This is the published version of a paper published in *Journal of Public Affairs*.

Access to the published version may require subscription.

N.B. When citing this work, cite the original published paper.

Permanent link to this version:
http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:sh:diva-46393

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Along the government–media frontier: Press secretaries offline/online

Elena Johansson[1] | Karl Magnus Johansson[2] ⓘ

[1]Department of Journalism, Media and Communication, University of Gothenburg, Gothenburg, Sweden

[2]School of Social Sciences, Södertörn University, Huddinge, Sweden

Correspondence
Karl Magnus Johansson, School of Social Sciences, Södertörn University, 141 89 Huddinge, Sweden.
Email: karl.magnus.johansson@sh.se

While the position of press secretaries to ministers has become routinized, we still know little about their everyday life in the political executive. This article, based on in-depth interviews with press secretaries and an inventory of social media use conducted among ministers and press secretaries in Sweden, explores what press secretaries do and the roles and functions they fill. It addresses the overarching question of what it is really like to be government press secretary. It engages with this question through a combination of methods, mapping, and explaining patterns of behavior across related fields and strategic spaces. We argue that existing research and role typologies, while still useful, must be developed by accounting more for how press secretary work changes through new techniques and digitalization. We conclude that press secretaries fill a mix of roles and these are quite stable, but social media impacts on the daily routine of the press secretary and are a part of the work that is difficult or impossible to control. In addition, this study of Swedish press secretaries helps to redress a geographical imbalance in political communication (system) research where the focus usually is on Anglo-American-based scholarship and systems.

KEYWORDS
digital, executive, press secretary, role, Sweden

1 | INTRODUCTION

The title of this article draws inspiration from the book "The Wages of Spin" by Bernard Ingham, Margaret Thatcher's chief press secretary. Ingham (2003), p. 16 suggests that the so-called spin-doctors are required to patrol the turbulent frontier between government and media. Here we will call them press secretaries, less pejoratively. The central concern of this article is the political executive press secretary—the variety of roles and functions that press secretaries perform. The rise of communications staff suggests that these staffers are really needed, indeed institutionalized.

We define government "press secretary" broadly and simply as the staffer who carries out press secretary work as part of their everyday activity in a national executive, either in the executive center or at a line ministry. What the work entails is what we try to find out.

Therefore, what we are talking about here is the name of a function, a role, and it comes with certain expectations. The term "role" refers to the socially prescribed behavior of a position holder, the attitudes, and behaviors structured around tasks linked to a specific social position. At its core, role theory posits that position holders will behave in accordance with both their own role expectations, and perception of what the position entails, and those, which exist in the environment, or of counter position holders (e.g., Parsons, 1951). Role theory explains roles by presuming that persons are members of social positions and hold expectations for their own behaviors and those of other persons (Biddle, 1986). We view roles and role conceptions as multidimensional and dynamic, meaning that they may be subject to

change and are nondeterministic while carrying a degree of continuity that comes with the profession. At the same time, "role" is not the same thing as a "task" or "duty." While "gatekeeper" and "adviser" are role conceptions, writing a press release is a task. Taken together, we are dealing here with practices that define a profession.

This article explores the kinds of roles played by contemporary government press secretaries, aiming for improved knowledge of the general characteristics of press secretary roles and these practitioner logics. What is it really like to be government press secretary? This article provides an attempt at answering this question.

It does so by summarizing and analyzing the information obtained from 11 interviews that were carried out with present and former Swedish government press secretaries in 2014–2017, capable of offering first-hand testimonies on relevant aspects of research, their work, and working environment. Each interview lasted a minimum of an hour and followed the same interview procedure and were recorded and transcribed. Since most interviewees asked to remain anonymous, nobody is named in the text. We have reported on what they say they do and in their formal roles. There may be a difference between what they say they do and what they do on a daily basis and in their more informal roles. In addition to this élite interview evidence, the article collects from an inventory of ministers' and press secretaries' use of online media, for example, social media. The same interviews asked about the role and place of social media for government communication.

We conducted automated text analysis (ATA) or computational analysis of textual data, retrieved from ministers' and press secretaries' Twitter timelines. By using this method for visually presenting text, we have identified word frequencies in both groups of texts in order to better understand the dominant themes and thematic clusters.

Methods like ATA are often based on traditional communication studies tools, for example, traditional content analyses. A word cloud (or tag clouds) is a collection (cluster) of words depicted in different sizes. The more a specific word appears in a given body of text, the bigger it appears in the visualization. Word clouds analysis has a tabular analog, the word count. ATA instruments, specifically Word clouds, are often used for large data processing (e.g., Cidell, 2010; Dewi et al., 2020; Etling et al., 2010; Heimerl et al., 2014; Viégas & Wattenberg, 2008). A variety of online tools can be used for visualization of word clouds (MonkeyLearn's, WordCloud Generator, Jason Davies, TagCrowd, Word Cloud Generator for Chrome, Word Cloud Python tools, Google Word Cloud tools, etc.), and WordItOut is one of them. There are no fundamental differences between the services when it comes so elementary analysis. Simple to use, WordItOut provides "more sophisticated options" as a filter (to ignore common words such as "it," "but," etc.), a tabular word count, and a preferable design.

Poynter (2010), p. 234 describes words clouds as a very simple, rudimentary textual analysis, which might rather suggest words that should be inspected further. However, this method is satisfactory for our goals as a supplementary method to interview data. The results provided us with a clear understanding of the main direction of

ongoing discourse on ministers' and press secretaries' Twitter accounts. This has given us the basis to assess similarities and differences in these discourses, mores specifically, for comparison of thematic clusters of ministers' and press secretaries' Twitter feeds.

While the primary focus is on the role of the press secretary, we thus pay attention also to the impact of social media on their role. We argue that role typologies must account for how press secretary work changes over time through additional functional demands, notably through new techniques and digitalization. To better understand what they do we use real world examples to illustrate our discussion. While they may be pursuing their jobs in a qualitatively different way, we expect to find considerable commonality in how executive press secretaries operate both offline and online. The main focus we would like to highlight is that their work is basically about how to attract or divert attention. From that aspect these communication professionals have a role to play in day-to-day government communications. They are virtually in constant communication. That is the essence of the job.

We build on the concept of role and role typologies, and contrast these with real life experiences of press secretaries in the Swedish government; controlling the fit between general models and empirical realities in one state. This article therefore serves to redress the geographical imbalance in political communication (system) research where the focus usually is on Anglo-American-based scholarship and systems. However, limitation of space does not allow for any deeper contextualization.

The article proceeds in three steps. First, we discuss the role of press secretary and outline our argument about role typologies for contemporary government press secretaries. Second, we present the case study of press secretaries in Sweden, focusing on roles and functions related with media and communication with journalists and their dynamics and how they have evolved in recent decades. We present the results of the analysis, which we underpin by using the qualitative interview data as well as quantitative research for the social media. Finally, we conclude the article by reflecting on the main findings and their broader implications.

2 | LITERATURE: EXECUTIVE PRESS SECRETARIES IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

What are the defining characteristic features and elements of being a government press secretary? To illustrate and understand the *modus operandi* of press secretaries and what they are needed for we first look for insights in existing literature, authored by practitioners or academics.

To begin with, former press secretaries detail their work or role, in fact the many roles and the demands placed on the staffer, in autobiographies or diaries covering the UK (e.g., Campbell, 2007; Ingham, 1991; McBride, 2014; Price, 2005, see also Price, 2010) or the USA (e.g., Fleischer, 2005; Spicer, 2018; Stephanopoulos, 1999; see also Nelson, 1998). These accounts lay bare the role of and the pressures on the press secretary, and the different sides of the job.

They offer some home truths about the press secretary's profession. In summary, they flesh out the mixed experiences and emotions of the pressure and thrill of working for those elected to office. The job to accurately reflect the persons they represent, as spokesperson, is a recurrent theme in this literature. In these accounts of their work, what matters most to the press secretary is media coverage, getting positive news and avoiding negative stories. At the same time, there seems to be no proper job description and it may vary a great deal. The role once designed for a previous time and occupant may be redesigned, possibly rewritten, by the incumbent press secretary. In any event, much time has to be spent dealing with media, preparing for interviews, issuing statements, briefing, preparing announcements, and so on. To get them "good headlines," or perhaps to avoid getting "bad headlines." To this end, their relationships with the media include cultivating contacts, day-to-day contact with journalists. However, this varies from one policy area to another. There are normally more requests made to interview some ministers, including the prime minister, than others.

There are procedures. These also include the internal functions such as coordinating government information and, at least trying to coordinate, the government's message, and communications. This involves establishing and then enforcing "the line" for the media, trying to place a story, through "soundbites," choosing the words, which are used when trying to make the news, and going public, the message to be conveyed, perhaps signaling a strong commitment to a particular policy or clear rejection of it.

Academic research suggests that these staff functions—of communications staffers—have become institutionalized and centralized (e.g., Maltese, 1994; Seymour-Ure, 1991, 2003). It involves determining and enforcing "the line-of-the-day," deciding who says what where, preparing talking points, and maintaining centralized oversight of executive information. This requires central coordination and a degree of central control and power. That would imply that the press office has a coordination function as well as a policymaking function, as communication encompasses both functions. However, it is an empirical question whether or not they are actually involved with policy.

In relation to control, Ericson et al. (1989) explore the question of the power of news sources, and its variation across and within different institutions, from the perspective of the sources themselves. It is here that press secretaries have an influential role to play as intermediaries between authoritative sources and journalists, trying to control the news media and the public conversation.

For the press secretary the requirements of the job take much of a liaison function, to serve as a liaison with media and within the executive. They may act as press spokesperson and be traveling with the minister. This too requires logistics. Effectively, they serve as a kind of gatekeepers.

Some may have another title. For all practical purposes, they were still press secretary. However, existing academic research has little to say about the real life and role of press secretaries. The existing scholarly literature in the field usually addresses "spin" and its culture (e.g., Andrews, 2006; Downes, 2008; Esser et al., 2001; Franklin, 2010; Gaber, 1999; Hood, 2011; Louw, 2005; Maltese, 1994; McNair, 2004). This literature tends to use the term spin doctor in a pejorative way, to demonize any kind of professional PR. The emphasis on "spin" in existing research plays up the drama and hype, leaving more mundane issues and tasks largely unexplored. Moreover, the "spin" focus may exaggerate the strategic element; thinking and acting in terms of some rationality and intentionality. In fact, as we shall see, much of what press secretaries are doing is reactive; reacting to various kinds of statements, to interviews or speeches, and to breaking news events, and so forth.

Congressional press secretaries in the USA have been well researched (e.g., Cook, 1988, 1989, see also Downes, 2008; Paletz & Entman, 1981). And there are important works describing the roles of the press secretary to the chief executive in the USA (Grossman & Kumar, 1981; Kumar, 2010; Maltese, 1994), the UK (Blick & Jones, 2013; Seymour-Ure, 1991, 2003), Canada (Thomas, 2010), or of media advisers in Australia (Phillipps, 2002), and Germany (Pfetsch, 2008). In particular, they describe daily work and suggest kinds of role sets. It is noteworthy that these works are usually covering Anglo-American systems, leaving open questions about their general range.

According to the existing literature, professional roles played by press secretaries can range from adviser to gatekeeper. We find quite similar roles or activities (e.g., Esser et al., 2001; Pfetsch, 2008). In much, press secretaries perform by routines; duties that the press secretary always performed to varying degrees have become required routines. At the same time, contemporary press secretaries have to face the demands of the modern media. As we shall see, this means an additional workload for press secretaries. They have to be up to the speed at which the digital media operate.

Press secretaries can fill what Blumler and Gurevitch (1981), p. 485 term "boundary roles, whose occupants are closely familiar with the values and practices of the other camp." They include publicity advisers. The term "boundary role" has been taken from them by various scholars, including Cook (1989), p. 71 who notes that "the position of press secretary can best be understood as a boundary role between politicians and reporters…" Hence, press secretaries are "boundary spanners" engaged in "boundary spanning" activities, notes Graber (2003), p. 114: "Boundary spanning occurs when duties of various individuals cut across organizational barriers."

In sum, press secretaries have multiple functions and in their different roles and "boundary role," they are involved in boundary spanning and in formal and informal exchanges in several related fields: media, political, public. Press secretary is in essence a position that follows a script of what the job entails. However, in our dynamic and nondeterministic understanding, these professionals may in practice redefine the very role of the profession.

Based on this overview of the literature, we have collected some evidence of what a day in the life of a government press secretary may look like. We can expect to find substantial similarities between press secretaries around the world. Yet there is bound to be some variation in how press secretaries execute their job. Now we will turn to our case, Sweden.

3 | ANALYSIS: EXAMINING EXECUTIVE PRESS SECRETARIES

What are press secretaries doing? We empirically examine press secretary roles through 11 in-depth interviews as well as an inventory of social media use conducted among ministers and press secretaries at Swedish administrations in office from 2006 to 2018.

3.1 | Life as a press secretary

The press secretaries interviewed for this study described four aspects of their daily work: first, it is very much determined by structural factors; second, how they establish or maintain contacts with media people; third, why there is more coordination from the executive center; and fourth, the time spent on different media, including social media, and talking to journalists.

According to the press secretaries, their daily work is very much decided by political structures: calendars with meetings, conferences, and travels provide the framework for daily work and coverage. A larger framework is provided by the schedule in parliament (days for different debates, budget procedures and proposals), party congresses and the 4-year election cycle. The calendar of ministers, which includes meetings, public speeches, travels, and other commitments, is what determines the daily work of the press secretary. One of the press secretaries provided an example:

> There are many things that a prime minister does that need to be planned in detail. If we are going to visit somewhere, we have to decide where to go, where to stand, where to meet the press, who is going to be present, what will happen during what moment and how the transport will work (…). I always have to be updated, always reachable, always be in control (…). And when we are out, we meet a lot of journalists.

In order to plan the day, daily meetings are held by political staff. These meetings usually achieve evaluation of the media flow as well as discussions to promote important issues of the minister. Political staff includes press secretaries, minister, the state secretary, the political advisers, and a few other officials. All press secretaries meet at 8:45 every morning for about 20 min. This morning meeting with the team is with the press chief (or a deputy) directly under the prime minister. It serves as a daily line-of-the day meeting for the people in this team. Their communications need to prepare statements and talking points. The attention to the issues the government desires to promote is maximized by communication coordinated for this purpose.

Since the shift of government in 2014 all press secretaries are employed by the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) and coordination is strong with daily meetings. As one press secretary put it, "In more intense media coverage, we need to have better control over what we are sending out," an apparent recognition of the demands for central control of what different parts are doing.

Among the press secretaries themselves, there is simply a functional pressure for more resources dedicated to communication. Their increase in numbers along with other communication staff reflects "a kind of increased professionalization not to give a messy impression." The increased speed in media coverage is the cause for resources on communication and more coordination within the government as stressed by one of the press secretaries.

Press secretary work, strategic communication, can be divided into a reactive part, reacting to what is happening, and a more planning or proactive part, meaning more offensive measures to reach out to audiences. In order to provide exclusive news, the carefully planned presentation of the government's budget is just one example of this. The press secretaries and the journalist often already know one another, and press secretaries are proactive in their work. It is important to control information by not only preventing publication of news.

It appears as if government press secretaries in Sweden have become more active and controlling. More times than not the presence of the press secretaries is evident in interviews with ministers, as gatekeepers or for various kinds of communications. Some obviously are like gatekeepers and see their work as protecting the minister. Hence, ministers rely on press secretaries. Trust is imperative between both parties in order to sustain this kind of relationship. Another development has to do with the more public role of the press secretary. Despite the traditional norm regarding ministers and prime ministers speaking to media, their press secretaries increasingly appear as spokespersons.

Interview evidence suggests that all press secretaries work quite similar. But the press secretary role may vary somewhat depending on which minister they are working with, for how long they have worked as a press secretary, if they are new on the scene or not, and what their position is among the minister's staff, and so on. For one, it means being a gatekeeper vis-à-vis journalists, helping them in various ways but also to advice the minister. A lot is about being a sounding board for the minister; what to say, when, how and why, or why not saying it. This role means a certain influence over politics. However, what relationship you have can also vary a lot between different press secretaries and different ministers.

All requests from media mean that the press secretaries perform a gatekeeper role, making a selection and priority among all these requests. Press secretaries are more active in limiting the possibilities for journalists to have direct contact with politicians—press secretaries are a filter. This shows that there is an increase in the way information is managed coupled with fewer opportunities for spontaneous meetings with sources.

When all contact with media shall go via the press secretaries, and their work to a large extent is about filtering information and managing when the minister shall participate in public, it is clear that the press secretaries have an influential role. But what are the consequences of this role? The strategic considerations naturally reflect a shifting political and media landscape.

Relationships are regarded as the heart of press secretaries' job. These relationships are professional but are also reflecting a shared culture that holds actors together. There is a professional line not be crossed, normatively speaking. But the daily work of press secretaries is carried out in a quite small world where people know each other at least in their professional roles, which usually are clear. The most important tool for press secretaries is the wide web of personal relations.

In the interviews with press secretaries, a common picture became visible of their daily work and relationships. The importance of personal relationships was articulated by several press secretaries. In the words of one of them:

> Relationships are the core of this profession, the ability to build human relationships not only as colleagues but also with journalists (...). To build external relationships to spread our message (...) requires that we have a relationship somewhere, and it takes longer than you would expect to build these relationships.

Press secretaries have a clearly defined position, which has developed professionally over the last two to three decades. These press secretaries have common standards and norms guiding their work and behavior.

Press secretaries described how resources have increased—more coordination, more press secretaries, and more active work from sources to influence news reporting. As time went on, the system has not stayed the same with regard to accessibility and management. There is more control of information by press secretaries. The picture is one of increased information management.

Communication within the government relies to a huge extent on the flow of information with the main political parties. The promotion of good news to journalists and newsrooms, and avoidance of bad news is the constant job of the press secretaries. This is managed via choosing which information to disclose, and which to withhold, as well as through negotiating with journalists. As a result, their work is very political in scope. Many of the press secretaries stressed the significance of an understanding of politics—"we work in a political environment, and for that you need both a political compass and political competence," as dictated by one of them.

Press secretaries reported on a rising level of planned communication within the government. The reasons for this vary, from being politically based, to being related to the media's involvement. This links to our next angle of focus: life as a press secretary in the social media age.

3.2 | Life as a press secretary in the social media age

Life as a press secretary in the social media age has been significantly changed, with an increasing number of media outlets placing additional demands on these staffers. The emergence of plenty new digital channels and platforms conditionally divided into Web 1.0 (usually related with one-way platforms, as static websites), Web 2.0 (associated with two-way services, like social media) and more advanced but still rarely presented Web 3.0, expanded responsibilities and functions of press staff. In these new conditions, the press secretary not only responds to emails and edit content for the government website but also deals with a quantity of accounts in social media, which form their own milieu.

Governmental media strategies depend on several factors; one of them is related to the opportunities and constraints determined by the media's priorities. Since the media sphere became digital and interactive the focus in the communication has gradually switched from TV to social media. All the media channels (traditional and newer) work in synergy and one of the responsibilities of the contemporary press secretary is to build an acceptable media strategy involving as many platforms and services as possible and to make priorities.

Social media has generated changes in how governments communicate (e.g., DePaula et al., 2018). Social media is an essential ingredient in modern government communication, in today's everyday politics (Highfield, 2016). More specifically, there are accounts of the use of social media platforms by political advisers (Kreiss et al., 2017). There is also a wealth of literature about the use of social media by politicians and the shift in power that has caused (e.g., Broersma & Graham, 2018; Enli & Skogerbø, 2013; Surowiec & Štetka, 2017).

Swedish ministers use different platforms to different purposes, but Facebook and Twitter are still most preferable. Press secretaries are almost always behind this communication. Swedish ministers usually keep their personal profiles closed but almost all have public Facebook pages. This channel serves rather purposes of broadcasting and branding than citizen input and almost never for a dialog and discussions: posts are updated frequently but followers are usually left to themselves and send predominately emotional feedback–likes and reactions (Johansson, 2019) described by Kalsnes et al. (2017) as "low-threshold interaction." Twitter is more interactive but limited by communication among mostly professional elites (e.g., journalists), as also argued by, for example, Kalsnes et al. (2017) and Enli and Skogerbø (2013).

Press secretaries are drawn into social media, themselves and on behalf of their masters, into different social media networks to varying degrees: for example, press staffers are numerously represented on Twitter and form clear clusters together with ministers and political journalists (Johansson & Nożewski, 2018). However, their roles in the different platforms are different. They are rather gatekeepers on Facebook, because this channel emerges as a substitute for traditional media, and observers on Twitter because they usually use it "to monitor a field" (Johansson, 2019).

But what else and how do press secretaries communicate in social media? To answer this question, from the current government[1] 2 press staffers and 22 ministers were identified on Facebook public pages, accordingly 39 and 14 have Facebook profiles, and 37/20 presented on Twitter. During the research period, statistical data for Twitter were collected by the online service Inteltechniques. This service provides statistical data for 1 year (2017) (as number of different tweet types, followers, frequency of tweeting, etc.) and access to the timelines, which display a stream of tweets for any Twitter account. The content of the Home timeline has been visualized with support of

---

[1]The data were gathered from the publicly available government website: www.regeringen.se

WordItOut service in order to identify the most frequently used words.

Interviews provided main data for exploration of press secretaries' roles on Facebook because at least one half of press secretaries' personal profiles on Facebook have been closed and semi-closed. They are mostly used for private purposes as confirmed in the interviews. This fact makes data gathering for a reliable analysis difficult. Only two press secretaries have public pages, which would mean that they consider themselves as public figures and have their own agenda as well as something "to broadcast."

Twitter is frequently used: on average press secretaries write 1,1 tweet/retweet per day. Press secretaries follow other users and are followed by others almost to the same extent. They rather share content than produce original one: 57 percent retweets versus 43 percent original tweets. They mostly retweet institutions (among them government departments' information, [ruling] parties' messages, and media) than individuals (journalists, ministers, press secretaries): 37 percent respectively 20 percent. It means that they use personal Twitter profiles rather for the spreading of official information.

Other key questions of this research are related to content on Twitter. What do they write in their timelines? ATA of 100 tweets/retweets of each sampled press secretary and minister in comparison show that press secretaries write about similar matters as ministers but in different variations (Figures 1 and 2). Four main clusters of words were identified: (1) mentions of ministers' names (e.g., @gabrielwikstrom, @AnnLinde); (2) references to leading Swedish media (e.g., svt.se, expressen.se); (3) words and hashtags associated with main political discourses (e.g., #svpol, #utbpol, #climat); and 4) unspecified words somehow related with political parties' rhetoric (e.g., suggestion, security, and collaboration).

Thus, we can see that press secretaries use their personal profiles on Twitter for professional purposes. They promote the government's agenda and their bosses, spread government information, and monitor

media. As members of staff, they are in charge of some social media material, such as government budget related content.

The results from the interviews reveal how social media impacts on press secretary work.

As one of them said the emergence of social media around 2005 was "an explosion," "a revolution." Political communication has been fundamentally transformed; it became less hierarchical, quicker, and conditions on the media market became harder. As a result, the requirements on public persons became higher too. According to another Swedish press secretary, "everything is much faster (...), when something is written on Twitter, it can be a news article immediately (...)."

Another press secretary explained that social media is now a part of her work, adding that this is "very different" among ministers. A dominant pattern in the interviews is that this is a trend that will continue and that it involves clear risks, notably no or poor fact-checking otherwise at best carried out in the editorial process. Press secretaries recognize that centralization efforts to control the media have increased. Government communication policy includes an internal document on the use of social media.

The main use of social media for people engaged in daily politics is as a means to be updated with news flow, trends, and events (e.g., Berglez, 2016; Larsson & Kalsnes, 2014). Since this kind of news mainly appears in the morning, press secretaries start their day by visiting social media posts, feeds, and the websites of the most popular media companies. They monitor "a mood" to be "updated." They may help the minister with the blog or to maintain a social media feed for him or her. Social media is also used to build relations with journalists and others, either through direct messages or public discussions. The press secretaries interviewed stated that social media is additionally used as a means to directly relay information, such as that published on the government's website, without any "filter." According to one press secretary, Facebook serves as "an own channel, some kind of

FIGURE 1 Ministers' tweets/retweets, the main clusters of the most frequent words
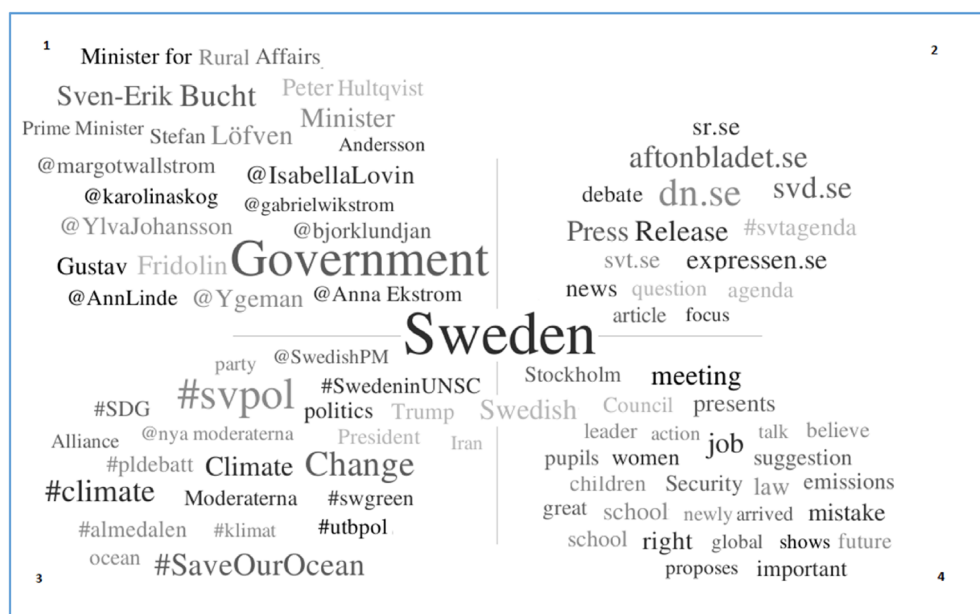
local newspaper." Moreover, social media can be used as a way of "building persona," as one interviewee put it. Social media, if properly used, could be a good tool for control of informational flows in the hands of a skillful "spin doctor." One press secretary revealed that she counted herself as lucky if she could "kill a question before it would pose a big problem" on Twitter and prevent an "embarrassing" issue from becoming news.

As mentioned, to define priorities between media outlets correctly is one of the key steps in government communication. However, it is also crucial to do it for social media as well. What social media should be chosen, why, how and for what purpose? Different platforms attract different target groups due to socio-technical affordances (e.g., Stier et al., 2018). This factor defines the primary strategy of using one or another social media service in government communication.

The Swedish respondents we questioned declared Twitter as "elitist" and revealed that Swedish politicians see Facebook as a place for political partisans, whereas Instagram is popular with younger people, who are potential voters. Those questioned conveyed that the specifics of each social media platform are what define the methods of use. However, the choice of social media might also be driven because of personal preferences. For example, some ministers use Twitter exclusively, whereas others prefer Facebook or Instagram, and others want a presence on all social media channels, including Snapchat. According to those interviewed, Twitter is used more than Facebook, particularly by some press secretaries to promote news. However, this takes up a lot of time in order to have continuous presence. Despite this, all respondents revealed that everybody follows Twitter, in order not to miss out on breaking news.

Additionally, the findings reveal that both politicians and staff post content on social media. One Swedish press secretary reported that although ministers have staff who manages their pages and profiles, some also choose to write their own posts, particularly to express their views. Another press secretary confirmed that the ministers' Facebook pages are usually updated by staffers; sometimes they also write on Twitter on behalf of the ministers. The ministers' use of Instagram is more personal, with ministers preferring to take selfies themselves, but there are exceptions.

As recognized by one Swedish press secretary, not all ministers are comfortable with new communication technologies, especially not the older generation. That being said, politicians want to be present in social media. This means press secretaries often update their ministers' profiles because they are more tech savvy. This helps ministers to build their public persona through social media.

Press staffers realize that politicians can be recognizable only if they are mentioned in the traditional media. A way to do this is to be visible on social networking sites, because the mainstream press, newspapers, radio, and TV channels often refer to user-generated content in their coverage. However, personal characteristics of a minister matter, such as interests, in addition to age, gender, and so on.

In conclusion, this case study enhances the understanding of the varying practices and functions of press secretaries in the digital age. Using two complementary data sets, it shows that they work in the hard conditions and should be subordinated centralized media policy. They are content producers and editors, communicators and image makers, promotes, and to some extent "spin doctors." The influence of the Swedish press secretary varies between different social media: if the minister is active on social media and especially if writing on her or his own (for example, in a blog), it affects the work of the press secretaries in so far as it is a part they cannot control.

However, a press secretary may serve the minister by exploring a specific issue, or like that. Whereas press secretaries have less influence over some social media platforms they, and other ministerial staff, may assist the minister with posts; to disseminate news or comment on events, requiring a longer explanation. They can play the roles of gatekeepers or observers. Nevertheless, they should always

have a strategic view of the media, including social media, in conditions of constant noise and more input.

Digital media and branding strategies have profound consequences for governments, driven by continual communications control (Marland et al., 2017). Taken together, these findings point to a conclusion as seemingly improbable as it is inexorable: the development does not necessarily favor fragmentation; perhaps quite the opposite. The forces of political and technological reality are arguments for centralization within governments.

4 | CONCLUSIONS

This article suggests that press secretaries are important in the everyday life of the political executive and demonstrates the mix of roles they fill. Functional pressures from the media, in particular, generate a need for these staffers at the heart of government.

The article has explored the question of what Swedish government press secretaries are really doing and serves to advance this research agenda. In particular, we have examined the profession from a role perspective. The study has highlighted a development of professionalizing press secretaries that strongly affects political executives and modern-day government. A profession would appear the press secretary corps. By doing work, they are routinizing it and institutionalizing the position.

The demand for knowledge of and the need for and value of communications means that the press secretary is a valuable resource. The resource provided by press secretaries is recognition of the functional prerequisite for these professionals, creating an additional capacity in the system to present the government's arguments. Regardless of regime type, executives need communications staff. What do they do? In the interviews, there was considerable commonality, but also variety. Connecting offline is fundamentally different from connecting online. It is the press secretary's new frontier. It further epitomizes the boundary role of a press secretary.

The article makes three significant contributions. First, while most existing research on press secretaries takes a "spin" approach, this article develops a role approach, examining the multiple roles and the concrete work that is going on in day-to-day practice of government press secretaries. Second, this article moves beyond the traditional focus on media relations to consider a broader spectrum of roles. We have also accounted for how press secretary work changes through new techniques and digitalization and this is a principal contribution. Third, this article has a mixed-method design, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches.

When carrying out their function, the roles played by press secretaries appear to be essentially quite similar across cases and time but in the digital age the life as a press secretary has become even more demanding and multifaceted. Government social media communication impacts on the daily routine of press secretaries in various ways. They face difficulties in controlling how media, and of course especially social media, impinge on their work. This is another finding that warrants further exploration. Of particular interest will also be how press secretaries might shape policy. They might be expected to influence policy, but we still know little about this.

While turning attention to a system less studied than Anglo-American systems, this study too leaves open questions about the general range of the findings. The limitations of the study must be recognized. While the data provide evidence of behavioral patterns, it remains difficult to generalize across cases. The framework for analysis and repertoire of methods employed in this article could be tested in other countries, accounting for the domestic political context including composition and organization of government.

ORCID
Karl Magnus Johansson https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3804-5020

REFERENCES
Andrews, L. (2006). Spin: From tactic to tabloid. *Journal of Public Affairs*, *6*(1), 31–45.

Berglez, P. (2016). Few-to-many communication: Public figures' self-promotion on Twitter through "joint performances" in small networked constellations. *Annales. Series Historia et Sociologia*, *26*(1), 171–184.

Biddle, B. J. (1986). Recent developments in role theory. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *12*(1), 67–92.

Blick, A., & Jones, G. (2013). *At Power's elbow: Aides to the prime minister from Robert Walpole to David Cameron*. Biteback Publishing.

Blumler, J. G., & Gurevitch, M. (1981). Politicians and the press: An essay on role relationships. In D. D. Nimmo & K. R. Sanders (Eds.), *Handbook of political communication* (pp. 467–493). Sage.

Broersma, M., & Graham, T. (2018). Tipping the balance of power: Social media and the transformation of political journalism. In A. Bruns, G. Enli, E. Skogerbø, A. O. Larsson, & C. Christensen (Eds.), *The Routledge companion to social media and politics* (pp. 89–103). Routledge.

Campbell, A. (2007). In R. Stott (Ed.), *The Blair years: Extracts from the Alastair Campbell diaries*. Hutchinson.

Cidell, J. (2010). Content clouds as exploratory qualitative data analysis. *Area*, *42*(4), 514–523.

Cook, T. E. (1988). Press secretaries and media strategies in the house of representatives: Deciding whom to pursue. *American Journal of Political Science*, *32*(4), 1047–1069.

Cook, T. E. (1989). *Making laws and making news: Media strategies in the U.S. house of representatives*. The Brookings Institution.

DePaula, N., Dincelli, E., & Harrison, T. M. (2018). Toward a typology of government social media communication: Democratic goals, symbolic acts and self-presentation. *Government Information Quarterly*, *35*(1), 98–108.

Dewi, I. N., Farizal, E. & Nurcahyo, R. (2020). *Word cloud result of mobile payment user review in Indonesia*. [Conference presentation] 2020 IEEE

7th International Conference on Industrial Engineering and Applications (ICIEA).

Downes, E. J. (2008). Hacks, flacks, and spin doctors meet the media: An examination of the congressional press secretary as a (potential) public relations professional. In M. Lee (Ed.), *Government public relations: A reader* (pp. 115–135). CRC Press.

Enli, G. S., & Skogerbø, E. (2013). Personalized campaigns in party-centred politics: Twitter and Facebook as arenas for political communication. *Information, Communication & Society*, 16(5), 757–774.

Ericson, R. V., Baranek, P. M., & Chan, J. B. L. (1989). *Negotiating control: A study of news sources*. Open University Press.

Esser, F., Reinemann, C., & Fan, D. (2001). Spin doctors in the United States, Great Britain, and Germany: Metacommunication about media manipulation. *International Journal of Press/Politics*, 6(1), 16–45.

Etling, B., Alexanyan, K., Kelly, J., Faris, R., Palfrey, J., & Gasser, U. (2010). *Public discourse in the Russian blogosphere: Mapping RuNet politics and mobilization*. Berkman Center Research Publication 2010–11.

Fleischer, A. (2005). *Taking heat: The president, the press, and my years in the white house*. William Morrow.

Franklin, B. (2010). *Packaging politics: Political communications in Britain's media democracy* (2nd ed.). Bloomsbury.

Gaber, I. (1999). Government by spin: An analysis of the process. *Contemporary Politics*, 5(3), 263–275.

Graber, D. A. (2003). *The power of communication: Managing information in public organizations*. CQ Press.

Grossman, M. B., & Kumar, M. J. (1981). *Portraying the president: The white house and the news media*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

Heimerl, F., Lohmann, S., Lange, S. & Ertl, T. (2014). *Word cloud explorer: Text analytics based on word clouds*, [Conference presentation] 47th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences, Waikoloa, HI: 1833–1842.

Highfield, T. (2016). *Social media and everyday politics*. Polity Press.

Hood, C. (2011). *The blame game: Spin, bureaucracy, and self-preservation in government*. Princeton University Press.

Ingham, B. (1991). *Kill the messenger*. HarperCollins.

Ingham, B. (2003). *The wages of spin: A clear case of communications gone wrong*. John Murray.

Johansson, E. (2019). Social media in political communication: A substitute for conventional media? In K. M. Johansson & G. Nygren (Eds.), *Close and distant: Political executive–media relations in four countries* (pp. 149–173). Nordicom.

Johansson, E., & Nożewski, J. (2018). Polish and Swedish journalist-politician Twitter networks: Who are the gatekeepers? *Central European Journal of Communication*, 11(2), 129–150.

Kalsnes, B., Larsson, A. O., & Enli, G. S. (2017). The social media logic of political interaction: Exploring citizens' and politicians' relationship on Facebook and Twitter. *First Monday*, 22(2).

Kreiss, D., Lawrence, R. G., & McGregor, S. C. (2017). In their own words: Political practitioner accounts of candidates, audiences, affordances, genres, and timing in strategic social media use. *Political Communication*, 35(1), 8–31.

Kumar, M. J. (2010). *Managing the President's message: The white house communications operation*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

Larsson, A. O., & Kalsnes, B. (2014). "Of course we are on Facebook": Use and non-use of social media among Swedish and Norwegian politicians. *European Journal of Communication*, 29(6), 653–667.

Louw, P. E. (2005). *The media and political process*. Sage.

Maltese, J. A. (1994). *Spin control: The white house office of communications and the management of presidential news* (2nd ed.). University of North Carolina Press.

Marland, A., Lewis, J. P., & Flanagan, T. (2017). Governance in the age of digital media and branding. *Governance*, 30(1), 125–141.

McBride, D. (2014). *Power trip: A decade of policy, plots and spin*. Biteback Publishing.

McNair, B. (2004). PR must die: Spin, anti-spin and political public relations in the UK, 1997–2004. *Journalism Studies*, 5(3), 325–338.

Nelson, W. D. (1998). *Who speaks for the president? The white house press secretary from Cleveland to Clinton*. Syracuse University Press.

Paletz, D. L., & Entman, R. M. (1981). *Media, power, politics*. The Free Press.

Parsons, T. (1951). *The social system*. Free Press.

Pfetsch, B. (2008). Government news management: Institutional approaches and strategies in three Western democracies reconsidered. In D. A. Graber, D. McQuail, & P. Norris (Eds.), *The politics of news: The news of politics* (2nd ed., pp. 71–97). CQ Press.

Phillipps, R. (2002). *Media advisers – shadow players in political communication*. PhD thesis, University of Sydney.

Poynter, R. (2010). Blog and buzz mining. In R. Poynter (Ed.), *The handbook of online and social media research: Tools and techniques for market researchers* (pp. 221–242). Wiley.

Price, L. (2005). *The spin Doctor's diary: Inside number 10 with new labour*. Hodder & Stoughton.

Price, L. (2010). *Where power lies: Prime ministers V the media*. Simon & Schuster.

Seymour-Ure, C. (1991). The role of press secretaries on chief executive staffs in Anglo-American systems. In S. J. Campbell & M. J. Wyszomirski (Eds.), *Executive leadership in Anglo-American systems* (pp. 381–412). University of Pittsburgh Press.

Seymour-Ure, C. (2003). *Prime ministers and the media: Issues of power and control*. Blackwell.

Spicer, S. (2018). *The briefing: Politics, the press, and the president*. Regnery Publishing.

Stephanopoulos, G. (1999). *All too human: A political education*. Little, Brown and Company.

Stier, S., Bleier, A., Lietz, H., & Strohmaier, M. (2018). Election campaigning on social media: Politicians, audiences, and the mediation of political communication on Facebook and Twitter. *Political Communication*, 35(1), 50–74.

Surowiec, P., & Štetka, V. (Eds.). (2017). *Social media and politics in central and Eastern Europe*. Routledge.

Thomas, P. G. (2010). Who is getting the message? Communications at the centre of government. In C. Forcese (Ed.), *Public policy issues and the Oliphant commission: Independent research studies* (pp. 77–136). Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada.

Viégas, F. B., & Wattenberg, M. (2008). Tag clouds and the case for vernacular visualization. *Interactions*, 15(4), 49–52.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Elena Johansson is a lecturer in media and communication studies at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden. Her research focuses on political communication, journalistic cultures, and social media.

Karl Magnus Johansson is a professor of political science at Södertörn University, Sweden. His research interests include political executives and communication.