatives foster trust and establishes relations. Sustained reciprocity is also noted as journalists and NGOs mention long-term networks which provide benefits of efficiency in terms of trust evaluation and operational processes.

Even through the direct reciprocity turns out to be the dominant form of how the social exchanges are carried out, some tendencies for indirect reciprocity were observed. On a meso level, indirect reciprocity can be considered to be carried out by the public as the third party—since it is them who ultimately have the mandate to declare an NGO or media organization as credible. Zooming in to the micro level, indirect reciprocity can be seen to benefit individual actors through recognition in the internal networks of the NGOs and media organizations.
8. Discussion and Conclusion

This thesis set out to explore the relationship between journalists and communications professionals of human rights and humanitarian NGOs in a Swedish setting by identifying the main characteristics of the relationship. The study was conducted through qualitative interviews with journalists and NGO representatives and analyzed thematically by applying the social exchange theory in order to uncover individual and contextual influences shaping the journalist-NGO relationship. By doing so, this thesis gives new insights to the power dynamics of the journalist-source relationship in general, and the journalist-NGO relationship in particular.

The primary research question for this thesis was:

*What are the main characteristics of the journalist-NGO relationship in Sweden?*

Through the thematic analysis, three main themes emerged that represent the main characteristics of the journalist-NGO relationship in Sweden: *Mutual dependency despite having different goals*, *Initiative imbalance*, and *Long-term relations lead to trust and efficiency*. These themes were the result from in-depth analysis based on the four research questions which were derived to account for different parts of the SET framework. Noteworthily, the different characteristics, and the SET concepts explaining them, are more interlaced in reality than what the result from the analysis might indicate. However, the themes are based on the characteristics being more prominent in some regards than others.

The two first research questions were applied to understand the motivation for interacting through identifying what benefits and costs were in play during the exchange:

- **RQ 1**: *What are the motivations to interact for journalists and NGOs?*
- **RQ 2**: *What are the costs and benefits of the interactions between journalists and NGOs?*

The first and second research question are intertwined, as it turns out that the desire for the benefits that are to be exchanged is what motivates journalists and NGOs to interact. The analysis shows a motivation to interact driven by a mutual dependency based on separate goals. The separate goals of journalists and NGOs are in turn made up by wanting certain benefits that the journalists or NGOs are lacking themselves and are held by the other party. The goal for journalists is to substitute resources that they lack themselves but are held by NGOs such as the benefits of expertise, independent commentary, and access. The goal for
the NGOs is to fundraise and strengthen their advocacy through the benefits of outreach and authorization held by journalists.

Further, the analysis show that the cost of the social exchange between journalists and NGOs is a decreased control over actors’ own processes. This is resulted from the mutual dependency which demands the journalists and NGOs to rely on the other party in order to gain the benefit they can provide. The cost for journalists involves losing control over the execution of certain parts of the news process, and for NGOs the loss involves not being able to control how their message is framed in the media.

The third research question was applied to understand how conditions of the social context affect the choices of journalists and NGO representatives when interacting:

RQ 3: What are the conditions for the social context in which the journalist-NGO relationship take place?

The findings of the analysis suggest a social context of reciprocal exchanges where the exchanges are influenced by the overruling norm of the media logic, which further fosters a power imbalance between journalists and NGOs.

The general characteristic of the social context of the journalist-NGO relationship is that there is an initiative imbalance with a dual meaning: Firstly, there is an imbalance in the amounts of initiatives taken since NGO reach out to journalists far more than vice versa. Secondly, there is an imbalance in terms of how the opposite party is expected to act when the other initiate interaction - journalists expect immediate reciprocity while NGOs only expect a small fraction of the interactions to be reciprocated. When analyzing these patterns from a SET perspective, it can be concluded that there are no pre-negotiated rules for the interaction between journalists and NGOs which indicates that the exchange occurs in reciprocal exchanges. What further can be seen, is that the journalists have higher expectations and demands than the NGOs, which points to a power imbalance between the actors. However, the analysis show that the NGOs, who are subordinates in the power imbalance, accept the uneven conditions of the context which further reproduces the power imbalance.

Lastly, the fourth research question was applied to examine the way that reciprocal actions are carried out by journalists and NGOs and how that behavior, in turn, effects the possibility of trust and to be develop between them:

RQ 4: How is the reciprocity between journalists and NGOs structured, and how does that affect trust building between the parties?
The primary structure of reciprocity that is identified in the journalist-NGO relationship is what Molm (2010) refers to as direct reciprocity in reciprocal exchange. In addition, the analysis indicate that positive experiences of reciprocal exchanges lead to long term relations through what Lewis and colleagues (2014) call sustained reciprocity. Tendencies for indirect reciprocity can also be extracted from the analysis, yet it is not a prominent feature of the reciprocal structures that characterizes the journalist-NGO relationship in Sweden.

The findings of this thesis suggest that trust is established through successful exchanges where both parties regard for each other’s risk of losing credibility on a meso level. Further, this mutual risk constitutes a condition for trust evaluations on a micro level. In other words, before the individual actors decide on whether or not to interact, one way to evaluate each other’s trust is through their experience of how the organization that the counterpart is representing have respected the mutual risk of losing credibility before.

On a micro level, the analysis show that personal experiences play a significant role in trust building as trust is established through individual experience of successful reciprocal exchanges. Moreover, the journalists and NGO representatives develop personal networks from their positive experiences. These networks are utilized due to its benefit of creating efficient processes due to the already established trust and lead to reoccurring exchanges which ultimately establishes sustained reciprocity.

The results from this analysis show an interplay between interpersonal interactions on a micro level, and organizational exchanges on a meso level. Since the journalists and NGO representatives interact in a professional setting, their actions further affect the organizations they represent. To clarify the results of the analysis in relation to the research questions and the micro and meso level, a summarizing table is provided to conclude the results of this study (see table 2).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structure of reciprocity and its effect on trust within the relationship</th>
<th>Long-term relations lead to trust and efficiency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The social context of the social exchange</td>
<td>The dominating structure of reciprocity is direct reciprocity in reciprocal exchange. Trust is fostered through personal positive experience from direct reciprocity. It enables reoccurring interactions through sustained reciprocity. Through sustained reciprocity personal networks are established that lead to efficiency in trust evaluation and work processes. Indirect reciprocity can be established through the networks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costs of the social exchange</td>
<td>The context of no pre-negotiated rules of the social exchange indicates a relationship through reciprocal exchanges. Context of normative power imbalance through ruling media logic lead to norms of following the journalistic tempo of work, and higher expectations of reciprocity from journalists than from NGOs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits of the social exchange</td>
<td>Journalists gain benefits of expertise, independent commentary, and access. NGO representatives gain benefits of outreach and authorization. News companies gain substitutes for resource shortage. NGOs gain abilities to fundraise and build their brand for advocacy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivations to engage in social exchange</td>
<td>To maximize the result of professional tasks through acquiring resources that the other actor is in control of. Achieving organizational goals through the benefits acquired (good journalism making societal impact).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Summary of results.
To conclude, this thesis suggests that the relationship between journalists and NGOs in Sweden is characterized by three main themes. The actors are motivated to interact due to a *mutual dependency despite having separate goals*. The interactions are carried out through an *initiative imbalance* caused by the norm of a ruling media logic which, in turn, present a social context of power imbalance. Lastly, trustworthiness is established by accounting for each other’s risk in the interaction. Successful interactions tend to reoccur and foster trust which rationalizes professional processes, ergo *long-term relations lead to trust and efficacy*. Further, the finding of a mutual dependency to gain benefits against the cost of lost control adds to previous journalist-source research of a mutual dependency involving competition over the control of news content (Gans 2004; Broersma, den Herder & Schohaus 2013).

As mentioned in the theoretical chapter (5), this thesis also explores the viability of the SET framework in analyzing the journalist-NGO relationship. The SET framework proved to be viable for mapping out the main components of the journalist-NGO relationship. The theoretical framework enabled detailed examination of the relationship by providing tools and concepts to categorize different influences, account for both the individual and contextual perspective, and understand the conditions for reciprocity to occur. SET’s focus on reciprocity also promoted understanding of how reciprocal relations between journalists and NGOs could establish trust. This led to one of this thesis’ most interesting findings, that the trust between journalists and NGOs is based on a mutual regard for the journalistic autonomy. A finding that would have been hard to argue for through other theoretical frameworks. Another finding in relation to reciprocity was the one of reciprocal relationships between journalists and NGOs leading to valuable professional advantages such as efficiency. This further adds to previous SET-research showing that separate goals and organizational advantages can be achieved through engaging in reciprocal exchanges based on trust (Oparaocha 2016; Waters 2020).

Interestingly, this thesis also highlights limitations of the SET framework, namely the criticism of it not accounting for the cultural or national influence on interactions (Cook 2000, p. 668). When relating the findings of this thesis to the issue of power in the journalist-NGO relationship, it can be concluded that journalists still hold an upper hand through the contextual norm of a ruling media logic. This finding can be assumed to be a result of what the previous academic notion of a high level of autonomy and independence of journalists in Sweden (Nilsson 2016; Hamada et al. 2019, p. 147; Reporters Without Borders 2021). It is, though, fair to question whether the macro level structure of a ruling media logic is a product of the interpersonal power structures on a micro level, or if the macro level structures...
influence the micro level behavior. According to the first paradigm of SET, the former argument applies (Zafirovski 2005, p. 19). However, the testimonies from the interviewees of adapting to the media logic could also be interpreted as being in line with the latter option. This option aligns with the sociological and anthropological criticism of SET, pointing to the possibility of cultural contexts affecting the norms regulating interpersonal behavior (ibid. p. 18). By accounting for the cultural context, the macro level, power dynamic of journalists and NGOs could be explained to be a product of the Swedish cultural and national context of highly valued journalistic autonomy and press freedom. In other words, the cultural macro level structures could be said to affect the norms regulating the interpersonal interaction on a micro level. This observation of potential cultural influence on the relationship could be further explored in future research through application of all three paradigms of SET.

Because of the power imbalance between journalists and NGOs, NGOs are positioned in a competitive field for media recognition. These conditions make them adapt to the media logic and develop strategies in accordance to journalistic norms to enhance their chances of getting media recognition. This confirms previous research showing that NGOs struggle to gain media attention due to a competitive media landscape which makes them adapt to standards of journalism to enhance their chances of inclusion (Cottle & Nolan 2007; Kwenda 2013; Powers 2015, 2017). Powers’ (ibid.) research pointed to NGOs taking on roles as experts, advocates, facilitators and critics to accommodate the needs of journalists. These roles are in line with the benefits that this thesis suggest NGO to provide journalists too. Further, tendencies of NGOs struggling to achieve their organizational goals due to media adaptation was noted in the analysis of this thesis, which also has been noted by previous research of the matter (Cottle & Nolan 2007; Kwenda 2013).

Previous research also shed light on tendencies for NGOs to circumvent media through digital tools that allow them to be their own news source (Powers 2015). These tendencies cannot be confirmed through the findings of this thesis. The findings of this thesis rather show NGOs’ significant role in providing substitute for the shortages of journalism. This is in line with previous academic suggestions of NGOs becoming a part of the media system, rather than only being a source in it, through the provision of viable resource for journalists to fulfill their journalistic work (Cottle & Nolan 2007; Powers 2016). These patterns underline the journalists’ dependency on NGOs as important building blocks for their news reporting which further can be related to the currently challenged media system marked by economic issues, decreased resources and profit making pressure (Blumler 2010, p. 243; Nilsson 2016, p. 4). Furthermore, the NGOs’ significant position in a struggling media landscape transfers power
of control over news content to NGOs which could have implications for the journalistic autonomy and professional integrity. Tendencies of this could be seen in this thesis’ notion of a journalistic preference of sourcing larger established NGOs and NGOs with whom reoccurring interactions have occurred. This resembles what previous journalist-source research refers to as source influence through being primary definers (Hall 2013). If an NGO reaches the status of being a primary definer, an ethical issue arises for journalism in terms of potentially not representing a plurality of sources or not being objective enough towards the favored NGOs. If the same reoccurring NGO keeps being used based on good relations, the risk of representing these NGOs’ private interests instead of the publics interests increases (Hallin & Mancini 2004, p. 38), which henceforth could be argued to undermine journalism’s democratic function (Hanitzsch, Ramaprasad, et al. 2019, p. 110). However, the degree to which these tendencies occur in the Swedish media landscape cannot be determined in this study due to its limitations but could be examined further in future research.

Lastly, this thesis suggests that relationship building and development of trust on both a micro an meso level plays an important role in the development and sustainability of the journalist-NGO relationship. These findings are in line with previous research claiming interpersonal credibility to be a form of information subsidy that is of importance for NGOs to enhance their potential to be sourced by media (McPherson 2016). However, the possibility of NGOs achieving an upper hand due to efficient information subsidies (Allern 2001) is not confirmed in this thesis since journalists and the media system still dictate the norms and rules of the interactions through the mutually accepted norm of the media logic.

For future research an exploration of the power balance between journalists and NGOs could be done with a broader scope to provide stronger conclusions on a meso level. Future scholars could include NGOs’ communications efforts as a whole to further examine their ability to circumvent traditional media, as well as include the perceptions of the public to determine the level of credibility media and NGOs hold in the public eye. It is also important to note that the NGOs included in this paper are among the largest and most established NGOs in Sweden with international affiliations. To extend the research of the journalist-NGO relationship, and relate it to media representation, it would be fruitful to examine smaller NGOs’ relation to media. Lastly, as this thesis explores the journalist-NGO relationship in a Swedish setting, further research of this matter could be done in other countries and media systems to enable comparison of how different contextual factors impact the way journalists and NGOs interact.
References


Appendices

I. Shortened interview guide: NGO representatives

   Background
   How long have you been working for the organization you are employed with currently?
   What is your educational background?

   Specific questions about the article
   In what way were you or your communications department involved in the process for this article?
   What considerations did you make before connecting with the journalist for article?
   Did you experience any challenges in the process for this article?

   General questions about experiences of the journalist-NGO relationship
   In what type of situations is it relevant for you to contact journalists?
   How do you usually connect with journalists? Who initiates the interaction the most?
   Do you find that you are often in contact with the same recurring journalists?
   Are you usually satisfied with the result after being involved in a process with journalists?
   Why/why not?
   What benefits do you think you can bring to journalists in your work for your organization?
II. Interview guide: journalists

Background
How long have you been working as a journalist?
How did you enter the journalistic profession?
Have you ever worked for a civil society organization? If so, what was your role?

Specific questions about the article
How did you get the idea to write the article?
Why did you choose to include an NGO perspective in this matter?
Can you explain your process of collecting relevant information for this article?
How did you get in come in contact with the person(s) you are quoting in the article? Why did you choose to quote them?
In what way were the information and the quotes exchanged? (e-mail/phone/meeting/zoom)
Did you ever consider using another source instead or also? Why/why not?
Did you experience any challenges in the process for this article?
What did the fact-checking process look like when you wrote the article?

General questions about experiences of the journalist-NGO relationship
In what type of situations do you use an NGO as a source?
What do you think NGOs can contribute with to your reporting?
How do you usually connect with NGOs? Who initiates the interaction the most?
What considerations do you make before contacting or interacting with NGOs?
Are you usually satisfied with the result after being involved in a process with NGOs?
Why/why not?
How do you reason about ethical dilemmas that may arise when working with NGOs?
What benefits do you think you can bring to NGOs in your job as a journalist?
III. Interview guide: NGO representatives

Background
How long have you been working for the organization you are employed with currently?
How did you enter the profession of communication?
What is your educational background?

Specific questions about the article
In what way were you or your communications department involved in the process for this article?
How did you get in touch with the journalist who wrote this article?
If any press work preceded this article, can you explain the process to collect relevant information for the communications material you created?
In what way were the information and the quotes exchanged? (e-mail/phone/meeting/zoom)
What considerations did you make before connecting with the journalist for article?
Did you experience any challenges in the process for this article?
Were you satisfied with the way your organization was portrayed?

General questions about experiences of the journalist-NGO relationship
In what type of situations is it relevant for you to contact journalists?
How do you usually connect with journalists? Who initiates the interaction the most?
Do you find that you are often in contact with the same recurring journalists?
What considerations do you make before contacting or interacting with journalists?
Are you usually satisfied with the result after being involved in a process with journalists?
Why/why not?
How do you reason about ethical dilemmas that may arise when working with journalists?
What benefits do you think you can bring to journalists in your work for your organization?
IV. Information letter to participants (Swedish)

Mitt namn är Linda Åström och jag skriver just nu mitt examensarbete för det internationella magisterprogrammet i journalistik vid Södertörn Högskola. Uppsatsen syftar till att undersöka relationen och samspelet mellan journalister och civilsamhällesororganisationer (NGOs) i nyhetsprocessen. Stort tack för att du väljer att delta! Studien innefattar intervjuer med journalister och representanter från NGOs. I bifogad intervjuguide återfinns information om intervjuinnehållet. Intervjun beräknas ta 30–40 minuter och kommer spelas in via zoom för att sedan transkriberas.

Examensarbetet skrivs på engelska, därav kommer utvalda citat översättas från svenska till engelska. Intervjupersoner kommer vara pseudonymiserade (inga namn kommer användas i uppsatsen eller i transkriptioner). Däremot behöver organisationen som intervjupersonen jobbar på, samt nyhetskällor som publicerat intervjupersonens artikel, namnges för att motivera urvalsprocessen - dock inte i samband med intervjupersoners citat.

Deltagarhetsvillan är helt fri villigt och eventuella personuppgifter samlas in och behandlas med ditt informerade samtycke, vilket när som helst kan återkallas utan att ange orsak.

Vi tillämpar relevant dataskyddslagstiftning enligt gällande rätt vid all personuppgiftsbehandling. Den rättsliga grunden för att behandla dina personuppgifter är att uppgifterna utgör uppgifter av allmänt intresse och du har samtyckt till behandlingen. Dina uppgifter kommer att sparas under uppsatsens gång och därefter gallras tillsammans med inspelat material och transkriptioner. Lämnade uppgifter kommer att vara tillgängliga för mig och min handledare fram tills att uppsatsen är inlämnad och bedömd.

Personuppgiftsansvarig är Södertörns högskola. Du har rätt att kontakta oss om du vill ha ut information om de uppgifter vi har om dig eller i övrigt utöva dina rättigheter enligt dataskyddsförordningen, för att begära rättelse, överföring eller för att begära att vi begränsar behandlingen, för att göra invändningar eller begära radering av dina uppgifter. Detta gör du enklast genom att kontakta oss via registrator@sh.se eller på 08 608 40 00. Du når vårt dataskyddsombud på dataskydd@sh.se. Om du har klagomål på vår behandling av dina personuppgifter har du rätt att vända dig till tillsynsmyndigheten (Datainspektionen). Genom att svara på detta e-postmeddelande samtycker du till behandlingen av dina personuppgifter.

Eventuella frågor välkomnas! Kontaka i första hand mig eller min handledare:

Kontaktuppgifter student:
Linda Åström, ___________, telefon: ___________

Kontaktuppgifter handledare:
Ester Appelgren, ___________